Suggested teaching practices to turn TEFL into TEIC

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Abstract

The present paper suggests modifications that should be made in an English language classroom in order for the current TEFL paradigm to be switched into a TEIC paradigm. The reason why this shift from one paradigm to the other is regarded as necessary has to do with the fact that learners from different cultural backgrounds attend this English language class.

After the presentation of the teaching context, the author provides the theoretical framework for both TEFL and TEIC. She analyses the current teaching practices in TEFL, and for each one of them she recommends the changes that need to be made in order for intercultural communication to take place in the lessons and the TEIC paradigm to substitute the TEFL paradigm.

Index Terms: TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language), TEIC (Teaching English for Intercultural Communication), multicultural classroom.

INTRODUCTION

Culture is viewed as behavior which is shared and learned (Brooks, 1969; Imhoof, 1968; Seelye, 1968) or practices, beliefs, and values that a group shares (Blatchford, 1973; Saville-Troike, 1978). Large culture comprises a national-level construct, which is product-focused and relatively fixed, producing stereotypes and otherising (Holliday, 1999). Stereotypes are either false or misleading generalizations about groups a society generally shares in a way which, most of the times, resists counterevidence (Blum, 2004). Large culture descriptions, being the default approach to culture, present a simplified national model excluding the multicultural aspect of societies (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Small culture, on the other hand, is viewed as a process of becoming (Street, 1993). It is emergent, descriptive and interpretive of a small group construct (Holliday, 1999).

The teaching of English should prepare students to communicate effectively in contexts of cultural diversity (Corbett, 2003), and perform a critical analysis of their own and other cultures (Bennett, 2009) so as to move from ethnocentrism, viewing their own culture as the only valid standpoint of the world and rejecting all the others (Sumner, 1906) to ethnorelativism, accepting the other cultures as equally valid as their own ones (Fay, as cited in Karas et al., 2018). In a multicultural class, where tensions and frictions are frequently caused due to the interactants' different cultural baggage, be it different behaviours, products, ideas (Robinson, 1988), the language teaching needs to raise the students' cultural awareness, which Tomalin & Stempleski (1993:5) define as the "sensitivity" demonstrated to the outcome a culturally-bound performance has on both communication and the use of language.

DESCRIPTION OF THE TEACHING CONTEXT

A. The School

The school is a multicultural primary school in Greece, hosting, apart from the Greek students, second-generation Albanian and Romanian students, immigrants from China and refugees from Syria. It is a public primary school of six classes. It is supplied with a well-equipped computer lab, and it runs a blog to be in contact with the local community and inform it about the school actions that have already been or are to be implemented.

B. The Teacher

The teacher has graduated from the Department of English Language and Literature of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. She works as an English language teacher at a primary school. She has teaching experience in public vocational training institutes, primary schools, a kindergarten and a second chance school in Greece. Her mother tongue is Greek and she speaks a little Spanish. She is an Orthodox Christian.

C. The Learners

They are 12 years old and they attend the 6th grade of primary school. Two of them are Chinese, with Chinese being their mother tongue; one is second-generation Albanian with Albanian being her mother tongue; one is second-generation Romanian and Romanian is his mother tongue; two are Syrians and their mother tongue is Arabic and eleven are Greeks with Greek being their mother tongue. A few are familiar with American English while most of them are familiar with British English. They learn French as a second foreign language. Some can speak a little German while others a little Spanish. They are Muslims, Buddhists, Orthodox Christians and one of them is a Catholic Christian. Some of them have an expressive face and let others know their feelings including anger and dissatisfaction while others do not show their emotions at all. Some are shy and introverted whereas others are outgoing and extroverted. Some are loud talkers whereas others speak low and softly, viewing the loud talkers as impolite. Some are offended when they are pointed to, others when they are touched as they do not accept any form of physical contact. Some get insulted when the god of their religion is sworn at while others rarely take offense to anything. They all love watching films and they are keen on reading books about legends, myths and heroes. Most of them like football while some are fond of gymnastics and martial arts. Most of them eat bread while others eat pita bread or rice in place of bread. Some do not eat pork whereas others eat mostly pork. Some fast during Ramadan. The Muslim girls wear a headscarf called hijab.

D. The Local Community

The local residents speak Greek, which is their mother tongue and they are Orthodox Christians. They are concerned about the presence of immigrants and especially refugees in their children's school.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND FOR TEFL AND TEIC

Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) is the teaching paradigm that best describes the current approach in the specific context. The teaching of English takes place in the Expanding Circle with regard to the concentric circles Kachru (1985) came up with in order to provide the context in which the language is used. Greece is placed in the Expanding Circle due to the fact that English is not adopted for any official or intra-national function (Crystal, 1997). The variety of English taught in the specific context is the British variety, which represents what is viewed as a first wave of variety-formation, resulting from emigration primarily from the United Kingdom (Fay, as cited in Karras et al.,

2018). This variety is associated with an Inner Circle societal context (Kachru, 1985), which provides the norms for how English should be used by the learners, who lack the ownership of the language and they have to respect the authority of the native speakers (Graddol, 2006). Language is, thus, viewed as the property of the native speakers who use it, which renders this paradigm a norm-dependent one (Fay, as cited in Karras et al., 2018).

TEFL involves context-specific cultural learning as it applies a culture-specific approach to cultural content and considers culture to be the homogenous culture of the target society. Therefore, it is regarded as a large culture attempt which involves learning about the culture of the target society, maintaining the linkage between the target-language and the target-society (Fay, as cited in Karras et al., 2018), which in the present context is the British one. In addition, communication is considered to be linguistic rather than cultural with the cultural dimension of communication, if remembered at all, being viewed as the fifth element of language teaching (Damen, 1987) after listening, speaking, reading and writing and has to do with the teaching about the arts, the literature, the institutions and the history (McAlinden, 2012). Intercultural communication refers mainly to asymmetrical interactions between native and non-native speakers who are expected to approximate the norms of native speakers. As a result, the teacher acts as a guru; the closer the learners' English is to that of a native speaker, the higher the scores they achieve; the learners are required to change their identity and be given English names for the duration of the classes; their cultural identity may change as a result of their language learning (Fay, as cited in Karras et al., 2018).

With the global population being more and more mobile, the non-native speakers outnumbering the native ones (Baker, 2016; Kirkpatrick, 2018) and people coming in contact with others from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds in their everyday lives (Kramsch, 1998; Stone, 2006), globalization is claimed to be the real purpose of teaching English (Block, 2004) and the need for efficient intercultural communication is increased (Fay, as cited in Karas et al., 2018). Intercultural communication is defined as the cultural baggage of an individual along with the culturally-bound expectations and preferences about communication, both of which are communicated to the others when he/she comes in contact with them (Hall, 1959 in Hall, 1990). In the light of the above, Teaching English for Intercultural Communication (TEIC), a newer teaching paradigm, which is also placed in Expanding Circle contexts and views the learners as speakers of the global English language phenomenon and the English language as a linguistic phenomenon owned by no-one (Fay, as cited in Karas et al, 2018) is argued as the most appropriate paradigm for the specific teaching context.

According to Fay (as cited in Karas et al, 2018), TEIC does not prioritize the characteristics of the English language as it is norm-reducing and refers to symmetrical interactions between non-native speakers of English, who are enhancing rather than losing their cultural identity in order to pass as a native speaker. Fay (as cited in Karas et al., 2018) also denotes that the approach to cultural content is culture-general as there is no target society. Culture is

seen as a small, emergent phenomenon (Holliday, 1999) and as a "third place", which is a space where negotiation between what is already known about one's culture and the new information about the new culture takes place (Kramsch, 1993: 236). Small culture is related to ethnographic research (Holliday, 1999), which is claimed to be a promising technique for the learners (Morain, 1983), since classroom learning, apart from the experiences outside the classroom, is considered to engage the learners with otherness (Byram, 1997). Thus, TEIC, through ethnographic research, draws the cultural content from the multicultural context of the classroom, respects the diversity of the classroom and links languaculture, the linguistic resources of the learners, to the full set of their cultural resources (Fay, as cited in Karas et al., 2018) since the methodology needs to be appropriate to the social context (Holliday, 1994). TEIC refers to diverse contexts and, consequently, it prioritizes generic cultural awareness, which, according to Clark (1984) is raised when the teacher focuses on the development of intercultural communication skills. These skills are claimed to be the de-centeredness, the suspension of judgement and the mediation between individuals coming from different cultural backgrounds (Byram, 1997) and they are classified as "externalization", "analytical", "monitoring", "communication", "anxiety management", "tactical" and "investigative" skills (O'Sullivan, 1994: 99). They account for individuals' intercultural communicative competence, which comprises their capacity and eagerness to communicate effectively with people of another culture (Wiseman, 2002). One aspect of this communicative competence, which needs to be fostered in language teaching, is interculturality (Galante, 2014). Interculturality, according to Sercu (2005), requires the ability to have a view of self as an outsider, to look at the world through others' eyes, to deal with uncertainty and to develop an understanding that individuals should not be viewed as collective entities. Another aspect of intercultural competence is the empathetic experience of the foreign culture (Arnold, 1999; Byram, 1989; Stier, 2006) with Arnold (1999) stressing the significance of empathy in individuals' co-existing harmoniously in society.

TEIC does not focus on cultural information but on cultural understanding, aiming at the creation of new schemata in order for learners to acquire the "insider's" understanding of the foreign culture through the provision of factual data and full cultural context (Byram, 1989: 21), with role plays, simulation games and critical incidents being some activity types (Fowler & Mumford, 1995) to foster their intercultural communicative competence. In TEIC communication is regarded to be an intercultural process and the teacher acts as a facilitator, who facilitates understanding between learners from different cultural backgrounds, helps them reflect on cultural differences and understand their own and target culture, teaches them how to be tolerant, non-prejudiced and open-minded (Fay, as cited in Karas et al., 2018).

CURRENT TEACHING PRACTICES IN TEFL AND SUGGESTED TEACHING PRACTICES IN TEIC

Grammar and vocabulary of British English are taught through various exercises so that the learners can build a solid foundation in the language. Emphasis is placed on language acquisition as the learners are required to apply the grammar rules by performing filling the gaps, matching or multiple-choice tasks and practice the vocabulary through gap-filling, matching, grouping, categorizing or listing activities in order to develop accuracy in production. To give the practice of these language components a TEIC orientation, though, the English language teacher has to focus on language usage so that the learners will be prepared for intercultural communication in real life situations. Thus, she needs to develop their fluency and communicative competence. This will be achieved through tasks which will have the students use grammar and vocabulary in order to express themselves and participate in discussions with topics relevant to their cultural baggage. For instance, when the grammar refers to Present Simple, the learners could conduct a search on the internet and prepare a presentation of a festival taking place in the hometown/country of one of their classmates by not only describing it but also explaining the reason why it is held, what it means to the participants and how it makes them feel. Next, they could engage in a discussion with all their fellow-students and especially with those coming from the country of their presentation in order to find out whether they have omitted something important that needs to be highlighted. This way they will get the insider's perspective of the other festivals and the outsider perspective of their own festivals and they will not just stand in cross-cultural comparisons which according to Fay (as cited in Karas et al., 2018) are fostered by the TEFL paradigm. When the vocabulary relates to clothes, they could write or talk about their favorite outfit, what it means to them, when they wear it and how it makes them feel. They could even answer any possible questions their classmates might have. This way they will get an understanding of the reason why their classmates wear, for instance, a headscarf and they will acquire an empathetic view of their culture. In addition, the teacher could render the linguistic-oriented vocabulary tasks used in the TEFL paradigm more culturally-oriented by asking the students to provide the vocabulary in their mother tongues or the foreign languages they are aware of in order for their languaculture to be exploited in the lessons. The teacher could also provide the American spelling rules apart from the British ones, such as the suffixes -or in place of -our, and -er in place of -re and she could supply the students with the equivalent American English lexical items, such as apartment and elevator in place of flat and lift respectively.

As regards pronunciation, the teacher teaches only the British one. However, she could also refer to the American one, mentioning, for example, that the final /r/ sound is actually pronounced in American English when it comes after a vowel sound or that tomato is pronounced differently. She could even ask those students who have been taught American English to provide the equivalent pronunciation or vocabulary instead of her. Moreover,

she could trigger the learners' curiosity to search for the equivalent Australian, Indian or South African words and their pronunciation by assigning a relevant project and having them work in groups and present their findings in class.

With regard to the teacher's approach to teaching, it is claimed to be teacher-centered since she is the primary source of knowledge and instruction. She delivers lectures, explains grammar rules and models correct language usage while the students listen, take notes and complete exercises to practice what they have been taught. However, in order to apply the TEIC orientation, the teacher needs to employ a more learner-centered approach, focusing on student engagement and interaction. This way she will act as a facilitator, guiding the students in their learning process and providing them with opportunities to actively participate in the lessons. Her role will be to create a supportive environment that encourages student involvement and autonomy. More specifically, she shall introduce Inquiry-based learning. The learners can make hypotheses about causes of miscommunication, misunderstandings and problems occurring in the classroom or during the breaks in their intercultural interactions and then, with the appropriate teacher support, they will try to discover answers and find evidence to support or disprove these hypotheses. Critical incidents could also be exploited to this end. Critical incidents are brief accounts of scenarios in which a misunderstanding, issue, or conflict emerges as a result of the interacting parties' cultural differences, or a challenge with cross-cultural adaptation and communication. They could involve problems related to the different ways the students express their feelings or the different reasons why they are offended and insulted. The learners will again have to form hypotheses and ask questions, conduct research in order to confirm or disconfirm their hypotheses. Furthermore, the teacher could introduce projects in her lessons. When vocabulary about food and recipes is taught, the students can be assigned a project regarding a traditional food they enjoy, the basic ingredients involved in its preparation, whether they eat bread or not and whether they have any food constraints along with any possible reasons why things happen this way in their culture. In the plenary, when all the projects are presented, they will have the opportunity to find out what happens in the other cultures and why things happen that way. Recipes of a favorite traditional food or cake could also be uploaded on the school blog and the whole class could even organize a food festival so that all the different flavors are tasted by everyone in the school and the local community. When the Past Simple tense and the Past Continuous tense are taught, they could also be assigned to carry out a project about a myth, legend or fairytale of one of their classmates' hometown or of a country whose language they are familiar with and create an e-book with it. All the e-books will be read in the plenary and then they could be uploaded on the school blog for the rest of the school and the local community to read.

As far as the skill of reading is concerned, the teacher uses the textbook-based materials which are designed explicitly for language learning, providing structured lessons, language explanations and controlled practice exercises. In order to make her lessons more culturally oriented, though, she needs to develop her students' reading skills through exposure to authentic materials, which prepare them for real-world usage. A Webquest could be an ideal tool to be exploited to this end. She could assign her students some group work by placing them in multi-cultural groups and have each group perform tasks about a religion that its members do not worship but the members of other groups do. These tasks, which will be performed at the computer lab, could involve places, objects and ways of worship and fasting. Posters with their findings can be created and presented to the rest of the groups. Students whose religion is dealt with can comment on their classmates' findings to highlight the insider's perspective.

Regarding the practice of the speaking skill, the learners role-play model dialogues provided in the book. To promote intercultural awareness in her lessons, though, the teacher should encourage her students' engagement in simulations and role plays for the acquisition of the insider perspective. One introverted student could be given the role of an extroverted student and an extroverted student could undertake the role of an introverted one. Another case could be a simulation of a loud talker by a student who speaks low and softly and views loud speakers as impolite.

Concerning the teaching of the listening skill, the teacher uses the audio CDs, which are tailored for language learners and provide controlled practice exercises. In order to apply the TEIC orientation, though, she should use authentic materials which offer the students exposure to natural language, different accents and cultural aspects, allowing them to develop their comprehension skills and adapt to real-life language usage. Podcasts about sports, especially football, gymnastics and martial arts could be utilized and videos with stories about the life and adventures of heroes could also be made use of so that their listening skills will be developed in authentic contexts.

As regards the overall language teaching, the teacher prioritizes the enhancement of the teaching of the four skills, namely reading, writing, speaking and listening whereas, in order for a TEIC orientation to be applied, she needs to shift the focus to the training of her students' intercultural communication skills. Using the English language to communicate and collaborate with pupils from other countries in real life situations through eTwinning projects, where pupils across Europe work together on the European School Education Platform. Her students will, therefore, get the opportunity to develop and practice the skills required for their intercultural interactions in authentic contexts.

Last but not least, the curriculum sets the teaching of English as a foreign language provided it links it to a language certificate called KPG. In order for the teaching of the language to be culturally oriented, though, the curriculum has to disconnect the teaching of English from the KPG exams.

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