

Hi, the purpose of this presentation is to introduce nine assumptions about language and culture learning. It's a narrated slide presentation, which means that whenever you click the button to move on to the next slide, I'll speak about the content on the slide. You can go through these slides at your own pace. If you're in a group, I hope that you'll pause to discuss the material as well. If you don't want the narration, you can of course mute your computer speakers.

The assumptions that I'm presenting come from Lorna Dickerson, of the Institute for Cross-Cultural Training. She earned her PhD in the 1970s and has been working in second language acquisition with expatriates ever since. I have been deeply impressed with her work. So when I present these assumptions, they're not just my own ideas: they're time-tested observations. But that said, they are presented as assumptions. I'm not going to defend the truthfulness of any of them. If you disagree with one, you're free to do so. But my main focus is to apply these assumptions to our context in Afghanistan, and to think about concrete changes we can make to our thinking and behavior in language learning. The next three slides contain the nine assumptions, without any voiceover. Click through those at your own rate, and think a bit about each one. If you're in a group, take the time to discuss any thoughts you have about them. After that I've got some reflections about each one.

Assumption 1.... The reason we have to state this assumption at the outset is because, at one time or another, we've all been tempted to think that we can't learn a new language. And that's simply not true. Everyone can do it. But it's also true that everyone faces unique challenges, and we'll talk about some of those. The second bullet point is quite important, because we often fall into the trap of comparing ourselves with other people. If you have a high language learning aptitude—and maybe you've taken a test about your own aptitude—then you can learn very quickly. If you have lower aptitude, it will probably take more time. But that doesn't mean that one person end up a better speaker of the language than someone else. Perseverance is more important than aptitude.

Assumption 2... I don't think anyone is tempted to disagree with this assumption, but it's also one I don't think that we apply very well. We need to do a better job in IAM of learning local culture, and we need to think carefully about how we can do that. What are some ideas that you have?

How can we move out of the language classroom and into the community? How do we do ethnographic interviews to get at underlying cultural systems and values? I'm talking about things deeper than the usual descriptions we get of weddings, funerals, and those sorts of highly structured cultural events. And I want us to be open to using our three hours of LCP time to get out into the community and get some of these answers for ourselves. It's easy to say these things, but really I'm laying down a challenge for each of us to learn how to do these things, and then to share our knowledge.

Assumption 3... This too sounds good. No one's going to object to being a lifelong learner. But I've got these two questions. First, are you using your language and culture time? And are those three hours making a difference? If we don't want to plateau in our ability, we need to protect those hours, and make sure that we're making the most of them. And we'll be talking about ways to do that.

Note that this doesn't mean you'll always feel like you're learning very much. This quote, again from a very experienced researcher, suggests that the kind of progress we can make in 100 hours at the beginning of our studies takes 300 hours at higher levels. So when you get to be more advanced, you'll feel like you're moving more slowly, even when you're moving at an appropriate pace. Phase 1, and the Long Course, is a special time because we're learning so much, so quickly. Our later progress will seem much slower, but we need to stick at it. And that implies that we manage our motivation

and our emotional energy so that we keep on learning.

Assumption 4... This too sounds like a good idea, but it's where we're weakest as an organization. And, to anticipate the conclusion of my next two slides, we need to think about our language learning as being more than what LCP provides. I've got some diagrams on the next two slides.

This shows the current approach to language study. We've got a plan to get you through the Long Course... and then you're on your own. We've got a number of resources for you after the Long Course, but nothing like the personalized plan you require to succeed.

In this diagram, we see a learner surrounded by a variety of different types of resources. The structured curriculum is still there in the lower left—this would include the Long Course and the classes that our teachers offer—but it's one type of resource out of five.

So while the classes we offer have always been emphasized—at least in the regions where we have language schools—you as a language learner need to think more broadly than that. You can make use of resources for second language learners that LCP doesn't create; there are excellent resources available for Persian study (and the dialect differences are not insurmountable). We're also surrounded by a lot of media for native speakers—whether on television, YouTube, other Internet sites, or in print media. And we recommend that you have a native speaker helper, which means a person you pay to help with language learning, who is not a trained teacher; a conversation partner, or something like that. And we've got a community of native speakers, and especially as we move into the higher levels we can learn directly from the community.

Here are some ideas about native speaker resource. Dictionaries. The Farhang-e Moaser, compiled by Suleiman Haim, is without doubt the resource that has helped me the most in my own learning. We can also get books written for children or adults. Since moving to Mazar we've found an excellent book store, with fascinating books aimed at both children and adults. That's not available in every region, but I could send them to you. We also have television stations like Tolo TV that put all their programs on YouTube for free. We have the BBC Persian web site. It's difficult reading, but it's exactly the vocabulary you need for discussing current events or security. And they also have radio programs. To learn a specific set of vocabulary we have Persian Wikipedia, which is a very high quality resource. There are radio shows of course. And there are translated texts, which are sometimes available in audio form as well.

Assumption 5... This is another area where we've been weak. First, let's just acknowledge that people learn differently. Quite apart from aptitude, people just learn differently. There are visual learners, aural learners, tactile learners. There are introverts and extroverts. Every one of our team members is different. You need a learning program customized to your own strengths and weaknesses.

Assumption 6... This again is a huge topic. Almost all of us are in different life situations. The social opportunities of men are different from those of women, and are different again depending on whether you're single or married, whether you work at home or the office, and what your work demands are like. We need to think carefully about how to work with—or work around—each of those situational variables.

But more importantly, we need to think about individual goals. Why do you want to be able to speak Dari? Is it for personal relationships? Is it for work? Is it because you just enjoy the culture? What's your motivation? When it comes to developing a personal language learning plan, this is the most

important thing to think about.

And that leads us right into Assumption 7 You need to take responsibility for your learning and make a plan that will work for you. I am here to help you to plan and evaluate—and in time we'll be training others to help as well—but you're the one responsible for the plan. After all, you'll be the one carrying it out. So I really encourage you to think carefully about your goals, and then together we can work out a way to get you there.

And that leads right into Assumption 8... If I were listening to this presentation and the LCP Consultant said that to me, I would think he was trying to get out of doing his job. I plead not guilty. But I want you to consider all of the other assumptions: how we differ as individuals, how we have different life situations, how we have different goals. There's no way you can just schedule three hours of lessons a week and expect the teacher to create a perfect learning experience. You need to bring the teachers into your own learning plan; and you also need to make intentional use of opportunities outside of our language schools.

So in the old paradigm, you had a lot of interaction with LCP staff during the Long Course, and then sporadic contact thereafter.

Instead, we want to be alongside of your in navigating all of the resources that you have to work with. One of those resources is formal instruction, but it's not the only one.

And to wrap up, we have Assumption 9... I don't just want you to learn Dari better. I want you to learn how to learn Dari better. That means learning new strategies for learning, and it means applying them more effectively. It almost certainly means *stopping* doing things that you're currently doing that aren't working. So a successful outcome from this talk would be for you to develop some personal goals, and then get in touch with me to discuss the best way forward.

This is the last slide. I've just got the nine assumptions here for you to review, and if you're in a group, to discuss.