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## CHARACTER AND CULTURE IN EDUCATION

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**Abstract:** Every once in while we need to go back and analyze which were the roots and goals of education. Was it to educate individuals, communities or the whole society? In this labyrinth of wide variety of systems of education it seems that we moved from the original idea of “improving the society” into creating an ideal teacher. However, this ideal teacher would be full of skills and instruments but not very worthy if it lacks character. The paper argues on the dilemma raised by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. that argued that .. “education has both a utilitarian and a moral function”. He asserted that reasoning ability is not enough, and this is particularly evident in the present educational reality in which the sense of success and the virtue of the society are more often valued through individualism. The paper raises the dilemma if the purpose of the process is the individual or the community? Also, is the success of the educational system measured by the number of individual experts or the impact they have in the surrounding or the global environment? Is character in education a moral category or it includes cultural factors that are non-visible and sometimes non-measurable?

**Keywords:** Character , culture, education , ethics and morals, non-traditional methodology

### Introduction

It is evident today in regard to educational practices that a number of skills are essential in the process of teaching and learning. Very often in the teaching methodology publications these skills are integrated in one particular learning context. However there is an element that is present and shadows almost every learning/teaching material and that is the cultural aspect. Among the first to argue that culture should be considered as the fifth skill in language teaching. This skill is evident in every step of the process not only in the language teaching but also in other fields of study/research. According to Omaggion (1993) teaching culture is considered important by most teachers but it has remained "insubstantial and sporadic in most language classrooms" and there are few reasons for this such as lack of practical techniques and the uncertainty about which aspects of culture to teach. Last but not least important according to Omaggion is the lack of time.

In continuation to this scheme I would also add the lack of courage to discuss culture sensitive issue in some multicultural classes and a factor that is almost forgotten in the teaching process which is the character of the educator throughout the process. According to Peterson and Coltrane(2003) the(American) National Center for Cultural Competence defines 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 the ability to transmit the above to succeeding generations” (cited from Goode, Sockalingam, Brown, & Jones, 2000). Seeing it from an academic/teaching standpoint understanding culture and cultural relativism creates a “healthy” ground to build up a culture sensitive perspective in education, which we may also refer to as multicultural education. In attempt to clarify the meaning of multicultural education, Brian M. Bullivant broke the word Multicultural down in to its constituent parts: Multi- and cultural. Knowing the meaning of “multi” as “many” his work aimed at defining culture in a multicultural education context. After analyzing several alternative meanings, Bullivant defined culture “as a social group’s design for survival in and adaptation to its environment...” and with this definition in mind he added that one aim of Multicultural education would be “to teach about the many social groups and their different designs for living in a pluralistic society”(cited in Davidman & Davidman, p.6). This paper aims to explore the presence of the culture element when teaching foreign languages, the need for a

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stronger focus toward the character features of the teacher and review few models that are reported as efficient in particular studies.

Throughout the different definitions on culture there are a number of concepts such as house hold, environment, tradition, language and family that are also teaching topics in foreign language classes. This is another fact that alerts us not to minimize the role of culture when teaching foreign languages. Language skills would normally develop the necessary linguistic infrastructure in language teaching but it is evident that the cultural element creates the context and today we are fully aware of the constant popularity that the “teaching in context” concept has in foreign language methodology.

Based on the National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, when regarding the standards for foreign language learning in the 21st century in USA(Yonkers, 175 – 181 177 1996) the program states that students cannot really master the language until they have also mastered the cultural contexts in which the language occurs(page 27). This helps in building skills that can reflect cultural appropriateness when performing in the target culture. This appropriateness might cover language skills, avoiding ambiguities in language but also ignore cultural taboos.

### **Few modes to develop culture sensitive manual/activities**

Through a thorough literature review we can note a number of attempts to promote culture sensitive models and activities in the 1960, 1970 and 1980. This techniques were designed to adapt to the so called “Culturally Conditioned behavior”. These techniques have persisted different movements in language education and are believed to reflect efficiency in the process.

We can distinguish few approaches that are widely acknowledged such as :

1. Culture Capsule developed by Taylor and Sorensen (1961)
2. Culture Clusters developed by Meade and Morain (1973)
3. Culture Assimilator developed by Fiedler, Mitchell and Triandis(1971)
4. Culture Minidramas developed by Seeyle (1984)
5. Deriving Cultural Connotations developed by Seeyle (1984)
6. Hypotheses Refinement developed by Jorstad (1981)
7. Artifact Study developed by Galloway (1985)
8. Decreasing Stereotypic Perceptions
9. Using proverb in Teaching Cultural Understanding
10. Humor as a Component of Culture : Exploring Cross-Cultural Differences .

The select a topics of cultural activities helping developing common ground for students believes, coordinating it with topics being treated in the textbooks, create perspectives on differences and similarities between the target culture and home culture customs in relation to avoid stereotypes, judgmental position and stimulate a more intercultural environment in this process with clear focus toward students learning objectives.

### **The forgotten role of the character in the education**

Every once in while we need to go back and analyze which were the roots and goals of education. Was it to educate individuals, communities or the whole society? In this labyrinth of wide variety of systems of education it seems that we moved from the original idea of “improving the society” into creating and ideal teacher. However, this ideal teacher would be full of skills and instruments but not very worthy if it lacks character.

It is important to periodically reflect on the argument and the dilemma raised by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. that argued that: ...“education has both a utilitarian and a moral function”. He asserted that reasoning ability is not enough, and this is particularly evident in the present educational reality in which the sense of success and the virtue of the society are more often valued through individualism. Educators need to be aware of the dilemma if the purpose of the teaching process is the individual or the community? Sometimes by focusing too much on the individual skills and values of the individuals/our students we forget the common values that the community should promote in regards to equity education and social equality. Often the evaluation of the success of particular institutions is reported in relation to the successful individuals who graduated in this institution. The question that derives naturally is: if the success of the educational system is measured by the number of individual experts or the impact they have in the surrounding or the global environment? The last dilemma that concerns the role of the character in the educational process if character in education is a moral category or it includes cultural factors that are non-visible and sometimes non-measurable? Although it seems that in this paper we raised more questions that answered questions it is in fact following the general purpose of education which would be to never stop questioning nor exploring. The exploration of ideas and concepts is the only constant thing in the educational process since everything else very often becomes subject of examination and continous reforms of education.

## Conclusion

Most of the abovementioned questions, dilemmas and theses might not be completely new ideas. Its appropriateness also depends on a number of socio-linguistic factors that impact the process extensively. At this stage it is important to be aware that treating culture and character as an important skill of teacher widens the horizon of education which might be interesting and thorny at the same time. Character and culture are interconnected but it is important to mention that teaching in context does not necessarily mean teaching culture or character values. The teacher teaches in context in order to create a real-life situation for students' comprehension but this context is not always culture related. Raising this type of dilemmas would increase the comprehension of the process more effectively and minimize ambiguity in regard to the profile of the educator. Different cultures and characters coexist together in the process of teaching and learning and our main objective as educator would be to develop and promote character and cultural values to and for perspectives teachers as one of their strongest tools in becoming competent professionals.

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