

THE CROSS-CULTURAL ISSUES IN THE PROCESS OF TEACHING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

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Abstract

Nowadays it is not enough to be just a good professional teacher, one should also research new teaching methods and approaches as well as combine different school disciplines in the educational process.

One of the innovative approaches was implemented in Shanghai Foreign Language School. On the lessons of ESL with a group of schoolchildren (returnees) were used "The analects" by Confucius, furthermore the parents got involved in the educational process. Bilingual method of teaching isn't something new nowadays but using the classical Chinese educational source in teaching ESL is ultimately innovative method.

Keyword : bilingual, ESL, intercultural, cross-cultural, returnees.

1. INTRODUCTION

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All over the world English language learners are the fastest growing group of students today. One out of every nine students is learning English as a second language. [1]. Teachers' demands and expectations today are far greater than they have ever been. But our students also demand new approaches in teaching and new ways of solving different problems that might occur in the classroom.

One of the most frequently occurring problems in the educational process is the problem of multicultural diversity. Any teacher of English as a second language or English as a foreign language has already met such problem. The way how to deal with it probably depends on the teacher's experience and the background of the issues. Yet the intellectual recognition of these issues does not always provide specific pedagogical direction; that demands not only the sound judgment born of training and experience, but also an understanding of the cultural factors that shape the actual processes of classroom instruction. This identification of some cultural factors that can influence students and teacher behavior during the educational process should be the first step of dealing with cross-cultural problems.

But are we capable of dealing with the cross-cultural issues, and are classroom teachers fully prepared to teach in the environment of cultural diversity? One attempt to answer these questions may give us an opportunity to open up a new pedagogical approach to teaching languages.

If teachers are to become effective cross-cultural communicators, it is essential to understand the role that culture plays within the multi-cultural school setting. Lustig and Koester [2] define culture as "a learned set of shared interpretations about beliefs, values, and norms, which affect the behaviors of a relatively large group of people." Similarly, Samovar and Porter [3] explain culture as a medium that touches and alters all aspects of human life, including personality, how people express themselves (which includes displays of emotion), the way they think, how they move, and how problems are solved.

Furthermore students may bring to class the expectations regarding teacher relationships and behavior that is essential for their home countries, especially if they had extensive schooling there [4]. Failure to conform to these ideals may give learners the impression of lazy or inadequate class preparation on the part of the teacher.

Teachers, similarly, bring to the classroom their own expectations. For them "the process of becoming culturally competent also comes with new challenges and experiences that might, initially at least, surprise, shock,

or even offend". In the classroom, being culturally competent also involves an understanding of how cultures differ under the surface and how cultures respond differently to similar situations. [5]

In dealing with cross-cultural issues in the process of teaching English as a second language, we definitely should take into considerations some steps to identify the problems and determine the ways and approaches of solving them. Developing an awareness of cultural information acquisition helps us to find the best ways of learning for each culture more effective techniques for using culture specific, non-verbal communication, and approaches for preventing and dealing with conflicts.

But what should be your prime goal and strategy if there is a class of returnee students in front of you?

Firstly, we should give the definition for the term "returnee". According to the American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, a returnee is one who returns from a journey or to school after a long absence; a person who returns from military duty or from work overseas.

In our case, there were children whose parents stayed for a long time in different foreign countries, and not all of those countries had an English speaking environment. How could you start teaching them English as a second language? What culture should be taken as a departing point?

To simplify this process and to make the teacher's task easier, one can decide to ignore these circumstances and teach them according to their country of origin – China.

It is true, the children were born in China, but then they spent more of their conscious age out of their motherland. It reflects not only on their behavior or level of written and oral Chinese and English languages they possess, but also on their perception of cultural issues and their attitude towards the educational process. It led to different problems such as:

1. Lack of interest and motivation in subject. The educational process of ESL is not considered by them to be essential. They are confused and can't find sufficient language implementation due to the changes language environment.
2. Low self-esteem or too high opinion of themselves They are still in the process of transferring from one country to another and haven't found their place yet in a new cultural environment. They might have psychological trauma that affects them even in the future.
3. Unwillingness to participate in communication. Expectations about educational roles that those participants bring to the classroom influence not only their views of the class, but also their willingness to participate in different kinds of learning activities.
4. Avoidance of direct contact with a teacher. This presents potential conflict between the teachers' and students' expectations and evaluations of behavior.

We mentioned above the most serious problems that occurred in the classroom. Cultural expectations regarding the nature of education and what is appropriate to talk about may also affect the kinds of topics students are willing to pursue in class. Cultural as well as personal sensitivity is vital in knowing if, when, and how to introduce topics or lessons that may be inappropriate or difficult. Even apparently innocuous topics can be sources of difficulty, depending on the experience, sophistication level, and particular social situation of learners.

Following the main steps in dealing with cross-cultural issues (problem acceptance, the information gathering, searching the most appropriate ways of solving the problem), we started with the topic related issue as a first step for improving motivation and creating trustful relationships among students and between teacher and students.

Thereby, the leading teacher of the classroom, Zhao Junning, a teacher at Shanghai Foreign Language School affiliated to SISU (China), during his lessons used the book titled "The analects".(literally "Selected Sayings"). Also known as the Analects of Confucius, this book is a collection of sayings and ideas attributed to the Chinese philosopher Confucius and his contemporaries, traditionally believed to have been written by Confucius' followers. The students had two variants of dicta in this book one English and one Chinese. A bilingual method of teaching isn't something new nowadays but using the classical Chinese educational source in teaching ESL is ultimately innovative method.

To understand the difficulty in using this historical source, it is essential to know the key points of it. Confucius believed that the welfare of a country depended on the moral cultivation of its people, beginning from the nation's leadership. He believed that individuals could begin to cultivate an all-encompassing sense of virtue through "ren", and that the most basic step to cultivating "ren" was devotion to one's parents and older siblings. He taught that one's individual desires do not need to be suppressed, but that people should be educated to reconcile their desires via rituals and forms of propriety, through which people could demonstrate their respect for others and their responsible roles in society. He taught that a ruler's sense of virtue was his primary prerequisite for leadership. His primary goal in educating his students was to produce ethically well-cultivated men who would carry themselves with gravity, speak correctly, and demonstrate consummate integrity in all things. In spite of having such a complicated "study pack" as a material for the classroom, we managed to get great results. As it was mentioned above, the students are all Chinese in their origin but as the fate decree they

spent most of their lives in foreign countries and absorbed the culture and language of those countries. So during the lessons there were several goals that the teacher should have reached:

1. to improve the level of English
2. to improve the level of Chinese
3. to enhance students' awareness of Chinese culture and give them a chance to relax and feel at ease during the lessons.

Mr. Zhao also uses the English variant of the same texts of "The Analects" together with the Chinese book. He took advantage of available resources (books, articles, films, music, audio recordings, and a variety of material from the Internet) that might aid teachers in learning more about their students' cultures and also help them to adapt to new environment. Moreover, during each lesson Mr. Zhao alternated between classical and innovative methods of teaching children.

He invited children's parents who could speak English to participate when the topic of the lesson was "The relations between parents and children". Building relationships with students and their parents can help to overcome students' alienation. Relationships built on trust go a long way. Students must feel that they belong and are accepted. Politeness, friendliness, kindness, fairness, respect and empathy are important factors in establishing a sound teacher-student relationship."

For the topic "Education" he invited a teacher from Russia with PhD in Teaching Methodology, yours truly. Using different types of lessons: the communication-oriented lesson, the form-oriented lesson, and the control-oriented lesson, we made it possible for all students too participate in one or another way.

In the table below we tried to summarize and represent monthly results of the work.

Months	Increasing of motivation	Contact with teacher	Participation in communication	Improvement of listening comprehension and speaking
February	2%	1 from 12	4 from 12	5%/7%
March	4%	4 from 12	6 from 12	10%/11%
April	12%	All	11 from 12	15%/ 13%
May	15%	All	all	17%/15%

The calculation of the results for motivation increase was carried out according to students' willingness to participate (hands raising, questions to teacher and group mates and etc).

The calculation of the results for the improvement of listening comprehension was done on the base of the test (open question test).

Discussing and comparing each dictum from the book, children were able to reveal their own attitude to different sociological and social phenomena of the society. But at the same time they didn't have to speak on behalf of themselves, thus could avoid accusations of personal aggressiveness or intolerance. It was a great opportunity for students to find out the circumstances of living in different countries and to share their fear and uncertainty.

It is necessary to mention that for the teacher and even for parents who participated in these lessons, it was a unique chance not only to improve students' foreign language but also help them to adapt to a new environment and reduce the affection of their transfer back to China.

2. CONCLUSION

Living in a global society, teachers are called upon to instruct and work with students with very different ethnicities and beliefs from those to which they have been accustomed. Therefore, it is vital that teachers continuously educate themselves, discovering all that they can about their students and their backgrounds. In the process of developing their cultural knowledge and cross-cultural communication skills, the teacher can step out of the methodological frameworks in searching for the best recourse for students' education. You shouldn't be afraid of "the inappropriateness" of the book or resource which has been chosen or how far it is from the recommended study pack. Ultimately, such an approach should help teachers to understand and to guide students more effectively toward academic and personal success and fulfillment.

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