

On Experiential Cultural Teaching Model in EFL College Classroom

DU MODELE D'ENSEIGNEMENT DE CULTURE EXPERIMENTAL DANS LA CLASSE D' ALE UNIVERSITAIRE

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Abstract: Teaching culture in EFL classroom has long been debated and studied in foreign language teaching field. But the perfect combination of language and culture in a foreign language classroom is a noble aim and how the transition can be made from theoretical matters to the active, crowded, and sometimes noisy foreign language classroom is a completely different story. This paper will introduce a new cultural teaching model, named by Experiential cultural teaching model. This model is a merger of Kolb's model of experiential learning cycle and Moran's cultural experience, which emphasizes learners' experience and participation in cultural teaching in EFL classroom. Based on the previous achievements of this field, this paper will focus on answering the following questions: why is culture taught in EFL classroom? what culture should be taught in EFL classroom? what is experiential cultural teaching model? and how is the new model of experiential cultural teaching applied in EFL classroom? The last two questions will be investigated in a greater detail and some experiential cultural teaching techniques and strategies for EFL college classroom will be provided. It is hoped that the present paper will help contribute to a better understanding of culture and its importance in the foreign language classroom.

Key words: EFL college classroom, cultural teaching, experiential model, teaching strategies

Résumé: L'enseignement de culture dans la classe d'ALE(anglais langue étrangère) a été discuté et étudié depuis longtemps dans le monde de l'enseignement des langues étrangères. Mais la combinaison parfaite de la langue et la culture est toujours un objectif noble de l'enseignement d'une langue étrangère. Alors la transition de la théorie à la pratique est bien une autre histoire. Cet article introduira un nouveau modèle d'enseignement de culture sous le nom de modèle d'enseignement de culture expérimental. Ce modèle provient de la fusion du modèle de cycle d'apprentissage expérimental de Kolb avec l'expérience culturelle de Moran, qui met en relief l'expérience et la participation des apprenants en cours de culture. Quelle culture faut-il être enseignée dans la classe d'ALE ? Qu'est-ce que c'est le modèle d'enseignement de culture expérimental ? Et quel est le nouveau modèle d'enseignement de culture expérimental. Les deux dernières questions seront étudiées en détail et des techniques et stratégies d'enseignement de culture expérimental pour la classe d'ALE seront présentées. Il est souhaitable que l'article présent puisse contribuer à une meilleure compréhension de la culture et de son importance dans la classe des langues étrangères.

Mots-Clés: classe d'ALE universitaire, enseignement de culture, modèle expérimental, stratégies d'enseignement

OVERVIEW

Teaching culture in EFL classroom has long been debated and studied in foreign language teaching field. Over years of efforts, more and more people have

realized that language and culture are not separable, and we cannot teach a language without teaching a culture.

“If we teach language without teaching at the same time the culture in which it operates, we are teaching meaningless symbols or symbols to which the student attaches the wrong meaning...” (Politzer, 1959, pp.100-101). Therefore the teaching of culture since the

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early years has been integrated in language teaching program and teaching materials in one way or another. But what culture should be taught in EFL classroom? And how is culture taught more effectively and efficiently in EFL classroom? These two questions still need more inquiry and profound research in terms of EFL classroom.

For what culture should be taught in EFL classroom, there are two main perspectives influencing the teaching of culture. One pertains to the transmission of factual, cultural information, which consists in statistical information, that is, institutional structures and other aspects of the target civilization, highbrow information, i.e., immersion in literature and the arts, and lowbrow information, which may focus on the customs, habits, and folklore of everyday life (Kramsch, 1993, p.24). This preoccupation with facts rather than meanings, though, leaves much to be desired as far as an understanding of foreign attitudes and values is concerned. All that it offers is 'mere book knowledge learned by rote' (Huebener, 1959, p.177). The other perspective, drawing upon cross-cultural psychology or anthropology, has been to embed culture within an interpretive framework and establish connections, namely, points of reference or departure, between one's own and the target country. This approach, however, has certain limitations, since it can only furnish learners with cultural knowledge, while leaving them to their own devices to integrate that knowledge with the assumptions, beliefs, and mindsets already obtaining in their society. But from the classroom perspective, Nelson Brooks' ideas of what culture should be taught in EFL classroom may be noteworthy. Brook has identified five meanings of culture: growth; refinement; fine arts; patterns of living; and a total way of life. He believes that patterns of living should receive the major emphasis in the classroom. Patterns of living refer to the individual's role in the unending kaleidoscope of life situations of every kind and the rules and models for attitude and conduct in them. If we provide our students only with a list of facts of history or geography and a list of lexical items, we have not provided them with an intimate view of what life is really like in the target culture. Culture in real life is not an abstract entity, but what we can feel, touch, smell and experience. As language teachers, we should adapt all kinds of definitions of culture to specific ways of life and provide our students with the experience of participating in that culture. In the West, although the integration of culture in language teaching has a longer history, and a package of sophisticated theories have been developed, how to incorporate culture into EFL classroom is not an easy undertaking and the profession is still probing ways of applying them into real classroom activities and teaching materials as well. Experiential cultural teaching model introduced in this paper just arises as a response to particular historical, social and cultural conditions of learning and teaching and has the transformation of the educational processes as a characteristic objective, especially reforming and

reconstructing the nature of the interactions and their discourses between teachers and students. The reconstructing of classroom discourses is not only towards a more participatory, and individual experience-based interaction order in classroom, but for a commitment to the humanizing of learning and to the signaling of such discursive restructuring as a prime agent in the development of a critically aware citizenry in the context of social interaction outside the school (Kohonen, 2001, *Preface*).

WHAT IS EXPERIENTIAL CULTURAL TEACHING MODEL?

The roots of experiential learning can be traced back to John Dewey's progressive pedagogy, Kurt Lewin's social psychology, Jean Piaget's work on developmental cognitive psychology, and to humanistic psychology of Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers. But experiential cultural teaching model is primarily based on the more recent theories of Patrick R. Moran's "cultural experience" and Kolb's model of experiential learning.

According to Patrick R. Moran's "cultural experience", culture learning is the encounter with another way of life. Foreign language teachers should help our students with participating in that way of life and learn culture. Moran's "cultural experience" consists of five parts: the cultural content, the activities in which students engage this content, the outcomes that are intended or achieved, the learning context, and the nature of the relationship the teacher develops with students (Moran, 2004, p.13). Learners encounter another way of life. The way of life is the content, and the learners' encounters are the activities they undertake and the outcomes they achieve. The teacher, through a working relationship with the learner, is an integral part of this experience. This experience, in turn, is very much a function of the particular context or learning circumstances where the culture learning takes place (Moran, 2004, p.14). Moran's "cultural experience" tries to make cultural learning a process of participation and experience, rather than a focal point of definitions, all with the intention of helping learners learn culture like food, clothing, literature, music, film, realia, personal anecdotes, native speakers, and more. All these cultural items are much more understandable and acceptable for learners. The cultural experience contains four interconnected learning interactions: knowing about, knowing how, knowing why and knowing oneself (Moran, 2004, p.15). Going through the five parts of Moran's "cultural experience", learners will have the experience of participation, description, interpretation and response. This whole process is totally an overall experience of the target culture and moves toward mastery of the subject at hand, which is quite different from the traditional cultural learning — passive learning and hearing.

Kolb's model of experiential learning is akin to Moran's "cultural experience", learning from experience. Immediate personal experience is the focal point for learning. As pointed out by Kolb (1984, p.21), personal experience gives the 'life, texture, and subjective personal meaning to abstract concepts'. At the same time it also provides 'a concrete, publicly shared reference point for testing the implications and validity of ideas created during the learning process'. Experience alone is not, however, a sufficient condition for learning. Experiences also need to be processed consciously by reflecting on them. Learning is thus a cyclic process integrating immediate experience, reflection, abstract conceptualization and action. Kolb's model therefore proposes a cycle of four distinct stages, each with a different learning purpose. Through a cycle of observation, theorizing, and strategizing, learners go from one experience to another and are engaged on a number of levels — intellectually, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. The four stages occur in sequence: ①concrete experience; ②reflective observation; ③ abstract conceptualization; ④ active experimentation (Kolb, 1984). From participation in the experience to reflection on what happened to developing explanations or theories to devising strategies consistent with personal learning goals, the nature of the content and the form of the experience, learners finish the experiential learning cycle and no doubt get a complete mastery of the subject and a better awareness of the target culture and themselves.

Moran's model of cultural experience and Kolb's model of experiential learning cycle can be merged together: concrete experience becomes participation, with emphasis on knowing how; reflective observation becomes description, with a focus on knowing about; abstract conceptualization becomes interpretation, with concentration on knowing why; active experimentation becomes response, with an emphasis on self-awareness, knowing oneself. In the participation, description, and interpretation stages, the learner's attention is on the culture, whereas in the response stage, the learner's focus shifts to self (Moran, 2004, p.19). The four stages present an overall procedure that teachers and learners can use to work on the cultural experience and each stage provides a clear pedagogical focus.

Founded on Moran's model and Kolb's model, experiential cultural teaching model does some adaptation to make it appropriate to the different levels of EFL classroom. Different levels of students may go through the process and stages of learning in different emphases in terms of their specific needs and capabilities. From the teacher's point of view, experiential cultural teaching means that opportunities are provided for the full development of the cycle. There are various instructional techniques to promote the different aspects of the learning cycle. The traditional academic setting has tended to emphasize reflective observation and concept formation at the

expense of active experimenting and immediate concrete experiences. The model also cautions against the opposite extreme, the assumption that any experience can lead to learning. Only experience that is reflected upon seriously yields its full measure of learning. Reflection must in turn be followed by action for further experiences (Kohonen, 1992a).

To summarize the discussion, experiential cultural teaching model is characterized as followed: ①learning takes place along a continuum of meaning, ranging from 'meaningless' routine learning to 'meaningful', experiential learning that involves the learner. Learning is the process of creating knowledge through the transformation of experience. ②learning is a continuous process that is grounded in experience. Thus knowledge and skill gained in one situation become instruments of understanding and dealing with situations that follow. ③the process of learning requires the resolution of conflicts between dialectically opposed modes of grasping and transforming experience. Learning is a tension-filled process, where knowledge, skills and attitudes are achieved through varying degrees of emphasis on the stages of learning. ④learning is a holistic process of relating to the world. It involves feeling, observing, thinking and acting, as a cyclic process (Kohonen, 2001, p.30). Learning is active and self-directed and continues throughout life.

Traditional academic learning has been strong on theory but weaker on application and practice. So the rest of paper will contribute to the techniques and applications of experiential cultural teaching model in EFL classroom.

HOW IS EXPERIENTIAL CULTURAL TEACHING MODEL APPLIED IN EFL CLASSROOM?

Experiential teaching model is centrally concerned with the role of learners' experience and reflection in learning. Critical reflection is a key to learning from experience. Critical reflection also has a greater demand for learner awareness and autonomy. In order to foster responsible learner awareness and autonomy, teachers need to perform different roles in classroom. In experiential learning, the teacher is a facilitator of learning, an organizer of learning opportunities, a resource person providing learners with feedback and encouragement, and a creator of the learning atmosphere and the learning space. The relationship between teacher authority and the development of learner learning is different for learners who are at different stages of their growth. For teachers, the big problem in experiential teaching is how to facilitate students to take an increasing charge of their learning and bring their full contribution to the work at hand.

With an emphasis on the role of learners' experience

and reflection in cultural learning, our pedagogic strategies in EFL classroom should incorporate this emphasis into its language teaching and consciously foster learner awareness and autonomy. On the basis of a package of ideas discussed above, some techniques and strategies are offered as how to put the experiential cultural teaching model in language teaching into practice and how to infuse cultural issues in classroom instruction (Moran, 2004).

1st. First of all, adopting the framework of teaching culture in guiding learners through the cultural experience to develop cultural knowings.

2nd. Organizing cultural content and learning process through the four stages of the experiential learning cycle: participation, description, interpretation, and response.

3rd. For each stage of the cycle, the teacher needs to select and structure particular content areas, learning activities, and accompanying learning outcomes. In each stage, learners are thus engaged in distinct tasks.

4th. In teaching each stage, the teacher must play different roles. These roles stem from different teaching strategies and call for different outlooks or attitudes on the teacher's part. Teachers need to consciously interact differently with learners when teaching knowing how, knowing about, knowing why, and knowing oneself. The working relationship through these roles is crucial in classroom.

5th. Teachers need to be versatile. They need to be able to present or elicit cultural information, coach and model cultural behaviors, guide and conduct cultural research and analysis. They also need to be able to enter learners' worlds by listening, empathizing, and sharing their own experiences as cultural learners so as to help learners step out of their worlds into another language, another culture.

6th. Using authentic sources from the native speech community helps to engage students in authentic cultural experiences. Sources can include films, news broadcasts, and television shows; Web sites; and photographs, magazines, newspapers, restaurant menus, travel brochures, and other printed materials. Teachers can adapt their use of authentic materials to suit the language proficiency level of the students.

7th. In role plays, students can act out a miscommunication that is based on cultural differences. For example, after learning about ways of addressing different groups of people in the target culture, such as people of the same age and older people, students could role play a situation in which an inappropriate greeting is used. Other students observe the role play and try to identify the reason for the miscommunication.

8th. Discussion of common proverbs in the target language could focus on how the proverbs are different from or similar to proverbs in the students'

native language and how differences might underscore historical and cultural background (Ciccarelli, 1996). Using proverbs as a way to explore culture also provides a way to analyze the stereotypes about and misperceptions of the culture, as well as a way for students to explore the values that are often represented in the proverbs of their native culture.

9th. The use of realia is commonplace in the EFL classroom and is widely considered to have great value in fostering an active teaching-learning environment. By presenting information through diverse media, realia helps to make English language input as comprehensible as possible and to build "an associative bridge between the classroom and the world" (Heaton, 1979).

10th. Literary texts are often replete with cultural information and evoke memorable reactions for readers. Texts that are carefully selected for a given group of students and with specific goals in mind can be very helpful in allowing students to acquire insight into a culture (Peterson and Coltrane, 2003).

11th. The regular visit of a native speaker in the classroom is very effective. The visits should be planned so that they could be integrated with the normal study program. The visits should include discussion of the students' observations of foreign linguistic and cultural behavior in certain communication situations. The role of the native speaker in the classroom can be that of a discussion partner and teacher, and also that of a foreign observer.

12th. Theme-based and problem-solved group discussions can be most fruitful. In face-to-face interactions, students can compare and argue their observations and assumptions and then do reflections in group. A theme-based discussion allows students to explore relevant issues raised from a variety of perspectives, develop critical thinking skills, elicit responses, converse freely on all aspects of the theme they observe and release them from inhibiting grammatical rule-binding and detailed-oriented learning habits.

CONCLUSION

It goes without saying that foreign language teachers should be foreign culture teachers, having the ability to experience and analyse both the home and target cultures (Byram, Morgan et al., 1994, p.73). Language courses with strong cultural aspects integrated into them aim not only at developing language skills but also give the students' cultural knowledge and raise their cultural and language awareness. Basing dialogues on situations that are authentic (using body language) is as important as linguistic structure and semantics. Using pictures as

much as possible, preferably ones from target language magazines is advocated. While pictures cannot teach the sounds or structures of a language, they can often show what language stands for. Lastly teachers should concentrate on active learning and should give students more hands-on experiences so that they can feel, touch, smell, and see! These kinds of activities will keep students motivated and will result in positive attitudes, greater awareness, and academic success (Peck, 2005).

Exploring the culture of learning which is operant in a given context is not, however, an easy undertaking. It calls for a study of the deeply rooted cultural and educational traditions of the target society, as well as of the way in which these interact with current socioeconomic and ideological trends. It also calls for a willingness to invest both the time and the effort which are required to understand students' behaviors in terms of the meaning which they have for them in the light of

their own beliefs and assumptions. The exploration of local cultures of learning does not therefore fit easily into a quick-fix, technocratic approach to decision-making. Nevertheless, both in purely educational terms and with respect to the long-term cost of program development, it is a crucial element in developing a locally meaningful and sustainable approach to teaching. (Tudor, 2001).

Experiential cultural teaching model is a response to the national EFL education reform. The main purpose of this paper is arguing for an official place for the teaching of culture in Chinese foreign language education and that cultural aims in foreign language teaching must be made crystal clear from the beginning. It is hoped that the present paper has contrived to clarify most of the issues it set out to investigate, and has helped contribute to a better understanding of culture and its importance in the foreign language classroom.

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