



Culture in our Classrooms began by pointing out the all-present and all-pervading nature of culture. And the classroom is obviously no exception. Our pleasure in teaching is largely based in trying to understand our students not only on an individual personal basis but, equally importantly, as members of their cultural groups.

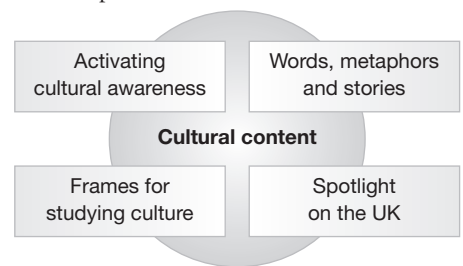
- Cultural matters are powerfully psychodramatic, they sit so fiercely, they are so emotional and so well-buried below the surface of consciousness. Cultural norms govern wide swathes of what we do and what we believe.
- The groups we belong to tend to regulate our unconscious and conscious existence: we ‘introject’ their values so firmly that we take them to be our own, individual values.

Culture in our language classrooms

Our students, and ourselves their teachers, belong to a classroom group, an environment which offers huge possibilities for raising awareness of these subterranean forces, as we address ‘cultural content’ while still accomplishing our roles as language teachers.

A more precise look at language, the cultural aspects of its words and discourse, provides further areas of communication, contact and even surprise.

Cultural issues can be the basis of whole courses – or the subject of individual lessons. And the frames that allow us to approach culture can range from the analysis of concepts and constructs, codes and conventions, diagrams and debates, surveys and statistics – to roleplays and simple (and not so simple!) reactions and responses to a single open-ended question.



Even focusing on an English-speaking country like the UK, the subject of the cultural content of many a language curriculum or the target of many student exchanges, can be a touchstone for discussion and dialogue – creating more language and more awareness.

In other words, Chapter Four inextricably refers us back to Chapter One, across the threads of the intervening chapters. As readers, you are invited to view this book as a whole, taking and adapting from it what, where and how you see fit. As authors, we feel a little sad that our experimentation with the many ideas in Part B of *Culture in our Classrooms* is tapering to a close. However, we are buoyed up by the expectation that you will meet your students in new and exciting ways through these practical lesson scenarios.

Onion ring culture

Differences go deep

● Cultural content ●

Students see the relationships between the products of culture and the values behind them.

Preparation

It is a good idea to do this activity yourself first, so you are prepared for some of the things that might come up.

Procedure

1 Ask the students (in pairs or small groups) to prepare a list of all the things they think would come under the heading of 'culture'. When everyone is ready, let them compare their findings. You might want to do some feedback in plenary.

2 Ask them to think of a list of things they think would *not* come under the heading of 'culture'. (This list will probably be much smaller!)

Again, allow the groups to compare notes. (For example: weather, of itself, is not part of culture, but how we live with it is.)

3 Ask the students to close their eyes and visualise getting off a plane or boat and entering a very different country to their own. (They may draw on memory or on their imagination.) They should imagine the temperature, sounds, smells, etc, of this new place.

4 When they are ready, ask them to imagine a journey around a town in this new place. (This could be on foot, by taxi, or any local form of transport.) They should take in all the new sights, sounds, smells, etc, and build up a strong impression of the place.

While they are doing this, draw four concentric circles on the board (see the diagram opposite). In the innermost circle, write 'Core beliefs'.

5 When the students are ready, tell them to list the things they noticed which were different from their own countries.

Ask them to give you some of their ideas. (You might get items like: architecture, height of buildings, street food, language, body language, money, clothes, etc.) Write these in the outer circle on the board. Explain that these things are 'products' of a culture and are the things we tend to notice when they differ from our own.

6 Now ask the students to imagine or remember learning a bit more about the country, having met a few people and stayed there for a week or so. What did they learn about the new country? Ask them to make lists and compare notes with those working close by.

7 While they are doing this, label the other sections in the 'onion ring': 'Rituals and practices' (closest to the centre) and 'Icons' (on the inside of 'Products').

- An example of rituals/practice is the game of football, with all its rules and regulations, kit, officials, supporters, etc.
- Icons or figureheads for this practice might be Maradona, Pele, Messi or Beckham.

8 When the students are ready, invite them to put their ideas in the relevant places in your onion ring.

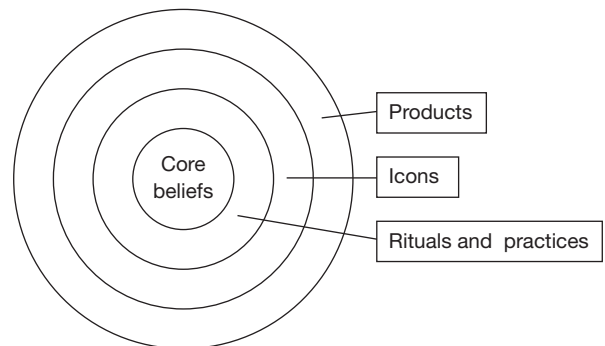
9 Through plenary discussion, make any adjustments to the placing of these practices, rituals or icons.

You may be able to draw several lines through the onion ring from *belief* to *product*, showing in a powerful way that when we sneer at seemingly small things – cultural products of another country – the criticism goes a lot deeper than we think. As, of course, does the praise!

Postscript

The simplified onion ring diagram is adapted from Trompenaars. (See Part A, on page 10, for more information.)

Onion ring diagram



Time is of the essence

Is my late your early?

● Cultural content ●

Students are made aware of the difference between the time conventions in their countries compared with, for example, middle-class Canadian time conventions.

Preparation

Make copies of the Canadian quantification text opposite, one for each student.

Procedure

- 1 Explain to the students that you are going to dictate a number of sentences and that they should write these down and also write down a 'quantification'. For example:
If the sentence you dictate is '*She got up early on Tuesday morning*', the students write this and also jot down what they consider to be 'early' as a getting-up time on a Tuesday morning in their culture.
- 2 Dictate the list of sentences opposite, without the Canadian quantifications. After the first one, remind them to quantify.
- 3 When the students have finished, ask them to compare their quantifications and then give out the Canadian quantification sheets.
- 4 Ask them to check any spelling mistakes they have made in their taking down of the sentences and look at the times.
- 5 Round off with any comments they want to make about similarities or differences.

Variation

Write the names of the months up on the board and ask the students to copy them out and write down against each:

- the normal temperature for the month
- the normal humidity
- two weather features they associate with the month:
rain, snow, fog, light winds, etc

In a multi-national class, this can lead to a new awareness of other people's climates.

Postscript

The Canadian times were suggested by Lindsay Clandfield. We learnt the quantification dictation idea from Paul Davis's book, *Dictation Many Ways*, CUP, 1989.

	Canadian quantifications
She got up early on Tuesday morning, a workday.	between 5.00 and 6.00
The traffic was heavy and it took her a long time to get to work.	over an hour
She arrived at work on time.	9.00 am
She took a normal length of time for her lunch break.	one hour
He got back home very late from work.	after 7.00
They had dinner rather late.	after 7.00
That weekend they had lunch at the normal sort of time.	one-ish
They were invited to supper with friends who like eating early.	before 7.00
They were invited for a specific time but, as they were polite, they arrived at the time their hosts <i>expected</i> they would.	between 10 and 20 minutes late
They got home and watched the last national TV news.	from 10.00 to 10.30
As the next day was a workday, they went to bed at a sensible time.	around eleven-ish
They usually put their 8 year old to bed fairly early as he has to get to school by the right time next morning. (Two quantifications here)	a bit before 9.00 pm / 8.45 am
Occasionally the 8 year old gets to stay up really late.	11.00 pm or even midnight