



## Developing Critical Cultural Awareness in the ELT Classroom

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### Introduction

In the current age of globalization, migration, and immigration, integrating interculturality into language instruction is essential in order to prepare language learners to become competent intercultural speakers (Byram, 2020), described as competent communicators (Byram & Zarate, 1996) who engage with complexity and multiple identities and who “avoid the stereotyping which accompanies perceiving someone through a single identity” (Byram et al., 2002, p. 5). Intercultural speakers are successful not only in communicating information but also in developing human relationships with people of other languages and cultures with whom they live and work. In contrast to monolingual native speakers (NSs), intercultural speakers are able to navigate the intercultural space where communication occurs among speakers of various linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Kramsch (1993, p. 236) defines the space that combines the culture of the target language and the social characteristics of the learner’s environment as a “third place” of intercultural communication. Resonating with this concept, Wilkinson (2020) opines that intercultural speakers can navigate the space between languages and cultures in communication with people of diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Defining intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is challenging, and scholars have offered a variety of definitions. A popular definition is “the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one’s intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitude” (Deardorff, 2006, p. 247-248). Byram (1997) provided one of the most comprehensive ICC frameworks designed to guide foreign language teachers in integrating language competence (linguistic, sociolinguistic, and discourse competence) and intercultural competence (IC) into language classrooms. His ICC model is a combination of five elements: attitude, knowledge, skills (skills of interpreting and relating; skills of discovery and interaction), and critical cultural awareness (CCA). This paper provides an approach to integrating critical cultural awareness in the language classroom that promotes curiosity, inquiry, and empathy aimed at transforming understanding and behaviour of another culture.

### Critical Cultural Awareness

Byram’s (1997) model of ICC places CCA at the centre of ICC, encircled by the other four components.



By highlighting the pivotal role of CCA, the model reveals the additional educational benefits of foreign or second language teaching, which extend instruction beyond cultural knowledge and language skills. CCA emphasizes the role of teachers in challenging learners' implicit views regarding cultural norms and practices in their own and other cultures. Byram posits that the qualities of an intercultural speaker "are seldom acquired without help, are seldom learnt without teaching" (Byram, 1997, p. 2), thereby underscoring the critical role of the language teacher to incorporate intercultural learning into the classroom. Although the fundamental idea of the model has not changed, Byram (2020) revised his description of CCA and further defined it as "an ability to evaluate, critically and on the basis of an explicit, systematic process of reasoning, values present in one's own and other cultures and countries" (p. 115). This reconceptualization tasks the teacher with creating pedagogy that promotes and encourages inquiry, reflection, identity formation, democracy, and social justice.

Baker (2012) espoused the notion of CCA as a vital basis of knowledge in successfully preparing language learners for intercultural communication. He argued that the notion may be confined to intercultural communication between defined cultural groups, typically at the national level, and proposed "intercultural awareness" (ICA) (Baker, 2012, p. 62) as an alternative non-essentialist view of culture and language. Others had similar criticisms about Byram's model; however, this appears to be a misinterpretation. Byram (2020, p. 55) clearly stated that teachers should not introduce learners' national culture or a particular combination of dominant beliefs, values, and behaviours in a particular society without careful consideration of issues of power. Rather, Byram (2020) asserted that teachers should encourage learners to acquire the ability to communicate with any speaker of another language. He emphasized that:

Foreign language teaching should not attempt to provide representations of other cultures, but should concentrate on equipping with the means of accessing and analysing any cultural practices and meaning they encounter, whatever their status in society (pp. 56-57).

It is important to keep in mind that understanding social and cultural norms of particular communities is insufficient and inappropriate for understanding the sociocultural contexts of English as a lingua franca (ELF) and international language. Baker (2012) claimed that, although learners may use their knowledge of specific cultures for initial communication as part of ICA, they should overcome single cultural frames of reference in intercultural communication. Furthermore, Byram (2020) did not deny that learners know and analyse a dominant national culture. Understanding the dominant culture helps in cross cultural communication and interaction, as national identity and cultural beliefs and practices exist to some extent in all interactions. In addition, a critical analysis of the dominant culture allows learners to challenge it, critique its values, and become aware of power issues in their society.

Teachers often make use of cultural comparisons to promote students' CCA. Comparison leads learners to recognize and understand similarities and differences between their own and other cultures. Bridging the gap between differences is essential to create an atmosphere of acceptance and empathy in a multicultural society. While cultural comparisons are useful, they must be treated carefully (Baker, 2015). Presenting simplistic images or references of a dominant national culture may reinforce prejudices and stereotypes. Therefore, it is essential to provide learners with a variety of representations of cultures, including those of foreign and second language users of English, and encourage critical examination of cultural practices and perspectives.

To become a competent intercultural speaker, learners are encouraged to recognize differences and variations within their own and other cultures. Different cultural values and perspectives based on age, gender, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity exist within every culture. Learners should explore and become aware of diversity and complexity of cultural groupings and influences within their local and national cultures, including through discussions among students (Baker, 2015). Implementing the diversity of cultural values and practices within one's own culture as well as that of another culture can prove challenging. The following section provides a theoretical framework that can serve as a model for

introducing sensitive topics in ways that provoke students to reflect upon their own practices and discover similarities and differences with another culture.

### **Implementing ICC in the Classroom**

Although many English language teachers agree on the importance of incorporating ICC into language instruction in theory, they may encounter challenges in practice that inhibit the teaching of culture. Due to limited class time, teachers may question which aspects of culture to focus on, as English is used worldwide as an ELF, or international language. Non-native speakers (NNSs) of English outnumber NSs, with communication between NNSs likely the most common in intercultural contexts. As such, the target culture need not be associated with one where English is spoken as the first language, as is the case in the United Kingdom and United States of America (USA). As English is the lingua franca of several nations, cultural aspects can be integrated into the language classroom from a variety of sources and countries affording the teacher a wealth of options for inclusion in the language curriculum. The dominant national culture of such a country can be introduced as an example; however, the purpose of this introduction should be made explicit. A good starting point is to conduct a critical analysis of the students' own cultural practices, values, and beliefs and note the diversity within their own culture before moving on to a second culture. This allows students to realize that there are a multitude of practices, beliefs, and values within each culture, thereby reducing the risk of cultural stereotyping.

Furthermore, some teachers may not be fully prepared to instruct and engage students in ICC tasks using the target language. However, a distinctive feature of Byram's ICC model is the integration of language competences and IC. Fantini and Garrett-Rucks (2016) emphasized the importance of communicating in the target language as a fundamental component of ICC essential for qualitative and quantitative development. Nugent and Catalano (2016) identified factors, such as students' and teachers' proficiency level and class climate that can influence target language use. Another factor noted was the native language skills of the students that facilitate deeper understanding and awareness. Nugent and Catalano (2016) argued that teachers can create an environment to promote target language use through inquiry and in-depth discussions within ICC learning tasks.

While many ICC frameworks indicate what teachers should teach, they do not reveal how to teach and integrate ICC. For example, Chen and Le (2019) point out the abstraction of Byram's ICC model from a pedagogical perspective and the need for more concrete and detailed guidelines regarding how to implement the model into practice. Based on a literature review, Nugent (2020) found that many foreign language instructors are not prepared to teach culture when they enter the field and lack a teaching methodology. Her study over a nine-month period of teachers' professional development in teaching culture in the French language classroom revealed that not only is it important to understand the ICC framework, but equally important is that teachers possess practical strategies regarding how to optimize target language when teaching culture in the language classroom. Moeller and Faltin Osborn (2014) suggested an approach for effective implementation of culture through alignment of language and culture curricula with the World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages (The National Standards Collaborative Board, 2015) in foreign language classrooms in the USA. The standards delineate five interconnected language goals (Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities), referred to as the five Cs, which establish an inextricable link between communication and culture. Within the five C's, the Culture standard makes use of the three P's model, or framework (Products, Practices, Perspectives) aimed at investigating how the products and practices of a culture reveal the underlying perspectives (values, beliefs). This model can be applied to English Language Teaching (ELT) in numerous contexts as a useful framework for integrating culture into language instruction.

## **The Three Ps Framework**

A pedagogical approach proposed by Dema and Moeller (2012) for teaching culture in a language classroom is based on the theoretical construct of the three Ps (Products, Practices, Perspectives) in combination with inquiry-based teaching with technology. This approach enhances student motivation and engagement and assists in overcoming prejudices and stereotyping on the part of students thereby raising their CCA. The World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages (The National Standards Collaborative Board, 2015) presented culture as products of a society, behavioural practices, and philosophical perspectives. The five Cs mentioned above include two standards based on the three Ps framework:

Cultures: Interact with cultural competence and understanding.

Standard 1 (Relating Cultural Practices to Perspectives): Learners use the language to investigate, explain, and reflect on the relationship between the practices and perspectives of the cultures studied.

Standard 2 (Relating Cultural Products to Perspectives): Learners use the language to investigate, explain, and reflect on the relationship between the products and perspectives of the cultures studied. (The National Standards Collaborative Board, 2015, p. 2)

Cultural products are created by members of a culture and may be tangible, such as a house, painting, or piece of literature, or intangible, such as a ritual, piece of music, or dance. Cultural practices refer to patterns of social behaviour accepted by a society, such as gestures, mealtime etiquette, and social distance. Cultural perspectives include attitudes, values, and beliefs held by members of a culture, as seen through the products and practices of a culture.

According to Dema and Moeller (2012), among the three Ps, learners have little difficulty in identifying and understanding cultural products and practices; however, perspectives may be challenging. Textbooks primarily focus on products and perspectives and seldom address perspectives, as these represent intangible values, beliefs, and attitudes. There also may exist an inherent danger when teaching perspectives as a teacher's own attitudes, values, and beliefs about a culture may potentially create stereotypes. Bell (2011) points out that teaching can be viewed as a "cultural practice" (p. 39) because one's own culture informs the knowledge teachers value and the choice of teaching and learning activities, as well as the culture of the students in the classroom. Hence, teachers themselves should be aware of their own cultural positioning when teaching culture. Perspectives included in the three Ps is closely related to CCA in ICC as students explore and grow in awareness of cultural perspectives.

## **Inquiry-Based Teaching and OSEER**

While recent ELT textbooks cover a wider variety of cultures, avoiding stereotypical images of Angrocentric cultures, cultures should be presented in a less static and fixed manner (Kiczkowiack, 2020). A textbook may offer images of some cultures, but cannot describe and represent all aspects of a given culture. As a result, teachers are encouraged to present culture as fluid and dynamic and have students critically examine how a culture is represented in textbooks. Authentic materials and digital media afford learners direct access to updated and current products, practices, and perspectives of a culture that students can investigate and analyse through inquiry-based learning tasks. Skills such as inquiry, noticing, curiosity, and openness that are integral to acquiring deeper cultural understanding must be developed by students as they actively explore and discover knowledge and behaviours first-hand through carefully structured learning tasks that guide and hone these skills. To avoid placing students in the role of passive recipients of information, teachers are tasked with developing instructional activities that place students in the role of inquirers and observers, much like that of a cultural anthropologist, as they uncover and

actively explore culture (Dema & Moeller, 2012).

Through the integration of authentic materials, digital media, and the three Ps framework, students can challenge and develop their own attitudes and assumptions towards a culture in an open and non-judgmental manner (Moeller & Faltin Osborn, 2014). As such, teachers should not be the sole purveyor of knowledge and information about products, practices, and perspectives of a culture; rather, it is vital to have students explore a culture in the role of a cultural anthropologist. This ensures ownership in the learning and motivates learners to share their learning with others as they become “experts” on a particular topic. The teacher’s role becomes one of creating learning tasks, providing resources, and one who facilitates the learning process.

In the process of ICC development, attitudes are considered a key starting point (Byram, 2020; Deardorff, 2006). For this purpose, Deardorff (2012, p. 58) proposed the Observe, State, Explore, Evaluate (OSEE) tool, which was initially developed in 2000 and allows learners to challenge their assumptions, move beyond them, and reflect more objectively on an intercultural situation:

- O—Observe (and listen to) what is happening;
- S—State objectively what is happening;
- E—Explore different explanations for what is happening;
- E—Evaluate which explanation(s) is the most likely one(s).

This tool can be employed for film clips, photos, and critical incidents. Moeller and Faltin Osborn (2014) explained how this tool can be used in a foreign language classroom using a video clip, such as the initial scene of a dinner party at someone’s home. The first step is to observe and listen to what is happening. In order to focus the learners’ attention on what is occurring, the first viewing should be seen without sound. Learners solely observe how the host and guest greet each other and how the host invites the guest into the house using non-verbals and gestures. Then, learners state as objectively as possible what they saw in the video clip. The learners watch the clip again, but this time with sound to confirm or refute their observations. The next step is to explore with peers in small groups different explanations of what they saw and heard happening. Learners hypothesize why people may behave or make an utterance in a certain manner in this particular context. Different explanations could include personal and cultural explanations, including underlying cultural values. As learners explore various explanations and exchange hypotheses with their classmates in pairs or groups, they actively use the target language and hear different perspectives. The last step is to evaluate which of the offered explanations is the most likely one occurring in this scenario.

Moeller expanded and adapted this model for application in the language classroom by adding Resources as the fifth step to the OSEE model (OSEER) with the intent of moving the learner from a position of judgment and fixed mindset to one of openness and curiosity through carefully sequenced learning tasks. Once students are motivated to want to know which of the explanations they explored reflect the observed cultural practices, they are involved first-hand in a discovery mode of learning. By adding the R (Resources) to the OSEE model (OSEER), students are provided a variety of resources in the target language to “discover” the knowledge they seek to learn. When working in a small group, each learner within the group selects either a text, video, podcast, or interviews a native speaker to gain insights into the cultural topic under discussion (dinner party behaviour). Once all members of the group have completed their inquiry, they share what they learnt and gain a deeper understanding of the topic under study. Through such an inquiry approach, the students become an integral part and active participant in the learning process while using the target language, an important aspect of the ICC model. Students are also motivated to learn additional information about the topic at hand as they had previously hypothesized possible explanations for an observed behaviour and now are able to discover first-hand whether or not their hypothesis was accurate.

By putting the learner in the role of discovering knowledge, the chance of judgment and stereotyping is reduced. They view, observe, discuss, share, hypothesize, and then become informed through a variety of

resources they choose (a menu of options is provided by the teacher). Cultural research using the OSEER tool enables students to more objectively view and understand the cultural perspectives in their own and other cultures.

### Example of an ICC Task

This section introduces a task that illustrates the integration of culture into language instruction using the OSEER model with the three Ps framework. This task was originally developed for low–intermediate level university students in Japan in two consecutive compulsory 90-minute EFL classes emphasizing listening and speaking skills. The cultural context and product in this task are school lunch habits.

#### Task Objectives

Linguistic aspects:

- 1 Students can identify school lunch procedures in an online video (interpretive mode of communication).
- 2 Students can describe school lunch procedures (interpersonal mode).
- 3 Students can exchange information about school lunch habits (interpersonal mode).

Intercultural aspects:

- 1 Students can identify the values expressed through a student’s school lunch habits compared to their own and those of other cultures.
- 2 Students can discuss similarities and differences of school lunch habits with a peer from another culture.

#### Task Procedure

##### Phase 1 (students’ own culture): Pre-viewing activity and video-viewing

In the first phase, students examine school lunch habits in their own culture. First, as a pre-viewing activity that activates students’ background knowledge, teachers invite the students to describe Japanese elementary school lunch habits based on their own experiences. Then, teachers instruct students to watch a video about school lunch habits in a Japanese elementary school and observe what is happening.<sup>1</sup> Next, teachers invite students to describe and discuss what is happening in the video. Teachers also introduce vocabulary and phrases that students can use to describe school lunch habits.

##### Exploration of cultural practices of students’ own culture

Next, teachers engage in further discussion about Japanese elementary school lunch habits, using questions such as these:

- What are the similarities and differences between the school lunch habits shown in the video and those in the school from which you graduated?
- What food is typical for school lunches?
- How do students spend their school lunchtime?
- What behaviours are expected from students during lunchtime?

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<sup>1</sup> An example of a video teachers could use is ‘School Lunch in Japan - It's Not Just About Eating!’ (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hL5mKE4e4uU>).

At this stage, students examine practices of school lunches in Japan. By comparing the practices in the elementary school in the video with those the students have experienced, students will also explore similarities and differences among local communities.

### **Exploration of cultural perspectives of students' own culture**

As a final activity of the first phase, teachers instruct students to form pairs to explore different explanations for what is happening and discuss the underlying values regarding school lunch habits in Japan. At this stage, students investigate the relationship between cultural practices and perspectives. Finally, teachers ask students to share their explanations with the class and discuss which explanation is the most likely to explain underlying values of school lunchtime in Japan.

For instance, one cultural practice which can be extracted from the video is that students eat their lunches in groups of four in their homeroom classrooms. This practice may reveal an underlying cultural value of socialization as students are expected to build communities and relationships within their homerooms. It is important for students themselves to explore first-hand such cultural practices and perspectives, as they begin to see different and varied practices and perspectives through a different lens.

### **Phase 2 (other culture[s]): Video-viewing and description of cultural practices of another culture**

In the second phase, students explore school lunch habits in another culture and compare them with their own culture. Here, we use a school lunch in the USA as an example. First, teachers instruct students to watch a video to observe lunchtime in an elementary school in the USA.<sup>2</sup> After viewing the video, teachers encourage students to describe and discuss scenes from the video. Teachers need to clearly state that the video is only an example and does not represent the practice of all American schools.

### **Exploration of cultural perspectives of another culture**

Next, teachers instruct students to form pairs and discuss underlying values of school lunch habits. Then, teachers provide students with options to glean additional information on the topic. These may include online articles, podcasts, videos, or interviews with a native speaker on the topic. Providing additional resources at this stage allows students to investigate underlying values of another culture more deeply as cultural anthropologists, providing evidence and reasoning before evaluating the most plausible explanation. After students share what they learn from the resources, they discuss and evaluate which explanation is the most plausible one.

### **Comparison of the students' own and other cultures**

As a final activity, teachers invite students to discuss the similarities and differences in practices and perspectives between school lunches in Japan and the USA based on the videos. Students, in pairs, draw a Venn diagram, mind map, or may choose another form of graphic organizer comparing Japanese and American school lunch habits.

### **Post-task activity for self-and peer-evaluation**

As a post-task activity, teachers ask students to engage in a role-play activity in pairs, distributing

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<sup>2</sup> An example of a video is 'Powell elementary school lunch in Washington DC' (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aht9vf6rSTc>)

prompts and rubrics to the students. The purpose of this activity is to promote self- and peer-evaluation to determine if and how well they achieved the learning objectives. This allows students to see gaps in their learning that may require additional learning and involves the students directly in the learning process. After the role-play has been completed, teachers instruct students to listen to their recorded conversations and conduct self-evaluations using a rubric that guides the reflection process.

#### Prompts

A: You are an elementary school teacher in Japan. You are going to explain school lunch habits to a new assistant language teacher from the USA. You have three minutes to think about how you are going to start and sustain a conversation and explain to the English teacher what she should know about Japanese school lunch habits. Then, role-play the situation with your partner for five minutes.

B: You are a new assistant language teacher from the USA in a Japanese elementary school. You are going to ask a teacher about Japanese school lunch habits. You have three minutes to think about how you are going to start and sustain the conversation and what questions you will ask. Then, role-play this situation with your partner for five minutes.

### Reflection

In order to assess improvements in students' CCA, it is suggested that teachers ask students to write self-reflections after the task. Reflection is beneficial for students as they become aware of their increased understanding of aspects of their own and other cultures. Possible questions include the following:

- Did your understanding of school lunch habits in your and other culture(s) change? If so, how?
- Why do you think school lunch habits are different in your and other culture(s)?
- What are the cultural values and beliefs that underlie school lunch habits in your and other culture(s)?

### Conclusion

This paper presents the crucial role of CCA in ICC and highlights important considerations for teaching English as an ELF, or an international language. Byram's (1997, 2020) ICC model is a useful guide for language teachers in teaching and assessing students' linguistic and cultural learning processes. However, the abstract nature of the model may create challenges in classroom application. ELT takes place in a particular context, and teachers can adjust their teaching based on content and context. Various factors, such as educational institutions, curriculum, and the use and purpose of English in a particular society influence how teachers plan lessons incorporating culture into language classes. A pedagogical approach based on the theoretical constructs of the three Ps incorporating inquiry-based teaching can help teachers facilitate CCA within their language classrooms. In the language classroom, moving from a single perspective to multiple perspectives involves moving from knowing (knowledge) to understanding (attitudes) to behavioural changes (skills). Incorporating the three P's model as promulgated in the five goals of Communication in the World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages (2015), together with the task-based learning approach of the OSEER model ensures learners gain knowledge (cognitive) and attitudes (affective) that open their minds, develop tolerance for ambiguity and flexibility and behavioural (skills) that can be assessed through performance. The OSEER models can develop in learners the much-needed curiosity and inquiry in the language classroom that stimulates a deeper level of knowledge, understanding and skills to interact with a variety and diversity of people and cultures.



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