Intercultural Education in EFL Classroom

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A new cinema of the Caribbean is emerging, joining the company of the other 'Third Cinemas'. It is related to, but different from the vibrant film and other forms of visual representation of the Afro-Caribbean (and Asian) 'blacks' of the diasporas of the West - the new post-colonial subjects. All these cultural practices and forms of representation have the black subject at their centre, putting the issue of cultural identity in question. Who is this emergent, new subject of the cinema? From where does he/she speak?

Practices of representation always implicate the positions from which we speak or write - the positions of enunciation. What recent theories of enunciation suggest is that, though we speak, so to say 'in our own name', of ourselves and from our own experience, nevertheless who speaks, and the subject who is spoken of, are never identical, never exactly in the same place. Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation. This view problematises the very authority and authenticity to which the term, 'cultural identity', lays claim.

Nowadays, it is a widely known fact that teaching and learning a foreign language cannot be reduced to the direct teaching of linguistic skills like phonology, morphology, vocabulary, and syntax. The contemporary models of communicative competence show that there is much more to learning a language, and they include the vital component of cultural knowledge and awareness (Bachman 1990; Council of Europe 2001). In other words, to learn a language well usually requires knowing something about the culture of that language. Communication that lacks appropriate cultural content often results in humorous incidents, or worse, is the source of serious miscommunication and misunderstanding. According to

Kramsch (1993, 1), culture “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.”

When writing or talking about "teaching culture," theoreticians and practitioners often restrict themselves to the specific culture of the target language. In English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts, where students live and are immersed in the culture of the English speakers, this may be a satisfactory approach. But in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings, this is a very narrow view. — In an EFL class, students are usually monolingual and they learn English while living in their own country (Krieger 2005). They have little access to the target culture and therefore a limited ability to become culturally competent. Importantly, their aim for learning English is not only to communicate with native speakers of English but also with non-native speakers of English, which is why EFL learners are typically learners of English as an International Language (EIL). By learning English, EFL students are enabling themselves to become users of international, or rather intercultural, communication—thus, the target language becomes a tool to be used in interaction with people from all over the world, where communication in English takes place in fields such as science, technology, business, art, entertainment, and tourism.

The true complexity of what it means to know a language is revealed in the useful list of learner competencies produced by the Council of Europe (2001, 101–30). In addition to grammatical competence, a culturally competent learner must possess sociolinguistic competence, pragmatic competence, sociocultural knowledge, and intercultural awareness. — As can be seen, culture is a very broad concept, so to get to know a given culture means to gain extensive knowledge. It seems useful to make a distinction between the so-called big-C culture and small-c culture. The big- C part of a given culture is usually easy to study, as it constitutes factual knowledge about the fine arts such as literature, music, dance, painting, sculpture, theater, and film. Small-c culture, on the other hand, comprises a wide variety of aspects, many of which are interconnected, including attitudes, assumptions, beliefs, perceptions, norms and values, social relationships, customs, celebrations, rituals, politeness conventions, patterns of interaction and discourse organization, the use of time in communication, and the use of physical space and body language.

Needless to say, language is also part of what we call culture, and it also reflects and interprets culture. — Some of the small-c cultural aspects are directly observable, and hence easy to grasp and learn (e.g., celebrations and rituals). However, many dimensions of a given culture are hidden from the eye. Here belong the small-c cultural aspects that, being imparted to us from birth, are deeply internalized and subconscious and are often noticed only in contrast with another culture. It is mainly these non-tangible cultural aspects that have an enormous influence on people's way of thinking and their linguistic/non-linguistic behavior and that, importantly, determine the expectations and interpretations of other people's linguistic/non-linguistic behavior. A person who encounters an unfamiliar culture will lack knowledge of such behaviors, which may lead to amusing situations, and even conflict, caused by miscommunication. This happens because these aspects of culture are unspoken rules created by a community. Because these cultural rules are full of meaning and "allow people to anticipate events, they often acquire a moral rigidity and righteousness that engender stereotypes and even prejudices"

The intercultural approach — Clearly, if EFL learners are to become successful intercultural communicators, it is essential to provide them with a thorough and systematic intercultural training, and not only of the culture of the main English speaking countries. EFL students will benefit by gaining solid knowledge of the different world cultures, and they must also develop the ability to compare their native culture to other cultures, to evaluate critically and interpret the results of such comparisons, and to apply this knowledge successfully in both verbal and non-verbal communication, for both transactional and interactional purposes. Since "culture in language learning is not an expendable fifth skill, tacked on, so to speak, to the teaching of speaking, listening, reading, and writing" (Kramsch 1993, 1), it is of paramount importance that the cultures, not simply chosen cultural aspects, are dealt with during EFL lessons. — Successful international communication is reason enough to introduce the intercultural approach into EFL classrooms. However, there is another good reason. In many countries, there is still much intolerance towards and prejudice against other nations and cultures.

Intensive intercultural education seems to be a good way to sow the seeds of tolerance, acceptance, understanding, and respect. Successful international communication is reason enough to introduce the intercultural approach into EFL classrooms. However, there is another good reason. In many countries, there is still much intolerance towards and prejudice against other nations and cultures. Intensive intercultural education seems to be a good way to sow the seeds of tolerance, acceptance, understanding, and respect.

Nowadays, technology allows students from different cultures to "meet" in vir - tual reality. As described by Ho (2000), email exchanges between two classes from different countries are becoming a popular alternative to traditional in-person exchanges. Pairs of students from different parts of the world may also work in tandem, using email or chat programs. In case of technology-based contacts, just like with traditional exchanges, the teacher must direct learners about proper ways of getting to know other cultures. Appropriate activities must also be designed so that students can share the new information with the rest of the class. An extremely useful technique that can be successfully used in the intercultural approach is project work. Groups of students may dis - cover various facts about a given culture when working on a project and preparing a presentation. First, students find information about the given culture, using various sources (the Internet, newspapers and magazines, TV, people they know, or their "key-pals"). The next step is a synthesis of the collected information and, very often, some artistic preparation. The results of learners' work should be presented to others, which can be the whole class or even the whole school. Students may give a lecture (the teacher should prevent them from simply reading their texts aloud), prepare a performance, create a newsletter, or even organize a culture day in their school, with poster displays, slide shows, dance performances, food tasting, quizzes, and competitions. Students can be very creative and imaginative, and many project presentations are really interesting. A follow-up, in-class discussion is necessary, concentrating on the content of the end-product (not on language form).

Project work lends itself very well to the development of learners' intercultural knowledge because it is typically content-oriented. Additionally, it has a lot of other advantages.

It develops students' language skills, problem-solving skills, creativity, imagination, research skills, and teamwork skills. There is much emphasis on individualization and the development of students' interests. The end-of-project presentation of students' work is usually a very important event for them, which contributes to sustained motivation during project work. Because the responsibility and choice are theirs, each project is a unique, personal, and memorable experience for students. — In addition, project work can allow students to learn in an autonomous way. In assigning projects, good foreign language teachers help their students develop the ability to learn about the world's cultures without supervision. Effective projects, and learning activities in general, teach students where to look for information, how to infer cultural information encoded in a written or spoken text, how to make comparisons between different cultures, and how to make use of the new knowledge.

Students ought to have a chance to make their own choices and to work independently of the teacher, individually or in cooperation with peers.

Intercultural competence has become an important goal of foreign language education in response to the need for learners to function effectively in an increasingly multicultural world. Language and culture are seen as interwoven and inseparable components and therefore learning a foreign language inevitably means learning about other ways of being and behaving. Many foreign language programmes around the world, particularly in North America, Europe, Australia and New Zealand, have adopted an intercultural pedagogy which seeks to integrate into the language teaching experience opportunities for developing intercultural competence for language learners. This study investigates intercultural teaching and learning in tertiary EFL classrooms in Vietnam, a context in which intercultural approaches to language teaching and learning have not been widely considered. The study consisted of three phases.

Teachers wishing to implement the intercultural approach in the EFL classroom must consider possible problems and ways of dealing with them. Motivating students — A good foreign language teacher starts a course by conducting a needs analysis in order to be able to teach according to the students' language needs and objectives, present level of knowledge, learning preferences, and, especially, what they find interesting and engaging.

It is very possible that not all students will be interested from the start in learning about foreign cultures. The teacher's task is to convince them that intercultural training is in fact an indispensable element of modern education. The teacher may use accounts of real-life encounters where the lack of intercultural awareness led to amusing, embarrassing, or even dangerous situations. — Needless to say, intercultural lessons need to be interesting for students and should take place in a friendly, relaxed atmosphere. Students need to be active class participants, making choices and taking decisions. Interested, involved, responsible students are motivated students.

It is vitally important that students do not treat the information about the world's cultures as a curiosity, or, even worse, ridicule it. The teacher has to see to it that students make a serious attempt to get to know and understand other cultures (even if they may not agree with some aspects of those cultures). Both the teacher and the students have to fully understand that intercultural knowledge is indispensable for successful communication all over the world. — Stereotyped views and prejudices will prevent students from developing intercultural competence. The teacher must help students understand that there can be different sets of behaviors, beliefs, and values, and the fact that we represent just the one that we have been "born into" is pure coincidence. As Kramsch writes, "breaking down stereotypes is not just realising that people are not the way one thought they were, or that deep down 'we are all the same.' It is understanding that we are irreducibly unique and different, and that I could have been you, you could have been me, given different circumstances.Of course, there are aspects of some cultures that students need not accept, such as inequality between men and women or an inhuman attitude toward animals. The teacher's task is not to "convert" the students to other cultures; the role for the EFL teacher is to help students get to know and understand different cultures because this knowledge and understanding are indispensable for successful cross-cultural communication.

YUKO UCHIDA's article explores the complex interrelationships between language and culture, between teachers' sociocultural identities and teaching practices, and between their explicit discussions of culture and implicit modes of cultural transmission in their classes. A 6-month ethnographic study examined how teachers deal with institutional and curricular expectations regarding their teaching of (North American) culture in their EFL classrooms in a postsecondary institution in Japan. The study also explored the teachers' changing understandings of what constitutes culture and of how they viewed themselves in terms of their various social and cultural roles. Common themes included (a) the complexities and paradoxes associated with teachers' professional, social, political, and cultural identities and their (re)presentation of these in class; (b) their quest for interpersonal and intercultural connection in that EFL context; (c) their desire for educational (and personal) control in the face of contested cultural practices; and (d) disjunctures between teachers' implicit and explicit messages in relation to their cultural understandings and practices. We discuss these themes and make recommendations for teacher education purposes. We argue that the cultural underpinnings of language curricula and teaching must be examined further, particularly so in intercultural situations in which participants are negotiating their sociocultural identities as well as the curriculum.

Ho,Si Thang Kiet's paper said " The study consisted of three phases. The first phase involved a curriculum review in which I critically evaluated the extent to which culture and culture learning are represented in the curriculum frameworks for tertiary EFL programmes and in the national education policy on foreign language education in Vietnam. The findings showed that the importance of culture and culture learning is not emphasised, and the designation of culture to separate culture courses establishes a separate status, construct and treatment of culture and culture learning in the EFL programmes. In the second phase of the study, I analysed the perceptions of fourteen Vietnamese EFL teachers and two hundred Vietnamese EFL students on culture in language teaching and learning, and their classroom practices. The findings indicated that the teachers' beliefs about culture teaching revealed a predictable priority for teaching language rather than culture. Their culture teaching practices were greatly influenced by their perceptions and beliefs regarding culture in language teaching.

The students also treated culture as a subordinate priority in language learning. Overall, they found culture learning beneficial for their language learning and supported the teachability of language and culture in EFL classes. Both the teachers and students identified a number of constraints that restricted their opportunities and motivation to engage in teaching and learning culture. The third phase of the study involved an empirical study investigating the effect of adopting an intercultural stance in English speaking lessons on the development of the learners' intercultural competence. Over a nine-week teaching period, eighteen English speaking lessons (90 minutes / lesson / week) for two equivalent, intact classes (seventy-one students) were observed. For one class, the lessons were adapted to reflect the principles of intercultural language learning. For the other, no changes were made. The results showed that the intercultural competence of learners in the intercultural class increased by significantly more than that of learners in the standard class. In particular, the students in the intercultural class were able to better articulate ethnorelative awareness and attitudes towards their home culture and the target culture. The findings also showed that the reflective journal was an effective tool to assess learners' process of acquiring intercultural competence, particularly affective capacities that are not easy to evaluate by other means. Overall, the study provided evidence for the feasibility of intercultural teaching and learning in tertiary EFL classrooms in the Vietnamese context. It also showed that intercultural teaching and learning cultivated learners' affective capacities which are often overlooked in the EFL classroom. It is hoped that the study can inform the work of curriculum designers, education policy-makers as well as EFL teachers and students for the implementation of intercultural language teaching and learning in Vietnam andelsewhere."

Implementing the intercultural approach is a challenging, demanding task for the language teacher, who must possess at least some intercultural knowledge and very often keep developing it alongside his or her students. What must not be overlooked is that intercultural education leads, to a certain extent, to the acceptance of values, beliefs, and behavior that may conflict with one's own. "The language teacher, in guiding the learner to new perspectives and new identities, is tampering with fundamentals of human identity" (Gee 1988, 220). Therefore, the EFL teacher must implement the intercultural approach in a tactful, skillful, and conscious way. — Systematic intercultural training is a precondition for educating a

new generation of young people who will not only tolerate, but also understand, accept, and respect people from different world cultures, will communicate with them successfully, and will learn from them through that communication.