DEVELOPING STUDENTS' TOLERANCE THROUGH TEACHING CULTURAL ASPECTS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION

Kudritskaya M.I., Mukuzhanova A.,
Kostanay State Teacher Training Institute

Cultural interaction is a complex process that is not always peaceful and resulting in tolerance: history knows lots of examples when it ended in war and conflicts. When two views of the world meet in the classroom, inharmonious ideas emerge on how each party is to act, how material is to be learned, and what educational outcomes are acceptable. In current educational vernacular, this incongruence of perspectives is identified as differences in style. This incompatibility is most evident in (1) behavioral expectations and social interaction style, (2) communication style, arid (3) learning style.

When the main aim of foreign language teaching is to develop students' ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in various situations, the teaching of culture should facilitate intercultural communication and understanding. Seelye formulates what he himself calls a super-goal for the teaching of culture: "All students will develop the cultural understanding, attitudes, and performance skills needed to function appropriately within a segment of another society and to communicate with people socialized in that culture" /1,p.33/.

Chastain /2,p.26/ adds that, in language classes where intercultural understanding is one of the goals, students become more aware of their own culture and more knowledgeable about the foreign culture. In such classes, students learn to recognize cultural patterns of behavior and communication and function within the parameters with those new expectations.

Seeleye goes on to say /2,p.65/ that large goals should be described in more detail to be useful. He suggests six instructional goals, which he summarizes as follows: the teachers should "help the student to develop interest in who in the target culture did what, where, when and why" (the first five goals) and "some sophistication in evaluating statements about the culture and finding out more about it" (the sixth goal).

Tomalin and Stempleski have modified Seelye's goals of cultural instruction. According to them, the teaching of culture should help students:

- to develop an understanding of the fact that all people exhibit culturally-conditioned behaviours;

- to develop an understanding that social variables such as age, sex, social class, and place of residence influence the way in which people speak and behave;

- to become more aware of conventional behaviour in common situations in the target culture;

- to increase their awareness of the cultural connotations of words and phrases in the target language;

- to develop the ability to evaluate and refine generalizations about the target culture, in terms of supporting evidence;

- to develop the necessary skills to locate and organize information about the target culture;

- to stimulate students' intellectual curiosity about the target culture, and to encourage empathy towards its people /2,p.53/.

Stern, who has studied goals set by several other scholars, concludes that all goals, despite the differences in terminology, stress the cognitive aspect, that is: "knowledge about the target culture, awareness of its characteristics and differences between the target culture and the learner's own culture." A "research-minded outlook" is also important, that means "willingness to find out, to analyze, synthesize and generalize" /3,p.29/. Lastly, learners should understand the sociocultural implications of language and language use.

In order to reach the above-mentioned goals culture in foreign language classes should be presented in a systematic and organized way. It should not be "incidental to the real business of language teaching" /4,p.32/, neither could it be treated as "an interesting sidelight that is included periodically to provide a change of pace from language study" /4,p.44/. Cultural studies should have

"a rightful place" /4,p.35/ in foreign language teaching. Kramsch's observation seems to summarize what Chastain and Byram have previously said. She states: Culture in language learning is not an expendable fifth skill, tacked on, so to speak, to the teaching of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. It is always in the background, right from day one, ready to unsettle the good language learners when they expect it least, making evident the limitations of their hard-won communicative competence, challenging their ability to make sense of the world around them /4,p.55/.

The above-discussed general goals for teaching culture are also reflected in different ways in various education policy documents dealing with foreign language teaching as well as in the national curricula of different countries.

"Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: earning, teaching, assessment" (CEF) stresses, among other things, that one aim of teaching modern languages is to promote mutual understanding and tolerance, respect for identities and cultural diversity through more effective international communication.

The National Curriculum for England and Wales /5,p.98/ has the following aims concerning the cultural dimension:

- to offer insights into the culture and the civilization of the countries where the language is spoken;

- to encourage positive attitudes to foreign language learning and to speakers of foreign languages and a sympathetic approach to other cultures and civilizations;

- to develop pupils' understanding of themselves and their own culture.

The Curriculum also states that without the cultural dimension, successful communication is often difficult: comprehension of even basic words and phrases (such as those referring to meals) may be partial or approximate, and speakers and writers may fail to convey their meaning adequately or may even cause offence /5,p.44/.

In Denmark the curriculum states that foreign language teaching should "offer insights into the cultural and societal conditions" of the countries whose language is taught and enhance both pupils' international understanding and understanding of their own culture /5,p.110/.

We see, that the objective of teaching foreign languages at school is to ensure that students, among others things, are interested in the countries whose language is studied as well as in the culture of these countries. Students are expected to know the literature of the country, be familiar with the norms and rules of behaviour and communication as well as with the use of these norms in speech and writing. The document seems to stress students' knowledge and interest as the most important aims. However, differently from the English and Danish curricula, it does not consider understanding of ones' own and other culture equally important. The latter, as stated above, is seen as the main goal by most scholars.

How to secure culture a 'rightful' place in language teaching has been another ongoing concern for scholars. There seems to be a consensus among them that students' active involvement is paramount. Byram and Morgan stress that learners need to engage actively in the interpretations of the world and compare and contrast the shared meanings of both their own and foreign cultures. They should have access to routine and conscious knowledge held by the members of the foreign culture so that they can adjust to routine behaviors and allusive communication. They should also learn about the institutions and artifacts like literature, film, history and political institutions in order to further analyze the values and meanings of foreign culture. Byram and Morgan also suggest the so-called "spiral curriculum" /6,p.204/, in which learners repeatedly encounter certain information and progress from a superficial acquisition of information to a more complex analysis.

Kramsch warns against a simple "transmission of information" about the foreign culture and its members' worldviews. She highlights what she calls "new ways of looking at the teaching of language and culture" /6,p.220/. These include:

- Establishing a 'sphere of interculturality', which means that teaching culture is not transferring information between cultures but a foreign culture should be put in relation with one's own. The intercultural approach includes a reflection on both cultures.

- Teaching culture as an interpersonal process, which means replacing the teaching of facts and behaviors by the teaching of a process that helps to understand others.

- Teaching culture as difference, which means considering the multiculturality and multiethnicity of modern societies and looking at various factors like age, gender, regional origin, ethnic background, and social class. In other words, cultures should not be seen as monolithic.

- Crossing disciplinary boundaries, which means linking the teaching of culture to other disciplines like anthropology, sociology and semiology. Kramsch concludes that these "lines of thought lay the ground for a much richer understanding of culture than heretofore envisaged by the majority of language teachers" /6, p.98/.

While teaching culture we should observe the following important aspects:

1. *Learner autonomy:* Giving learners greater choice over their own learning, both in terms of the content of learning as well as processes they might employ. The use of small groups is one example of this, as well as the use of self-assessment.

2. *The social nature of learning:* Learning is not an individual, private activity, but a social one that depends upon interaction with others. The movement known as cooperative learning reflects this viewpoint.

3. *Curricular integration:* The connection between different strands of the curriculum is emphasized, so that English is not seen as a stand-alone subject but is linked to other subjects in the curriculum. Text-based learning (see below) reflects this approach, and seeks to develop fluency in text types that can be used across the curriculum. Project work in language teaching also requires students to explore issues outside of the language classroom.

4. *Focus on meaning:* Meaning is viewed as the driving force of learning. Content-based teaching reflects this view and seeks to make the exploration of meaning through content the core of language learning activities.

5. *Diversity:* Learners learn in different ways and have different strengths. Teaching needs to take these differences into account rather than try to force students into a single mould. In language teaching, this has led to an emphasis on developing students' use and awareness of learning strategies.

6. *Thinking skills:* Language should serve as a means of developing higher-order thinking skills, also known as *critical* and *creative thinking.* In language teaching, this means that students do not learn language for its own sake but in order to develop and apply their thinking skills in situations that go beyond the language classroom.

7. *Alternative assessment:* New forms of assessment are needed to replace traditional multiple-choice and other items that test lower-order skills. Multiple forms of assessment (e.g., observation, interviews, journals, portfolios) can be used to build a comprehensive picture of what students can do in a second language.

8. *Teachers as co-learners:* The teacher is viewed as a facilitator who is constantly trying out different alternatives, i.e., learning through doing. In language teaching, this has led to an interest in action research and other forms of classroom investigation /7, p.302/.

Teaching foreign languages in Kazakhstan is as complicated a process, as anywhere in the world, but it is still more complicated because of cultural diversity of our population. Once people of Kazakhstan solved this problem of understanding and tolerating another culture nearby, it can be hoped they will recognize foreign cultures of the target languages that do not share the territory with them: English, French, German, Turkish and other. Cultural diversity is probably one major element on which teachers should concentrate because it has a substantial influence on how students approach the learning process. This is particularly important when learning a foreign language takes place in a multicultural and multilingual community, like ours.

REFERENCES

1 Lado, R. 2006. How to compare two cultures. In J.M. Valdes (ed), Culture Bound. Bridging the cultural gap in language teaching. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

2 Chastain, K. 2008. Developing Second Language Skills. Theory and Practice. Orlando, Florida: Harcourt Brace Janovich Publishers. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

3 Stern, H. H. 2008. Issues and Options in Language Teaching. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

4 Byram, M. 2009. Cultural Studies in Foreign Language Education. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

5 Risager, K. 2008. Language teaching and the process of European integration. In M. Byram & M. Fleming (eds.), Language Learning in Intercultural Perspective. Approaches through drama and ethnography. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

6 Kramsch, C. 2008. Context and Culture in Language Teaching. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

7 Byram, M. and Morgan, C. 2007. Teaching-and-learning language-and-culture. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

INCORPORATING SUSTAINED PROJECT-BASED GROUP WORK INTO THE EFL CLASSROOM: CRITICAL REFLECTIONS FROM TWO TERTIARY EFL INSTRUCTORS

Alice S. Lee, Eve E. Smith
University of Macau

Abstract

This paper uses critical reflection as a framework for two tertiary EFL instructors to engage in reflective practice of their professional decisions related to implementing sustained project-based group work. The authors each describe one critical incident stemming from their semester-long group work interactions with their students. They then position each incident within the larger sociocultural context of the academia and professional world in Macao. Included in this deconstruction are the assumptions each instructor brought with her into her classroom. Analyzing these assumptions together with their critical reflection allows each author to achieve a better understanding of decisions made inside and outside of their classrooms and how these decisions impact group work activities.

Keywords: critical reflection, group work.

Introduction.

To improve our craft, all teachers should engage in some form of reflection. How often that reflection occurs and in what form that reflection occurs is the focus of this paper. The authors present the critical reflections of our classroom practices as two tertiary instructors with some general background knowledge of our students and their educational contexts. The authors situate this paper within critical theory because we recognize the need for all instructors to engage in some level of greater understanding of our roles as teachers in society and how we reinforce and propel certain social practices. We engage in this critical reflection so that others may become more cognizant of the consequences of their actions, not necessarily to effect some type of a change in their worldviews, but to necessitate similar critical practices in their own contexts as a means of improving their teaching. We draw on the theoretical works of Freire (2000) and Habermas (1984) but we also put critical reflection into practice as informed by the works of Brookfield (1995) and Hickson (2011). To illustrate how other teachers can engage in critical reflection, we use our experience of conducting project-based group work in our English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms at the University of Macau.

In the following, we first discuss our understandings of collaborative learning and why we wanted to incorporate this aspect into our classrooms. We then each pinpoint a critical incident that spurred us to conduct this critical reflection, followed by an analysis of the assumptions the authors each made about our students in relation to group work. We discuss these assumptions in relation to background knowledge, values, and perceived social structure. Finally, we discuss how we both benefited from this critical reflective exercise and how other instructors may benefit from this exercise as well.