INCORPORATION OF CULTURE IN TEACHING A
FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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Yana Orlova
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ABSTRACT

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This study describes the inseparable entities of language and culture. Mastering the cultural element is crucial in the EFL/ESL language learning process. Furthermore, the study investigates the role of culture in the EFL/ESL curriculum since the 1970s. The thesis examines the integration of culture into the EFL/ESL classroom. The importance of culture has increased in the last thirty years. However, this awareness has not been fully adopted in Russia. Most Russian EFL classrooms continue to simply focus on the grammar-translation approach, where students have to memorize significant and non-significant grammar points and then do dozens of exercises drilling the newly learned grammatical form(s). Moreover, there is no specific requirement in Russia for cultural communication to be taught in EFL classes. Based on this need, the question of how to implement culture into Russian EFL classrooms comes to the forefront. The foundation for teaching culture language learning include the 5 Cs, the Five Dimensions
of Culture, language learning authentic materials, and the Cultural Experiential Learning Cycle. Moreover, the incorporation of role-playing in the language learning process is emphasized as it not only enhances language ability but cultural awareness as well. Through experiencing role-playing situations and distinguishing similarities and differences between cultures, students are culturally prepared with appropriate behaviors and responses when they encounter a similar situation in the target culture. The recommendations provided should enable Russian educators and administrators to effectively integrate culture into EFL curricula.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Conventional Russian EFL (English Foreign Language) classrooms employ a grammar-translation approach, in which students are required to memorize significant and non-significant grammar points in the target language. Students are admonished to strictly focus on the teacher’s lessons and not to actively explore their subject in the classroom. Therefore, students are reluctant to speak up and natural classroom interaction is kept to a minimum. When students enter college in Russia (or any English-speaking country), they can be painfully reticent to answer the teacher’s questions, speak in front of the class, or perform a role for an audience, unless, of course, they are only asked to recite grammar. Further hampering these students is a lack of familiarity with the target host culture that inhibits their efforts at blending in and, often results in misunderstanding the behaviors and life-style of the target culture. This lack of awareness regarding appropriate social conduct results in an inability to effectively navigate in their new environment. Not surprisingly, these factors often result in reduced motivation to further improve and expand English language skills. In some cases, the continued frustration and negative experiences can even give rise to an aversion for the target culture.

These problems are grounded in the failure to teach cultural communication skills in the classroom. Broadly, this thesis scrutinizes the scholarly literature addressing the concepts of teaching and learning about culture in the context of teaching foreign
languages and the profession’s increasing awareness of its efficacy. More specifically, this thesis addresses one of the key reasons why Russian students have difficulties in their interactions in English-speaking host countries. More specifically, awareness of and sensitivity to American culture is not a part of the English language curriculum in Russia. At best, any relevant cultural instruction provided in Russia is based on the instructor’s idiosyncratic experiences. The lack of an intercultural competence curriculum leads, at best, to poor English communication skills or, at worst, to aversion to learning English altogether. This, of course, presents challenges for Russian students wishing to enter the workforce and severely limits their ability to enter colleges in the U.S. or other English-speaking countries. This thesis provides strategies and techniques for teaching culture in EFL classrooms. These tools will help bridge students’ gaps in learning classroom English and real world English in a natural way and increase their motivation and confidence to ‘live in and communicate in’ an English speaking environment. The literature review also demonstrates the need for even more research and study on the teaching of English to Russian students through American culture.

In contrast with, Poland, Germany and even China, for example, Russia’s distance from the U.S. and other English-speaking countries does not afford many Russian students the opportunity to easily go abroad and naturally interact with the inhabitants of the host countries to improve their English skills. Given the development of English as the world’s Lingua franca, the teaching of English effectively in Russian classrooms should be addressed with a sense of urgency. Despite the requirement that Russian students study English in school for a minimum of five years with continued English language instruction at the university level, the level of English language
proficiency is poor. The English language proficiency level is so poor, in fact, that Russian students have difficulties both in passing final exams to simply graduate from high school and passing college entrance exams in Russia. Many students who would like to get their university degree in the U.S. fail entrance exams, such as the TOEFL, when they apply to American colleges. Ultimately, their failure is not due to students’ ability, work ethic or desire to learn English, but rather in the methodology and curriculum used to teach English, namely, the grammar-translation approach.

Again, the goal of this literature review is to develop a foundation for incorporating the target language culture in EFL classrooms. This foundation includes the meaning of ‘culture’ in terms of language learning and the relationship between language and culture. Since the current EFL program in the Russian education system is ineffective, the literature review examines standards for foreign language learning that can be adopted and included in the Russian curriculum of teaching English.

Background

After working for five years as a teacher in a Russian grade school, I came to the U.S. and took English classes at an American college. This experience brought to light differences in how English is taught in the two countries and highlighted the ineffectiveness of the Russian methods of teaching English language classes. It took me one year to acquire basic English proficiency while learning and living in the U.S. I spent nine years in Russia learning the English language including private tutors and attending elective classes annually, only to find that after arriving in the U.S, my literacy level in English was so low that I was required to start with beginner level classes. My experience
clearly shows that the challenge of acquiring proficiency in the English language for native Russian students is not a function of their ability, aptitude or work ethic but, rather, an ineffective EFL curriculum. It is clear that the current Russian program in teaching English should be revised and updated.

The above conclusion was further buttressed by my own hands-on experience working as an English teacher in Russia for five years. As expected, I initially taught students using the mandated grammar-translation approach. However, after a very short time I realized that my students were not acquiring the language proficiency that they were capable of. As such, I experimented and tried incorporating some interesting assignments based on American cultural traditions, such as Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter. We created postcards for Valentine’s Day and exchanged them, and sang traditional American songs, e.g., “Old MacDonald Had a Farm,” all in an effort to help the students feel more comfortable with the language. I used authentic materials, such as greeting cards, books, newspapers, and magazines. We conducted a comparative analysis of target cultural products and Russian ones. I observed that my students became more interested in the foreign language, and culture, and loved to participate in class. While not part of the official teaching curriculum, it was clear to me that these assignments positively impacted my students’ overall performance.

In this era of globalization, English language is the international language of choice. All international organizations require the acquisition of English skills in order to communicate for purposes of trade, diplomacy, science and the like. English is not only important on the international stage; it is also the default secondary language within Russia, as Russia has a multitude of citizens of non-Russian heritage. One of the most
highly prized skills, and in some cases a requirement, for businesses in Russia is at least a basic level of English language literacy. Many beginning positions in Russia require a job interview conducted in English. These are often accompanied by job applications which are written and filled out in English.

Therefore, it is imperative that effective language programs be developed and implemented in Russia. Such programs will allow Russian students to successfully pass high school and college exams, increase student enrollments in U.S. colleges, and reduce learners’ frustration and increase comfort while interacting with the target culture. Acquiring English skills will also help the Russian people to be more successful in world trade and allow for a higher standard of living.

Statement of Need

This study identifies factors that will contribute to more effective English language instruction in Russia. It explores the effects of strategies and techniques based on standards for foreign language learning on students’ development of intercultural competence. These tools can be adopted in Russian EFL classrooms to enhance the development of students’ overall language skills.

Scope of Study

This thesis explores the incorporation of culture in the context of Russian language learning environments. It also investigates strategies and techniques that make the language learning process productive, so that Russian educators can incorporate them within their classrooms.
Research Questions

The main research question addressed in this thesis is: Given the relationship between culture and language learning, how can language acquisition be fostered more effectively?

The review addresses the following questions:

1. What is culture? What cultural dimensions of concepts are most relevant to teaching language and why?
2. How are culture and language learning related? What role does culture play in foreign language acquisition?
3. To what extent has ‘culture’ been incorporated into methodologies for language teaching?
4. What does current research reveal about the effectiveness to teach English in Russian secondary schools using the grammar-translation approach?
5. What does current research reveal about effective ways to incorporate culture to enhance language acquisition in EFL/ESL classrooms?
6. What is the purpose of role-playing techniques in teaching the target language and culture? How can role-playing be effectively integrated into teaching a foreign language?

Fundamentally, teaching a foreign language is incomplete without the study of the related culture. The clear and unique relationship between a culture and its language is based on the work of educators from various disciplines.

In Chapter II, the thesis identifies different definitions and concepts of ‘culture,’ and analyzes the relationship between culture and language in the context of
language acquisition. The assumption is that there is a unique and clear relationship between a culture and its language. This thesis examines how the forms and uses of language reflect the culture in which the language is spoken and how teaching and understanding the cultural underpinnings of language enhances both the quantity and quality of language acquisition.

Further, Chapter II addresses the ever-increasing emphasis on a culture-language approach and the ways in which it is being implemented. It will show that in the last few decades the integration of culture and language acquisition has come to the foreground. Educational programs have often still failed to grasp the usefulness of this approach. Even where flexibility is permitted, many teachers are unclear as to how to incorporate culture in EFL/ESL classrooms. As a result, they make little or no effort to include culture as part of the EFL/ESL curriculum. This uncertainty may very well be one of the leading reasons why language teaching is still ineffective in Russia.

The end of the Chapter II examines the development of literacy in Russia over several decades beginning with the Russian October Revolution in 1917, to the present day, focusing on the ineffectiveness of Russian EFL classrooms and the educational system as a whole. Nowadays, most Russian EFL classrooms continue to emphasize the grammar-translation approach, where students are required to memorize grammar points, then perform repetitive drilling exercises on the newly learned grammatical form(s). Russian students are not taught to develop intercultural competence communicate in the class, but to simply listen to the teacher’s instructions and complete the work (Kodotchikova, 2002). This thesis provides solutions to this problem.
The major concept explored in Chapter III is the subject of how culture can be applied in Russian educational environments to make the language learning process more effective. Scholars believe that teaching a foreign/second language might be functionally inaccurate and incomplete without the study of the related culture. Many tools discussed in this chapter concentrate on developing students’ cultural awareness in EFL/ESL classrooms. This chapter considers the 5 C’s, the experiential learning cycle, the five dimensions of culture, and authentic materials in language learning.

In Chapter IV, role-playing is identified as an effective teaching technique in language and culture teaching. Using the effective instructional sequence (EIS), it describes how role-playing can be implemented in the teaching of the target language in secondary schools in Russia to increase students’ cultural and language awareness. Toward the end of the chapter, conclusions based on the research are discussed.

Finally, in Chapter V, recommendations given for improving Russian language learning instruction are presented. These recommendations encompass the techniques and strategies discussed throughout the study and are targeted toward students, teachers, and the school administration. This holistic approach strengthens and underpins the goal of effective foreign language instruction for the Russian educational system.

Conclusion

While scholars agree that knowledge of the underlying culture is a prerequisite to successfully learning a new language, Russian language learning programs have been slow to adopt this concept. This thesis is intended to make Russian policy
makers and educators think deeply about the language learning process. Through thoughtful consideration, Russian policy makers should recognize the importance of including cultural content in their curriculum, and hopefully be encouraged to implement some of the tools discussed in their classrooms.

Limitations of Study

This research examines the incorporation of culture in Russian EFL classrooms. A great deal of the pertinent and applicable literature was written and available only in Russian. It would have been optimal had this research been translated into English and made available in the United States. However, this is not the case. Therefore, the first limitation of the study is that the necessary Russian students have not been translated into English and is not available in CSU, Chico’s library, either in print or digitally.

While the general topic of cultural incorporation in ESL/EFL classrooms is well documented, there is very little literature available that specifically relates to the inclusion of culture in Russian EFL curricula. Despite this limitation, enough research has been conducted on the topic in general to extrapolate a knowledge base that applies to the Russian classroom.

The findings and recommendations reflect research and literature reviews from both English and Russian sources. Additional research should be conducted, especially within the Russian educational system, before the specific recommendations are implemented. However, the principles and general recommendations provided should
offer Russian educators a strong foundation from which to start the process of cultural incorporation.

Definitions of Terms

Authentic Materials

“Refers to the use of spoken and written material that has been produced for purposes of communication not for purposes of language teaching” (Nunan, 2004, p. 49).

Culture

“Is the evolving way of life of a group of persons, consisting of shared set of practices associated with a shared set of products, based upon a shared set of perspectives on the world, and set within specific social contexts” (Moran, 2001, p. 24).

English as a Second Language (ESL)


English as a Foreign Language (EFL)


Five C’s

The 5 Cs were provided by the Standards For Foreign Language Learning and include five goal areas: Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities.
Role-Playing

“Role-playing is a way of bringing situations from real life into the classroom” (Doff, 2007, p. 232).
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The goal of this literature review is to provide a foundation that supports the application of culture in EFL classrooms in order to develop both students’ language skills and cultural awareness. As part of this process, this study examines the following themes:

1. The meaning of ‘culture’ in general and in the context of ESL/EFL.
2. The relationship between language and culture, and consequently, the importance of using culture in second language acquisition.
3. The increasing of the appreciation of culture in the context of language teaching.
4. The National Standards for Foreign Language Learning (NSFLL).
5. Culture and language in the context of language teaching in Russia.

The conclusion summarizes research on the relationship between language and teaching cultural awareness in EFL class norms.

Concepts of Culture

There is not a clear and universally accepted definition of “culture.” Trivonovich’s survey reflects more than 450 different definitions of and/or concepts of
“culture” (as cited in Croft, 1980, p. 550). Each ethnographer works within his or her own explicit and/or implicit definition(s). While there may not be a single overarching accepted definition of culture, not surprisingly the definitions are comparable with only subtle variations. Those subtle variations reflect slightly different perspectives which, arguably, reflect the culture of any given academic! In practice, instructors can use these variations as desired to shed more light on the concept so as to better develop their lesson plans.

The word “culture” originated from the Latin word “cultura,” which means “being cultivated” (Nababan, 1974, p. 18). As the Latin language evolved over time, the word “cultura” came to mean “the study of ‘civilization’ or ‘society’” (Tylor, 1865, as cited in Nababan, 1974, p. 18). Basically and perhaps simplistically, “Cultura” as civilization is understood in two ways: “big C culture” and “small c culture.” “Big C” culture reflects art, music, literature, historical events, and institutions of society. The “big C” concept further refers to large groups of people as a nation, and clearly distinguishes them from other societies. On the other hand, “small c” culture reflects customs, traditions, and lifestyles of both large groups of people as well as subgroups (Halverson, 1985; Lafayette, 2005; Nemetz Robinson; 1998, Tomalin and Stempleski, 1993). However, the field of foreign and second language education need not use an all-encompassing definition. Rather, it can work within a more narrow definition of “culture” than other academic disciplines. Through the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning, ESL/EFL has developed a reasonably accurate and workable definition of “culture.”
The National Center for Cultural Competence (1994) describes culture as an integrated pattern of human behavior that includes thoughts, communications, languages, practices, beliefs, values, customs, courtesies, rituals, manners of interacting, and roles, relationships and expected behaviors of a racial, ethnic, religious or social group; and ability to transmit the above to succeeding generations. (as cited in National Association of School Psychologists [NASP], n.d., “Culture,” para. 1)

Such a broad definition might not be the most workable variation for classroom instruction.

Some studies have defined culture by more narrowly emphasizing four meanings of culture in aesthetic terms: cinema, literature, music, and media (Adaskou, Britten & Fashi, 1990, pp. 3-10). While their semantic concept refers to thought processes, their pragmatic sense aims to emphasize social abilities and increase the realistic and pragmatic use of language for successful communication. Another important classification variation that relates culture to concept has come from studies by Larsen-Freeman (2000), Nemetz Robinson (1998), Klopf (1998), and others. They take the position that culture consists of artifacts, actions, and meanings. Larsen-Freeman (2000) referred to culture as being defined by the concepts of interrelated dimensions such as form, use, and meaning (pp. 2-10). Tomalin and Stempleski (1993), and Nemetz Robinson (1998) defined these dimensions as products, behaviors, and ideas, while Klopf (1998) chose to define the dimensions as artifacts, sociofacts, and mentifacts. The National Standards for Foreign Language Education also defines culture as three interrelated dimensions: products, practices, and perspectives.

Similarly, Moran (2001) proposed a variation where the definition of “culture” required five interrelated dimensions: products, practices, perspectives,
communities, and persons. He stated, “Culture is the evolving way of life of a group of persons, consisting of a shared set of practices associated with a shared set of products, based upon a shared set of perspectives on the world, and set within specific social contexts” (p. 24). In other words, cultural artifacts, actions, and meanings don’t exist separately from the people of a culture. “People – alone and with others – make and use artifacts, carry out actions, and hold meanings” (Moran, 2001, p. 24).

In contradistinction to definitions that reflect concrete elements, some studies tend to stress the abstract element of behavior. Larson and Smalley (1972), Risager (2007), and Peck (1998) suggest that culture is a “blue print.” Along these same lines, culture is defined by Thompson (1990) as “the pattern of meaning embodied in symbolic forms, including actions, utterances, and meaningful objects of various kinds, by virtue of which individuals communicate with one another and share their experiences conceptions and beliefs” (p. 132). Blue print definitions suggest that culture and behavior are related to each other in that knowledge of culture influences the blue print for behaviors of people in a society (Larson & Smalley, 1972, p. 39).

As mentioned earlier, through the NSFLL, EFL has a reasonably accurate and workable definition of “culture” which will be used for the purposes of this study. In this research, culture is considered to be “the way people live.” This definition encompasses a more focused analysis of the linguistic and non-linguistic patterns which are accepted in the society the culture represents (Chastain, 1988, p. 302) and is most useful for the Culture-Language approach. While there may not be a single accepted definition of culture, the definitions are comparable with only subtle variations. Those variations reflect slightly different perspectives which, arguably, reflect the culture of any given
field. In practice, an instructor can use these variations to shed more light on the concept so as to better develop their lesson plans.

The Relationship Between Language and Culture

Recently, Wardhaugh (2011) stated that “the nature of the relationship between language and culture has fascinated, and continues to fascinate people from a wide a variety of backgrounds” (p. 229). No matter the intellectual perspective or perspectives adopted as to the definition of “culture,” academics have increasingly concerned themselves with the inexorable relationship between culture and language, while increasingly realizing the necessity of understanding the culture in order to be able to effectively teach and use the language. In point of fact, the Culture-Language Approach confirms the interrelationship between language and culture (Wardhaugh, 2011, pp. 229-230).

Many authors, such as H. D. Brown (2007), Moran (2001), Nababan (1974), Tang (1999), Kramsch (2001), and Wardhaugh (2011) have explicitly stated that language and culture are closely related. Kramsch (2001) drew attention to the interaction of language; and culture with the understanding that members of society conduct their social lives with language and when language is “used in context of communication, it is bound up with culture in various and complex ways” (p. 13). Based on the Cakir (2006) study, culture is “patterned behavior,” where language is a “vital component” of the culture.

This relationship of language and culture is widely recognized, communicative behavior and cultural systems are interrelated, as there is relation between the form
and content of a language and the beliefs, values, and needs present in the culture of its speakers. (p. 156).

Similarly, Nababan (1974) concluded that it is impossible to learn the culture well without learning the language of the target context because beliefs, feelings, perspectives, and so forth are functionally embedded and interwoven within the language (pp. 18-30). As such, even a fluent speaker might misunderstand the messages he/she hears or reads or sees without sufficient cultural skills. Tang (1999) went even further, by asserting that “language is culture.” For Tang, absent the threshold ability to think in the target language, the speaker will not be sufficiently fluent in that language and culture. Perhaps mystically, Tang (1999) opined that language is the soul of the country.

More in line with the mainstream, H. D. Brown (2007) similarly postulated that “language is a part of a culture, and culture is a part of the language; the two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture” (p. 164). For H. D. Brown (1986), culture is “deeply ingrained part of the very fiber of our being, but language – the means for communication among members of a culture” (p. 34).

The Rise of the Appreciation of Culture in the Context of Language Teaching

It is essential to note the concurrent supporting contributions of two recent developments - information communication technology, such as the Internet, and the increase of exchange program studies - to the ever-widening acceptance of the Culture-Language approach (Risager, 2007, p. 32). These contributions have facilitated adoption of the Culture-Language approach.
Beginning in the 1960s and continuing into this century, the relationship between language and culture in the context of EFL/ESL has been widely discussed. However, the fruits of these discussions were not put into practice in the EFL/ESL curriculum of the 1960s (Sysoyev & Donelson, 2002). Rather than thoroughly adopting the Culture-Language approach, instructors continued to use other approaches such as the Classical approach, the Grammar-Translation approach, the Direct approach, the Audiolingual approach, Suggestopedia, Total Physical Response, and the Silent Way (J. D. Brown, 1995, pp. 16-17). These methods emphasized structure and vocabulary and neglected cultural aspects of communication.

Beginning in 1970, the cultural teaching of language was clearly in ascendance in EFL/ESL. Initially, those adopting this approach did so in a rudimentary fashion using only dialogues (H. D. Brown, 2001a, pp. 34-37). However, as the positive results of the Culture-Language approach were increasingly recognized as:

it was realized that to communicate effectively, one should adapt the properties of his language use (such as intonation, lexical choice, and syntax) to the social ‘variables’ . . . in which he interacts with others. Consequently, [the] role of culture in the ESL/EFL curriculum grew. (Purba, 2011, p. 46)

The growing importance of culture in the EFL/ESL curriculum was evidenced in the 1980s by the appearance of syllabi designed to assist teachers using the Culture-Language approach (Rivers, 1982; Robinson, 2001). Two of the most important scholars of that period, Byram (1989) and Zarate (1986), articulated the expanding understanding of culture teaching to include

using various sources of information, identifying stereotypes and other representations, contextualizing information, explaining one’s own culture to foreigners and establishing personal contacts with foreigners and preparing trips to a target language country. (as cited in Risager, 2007, p. 86)
Byram (1989) specifically advocated the development of an integrating discipline to teach language and culture (p. 23). By the 1990s, Byram and Zarate (1994) coined the concept of “intercultural speaker” which described those who “have the ability to see how different cultures related to each other in terms of similarities and differences and to look at themselves from an “external” perspective when interacting with representatives of other cultures” (as cited in Risager, 2007, pp. 86-90).

Today, the incorporation of the Culture-Language approach in EFL/ESL classrooms is ubiquitous and is used either or both explicitly or implicitly (Atkinson, 1999). For example and not surprisingly, Cakir (2006) expressed the belief that acquiring language skills involves grammar, speaking, listening, and reading ability, as well as unique and distinctive attributes of the target culture (p. 156). Cakir (2006) states that to communicate “internationally” means to communicate “interculturally.” He provided such explicit and implicit examples as tone of voice, appropriate topics of conversations, gestures, movements, and expressions that might be different from students’ native cultures. He proposed that when we teach languages in EFL classrooms, we should automatically teach culture: “the forms of address, greetings, formulas, and other utterances found in the dialogues or models students hear and the allusions to aspects of culture found in the reading represent cultural knowledge” (2006, p. 156).

National Standards for Foreign Language Learning (SFLL)

Almost all U.S. schools have students who recently emigrated from different countries for various reasons and for whom English is a second language. Additionally, foreign language learning has been a part of the American K-12 core curriculum since
2000. For these reasons, the U.S. federal government developed national standards for seven subject areas, including foreign language education (Shrum & Glisan, 2009, p. 51).

At the initiative of President George H. W. Bush in 1996, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), along with other associations, developed the Standards framework which broadly defines the essential skills and knowledge students should acquire in a foreign language from kindergarten to twelfth grade. The development was a collaborative effort with such organizations as the American Association of Teachers of French (AATF), the American Association of Teachers of German (AATG), and the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese (AATSP). The *Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing in the 21st Century* (SFLL) were published in 1996 and later expanded in 1999 as a result of further consultation with professional organizations from Italy, China, Japan, Russia, and Saudi Arabia. Consequently it was renamed *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century* (1999) (Shrum & Glisan, 2009, p. 51).

The *Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing in the 21st Century* (ACTFL, 1996) are based on three broad assumptions, each of which has clarifying points:

1. Competence in more than one language and culture enables students to:
   - Interact with people from other cultures
   - Better understand what is happening in cultures other than their own
   - Appreciate their native culture and language on a deeper level
   - Read, watch, and interact with knowledge sources from the target culture
   - Relate to the global community in a more meaningful way.
2. Any student can successfully learn a language and its corresponding culture. To succeed, they:

- Must be able to acquire the language and culture as a part of their entire school experience.
- Realize the benefits of gaining and maintaining proficiency in the foreign language
- Learn the language in multiple ways and in different settings
- Acquire proficiency at varied rates.

3. Foreign language curricula need to reflect language and culture simultaneously. As a result, it:

- Has direct correlation to programs that include productive tools, techniques, testing, and technology
- Shows ever improving standards at all levels of the educational system.
- Develops and improves upon communication and thinking skills.

Given these assumptions, the Standards focus on outcomes of foreign language learning:

- Students’ ability to communicate in authentic settings
- Understanding the target culture contextually
- Making connections to knowledge through the target language, competency in recognizing how languages and cultures compare
- Participation in multilingual communities (Shrum & Glisan, 2009, p. 55).
Taking the intended outcomes into consideration, the Standards framework is based on the 5 C’s goal areas: Communications, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities. When students study a language, their use of the 5 C’s might be weighted more toward one or the other, depending on individual goals which range anywhere from finding a rewarding career to simply fulfilling graduation requirements. The Standards provide flexible guidance to teachers, educators, and others who are involved in students’ educational lives. This guidance consists of curricular elements that should be “woven” into the 5 C’s goal areas. These elements are language systems, “cultural traits and concepts, communication strategies, critical thinking skills, and learning strategies” (Shrum & Glisan, 2009, p. 55).

Language systems aren’t based on grammar rules and vocabulary. Rather they take into account sociolinguistic elements of gesture, discourse style, and “learning what to say to whom and when” (Shrum & Glisan, 2009, p. 55). Cultural traits identify cultural concepts of the target culture with the intention of avoiding cultural miscommunication. Communication strategies reflect students’ interaction in a natural way. With the development of critical thinking skills, students are able to use their existing knowledge of their first language and apply it to the target language. Use of all of these elements facilitates students’ language learning processes and better prepares them to define solutions to problems that arise. Students use learning strategies, such as organizing their learning process, repeating newly learned vocabulary words or topics, rehearsing linguistic components, previewing new topics, and seeking opportunities to interact with native speakers. Being self-motivated, students expand their knowledge not only about the learned topic but also about other subjects (Shrum & Glisan, 2009, pp. 55-56).
Nevertheless, the Standards framework is not a specific curriculum, as it doesn’t provide point-by-point course content or teaching sequences. The broad guidance it offers as a stand-alone document “should be used with state and local frameworks and standards to determine the best approaches and responsible expectations for students” (Shrum & Glisan, 2009, p. 57). The Standards provide measurements to gauge improvement in foreign language acquisition. The Standards also describe abilities and knowledge that students should acquire during the language learning process. Finally, the Standards suggest the sequence and types of content that facilitate students’ language learning processes and acquisition of necessary skills. The Standards also inform teachers, parents, administrators, and others who are involved in the students’ learning to take an active role in the process. This is intended to help students attain the knowledge that will eventually help them successfully function within our multicultural world (ACTFL, 1996).

To sum up, the Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing in the 21st Century illustrates the essential skills and knowledge students should acquire when learning a foreign language. The Standards also address the importance of culture, how to avoid cultural miscommunication, and understand and respect cultural issues that are different from those of the native cultures in the language learning process. The Standards framework is used by U.S. teachers to strengthen their curriculum for Pre-K and K-12 students in conjunction with their own teaching philosophies and theoretical knowledge of how to teach a foreign language.

The importance of incorporating culture during foreign language learning has gained wide acceptance in the U.S. as well as many other countries. Despite this, the
Russian Federation has been slow to adopt the concept and even slower to implement the methodology and practices within the education system. For the most part, Russian educators still follow old Stalin era traditions for teaching foreign languages, with little change at the classroom level in the last several decades. The educational system in Russia over the last century has undergone dramatic changes, and this has had a profound effect upon how teaching methodologies have developed. It is also integral in understanding the problems and challenges that must be overcome in order to implement the changes needed to incorporate culture in foreign language instruction.

Culture and Language in the Context of Language Teaching in Russia

There was no greater stimulate for literacy and education than the Russian Revolution (1917-1923). After the Revolution, the Civil War, and the famine, the now-Soviet people prodigiously learned to read to enhance their productivity, assert their rights, and agitate for a better society. People struggled against the old social system to both overthrow Tsarism and more equitably redistribute property. This educational liberation unleashed innovative thinking and development of some notably successful educational methods (Bale & Knopp, 2012, p. 217).

Lenin, the leader of the Bolsheviks and later the head of Russia, stated, “As long as there is such a thing in the country as illiteracy, it is hard to talk about political education” (Armove & Graff, 1987, p. 8). Russians understood and embraced the importance of being literate. For the first time, education was not only free, but required for children from the ages of eight to sixteen, regardless of sex. Russian journalist Victor Serge wrote:
hungry children in rags would gather in winter-time around a small stove planted in the middle of the classroom, whose furniture often went for fuel to give some tiny relief from the freezing cold; they had one pencil between four of them and their schoolmistress was hungry. (as cited in Bale & Knopp, 2012, p. 235)

American journalist John Reed wrote: “Russia absorbed reading matter like hot sand drinks water, insatiable” (Bale & Knopp, 2012, p. 217).

Previously, Tsarist society legally permitted only the reading of simple fictional novels, fables, and dubious history. In the new society, one of the foremost progressive Soviet educationalists was Lev Vygotsky (Yarovitsky, 2004). Inspired by the Russian Revolution, Vygotsky championed and inspired others to read about politics, economics, history, philosophy, and the great works of legendary writers such as Tolstoy, Gorky, and Gogol. Later referred to as “The Mozart of Psychology” by Stephen Toulmin, Vygotsky made great contributions to the world of child and adolescent cognition and psychology. One of these was the developmental theory he called the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Shrum & Glisan, 2009, pp. 23-24). Many of the world’s teaching programs owe some of their curricular development to Vygotsky’s theory of ZPD. In ZPD, schools were operated on the principle that everyone in the school-community had an equal voice (Saville-Troike, 2012, p. 119). This school-community included students, teachers, administrators, and parents who made decisions together on everything from what to plant in the school garden to what to read in literature class (Behrent, 2012). “If the children decide against some necessary subject, it is the teacher’s job to show them through their play and life together that the subject is needed” (Bale & Knopp, 2012, p. 238). This technique was implemented to emphasize both collectivism and the equal rights of each individual (Behrent, 2012).
William Chamberlin, an American writer who observed Revolutionary Russian public schools, noticed that teachers largely played the role of advisers, providing students with the freedom to solve a given problem individually, in pairs, or small groups (Behrent, 2012). Based on ZPD theory, teachers helped only when it was necessary (Shrum & Glisan, 2009, pp. 26-27). Students freely chose subjects that they would like to learn in college. Chamberlin interviewed the Russian Commissar for Education, Anatoly Lunacharsky, and was particularly interested in how the Soviet system addressed such skills as spelling and grammar. Lunacharsky explained:

Frankly, we don’t attach so much importance to the formal school discipline of reading and writing and spelling as to the development of the child’s mind and personality. Once a pupil begins to think for himself he will master such tools of formal knowledge as he may need. And if he doesn’t learn to think for himself no amount of correctly added sums or correctly spelled words will do him much good. (as cited in Bale & Knopp, 2012, p. 239)

Moreover, Lunacharsky added that Revolutionary Russia didn’t utilize a grading system, as it was believed that an individual would not effectively listen to lectures that were not useful and interesting (Behrent, 2012). The education system at the time promoted freedom, equal rights, and the expression of ideas. Each student was considered an individual with his/her own views, ideas, perspectives, and beliefs. Educators directed and taught students to think and create, rather than simply memorize. With their critical thinking ability unlocked, students were believed to achieve their highest human potential grounded in freedom, honesty, and literacy (Behrent, 2012).

Subsequent to Lenin’s death, the Stalinist dictatorship increasingly rejected the ZPD and gradually reestablished Pre-Revolutionary ideas and methods of teaching and learning. Stalinists took control of the education system – and society as whole – and
altered it according their own best interests. Due to Stalin’s quest for power on behalf of the Communist Party – and thus his own power – everyone quickly learned what it would cost if they spoke against his leadership. Consequently, people spoke to praise their leaders and their leaders’ ideas, whether or not they truly supported them (Mironov, 2012, pp. 380-400).

Stalin’s primary goal was to control society to the extent that he and the Communist Party could manipulate it like a marionette (Arnove & Graff, 1987, p. 14). School policy and administration were centralized and made uniform. This gave Stalin direct control over policy and curriculum. As a result, he could nurture a future society that could be more easily manipulated (Benavot & Resnik, 2006 p. 53). Teachers were not allowed to encourage students to express their own ideas, especially if those ideas questioned or were different from the ideology of the Stalinist government. While they were theoretically free to implement their own strategies in class, teachers followed only the reestablished educational methods for second languages mandated by the government as they quickly realized that any new ideas could cost them – and even their relatives – years in the gulag and/or their lives (Benavot & Resnik, 2006 pp. 53-54).

Chillingly, teachers were also responsible for what their students said in class. As a consequence, teachers determined that the safest teaching method was to eliminate the communication component of instruction and to simply focus on grammar (Mironov, 2012, pp. 384-400.). The implementation of Stalinist educational theory is one of the major reasons the grammar-translation approach is so widely used to this day in Russian classrooms. “Based on notions of perspective grammar and what constituted proper usage, the grammar-translation approach advocated economy of time through deductive
teaching of language involving reading and translation, but also the emergence of writing and speaking as ultimate goals” (J. D. Brown, 1995, p. 6). As per the dictates of Stalinist leadership, Russian language teachers constructed lessons based on grammatical forms. Students memorized grammar points and were then asked to recall the main rules in assignments and exams (Benavot & Resnik, 2006, p. 54). Students were required to memorize approximately ten new vocabulary words for every class. The words were randomly chosen without any context; students were then asked to match them with their Russian equivalents. The government’s control of the curriculum extended to the texts used to explain grammatical forms, which often emphasized the Soviet Union’s socialist perspectives. Thus, second language acquisition reflected little of the target language’s culture, as it was filtered completely through the lens of Stalinist ideology (Benavot & Resnik, 2006, p. 59).

The echo of Stalinism in the educational system in Russia can be seen today, especially in foreign language classrooms. The Soviet – especially Stalinist – era left a heritage of strong bias toward standardized and routine instruction. Today, teachers continue to stress the essentially Stalinist educational model based on mechanical memorization. Students play the role of listeners who are not allowed to speak out. Teachers provide instruction from a blackboard with little or no class involvement. Even though foreign languages are a core subject in today’s Russian public schools, the foreign language learning process still uses one of the most outdated teaching models extant.

Numerous studies have highlighted the ineffectiveness of foreign language teaching in Russian public schools. For example, Millrood (1999) undertook an observational review of Russia’s method of second language acquisition. He approached
his observational research from the perspective that there are three essential components that contribute to successful foreign language teaching and learning: language, techniques, and culture (Millrood, 1999). Millrood subsequently concluded that none of these three components were effectively demonstrated in Russian language classes.

More specifically, Millrood (1999) conducted observational research on English language classes in several Russian public high schools, including one in my native town of Ryazan. During three years of observation from 1995 to 1998, Millrood explored the organizational and teaching techniques used in English language classes (Millrood, 1999). He found that lessons usually consisted of three stages: checking homework, explaining new material, and reinforcing new learning through mechanical drills. Teachers spent a great deal of time explaining new grammatical forms, following up with bilingual exercises, and finally textual translations, all with no correlation to the target culture (Millrood, 1999).

Millrood (1999) further reported that teachers seldom used effective supplemental resources in their lessons. Resources such as audio and video supplements could demonstrate the new subject more vividly and engagingly, while dramatically increasing students’ understanding and interest in the target language’s culture (Millrood, 1999). While textbooks were occasionally used, they were colorless and contained only a few black and white pictures. Also overlooked were cultural projects that include products from the target culture and role playing (Millrood, 1999).

Each day’s lesson was built upon individual work and did not contain tasks where students could work in pairs or small groups to practice communication skills. Students’ participation was regulated through the “answers” technique, in which teachers
usually signal when a particular student was to speak. For example, the teacher asked a question and called upon an individual student to give the correct response. The teacher corrected mistakes in the student’s response (Millrood, 1999).

Interviews with Russian teachers revealed that the teachers’ professional beliefs were built on a teacher-centered orientation (Millrood, 1999). They believed that the class should be under the teacher’s control and that students’ freedom of self-expression should be restricted in order to prevent a classroom from being out-of-control (Millrood, 1999). The teacher rating system was structured so that a teacher’s proficiency was directly related to whether the class was well disciplined, that is, students were quiet and focused on the drilling exercises individually. Teachers avoided using authentic target culture materials because they believed the students might become excited. This, in turn, could lead to poor discipline (Millrood, 1999). No thought was given to the idea that an interesting and engaging curriculum would not only increase the students’ language efficacy, but would also focus their attention on what they were learning. Another belief of Russian teachers was that a student’s errors should always be corrected, lest students learn to speak incorrectly (Millrood, 1999). Of course, these corrections were often based upon material that excluded the target language’s culture.

Russian Federal State Educational Standards for teaching a foreign language were promulgated in 1992. They reflect the development of four primary skills: speaking, reading, writing, and listening. Cultural skills were also included as a subset in the Learning Federal State Standards. These were to be implemented by teachers based on their own knowledge and interest in the target culture (Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation, 2009). Almost all standardized teaching materials and
textbooks eventually reflected the target language through the native culture. However, the adoption of the Standards was, at best, incremental, as the Standards had not effectively penetrated the Russian educational system by the time of Millrood’s study seven years later (Millrood, 1999).

In practice, public school language teachers are usually not very enthusiastic about incorporating authentic cultural materials. They either do not know how to do it or do not have enough target culture knowledge to effectively implement the new methodology or material. Stalinist baggage also continued to weigh down instructional effectiveness (Mironov, 2012, pp. 252-280). In contrast, private schools were often more open to providing instruction and materials that enhanced students’ intercultural communication skills and reflected perspectives of the target culture. These schools charge tuition for each student, and salaries for private school teachers are much higher than those in public schools (Mironov, 2012). The increased demand for student performance by those paying tuition usually prompts the private schools to hire native speakers of the target culture teach foreign language classes. Among the other advantages of using native speakers for instruction is their lack of exposure to Stalinist influence (Mironov, 2012).

Summation

The current state of foreign language instruction in the Russian educational system is the result of many different historical factors and a superb example of Brandt’s idea of literacy sponsorship. According to Brandt, “Sponsors, as I have come to think of them, are any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach,
model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy” (2001, p. 556). Brandt goes on to say that “sponsors deliver the ideological freight that must be borne for access to what they have” (p. 557). Such sponsorship can be functional, dysfunctional or both. The most glaring example of a dysfunctional Russian foreign language instruction sponsor would be Joseph Stalin and his government. The intense regulation and control of education under his totalitarian dictatorship had drastic and long lasting effects on the Russian educational system and the teachers that worked within it. Even after the fall of the sponsor, the ideological and practical burdens it brought to bear still affect the curriculum today. It was so pervasive that it was largely self-perpetuating; each generation that grew up learning under that ideology, subsequently indoctrinated the next generation with almost no outside cultural influence. While the new Russian Learning Federal State Standards allow, and to some extent encourage, the inclusion of more culturally diverse materials, most teachers are unable or unwilling to effectively incorporate them. This reluctance is not borne out of fear, as it was during Stalinist rule. It is due to ennui, ignorance, or possibly a sociological passivity to change with the ingrained thought that the ‘nail that sticks out is usually the one that gets hammered.’

As a new generation of teachers that is less influenced by a Stalinist upbringing emerges, a paradigm shift in the way foreign language is taught can begin to take place. The passion and thirst for education that engaged during the Revolution nearly 100 years ago is still very much a part of the Russian peoples’ weltanschauung. While suppressed for much of the 20th century, the influence of Lenin and Vygotsky can once again liberate the Russian education system.
Conclusion

Language and culture are inseparably, and immutably, connected. Absent an understanding of culture, comprehensive foreign language proficiency cannot be fully achieved. Conversely, cultural comprehension is impossible without a grasp of the language it has a symbiotic relationship with. The inclusion of culture in the foreign language classroom has enjoyed a position of prominence among academics and educators since the 1960s (e.g., Kramsch, Brown, Sysoyev, Byram, and Cakir). The necessity of intercultural understanding in the language classroom is rooted in the knowledge students gain about their own culture and the insights they acquire toward the target culture. Students learn to recognize and appropriate the specific cultural patterns of communication and behavior that occur within the target society. By leveraging this knowledge and understanding, students will be able to successfully function within the target society because they will recognize the culture’s unique features and respond appropriately.

The Standards for Foreign Language Learning substantiate the significance of cultural incorporation in foreign classrooms, while providing a rationale for helping students develop cultural awareness. The Standards provide the foundation needed to both understand and be understood in another culture. Should this standard framework be adopted by Russian educators, the curricula in EFL classrooms would be vastly improved. Echoes of the Soviet Era can still be seen in the Russian Learning Federal State Standards for foreign languages as evidenced by the continued use of the Grammar-Translation method, which essentially ignores the need for communication and cultural skills. The incorporation of a standard framework for SFLL will provide an extremely
efficacious curriculum as well as a more robust language learning experience that gives students a meaningful grasp of the target culture.
CHAPTER III

TEACHING CULTURE

Introduction

The main goal of a language teacher is to develop intercultural competence. Students need to develop an understanding of both attitudinal and performance awareness in order to interact with native speakers of the target culture. This makes the teaching of culture in a foreign language classroom essential. The importance and benefits of teaching culture in EFL classrooms are the focus of this chapter. Additionally, the concept of incorporating culture as a necessary and effective teaching strategy is examined and justified. Attention is given to the tools, strategies, and techniques for incorporating culture in the EFL classroom based on students’ needs and standards.

The Importance of Teaching Culture in EFL Classrooms

The growing awareness of the intertwined nature of culture-language has led to academic studies and articles encouraging educators to place significantly more emphasis on teaching about the target culture. Authors, such as Byram (1989), H. D. Brown (2007), Peck (1998), Atkinson (1999), Moran (2001), and Mishan (2005) have discussed culture as an important and necessary component in an effective language curriculum. In this context, Byram (1989) has written that his main goal is to develop “an integrated discipline of teaching language and culture” (p. 23). Moran (2001)
subsequently added that cultural awareness helps students discover and explore their personal perspectives, not only on the target culture but the world as a whole (p. 75).

Whatever the motivation and reasons, learning a foreign language is always “culture-bounded” (Valdes, 1986). The flip side of the coin is that the features of a target culture cannot be deeply taught without integrating instruction in the target culture’s language.

Using authentic sources from the target language community - newspapers, films, photos, news broadcasts, and television shows - makes language learning more realistic, comprehensive, and often enjoyable. According to Nunan and Miller (1995), authentic materials “are not created or edited expressly for language learners” (p. 68).

Authentic materials are designed for target culture speakers in their native language. Students “feel, touch, smell, and see the foreign peoples and not just hear their language” (Peck, 1998). Authenticity enables students to better perceive social and cultural aspects of the target culture.

Authentic materials open the door to the study of the target language’s culture. Moran (2001) notes that “culture is the evolving way of life of a group of persons, consisting of a shared set of practices associated with a shared set of products, based upon a shared set of perspectives on the world, and set within specific social context” (p. 24). While discovering the practices and products of the target culture, students inevitably compare the target culture to their own culture and others as well. In the process, the learners develop personal perspectives toward cultures. Along with a better understanding and respect for the diversity of cultures, students also gain a level of appreciation for their own native culture (Moran, 2001, p. 78).
A teacher must consider a student’s age, gender, and language proficiency when selecting materials in order to design relevant, authentic and appropriate tasks that are interesting and engaging (Kodotchkova, 2002). For example, a teacher can incorporate authentic materials such as videos with varying amounts of translation, Venn Diagrams, outlines, or charts (Conderman, Bresnahan, & Pedersen, 2008, p. 78). Textbooks are not enough for teaching a foreign language. Gilmore (2004) notes that “real life is not as simple and straightforward as textbooks” (p. 366). Authentic language learning prepares a student for real life situations and teaches appropriate ways to use conversational language.

Several researchers (Byram 1989; Moran, 2001) believe that learning about the target culture further develops intercultural competence. When a student discusses topics such as history, economics, politics, and society he/she is able to participate in more meaningful interactions with native-speakers of the target culture. Moreover, he/she is able to comprehend specific areas of the culture much more accurately (Moran, 2001, p. 109). These approaches to teaching culture in EFL classrooms provide opportunities for genuine and essential cultural awareness. Each approach facilitates one or more of the following: enhanced communication competence, reduced stereotypes, and the development of cultural sensitivity.

Through exposure to authentic products, utilization of genuine language, and culturally specific topics, students are able to avoid stereotypes and gain an appreciation for different facets of the target culture diamond. Students develop empathy and cultural sensitivity toward both the target culture and their native culture, and a healthy respect for the differences in the cultures. Authentic materials help students perceive the target
language and culture from a more realistic perspective. This imparts a level of comfort and ease with the unique cultural idiosyncrasies of the target culture. Learning the meanings of behaviors and specific communication styles for different situations, students are better able to communicate appropriately in different situations and avoid cultural misunderstandings. This increased level of proficiency improves motivation and, promotes the desire to continue to improve.

One of the five prongs of the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21st Century* (ACTFL, 1996) centers on “communication.” To communicate competently is to “communicate with each other across linguistic and cultural boundaries” (CEFR, 2001, p. 3); Bachman (1990) has proclaimed that communicative competence should be the core component in teaching and learning a second/foreign language (as cited in Bagaric, 2007, pp. 96-98). As Peterson and Coltrane (2003) assert, “Language use must be associated with other culturally appropriate behavior” to make communication truly comprehensive and fully successful. Otherwise, students will learn only “survival and routine transactions” (Byram, 1989, pp. 40-41). Canale and Swain (1980), and Canale (1983), defined communicative competence that includes five interrelated elements: linguistic competence, pragmalinguistic competence, sociopragmatic competence, strategic competence, and discourse competence (as cited Bagaric, 2007, p. 96).

Linguistic competence defines a student’s lexical, phonological, morphological, and syntactic knowledge of a language. It is the ability to construct words from morphemes, phrases and sentences from words, and appropriate utterances from sentences. It is important to note that, linguistic competence plays a lesser role in
teaching foreign languages in many countries, in contrast to other types of communicative competence (Gilmore, 2007, pp. 24-27). Pragmalinguistic competence refers to a student’s ability to understand and communicate appropriately using phrases or colloquialisms typically used by target culture speakers. In general, they are used when responding to speech acts such as requests, refusals, compliments, or apologies.

Contextualization is an important aspect of pragmalinguistics as it helps the learner know when and how to use the target language (Gilmore, 2007, pp. 28-32). Sociopragmatic competence is the ability to discern what is socially or culturally appropriate in the target culture. It entails an understanding of social conventions and taboos unique to the target culture, “what is appropriate to say to whom, and in what situations” (Peterson & Coltrane, 2003, p. 2). Strategic competence refers to a student’s ability to use verbal and nonverbal communication, such as gestures, movements, facial expressions, and paraphrases in situations when a breakdown occurs between interlocutors’ communications in order to reduce and avoid cultural misunderstanding. The use and development of strategic competence will allow students to build confidence in their target language skills and will help keep them engaged. Additionally, when students commit errors in L2 speech this communicative strategy will help them work through and negotiate the meaning instead of giving up on the conversation completely (Gilmore, 2007, pp. 40-44). Finally, discourse competence refers to students’ ability to create cohesive discourse in different genres of spoken or written speech such as in personal letters, narratives, gossip, or jokes. When speaking, the student’s ability to produce coherent and cohesive discourse depends on a number of factors such as determining when it is his/her turn to speak, staying on topic, making appropriate transitions to new
topics, providing short responses to the speaker, and how the end the conversation (Gilmore, 2007, pp. 44-46).

Teaching culture in EFL classrooms helps students to observe culture not only from a familiar perspective - often with a corresponding stereotypical perception - but from new perspectives as well. During language instruction, it is important to combine topics from different disciplines with authentic materials that represent components of and variations within the target culture. By doing so, the teacher allows students to acquire cultural information from different perspectives, thereby mitigating cultural stereotypes that often develop when a culture is explored through a one-sided prism (Hammerly, 1982). To “dispel myths,” H. D. Brown (2000) suggests teaching the target culture in positive ways while presenting the students’ native culture (p. 50). Along similar lines, Byram (1989) argues that both the target culture and native culture should be taught in a context of mutual respect. Otherwise, students may perceive the two cultures in competition for power and develop inaccurate cultural perceptions (p. 89).

Sauvignon (1972) and Cakir (2006) emphasize the importance of understanding stereotyping and advocate developing cultural sensitivity in EFL classrooms to avoid overgeneralizations. “[The] teacher’s task is to make students aware of cultural differences, not pass value judgments on these differences” (Cakir, 2006, p. 156). Cultural sensitivity helps a student to assimilate cross-cultural understandings that might otherwise be misunderstood (Cakir, 2006, pp. 156-157). The exploration of cultural differences is an effective technique for teaching the complex issues of the target culture and developing an appreciation of the differences across cultures. In addition, it contributes to greater sensitivity and empathy for differences between the native and
target culture. It also fosters positive attitudes toward the target culture as well as the language learning process (Byram, 1989, p. 89).

How to Teach Culture Using the 5 C’s

When creating lessons plans, teachers should follow The Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21st Century published by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language (1996). This framework is based on the 5 C’s: communications, cultures, connections, comparisons, and communities. All of these goals reflect the purposes for learning foreign languages. This chapter will look through the goals, the 5 C’s, to clarify their important role in learning foreign language (ACTFL, 1996, p. 3).

The focus of the first goal, Communication, is written and verbal communication between peers. Students grasp words and phrases for interactions with each other. For instance, students can exchange information about different events by asking each other questions (ACTFL, 1996, p. 4). Students also develop listening and reading skills in order to comprehend content; for example, the main idea of a text they have just read (ACTFL, 1996, p. 4). Students acquire “authentic patterns” and “appropriate styles” to express their ideas on a variety of topics. As an example, students can engage in a role-playing activity to present ideas on the following: what are you going to do after finishing high school? Communication activities are very important since they contribute to the development of students’ proficiency in the language by focusing on meaningful speaking skills (Zwiers, 2008, pp. 148-150).
In the second goal, Culture, students understand culture through its practices, that is, “what to do, when, and where” (Shrum & Glisan, 2009, p. 55). This goal reflects cultural practices that are produced by their distinctive views, attitudes, and perspectives of the target culture’s society. For instance, teachers can present American gestures by demonstrating the gestures, explaining their meaning, and explaining when and where these gestures are used (Shrum & Glisan, 2009, p. 55). Students understand culture through its products, the artifacts created by native speakers of the culture, including documents, religion, clothing, etc. (Moran, 2001, p. 48). Students focus on cultural products and their reflection of cultural perspectives. These products can be tangible or intangible. Tangible products are perceptible through the five senses: sight, smell, touch, taste, and hearing (ACTFL, 1996, p. 4). Examples of tangible products would be objects or places. Intangible products are those that aren’t perceived through the five senses, most often ideas or concepts such as a system of education. These cultural products are produced by distinctive views, attitudes, beliefs, and perspectives of the culture’s society. Teachers can present cultural products by showing pictures or by demonstrating them. For example, when creating a lesson plan about food in America, a teacher can include commonplace cultural products such as common American foods, sandwiches, hamburgers, and pies, which inherently reflect perspectives of the culture.

The third goal, Connections, focuses on learning the language itself and on other subject areas where students are able to acquire skills from other fields of knowledge including cultural competence and awareness. A teacher can connect each English class with other disciplines such as art, history, culinary, and literature. Connections also focus on a broader examination and subsequent extraction from the
various cultural information sources to which students have access. It’s a “new window of the world” (ACTFL, 1996, p. 4). Students gain proficiency in the foreign language because they are able to seek necessary information and then analyze the content. For example, students can observe distinctive viewpoints on different ways of traveling in the U.S. Connection activities help students to acquire knowledge not only in language and cultural context, but also to be proficient in other disciplines.

According to the fourth goal, Comparisons, students conduct a comparative analysis between the target culture and their own culture and language. Students build upon, and sometimes change, their assumptions of the target culture through reflection of the similarities and differences between the two languages. Grammatical forms are good examples of how students compare their own language to what they are learning in the target language. The goal demonstrates the students’ knowledge of the cultures they’re learning. Through comparative analysis, students identify products, practices, and perspectives of the target culture that are similar or different from their native culture. In this way, students are able to further develop their own assumptions about cultural systems in general. For example, students can find differences and similarities in the cuisine of their own culture and that of the target culture. Comparisons activities can be very helpful in terms of both developing target culture skills and basic concepts of critical thinking.

The fifth goal, Communities, centers on the student’s practical application of learned knowledge beyond the school setting. This might involve communication through email or Skype with native speakers of the target language, or direct communication with a native speaker of the target language that lives in the student’s community. Using the
learned knowledge, students are better able to appreciate the advantages of the learned skills, thereby increasing their desire to further develop their mastery of the target language. The skills and knowledge gained from foreign language instruction allow students to enjoy the many artistic endeavors of the target culture such as books, movies, music, and more, all while continuing to improve their language and cultural skills.

All of these goals guide students toward proficient interactions with others. The goals are meant to be taken holistically, not presented separately, with equal emphasis placed on each. “Each goal area contains two or three standards that describe the knowledge and ability that all students should acquire by the end of the program or high school education in order to achieve the goals” (Shrum & Glisan, 2009, p. 52).

According to Shrum and Glisan (2009), a teacher should provide students a real-world context so that students can understand and visualize cultural content and communicate in a natural way. A teacher should also provide students with tasks that connect with other disciplines for better understanding of the cultural context. Furthermore, teachers should eliminate artificial characters or texts when trying to provide perspectives of the culture. Finally, a teacher should expect and accept divergent student responses (Shrum & Glisan, 2009, p. 64).

In summary, The Standards for Foreign Language Learning: preparing for 21st Century is a framework for contextualizing language based on the 5 C’s goals which are Communication, Cultures, Comparisons, Connections, and Communities. Five goals enable students to be proficient in the target language within the cultural context.
Using Authentic Materials

A significant theme throughout this thesis is the inclusion of cultural awareness that facilitates and promotes learning of the target language. Beyond language acquisition, other benefits accrue from exposure to the target culture. The opportunity to compare cultural values and perspectives increases students’ awareness of both cultures. In this section, resources that can be used to develop fundamental knowledge of a target culture are explored more fully. These resources can include films, songs, texts, newspapers articles, and even advertisements from the target culture. Currently, however, English Foreign Language (EFL) teachers largely rely only on textbooks when teaching classes.

There is a broad range of international and local versions of current EFL textbooks. These often include additional components such as student books, workbooks, teacher’s editions, CDs, DVDs, and test books. International, sometimes referred to as global, textbooks are produced for universal use. These international materials can be used in any country, whereas local textbooks are designed to satisfy the national curriculums of the country in which it was produced (Pulverness, 1995, pp. 7-11). Despite their differences, almost all of the international and local textbooks focus on developing four language skills; however, none include teaching about the culture of the target language. Skopinskaya’s (2003) review of textbooks designed for the general global market revealed them to be, not surprisingly, universal in nature. They were insufficient in regards to individual learner’s needs and presented only the most basic of language or cultural features that would be considered acceptable or useful anywhere in the world. In an interesting contradistinction, Skopinskaya’s review of local textbooks
found that they attempt to teach EFL utilizing aspects of the learners’ natives’ culture instead of the target cultures (pp. 43-45).

To avoid superficiality in EFL classes, Nunan (2004), Shrum and Glisan (2009), and Mishan (2005) emphasize the use of ‘authentic’ materials. They assert that students must receive authentic input in order to effectively increase cultural and linguistic awareness. ‘Authentic’ is defined as “of undisputed origin; genuine” (“Authentic,” 2013). Nunan (2004) writes of text authenticity as “instances of spoken and written language that were produced in the course of genuine communication” (p. 212). He believes that authentic texts should “mirror communication” outside the classroom (p. 212). According to Galloway (1998), authentic materials are “those written and oral communications produced by members of a language and culture group for members of the same language and culture group” (as cited in Shrum & Glisan, 2009, p. 85). Shrum and Glisan (2009) classifies unauthentic texts as those scripted and recoded by speakers on audiotape, CD, or DVD. “Since these texts are not prepared by and for speakers of the target culture, but rather to accompany textbooks chapters, they are considered unauthentic” (p. 85). At the other end of his continuum, authentic texts are created, produced and used by native speakers in the target culture (Shrum & Glisan, 2009, p. 85). As examples, Shrum and Glisan (2009) consider scripted commercials, news and/or shows broadcast by radio and/or television as well as spontaneous and unscripted face-to-face conversations, telephone conversations, and interviews to be authentic.

Mishan (2005) begins her book Designing Authenticity into Language Learning Materials with the words “Nobody who has witnessed language blossoming in a small child can be in any doubt that language learning is a natural – an authentic –
activity” (p. ix). However, she notes that “the most natural approach” through the use of authentic communication for language instruction began to arise mostly after 1960, prior to which the Audiolingual and Direct language teaching methods were predominately used (pp. 2-10).

Mishan (2005) identifies seven separate categories of cultural products that, when produced by those who speak the language of the target culture natively, are genuine. They are: Literature, Broadcast Media, Newspapers, Advertising, Song and Music, Film, and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) (p. 95).

First and foremost, exposure to Literature of the target culture is necessary for the development of useful reading skills. During the exploration and comprehension of different genres of Literature, students practice their reading skills and become more competent with the target culture’s culture and language. Through Literature, students are able to observe and explore the target culture from native speakers’ perspectives. They gain a better understanding of essential features of the target culture, such as historical information, social interactions, and authentic vocabulary (Mishan, 2005, pp. 97-112).

Broadcast Media involves cultural products such as radio and television. It has many genres and examples include: news, art reviews, and entertainment programs. All reflect aspects of the target culture and the perspectives of its constituents. Broadcast Media is a convenient tool that allows students to quickly observe how target cultural values have changed over time.

Newspapers provide students with a broad range of topics ranging from local news to entertainment. This allows students to choose topics grounded in their own personal interests (Mishan, 2005, p. 154). Students are exposed to cultural
“microcosm[s]” that allow them to experience different nuances of the target language as a result of the wide range of writing styles represented (Mishan, 2005, p. 163) The different topics that are succinctly represented in Newspapers help students to more quickly compare their varying features.

Advertising demonstrates what is available and preferred by customers in the target culture. It captures what they buy - food, clothing, furniture, housing, entertainment etc. In other words, it reflects the lifestyle of the target culture.

“Advertisements can be serious, funny, exciting, enigmatic, sexy and so on, but, with the notable exception of health and safety campaigns (such as those intended to discourage drink-driving), they are rarely unpleasant” (Mishan, 2005, p. 184). Because there is such a wide disparity in the type, veracity and content of Advertising, it is important for teachers to be careful when selecting what students watch in order to appreciate and respect the target culture.

Songs and Music reflect peoples’ attitudes toward different things such as life, love, the world, and so forth. The primary feature students derive from the melody, rhythm, and content of Songs and Music is the cultural spirit of the target culture. Through historic Songs and Music, students can track the target culture’s historical events such as wars, revolutions and famines, and get a feel for a people’s spirit during those times. Songs and Music allow students to observe how the target culture celebrates their holidays and might allow a student to be able to gauge the relative importance and meanings of the various celebrations to the people of that culture (Mishan, 2005, pp. 196-197).
Film is a great resource for observing such non-verbal communication as gestures, body movements, and behaviors (Mishan, 2005, p. 225). “One of the fundamentals to remember when using films for language learning, is that a film can be enjoyed and understood even without language, as the films of the silent era demonstrated” (Mishan, 2005, p. 224). Through watching the target culture’s movies, students will be able to respond to questions such as “What do people eat and drink, where, and with whom? How do people spend their free time? Where do they shop? What do they wear?” (Mishan, 2005, p. 226). Moreover, students will be exposed to jargon, regional dialects, accents, idioms, and informal verbal and non-verbal language (Mishan, 2005, p. 225).

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) provides “virtual travelling” all over the world (Mishan, 2005, p. 247). Students may be able to visit any place in the target culture using ICT. Communication through email has many advantages. One advantage of using email as a communication medium is that it circumvents any predisposition of social class, accents, or race, and allows students to communicate in a more neutral environment emphasizing similarities between cultures (Mishan, 2005, p. 254). “Each partner should benefit equally from the relationship, by providing models of the native language’s cultural information and corrective feedback” (Mishan, 2005, pp. 250-251).

Mishan (2005) believes that the use of these seven categories of cultural products fosters students’ motivation. “A key factor affecting successful language learning, and indeed learning in general, is largely agreed to be motivation” (p. 25). Supporting and maintaining positive attitudes towards the target culture’s language
increases the degree of learning success and decreases the possibility of developing negative stereotypes about the target culture. Using authentic texts might be even more motivating when students clearly recognize them as belonging to the community about which they aspire to learn (p. 27). While Shrum and Glisan (2009) acknowledge that some authentic materials may be more difficult to comprehend than others, he embraces the concept of motivation as a solution to this occasional problem by positing that motivation “holds the attention” of the learner (p. 84).

As stressed above, students should be encouraged to make comparative analyses between native and target cultures when designing an EFL lesson plan. Mishan (2005) believes that

the fact that the native culture always serves as a reference point for the foreign one can actually be used to great advantage in the language learning classroom. Drawing comparisons and contrasts between cultures can serve as a useful exercise itself or as starting point for deeper explorations. It can also broaden understanding and ultimately improve the learner’s ability to communicate with native speakers of his/her target language culture. (p. 46)

Such comparative analyses can appreciably help students acquire cultural skills. Using a Venn diagram, for example, students are able to make comparisons and understand the degrees of relationships, or lack thereof, between aspects of their target culture and their own culture. Increased cultural awareness allows students to formulate appropriate responses and behave correctly during interaction with natives of the target culture. Comparative analyses of the cultures foster student introspection that serves as a foundation for development of the student’s personal identity as a member of both the world and local communities (Mishan, 2005, p. 46).
By exposing students to authentic language and materials, students more deeply and productively experience the genuine culture of the target language. Authentic materials play a crucial role in teaching a foreign language, as they give students the opportunity to learn and use the real language of the target culture with its many idiosyncratic features and unique spirit. The sense of real life that students experience will help them successfully interact within the target culture in a more natural way. However, students can successfully acquire and use a foreign language only when the genuine cultural context is incorporated with language learning at the same time. Teachers who fail to include cultural context risk employing rote memorization of disjointed symbols that may lead students to associate inaccurate meanings and negatively affect the student’s motivation to learn.

The Five Dimensions of Culture

According to Moran (2001), posits five dimensions of culture: cultural products, practices, persons, communities, and perspectives (pp. 8-9).

Products are tangible things created by the members of the target culture. Moran (2001) believes that the time spent learning and teaching about artifacts is some of the best spent time in EFL/ESL classes for purposes of foreign/second language acquisition. “Products, the visible dimension of culture, are at the gateway to the new culture, the new way of life. They are the first things that greet our senses when we enter the culture, and differences stand out” (Moran, 2001, p. 48). Such artifacts can be, for example, constructed places and art forms. Additionally, all artifacts are at least tangentially connected to each other. Moran (2001) proposes two strategies for examining
cultural products in the context of the classroom teaching and learning for this first of five dimensions of culture:

1. Study their relationships to other cultural products (p. 49).

2. Study their connections to other dimensions of culture (e.g., practices, persons, communities, and perspectives (p. 49).

The second dimension, ‘practices,’ “comprise all the actions that members of the [target] culture carry out as part of their way of life, including language” (Moran, 2001, p. 57). Practices involve verbal communications, such as conversation over a meal and nonverbal communication such as the winking of an eye. Moran (2001) states that teaching cultural practices helps students to participate in ways appropriate within the target culture. Appropriateness refers to “saying the right thing at the right time in the right way” (Moran, 2001, p. 70). In other words, the concept of appropriateness is transient as it is dependent upon social situations involving people who demand different practices for different situations. Saying or doing the wrong thing at the wrong moment can cause misunderstandings and problems in communication (Moran, 2001, p. 70).

While appropriateness is an important component of practices, Moran also includes other practice components: operations, acts, scenarios, and lives all of which will be discussed in Chapter IV (2001, p. 59). As a student compares his/her own culture’s practices with those of the target culture, his/her self-awareness is also stimulated and enhanced.

The concept of ‘persons’ in the five dimensions of culture subsumes two concepts: identity and life history. Moran (2001) notes that each person is an individual with his/her own unique identity derived from such factors as the person’s character, life experiences, and social environment. Additionally, one way to understand a target culture
is to explore the life histories of famous people originating in the target culture (p. 103). Moran believes that reading biographies and autobiographies helps students elicit knowledge and understanding of the target culture, both broadly and narrowly. Inevitably, this technique particularly helps students understand individuals in the target culture in depth. Moran also refers to the life histories of normal people in the target culture (i.e., those with whom students would daily interact). “There are also life histories of the people we meet as we enter another way of life. As we listen to them tell their stories, we build our relationships with these persons, and their lives illuminate our understanding” (Moran, 2001, p. 103).

Moran (2001) intellectually organizes the dimension of ‘community’ as consisting of a continuum of large groups such as a nation, a religion, and a shared language to more narrow concepts such as a sports team, a neighborhood and a family (p. 90). Moran posits that larger communities influence and even dominate narrow communities. For example, dominant communities provide the practices within which more narrow communities must practice. Moran states that understanding national communities is the most accessible path to language learners, as smaller communities may be more challenging to explore in a foreign language-learning classroom (pp. 91-92). Nevertheless, Moran argues that it is important to examine both “broad amorphous communities” as well as “more narrowly defined groupings” (p. 96). Moran believes his intellectual distinctions provide sufficient assistance such that students more easily can “put the content into perspective” (p. 96).

As to the fifth of the five dimensions, ‘perspectives’ are the “Practices, products, persons, and communities [that] embody cultural perspectives, and vice versa”
Based on an individual’s perspective, a person carries out particular practices, creates particular products, and communicates to particular persons and communities (Moran, 2001, p. 74). The nature of perspectives can be either explicit or implicit. Moran (2001) argues that beliefs, values, attitudes, and perceptions form explicit perspectives when they can “be explicitly stated in oral or written form” (p. 75). In contrast, implicit perspectives occur when people carry out practices without awareness, i.e., they do things simply because they should be done this way: “They take them for granted” (Moran, 2001, p. 76). Moran (2001) also categorizes perspectives into emic perspectives, which are “articulated by members of the culture to explain themselves and their culture” (p. 80) and etic perspectives, which are based on an explanation of the target culture and its people by members of other cultures (p. 80).

Moran (2001) suggests teaching emic and etic perspectives within the context of three main views: the Functional view, the Interpretative view, and the Conflict view (p. 84). The Functional view refers to “the broad view of culture” (p. 84) and focuses on the target culture from the perspective of educational, governmental, and economic systems. The Interpretative view considers how insiders of the target culture define their products, practices, persons, and their communities (Moran, 2001, p. 86). The Conflict view emphasizes the views of how individual communities view their relationships in perspective to others. Moran (2001) believes that each perspective should be explored by language learners in order to have a more holistic understanding of the target culture. This multiple-perspective awareness increases students’ understanding of the complexity of cultures such that “there are many possible explanations, not just one right answer” (p. 88).
In conclusion, each of the five cultural dimensions described by Moran (2001) should be explored in EFL classrooms. Learners need to be able to recognize and understand the five cultural dimensions in order to both respect the target culture and appropriately communicate within the target culture’s context. The cumulative teaching and awareness of the five dimensions of culture is an important and even essential stage in language learning and cross-cultural communication.

Using Cultural Experiential Learning Cycle

Along with strategies for using culture in EFL classrooms, Moran (2001) suggests incorporating cultural experiences throughout the experiential learning cycle by what he characterizes as “the cultural experience.” For Moran, the “cultural experience” consists of any encounter between learners and another way of life, be it through learning materials in the language classroom or through the discussion of news, events, etc. of the target culture. When students undergo the “cultural experience,” four kinds of culture learning or cultural “knowings” are elicited: (i) knowing about, (ii) knowing how, (iii) knowing why, and (iv) knowing oneself. In other words, “learners go through an interactive cycle of acquiring cultural information, developing cultural behaviors, discovering cultural explanations, and articulating personal responses to what they are learning” (Moran, 2001, p. 8). Cultural knowing often requires different types of teaching.

Knowing about” includes the gathering and subsequent demonstration of cultural information, such as products, practices, perspectives, communities, and persons of the culture. In this type of cultural knowledge, students master information about the culture. This stage is the basis for culture learning. Without knowledge of culture, a student’s ability to demonstrate cultural awareness might be inaccurate and limited. Cultural information should include such essential topic areas as “the
learners’ culture(s), general concepts of culture, the culture learning process itself, and personal experience. (Moran, 2001, p. 146)

In “knowing about,” Moran (2001) suggests that teachers play several roles. A teacher should be i) a source for obtaining information and then presenting this information to the class, ii) a resource for demonstrating to students where they can find necessary sources of information, iii) an elicitor asking students to share their information with the class, and iv) an arbiter clarifying the distinction between cultural facts and opinions. Moran (2001) explains that this is necessary, since “Learners always bring their own interpretations and opinions of this information, and as arbiters, teachers need to point out differences” (p. 146). Moran (2001) states that the “knowing about” part of the cultural learning process may be challenging for teachers because the teachers need to know enough information to provide students with accurate data. “Language teachers cannot know all about the culture they teach, especially if they are non-native speakers” (p. 147). Moreover, cultural information has been changing and evolving over time. In this case, Moran (2001) suggests using the teachers’ own cultural experience “as a tool for teaching culture” (p. 147). Such tools as authentic cultural stories, anecdotes, and personal narratives can be very effective.

“Knowing how” involves acquiring cultural practices, such as behaviors, gestures, and actions. Here students acquire skills that help them know how to act in varying situations in the target culture. To acquire cultural practices in an appropriate way, Moran (2001) suggests using teaching techniques such as role-playing in which students learn as “actors on stage,” expressing themselves as native speakers of the target culture (p. 143). A teacher should take the dual roles of model and coach in this stage,
modeling cultural practices using facial expressions, body movements, and gestures all in ways that encourage students to progress. Moran argues that “knowing how” is “a whole-person experience,” in which students are engaged with their thoughts, actions, and feelings (p. 143). Students cannot learn how to properly communicate in the target culture by learning theory alone; they need to practice it.

“Knowing why” involves the comprehension of basic cultural perspectives, such as beliefs, feelings, and values. This interaction involves analyzing and explaining cultural phenomena through a comparative analysis of the target and native cultures. Dealing with this stage of the cultural experiential learning cycle, students need to make a comparative analysis between the target culture and their native culture, allowing students to understand new cultural phenomenon in an appropriate way. A teacher plays the role of guide and co-researcher in “knowing why” (Moran, 2001, p. 149). As a guide, the teacher asks questions of the students but doesn’t give answers. In this way, students learn to explain, generalize, and justify the cultural concepts and underlying cultural perspectives. As a co-researcher, the teacher provides his/her own explanations of the cultural issue but only after students express their own interpretations. This sharing of alternative information might help students deal with the last stage “knowing oneself” (Moran, 2001, p. 150).

“Knowing oneself” requires students to understand the target culture from the perspective of their own personal values, opinions, feelings, and thoughts. Progress in this stage comes from increasing self-awareness. Students learn to better understand themselves and their native culture which, in turn, serves as the basis for developing themselves as cultural beings (Moran, 2001, pp. 12-19). This stage is considered the most
critical stage because it requires students to make their own decisions on how to respond to the target culture (Moran, 2001, p. 151). In this stage, the teacher primarily plays the role of a listener, to whom students express their thoughts, views, beliefs, and perspectives. Afterword, the teacher accepts each student’s response, while being empathetic to each student’s unique viewpoint. A teacher can be also a co-learner, sharing his/her own perspectives of the target culture. This will help students to better comprehend their own explanations by hearing those of others (Moran, 2001, p. 152).

Therefore, the sequence of the cultural experiential learning cycle can provide students with accurate information of “a particular kind of culture learning,” where a teacher assumes different roles in order to help students acquire cultural awareness based on their own preferences. When students come through the cultural experiential learning cycle, they acquire cultural skills by develop cultural behaviors, discover cultural explanations, and express personal responses to what they are learning.

While the “cultural experience” is generally efficacious, experience has demonstrated that, absent appropriate countermeasures, a number of students emerge from the “cultural experience” with psychological blocks or “cultural fatigue” vis-a-vis the target culture. However, Kodotchikova (2002), Doff (2007), Larsen-Freeman (2000) and other educators have shown that teachers can help most, if not all, students avoid psychological blocks/”cultural fatigue” with role-playing. “As language and culture are interrelated, language cannot be taught without culture, but there are many ways of co-teaching language and culture. One is role-play” (Kodotchikova, 2002).
Conclusion

These teaching tools, techniques, and strategies make language teaching effective. The tools, techniques, and strategies discussed in this chapter are all integral to a successful and effective language program. Most Russian students spend years receiving instruction in the English language. However, despite all their efforts, they meet with little success, often only acquiring the most rudimentary command of the English language. Incorporation of culture into English classes in Russia is essential for improving efficacy. Following the Standards for Foreign Language Learning through the cultural experiential cycle, including the five dimensions of culture, with an emphasis on authentic materials will help students to acquire language and cultural skills more quickly, and help them relate more functionally to the language and culture being learned. This will allow students to communicate appropriately based on the situation and allow students to adapt to their target cultures more easily.
CHAPTER IV

ROLE-PLAYING IN TEACHING CULTURE

Introduction

Chapter IV examines role-playing as an effective teaching technique in the foreign language classroom. It also explores how role-playing can be used in EFL/ESL classrooms in order to enhance students’ cultural and linguistic awareness. The chapter suggests an effective sequence for integrating role-playing in language learning instruction to increase students’ language proficiency.

Concepts of Role-Playing

The term “role” derives from “rolled-up” scripts which actors used two thousand years ago in Ancient Greece (Maheshwari, 2011). “Role-playing is a way of bringing situations from real life into the classroom” (Doff, 2007, p. 232). Budden (2004) describes role-playing as any speaking activity where students “either put [themselves] into somebody else’s shoes, or where [they] stay in [their] own shoes but put [themselves] into imaginary situations” (p. 5). Role-playing is a teaching strategy where students play roles that are out of the ordinary and differ from ones that they would usually experience (Donahue & Parsons, 1982, p. 361). According to Ladousse (2003), role-playing allows students to represent and experience a character known or familiar in everyday life from the perspective of an individual in the target language culture (p. 23).
From a broader perspective, Joyce, Weil, and Calhoun (2011) define role-playing as a teaching technique which emphasizes the social nature of learning; students develop social and intellectual awareness by cooperatively working with each other (pp. 265-278). Real world scenarios and situations are acted out in the classroom providing relevant experiences that students can then leverage in the future (Ments, 1999, pp. 6-8). Furthermore, Ments noted that the students’ exposure to unfamiliar circumstances and social situations stimulates creative thinking and greatly increases their comprehension of social norms within the given roles (1999, pp. 6-8). H. D. Brown (2001b) introduces role-playing as an activity that “involves a) giving a role to one or more members of a group, and b) assigning an objective or purpose that participants must accomplish” (p. 183). In order to succeed in accomplishing the assigned objectives, H. D. Brown (2001b) believes that role-playing should be designed in such a way that students, whether in pairs or groups, assign the particular roles to be played out (p. 183). Yardley-Matwiejczuk (1997) defines role-playing as encompassing “a range of activities characterized by involving participants in ‘as-if’ or ‘simulated’ actions and circumstances” (p. 1).

In *Scenarios, Discourse, and Real-Life Roles*, a role is defined as “a set of norms and expectations applied to the incumbent of a particular position” (Munby 1978, p. 68, as cited in Di Pietro, 1987, p. 227). However, Al-Arishi (1994) identified two distinct types of role-playing. In the first, role-playing is defined as “real play.”

Role-playing as a classroom activity fits in with this desire for realism since it gives students the chance to rehearse the typical activities they will presumably perform in real life: greetings, making suggestions, asking for directions, ordering food in a restaurant, or functioning at bank, post-office, airport, etc. (Al-Arishi, 1994, p. 339). In role-playing, students act out the situation as if it is really happening.
Di Pietro’s second category of role-playing is “surreal-playing.” “While real-playing seeks a willing acceptance of the belief that the classroom can become the real world,” surreal-playing is “willing suspension of disbelief on the part of students that the role-play situation is one of pretense” (Al-Arishi, 1994, p. 341). The proponents of surreal role-playing note that students love to imagine. People of all ages, especially children, often spend time imagining themselves as someone else or in different situations when they are at play. By engaging in surreal role-playing, the teacher is utilizing something that comes naturally as a learning tool (Al-Arishi, 1994, pp. 340-341).

Along similar lines, Doff (2007), Ladousse (2003), and Greenblat (1988) put role-playing into two categories: simulation and drama. While these concepts are interconnected and share similarities, there are also subtle differences (Ladousse, 2003, p. 5). Simulations typically center around more mundane, everyday, situations that students are more likely to encounter in the target culture on an average day (e.g., buying a ticket, ordering a meal, or asking for directions). Alternatively, while participating in drama role-playing, students play roles outside the bounds of typical experience (e.g., President or Prime Minister). Another subtle difference centers around the practical executions of the two types of role-playing. In a simulation, the teacher sets up a particular environmental situation in the classroom, but the role-playing is unscripted (Ladousse, 2003, pp. 8-20). In contrast to simulation, drama role-playing provides students with assigned roles which operate in a prepared scenario (Ladousse, 2003, p. 7). Doff (2007) and Shaftel and Shaftel (1982) provide a robust and succinct definition of drama as a
problem-solving situation in which students understand expressing emotions, social communication, and the values of the target culture (Shaftel & Shaftel, 1982, p. 116).

Within EFL/ESL classrooms, Shaftel and Shaftel (1982) described role-playing as a problem-solving strategy where students act out particular role(s) which represent everyday situations (p. 116). Whether in groups or pairs, students are involved in the decision making process, while working to solve the problem presented. Role-playing requires students to communicate and work with other students to create a cooperative learning environment (Shaftel & Shaftel, 1982, pp. 116-117).

Role-playing also includes variations in which the participant or student is the progenitor of the role and context, draws deeply on his or her imagination, and engages in improvisational conversations with other students. In this way, the students have the freedom to imagine any role, such as a president, doctor, millionaire, tourist, or secret agent; the students then play out their chosen roles within an imagined setting such as a restaurant, a hospital, the White House, or an airport.

Usage of Role-Playing in Teaching Foreign Language

Rettig (1991) has argued that the strong relationship between role-playing and cultural awareness – and, hence, efficacious language learning – is important for at least three reasons: (i) the large and growing diversity of people from almost all cultures throughout the world who are opting to learn English, (ii) the concurrent developmental maturation of students’ personal awareness, and (iii) the opportunity to cautiously explore another culture. These help mitigate and uncover cultural faux pas in a safe environment and further develop a respect for cultural differences which may develop.
Rettig (1991) noted that role-playing is an opportunity for students to learn about the world around them and to explore their own and others’ cultural values. As discussed earlier, communicating the cultural values of the target language to ESL/EFL students is a crucial part of the language learning process. Role-playing can safely mimic essential forms and customs of the target culture and improve communication skills both through language itself as well as nonverbal cues. Practicing social norms assists in the eventual assimilation of students into the target culture (Ladousse, 2003 p. 6). Role-playing should incorporate the use of artifacts that are normally part of the cultural practices illustrated. This enhances acculturation and provides a mirror through which students can contemplate, re-evaluate, and better understand their own cultures (Donahue & Parsons, 1982, p. 362).

Foreign/second language learning programs should be designed to increase positive awareness of individual differences and cultural diversity as a whole. Hence, role-playing is an excellent way to teach students about the differences between people, and foster understanding and respect for those differences (Rettig, 1991).

Therefore, if language instructors teach language absent the related culture, they teach mere symbols to which students can attach varying and sometimes incorrect meanings (Brown, 2007; Byram, 1989; Moran, 2001). Students will successfully acquire and use a foreign language only when the target population’s cultural context is incorporated within language learning. To achieve cultural goals in ESL/EFL classes, teachers should use the role-playing approaches described above, which help students successfully acquire overall personal and cultural awareness and enhance personal growth (Kodotchikova, 2002).
According to Sternberg’s 1979 Triarchic Cognitive Theory (Hook, Watts, & Cockroft, 2004), students engage in three types of intelligence when involved in role-playing: analytical, creative, and practical. The process of role-playing begins when the students are given a situation. The analytical process involves deciding what roles will be needed to fulfill the scenario, who will be acting out the various roles, and how the roles will interact (Hook et al., 2004, pp. 354). Thus, students engage their analytical intelligence. Once the situation has been analyzed, students draw on prior and current knowledge to create scripts that adequately communicate and convey what is happening in the scenario. Additionally, students must also creatively devise a way to fulfill the needs of the scenario, using appropriate norms from the target culture. This type of out-of-the-box thinking stimulates students’ creative intelligence. The final stage, of course, is the practical application of the students’ analytical and creative work as students use practical intelligence to collaborate in acting out the scenario (Hook, Watts, & Cockroft, 2004, pp. 209-212).

Other scholars have identified additional nuanced intellectual benefits afforded by role-playing. Piaget’s “Genetic Epistemology Theory” purports that activities such as role-playing facilitate students’ cognitive development through the assimilation of experiences and situations (Furth, 1975, pp. 11-35). During role-play, students’ cognitive ability is engaged as they adopt and interpret situations then extrapolate learned behaviors and apply them to real life (Donahue & Parsons, 1982, pp. 360-363).

Vygotsky believed that through imitation, children generate opportunities for intellectual development . . . through the dynamics of their imagination and recognition of implicit rules governing the
activities they have reproduced in their games, children achieve an elementary mastery of abstract thought. (1978, p. 129)

Vygotsky also noted the importance of using social interaction in the classroom to expand and stimulate students’ intellectual development. Students flex their imagination through role-play and develop notional abilities they then will use throughout their lives (Vygotsky, 1978, pp. 92-94).

Role-playing is an excellent tool for teaching the target culture. When children learn to speak their native language, they are learning to communicate ideas and concepts that have real meaning. The use of role-play allows students to engage natural strategies that allow them to learn quickly. This is the basis for the communicative approach. Based on the communicative approach, students act out an imaginary person in an imaginary situation; in doing so, they acquire and reinforce communication skills (Cakir, 2006, pp. 157-158). According to Maxwell (1997), “role-play can be integrated into many themes and content-based lessons as a building block of previous lessons while being a fun and creative way for learners to practice and/or improvise verbal and non-verbal communication” (p. 2). For example, students who participate in a role-play where they are asking others about their likes and dislikes will be able to engage in meaningful communication. As Maxwell (1997), points out “role-play is an interactive activity which allows students to use the target language for communication, it may, . . . help students gain confidence in their interactions with one another while using the target language at the same time” (p. 2). Students interact with classmates at the very beginning of the lesson and choose a social situation they would like to act out based on the day’s lesson(s) (Doff, 2007, p. 105-111). The students’ engagement in meaningful
communication makes role-playing an effective tool in learning a language and for learning the cultural nuances associated with the new language.

According to Ladousse (2003), “role-play is one of a whole gamut of communicative techniques which develops fluency in language students, which promotes interaction in the classroom, and which increases motivation” (p. 7). Ladousse believes that if students experience situations where the target language is used, then students can then apply their learnings in new situations (p. 7). In the process of creating imaginary situations, students work in pairs or small groups, and discuss how they will perform their situation, what gestures, body movements, vocabulary, and cultural products they will use in their performance, etc. (Ladouse, 2003, pp. 7-8). By viewing the target culture’s media, students further refine communication skills and build a mental repertoire of social situations through mimicry and imitation (Al-Arishi, 1994, pp. 339-340). “Role-playing will also encourage students to use gestures, body movements, facial expressions – all the non-verbal elements which are a natural part of talking” (Al-Arishi, 1994, p. 340).

Communication within a culture can be challenging for non-natives, as they do not have the benefit of a lifetime of enculturation and experience in different cultural situations. By actively practicing communicating with the target language in culturally diverse role-play situations, students begin to develop a feel for how native speakers of the target culture interact in different roles, including the use of unique cultural stereotypes, views, beliefs, opinions, and emotions (Stern, 1980, p. 85). The value role-playing provides is that it duplicates situations they might encounter in real life. Similar to communicating in real life, students must navigate “the interaction itself as it unfolds”
For students, role-playing activities are vital, both to learning to communicate fluently and to effectively interfacing with the target culture (Stern, 1980, pp. 85-90).

In the book *Techniques and Resources in Teaching Grammar*, Celce-Murcia (1988) stated that “these techniques facilitate a match between structure and social functions, and can be used for both communicative and focused grammar practice” (p. 61). During role-play, students have the opportunity to practice using vocabulary words and phrases (both new and previously learned) as well as apply new grammatical forms in a natural way. Hence, the subject is more naturally memorized and learned.

By stressing creative communicative work, role-playing helps avoid repetitive exercises which can become rote and boring. Role-playing helps students to build confidence in communicating with each other as well as in using the target language (Larsen-Freeman, 2011, pp. 127-129). Thus, role-playing enhances social skills and prepares learners for real-life communication.

As EFL is intended to be a practical and focused curriculum, role-playing activities should start with a focus on the daily life of peers in the target language country. Role-playing situations that involve relationships with family and friends, leisure time activities, and traditions or customs allow students to fundamentally relate to the target culture (Moran, 2001, pp. 59-64). In this way, students can more easily assimilate the language because it centers on situations and experiences in their personal lives.

At this stage, some students may not fully comprehend the teacher’s explanations and may need additional time to absorb new material. Role-playing takes this learning curve into account as the entire process gives students additional time to
comprehend the material fully (Kodotchikova, 2002). In this way, role-playing helps to level out the learning curve of the class by allowing students more time to correct themselves.

Further, role-playing activities offer good listening practice. In order to make the conversation meaningful, students must inherently learn to listen to and understand their classmates all the while interacting and performing their own role. In this sense, they acquire listening and comprehension skills (Doff, 2007; Ladousse, 2003; Larsen-Freeman, 2011). This also simulates the way the human brain assimilates language naturally, through a combination of both listening and speaking.

Role-playing activities enhance students’ experiences, giving them an increased awareness of the diversity across cultures. Zwiers (2008) believes that role-playing can teach key aspects of the content-specific standards in the language teaching process (p. 149). Kodotchikova (2002) explains that role-playing activities are an effective way to become aware of cultural significant norms. “Students learn to examine their perceptions and treat representatives of other cultures with empathy” (Kodotchikova, 2002). Brown (2007) observes, that learners and teachers need to understand how cultures are different and to appreciate that “people are not all the same beneath the skin” (p. 167).

Carik (2006) opines that role-playing activities can help students discover the distinctive features of the target culture’s language in a natural way (p. 157). As discussed above, students are able to find comparisons and similarities between the target culture and their own while acting out role play situations. This helps to develop awareness of both their own and the target culture. Understanding cultural issues through
such simple role-playing activities as greetings and farewells encompasses more than being able to produce language (Cakir, 2006, pp. 155-157). It teaches students appropriate ways to understand as well as communicate in the target culture. Therefore, teachers should design role-playing based on the cultural differences of students’ native and target cultures. The main role of a teacher here is to instruct students to react to cultural differences adequately, while expressing respect for both cultures (Cakir, 2006, p. 157). Role-playing helps to reinforce the idea that each culture is not “just like [their] native culture or like [them]” and that there are genuine differences among people and cultures (Carik, 2006, p. 157).

In *Language Teaching and Learning From an Intercultural Perspective*, Liddicoat (2011) notes that by “experiencing different social situations in a natural way, students observe perspectives, beliefs, feelings, and values of the target culture” (p. 837). It helps students explore and then express their own perspectives toward the target culture as well as their native culture. Liddicoat (2011) calls this process a basis for reflection (p. 837). For example, acting out an American role situation involving greetings, students visually learn distinctive features of the culture, which are different from those in Russia. Students may then share their own perspectives toward American and Russian cultural traditions (Kodotchikova, 2002).

All told, the incorporation of role-playing can be a very effective teaching method for purposes of acquiring, improving, and maintaining overall intercultural communication skills in a foreign language. Role-playing establishes a cultural context for the language learning process, by giving students an opportunity to experience communicating in the new language. This experience engenders a sense of social
confidence when interacting in the target culture. In addition to being more culturally aware, students will have learned the language in a more natural way and approach the idea of L2 communication with increased self-esteem and confidence. To reiterate, students can successfully acquire and use a second language only when its cultural context is incorporated with language learning. The inclusion of role-playing into the learning process solidifies contextual understanding of the culture and improves overall language acquisition.

Research on the Efficacy of Role-Playing

The efficacy of role-playing has been gaining attention over the last decade. Studies have been conducted in an effort to test the effectiveness of role-playing, specifically in the field of second language acquisition. While not exhaustive, the studies have shown a marked relationship between the usage of role-playing and teaching a foreign/second language. The studies address the usage of role-playing versus a traditional Grammar Translation and mechanical-memorization approach in the context of language learning and cultural awareness, as well as the effectiveness of different types of role-playing.

The first study which supports the effectiveness of role-playing is the Contrastive Study on Learning Vocabulary through Role-play and Memorization among EFL Female Learners (Lajooee & Barimani, 2013, pp. 1-19). The study was conducted in Iran, at the Hegmataneh English Institute in Tehran, by Elaheh Sadat Lajooee and Dr. Shaban Barimani to evaluate the effectiveness of vocabulary learning using role-playing versus mechanical-memorization. For this study, 75 female EFL students were randomly
selected. All had achieved an upper-intermediate level proficiency in English and ranged in age from fifteen to twenty-three years old. Participants were administered a vocabulary pre-test in order to establish a baseline of proficiency before the experiment started. The subjects were divided into two groups, a control group consisting of 38 students and an experimental group of 37 students, all had a similar level of English proficiency based on the results of the pre-test. Over the course of twenty sessions, each group received eight to seventeen vocabulary words to be learned in each session.

For the control group, the teacher employed the mechanical-memorization approach by speaking the words to the class. The students simply listened. The teacher then repeated each word in a phrase or sentence and had the class repeat the phrase. Afterward, the new vocabulary words, and their definitions were written on the board and spoken aloud again, with students repeating the information. For the next phase, the teacher removed the written words and definitions from the blackboard, and the class was quizzed as a group and individually while the teacher asked “What does ‘x’ mean?” The class concluded with exercises administered by the teacher, which required students to fill gaps in phrases, read texts, match words, and answer multiple-choice questions after listening to a conversation.

The procedure for the experimental group started with the teacher presenting new words to the students based upon a conversation in a book, which was played audibly for the students. The teacher then read the conversation, pointing out new vocabulary words and their definitions. Written transcripts were provided to the students, who then formed pairs and read the dialog to each other, sometimes even reading it aloud to the class as a whole. At this stage, the teacher ensured that the students were
pronouncing the words correctly and understood the definitions. Next, the students remained in pairs and were asked to choose one of the roles in the dialog, commit their part to memory, and practice their respective roles. The next step involved the students performing their rehearsed role-play in front of the class. After the demonstrations, the dyads were asked to use the words in a new conversation of their own choosing. During this time, the teacher observed the students and provided help or feedback when needed. Each pair of students role-played the new conversation for the class. The final stage for the experimental group was the same as the control group in which the students performed exercises administered by the teacher, requiring students to fill gaps in phrases, read texts, match words, and answer multiple choice questions after listening to a conversation.

After the final session, a vocabulary post-test was administered. The post-test was identical to the pre-test given at the beginning of the study. The data was collected and analyzed using statistical software. The results showed progress for both groups. However, students in the experimental group scored 21% higher than those in the control group in vocabulary learning and displayed a more thorough understanding, improved retention, faster recall, and superior usage of the subject matter.

The second research study, *Using Role-play in Chinese Language and Culture Teaching*, was conducted by Xiaochen Song in order to evaluate the effectiveness of role-playing in learning culture for Chinese EFL students (Song, 2011, pp. 12-25). The study involved eighteen fifth graders who were randomly divided into two groups: a control group and an experimental group. The control group received language instruction based upon traditional methods using textbooks and workbooks. The experimental group
received instruction through the use of role-playing. This included cue cards students created on their own by drawing from personal experiences and real-life situations. The researcher collected both qualitative and quantitative data over the course of twenty days. First, students in both groups were observed throughout the study in order to establish student responses and reactions to the material being learned. During the last two days of the study, students from both groups were interviewed about their attitudes about how the lessons were structured and the learned material itself. Listening tests were also administered to gauge student proficiency.

According to the researchers, the results indicated that students who received instruction using role-playing acquired cultural awareness and language proficiency much more effectively than the control group. Observational data showed a marked increase in student participation and activity in the experimental group. The exit interviews reflected a positive effect on student attitudes toward the class from the experimental group.

In the third research study, Russian educator Sysoyev (2004) investigated the potential of role-playing to develop Russian students’ cross-cultural competence. Sophomores studying EFL in the International Relationship program at Tombov State University in Russia constituted the pool of participants. Two distinct subsets were created, the first consisting of nineteen female students and the second consisting of eleven male students all of whom were randomly selected. The thirty students randomly ranged in age from eighteen to thirty years old. Subsequently, the two subsets were reconstituted into an experimental group and a control group, each consisting of fifteen people. The main evaluation tool applied to the experimental group was role-playing
correlated with the course curriculum. The participants in the control group did not engage in role-playing, but rather, were given materials used in traditional methods of teaching a foreign language. The research study was conducted over a period of two months. To measure the subjects’ cultural competencies, the study utilized Multiple-choice Discourse Completion Task (MDCT) in its pretest and posttest. The test’s methodology consisted of requiring students to read twenty realistic and commonly occurring social scenarios and then asking the students to select one of the three or four given options what would be best in that situation. Following the implementation of MDCT in both the pretest and posttest, four raters assessed both the control groups’ and the experimental groups’ pretests and posttests. To provide confidence in the reliability of the rating process, inter-rater reliability was computed by calculating Cronbach’s alpha coefficient. Based on the assessment results, the standard deviations and variances of the two groups were calculated. The same procedure was used for the posttest to determine if there were any significant differences between the two groups’ achievements or if the hypothesis would be rejected. The resulting data showed that students in the experimental group completed the test more quickly than students in the control group and scored 72% higher when tested on knowledge of the target culture (Sysoyev, 2004, pp. 35-45).

These research studies were aimed at investigating the effect of role-playing on ESL/EFL students’ cultural and overall language skills. They generated noteworthy results. The hypothesis that role-playing enhances EFL/ESL students’ cultural competence and thus their foreign language abilities is not rejected. Each study addresses a different nuance of role-playing usage, and all assert the effectiveness of using role-playing as a teaching tool in EFL classrooms. Therefore, role-playing can be
recommended and emphasized as an effective method for the teaching of foreign languages and cultures.

Incorporating Role-Playing in the EFL Classroom

In order to make role-playing effective, a teacher needs to follow a systematic approach. Researchers suggest a sequence of steps for applying role-playing in teaching. Doff (2007) and Laddouse (2003) both propose that the first step in effective role-playing is to determine objectives aligned with the skill level and needs of students. Laddousse (2003) suggests that the teacher must consider the age and level of the class. The complexity of role-playing must be minimized and simplified for beginning level students more complex for students at the upper levels (pp. 12-13, 21). During the formative years of language acquisition, beginning students will gain confidence in and through role-playing, especially when the teacher sanctions and supports it (Ladousse, 2003, p. 13). In the same way, Doff (1988) provides several topics that teachers can use, depending on student’s age level, language proficiency, and learning needs (pp. 100-103). For example, a teacher may utilize role-playing to teach beginners basic communicative functions such as greetings or giving compliments, while intermediate level students can engage in role-play to practice more complex intercultural situations such as discussing a topic with their professor or acting out a dramatic scenario playing the role of president (Ladousse, 2003, pp. 28-56). A teacher must also consider external constraints such as class size, time, and the classroom itself (Kodotchikova, 2002). If a complex scenario requires students to study documents or read articles, then the teacher must ensure that there is enough time for preparation before role play begins.
Additionally, the size of the classroom and number of students may influence how many separate groups can simultaneously engage in role play scenarios. Space may only allow a couple of groups to conduct role play at one time. Consequently, the teacher may elect to perform shorter scenarios to allow more students to complete the task in the given time frame (Kodotchikova, 2002).

The second step is to choose a situation for a role-playing activity based on the given objectives and external opportunities (Epstein & Ormiston, 2007, p. 17). Gangel (1974) provides role-playing situations which are clearly identified so that students not only understand the problem, but carry out actions that are appropriate to the scenario: “The teacher must identify [the] situation clearly so that both the characters and audience understand the problem at hand” (p. 25). Moreover, Huang (2008) claims that a teacher should always keep the students’ interests in mind. One of the ways to encourage this is to let students choose the situation. Similarly, Kodotchikova (2002) agrees that it is important to allow students to select topics or situations which draw from their own life experience. Through consideration of the role-playing situation, students are already getting involved in the learning process. This can increase their curiosity and motivation about the subject. Students can either suggest themes they like or select from a given list of situations (Kodotchikova, 2002). Once the role-playing topic is selected, the third step requires that the teacher provide students with appropriate materials, such as a video, book, article, or other realia in order to learn more about the chosen topic (Huang, 2008).

In the third step, the class comes up with ideas about how to create scripts for the various roles (Clark, 1992; Doff, 2007; Kodotchikova, 2002; Ladousse, 2003). Kodotchikova (2002) believes that role-playing scenarios can be created based on the
conflict between two or more characters. For example, the conflict created in a scenario
where one or two students play the role of customers, while several other students play
the role of salespeople who attempt to sell them items that they do not want
(Kodotchikova, 2002). Moran (2001) believes that cultural products should be
incorporated in role-playing scenarios (p. 57). Cultural artifacts can make role-playing
situations more real and interesting. “Products, the visible dimension of culture, are the
gateway to the new culture, the new way of life” (Moran, 2001 p. 48). Students develop
their perspectives toward the target culture, based on practices, perspectives, and products
as well (Moran, 2001, p. 78). For example, for designing a lesson about American
location of streets, a teacher needs to provide students with cultural products such as an
authentic American city map. Students can use these maps to explain the direction and
location of a particular point-of-interest (Ladousse, 2003, pp. 88-90). Therefore, realia
helps make role-playing activities more real, and it helps students to develop attitudes
toward the target culture and then reflect on their own perspectives on different cultures.

The fourth step revolves around linguistic preparation. Yardley-Matwiejezczuk
(1997) suggests that when students select a social situation, they must also consider what
roles would be suitable for acting it out as well as an appropriate script for
communication between the characters (p. 72). At each stage of development, teachers
are advised to share new words or grammatical forms prior to commencing role-play
(Epstein & Ormiston, 2007, p. 17). To illustrate, in a role-playing scenario at a clothing
store, the teacher and class could brainstorm different phrases the customers and
salespeople might use while communicating. They might then record students’ responses
on the blackboard and useful expressions on the other side of the blackboard. The
students could then be asked questions such as “Could the customer say it in another way?” or “What else might the salesperson say?” By following this method, the students will feel more at ease when engaging in role-play (Doff, 1988, p. 104).

In the fifth step, students prepare the character roles in order to be able to play their roles with confidence. Clark (1992) and Richard-Amato (1997) support the use of cue-cards at this stage (as cited in Epstein & Ormiston, 2007, p. 18). “The use of index cards with written cues or the complete role-play exchange will help students know what to say” (Epstein & Ormiston, 2007, p.18). This approach increases students’ confidence, and even shy students can easily perform their roles (Ladousse, 2003, p. 7). Before starting, students can create cue cards with thorough directions they can follow while performing (Kodotchikova, 2002). Byrne D (1983) provides an example of a cue card based on the role-playing activity involving a taxi-driver and passenger: “You are a taxi-driver: 1. Greet the passenger and ask him where he wants to go. 2. Tell the price. Make comments on the weather. Ask the passenger if he likes this weather. 3. Answer the passenger’s questions” (as cited in Kodotchikova, 2002). At the intermediate stage, students can perform the role-play with cards that simply have the main idea of the conversation or the most important vocabulary words written on them (Maxwell, 1997, p. 8).

In the sixth step, students practice the situation in pairs or small groups. Yardley-Matwiejczuk (1997) believes that before students perform the role-playing, they need to practice their respective roles (p. 145). Students practice their own roles several times, and then switch roles with their partner. While the students practice their roles, the teacher observes the class and corrects mistakes (Maheshwari, 2011). Kodotchikova
(2002) notes that the teacher should request volunteers perform the role-play for the other students. “At the beginning level, a teacher can take one of the roles and act it out as a model” (Kodotchikova, 2002). At times, students might have role-playing related exercises as homework, where they acquire helpful words and phrases, consider different gestures, or body language (Maheshwari, 2011).

In the seventh step, students perform. Ladousse (2003) notes that a teacher asks students to demonstrate role-playing only if they feel comfortable acting it out in front of the classroom (p. 7). A teacher needs to let students observe other students’ performances. Eventually, the shy students will flow into the work of the class and have fun. A comfortable, friendly, and informal atmosphere in the class lets even extremely introverted students speak out in a natural way (Ladousse, 2003, p. 10).

Livingstone (1986), Kodotchikova (2002), and Maheshwari (2011) claim that when the role-playing is finished, the class needs to spend time debriefing. It is in this eighth step that students engage in reflection and self-expression without correction from the teacher (Maheshwari, 2011). The students are polled to get their “opinion[s] about the role play and welcoming their comments the aim is to discuss what has happened in the role play and what they have learned” (Maheshwari, 2011, “Procedure for making: Step 6,” para. 1). Along similar lines, Kodotchikova (2002) notes that “after the role play, the students are satisfied with themselves, they feel that they have used their knowledge of the language for something concrete and useful” (Kodotchikova, 2002, “A Step-by-step guide: Step 6,” para. 1). After presenting their role-playing situations, Liddicoat (2011) suggests that students can more easily identify how their native culture is similar or different from that of the target culture (p. 838). Based on this knowledge, students are
able to express their personal perspectives toward discussed cultural issues that can serve as a basis for developing students’ identity as human beings (Liddicoat, 2011, p. 838).

In the ninth and final step, the teacher needs to assess the effectiveness of the role-play and evaluate whether the students have grasped the new content (Doff, 2007; Kodotchikova, 2002; Ladousse, 2003; Livingstone, 1986). Educators provide several strategies for evaluating a student’s progress. First, Kodotchikova (2002) and Maheshwari (2011) believe that students could be given a test based on the content. Kodotchikova (2001) notes that the test can be given orally with questions based on the role-play or it could simply involve having the students translate the role-play script into their native language. Second, students could write variations in which new characters are added or the scenario expanded. Third, a teacher could evaluate students’ comprehension while observing their performances (Huang, 2008). To sum up, this detailed nine-step sequence can make a role-playing lesson productive by providing a friendly and comfortable atmosphere where students can acquire language and cultural skills in a natural way.

Conclusion

The teaching of culture is one of the most important aspects of students’ education when learning a target language. Using techniques such as role-playing, the quality and efficacy of foreign language education for students can increase greatly. Role-playing is an especially effective teaching technique for several reasons. First, students interact with each other in designing the scenario and subsequently performing it; they improve their speaking, communicative, grammar, and listening skills. Second, students learn about cultural issues by identifying similarities between target and native
cultures. Third, through experience with different social situations, students develop personal perspectives toward target cultures as well as the world as a whole. Fourth, role-playing activities prepare students for real life. Role-playing activities also are available for different proficiency levels and age groups. A comfortable and non-threatening atmosphere in the class is required for role-playing to be most effective. The right environment allows students the freedom to make mistakes and feel empathy toward classmates. This increases motivation, builds trust, overcomes shyness, and helps students to have fun. In addition, to make role-playing effective, a teacher needs to go through each step of the sequence designing a lesson plan. The creation and incorporation of effective role-playing in the SLA classroom requires both effort and desire on the part of the teacher and the students. Adherence to the principles, techniques, and concepts highlighted will enable teachers to achieve their objectives.
CHAPTER V

RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study is to explore the importance of incorporating culture in EFL classrooms, and the relationship between culture and language learning. Culture language educators define culture through interrelated dimensions that include products, behaviors, ideas, beliefs, perspectives, communities, persons, and so forth. In other words, culture reflects unique insights into a country that can be different from other countries. Teaching culture is essential in foreign language education as language and culture are interrelated and inseparable. Students are able to fully comprehend the target language only when they understand the target culture. Culture needs to be taught effectively in order to allow students to accurately understand and respect cultural features different from those of their native culture. Acquiring an understanding of the target culture inevitably reduces cultural miscommunications and misunderstandings between people from different cultures. This process inherently needs to start within the classroom setting.

The study highlights the ever-increasing emphasis on the culture-language approach over time. It was found that the importance of culture has increased over the last few decades and plays an important role in EFL classrooms. This trend notwithstanding, some teachers and instructors in Russia lack proficiency in how to incorporate culture in the foreign language teaching process. Russia, one of the oldest
countries in the world, has a great and storied history which, of course, sometimes differs from that of other countries. In some ways, this makes aspects of its culture unique. One telling historical aspect is that Russia has endured struggles with foreign invaders and internal revolutions over the centuries. The difficulties and hardships that Russian society has had to endure and overcome may have slowed development in some areas, and yet, over time, they have generally strengthened both Russia’s internal structures and geopolitical standing. One of the most challenging times was the 20th century, when society suffered under the brutal and violent Soviet regime under Joseph Stalin and his successors’ iron rule. While Stalin’s Soviet government fell over 20 years ago, not surprisingly, Russian society has been slow to accept modern adaptations which would immediately strengthen the country’s economic and political standing. One change that would greatly impact Russian society’s internal and external strengths would be to immediately adopt modern practices in its educational system, especially in teaching foreign languages.

This research explores strategies and techniques that would contribute to more effective methods of teaching English language in Russia. If adopted in Russian EFL classrooms, these strategies would improve development of students’ overall language ability. They are the 5 C’s provided by the Standards for Foreign Language Learning, authentic materials, the five dimensions of culture, experiential learning cycle, and role-playing.

The Standards for Foreign Language Learning include the 5 C’s goal areas: communications, cultures, connections, comparisons, and communities (ACTFL, 1996, p. 1). This framework is used by most teachers in the United States and serves as a basis for
teaching world languages. The standards serve as the goal indicators of proficiency in the target language and culture. They indicate when students are ready to move from one level to another. The 5 C’s goal areas can be implemented using the five dimensions of culture: products, practices, persons, communities, and perspectives. This is accomplished utilizing authentic materials such as cultural artifacts, literature, multimedia, and music. The research also suggests that incorporating role-playing is an effective teaching technique in foreign/second language instruction. According to the research, through role-playing, students display cultural nuances of the target culture and demonstrate cultural communication that can be different from their native cultures. By acting out real-life situations, students increase self-awareness and integrate into the target culture more appropriately.

In combination, the 5 C’s, cultural dimensions, authentic materials, and role-playing provide cultural knowledge in a genuine cultural context. This process is much more effective if incorporated in a specific sequence – the cultural experiential cycle (Moran, 2001). The cycle provides four logical, interconnected learning stages: learning about, learning how, learning why, and learning oneself. This sequence helps teachers to organize lessons in logical order and in alignment with the 5 C’s, five dimensions of culture, authentic materials, and role-playing. These tools, strategies, and techniques can be used to create a productive language-learning environment for teaching English as a foreign language.

The following recommendations are offered to educational leaders, teachers, and students:
1. Administrators and School officials should:
   - Receive instruction on the integration of culture in the foreign language classroom in order to better understand the demands and needs of their teachers.
   - Encourage, support, and facilitate the use of appropriate technologies that teachers and students can leverage during instruction.
   - Support and facilitate continuing education for administrators and teachers to stay abreast of teaching methodologies and techniques for language instruction.

2. Teachers and Instructors should:
   - Incorporate authentic materials in the classroom. These include but are not limited to: literature, broadcast media, newspapers, advertising, music, art, communication technologies, etc. Authentic language learning materials provide students with a better understanding of the language and increase their level of engagement in the learning process.
   - Develop lesson plans that address the Five C’s, the Five Dimensions of Culture, and the Experiential Learning Cycle. This will provide students with the framework needed to not only respect the target culture, but to embrace and understand it more deeply.
   - Utilize role-playing as an essential part of the learning process. Role-playing helps students avoid psychological blocks during interaction with native speakers of the target language.
Encourage and allow access to technologies that provide students exposure to authentic materials from the target culture. This also includes direct communication with native speakers of the target language.

3. Students should:
   - Remain open to learning about other cultures and actively compare what they learn with their native culture.
   - Seek out authentic materials from the target culture and engage in open discussion with the teacher and other students.
   - Look for opportunities to interact and communicate with native speakers of the target language. This may include people who live in their community or students like themselves living in the target culture.
   - Use the target language for their own personal enjoyment (e.g., watching movies/TV shows or reading material from the target culture).

Conclusion

We are living in a time of rapid globalization where nations are becoming increasingly more diverse, multilingual, and multicultural. As the world becomes smaller and smaller, people need to communicate across borders more effectively, not only in order to understand each other but also to achieve success in international business ventures. It is particularly important that language educators, and the educational systems they are a part of, realize that it is their responsibility not only to teach the language itself, but also the culture it is inextricably linked to. Students who are learning a new language need to comprehend and appreciate the rich nuances and cultural diversity of other
languages and cultures. This approach not only increases understanding between multicultural and multilingual people in different communities, but also improves international relations on the world level. Therefore, EFL teachers in Russia and other countries must ensure that there is space in their curricula to incorporate cultural diversity and awareness when learning a foreign language.
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