



Culture in our Classrooms

Teaching language through cultural content

Gill Johnson and Mario Rinvoluceri

Delta Teacher Development Series 2010 104 pp.
Paperback ISBN 978-1-905085-21-7

The impact of Cultural Studies on English Language Teaching is highly visible in modern curricula and recent didactic publications on teaching culture in the EFL Classroom. Considering the intricacies and multi-layeredness of cultural issues it seems extremely challenging to provide "over 80 practical and easy-to-use communicative activities" – as the authors claim – that help students to see beyond stereotypes and empathise with other cultures. Gill Johnson and Mario Rinvoluceri have mastered this task most successfully and put forward a book that convincingly combines methods and activities for classroom application still firmly based on theoretical perspectives brought about by the cultural turn in humanities.

The authors explore the notion of culture from different angles and combine a reflection on culture, language and language teaching with a multitude of aspects of culture turned into classroom activities, thus fostering communication as well as critical thinking. The structure mirrors this approach. Part A offers definitions of culture and discusses issues such as "culture and society", "culture and values", "culture within culture" etc. preparing the reader for part B, the backbone of this book, which on some 70 pages provides activities grouped in four sub-chapters ("Activating cultural awareness", "Words, metaphors and stories", "Frames for studying culture", "Spotlight on the UK"). All activities follow the structure of preparation, procedure and postscript and offer easy-to-follow steps into both activating and reflection-inciting methods. Part C puts forward 16 practical exercises for staffroom sessions, taking a wider professional perspective into consideration and appealing to the teacher's mind-set. Relating back to part A and mediating between theory and practice, this latter part of the book focuses on observation, listening, rapport building and empathy.

The structure of "Culture in our Classrooms" is highly suitable for integrating theoretical perspectives and practical application in the format of a hands-on publication that offers more than just easy-to-swallow recipes. As Barry Tomalin in his foreword rightly stresses, Johnson and Rinvoluceri put an emphasis on the attitude to the teaching of culture and bring out the principle of interculturality very strongly. It seems fair enough to close this review with the authors' words: "In going through the text and experimenting with the activities, you will correct our biases – in your own biased way!"

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