

Analysis on the Cultural Teaching in High School English Class --Under the Chinese National College Entrance Examination System

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Abstract

The New Curriculum Standards in China lays special emphasis on cultural teaching in high school English class. Cultural background knowledge teaching has an great influence on the raising students' interest for English, the comprehension of text and the intercultural communication. It is helpful for students to successfully pass the national college entrance examination.

Key words: cultural teaching; high school English class; the national college entrance examination system

1. Introduction

Language and culture have an intrinsic and close relationship. Each language in the world is the vehicle conveying the culture. Culture is considered as a entirely complex whole which can be divided into eight parts, including belief, art, knowledge, custom and persons' habits and so on.[1] Cultural teaching is a very significant and meaningful part in language education. In Britain and American, culture teaching focused on history, life, customs as well as on the human civilization. Since 1970, the communicative method of English teaching had got broad permission by educational scholars and scientists. Language researchers are just about to witness another addition to the list of objectives of language teaching: that is, the ability to relate to differences between the learners' target and native cultures and hence strengthen the quality of communication.[2]

In spite of the significance of cultural teaching, a large number of English teachers in high school neglected its significance. It is said that many English teachers highly prefer to focus on the teaching of lexical, grammar and language skills rather than value the critical part of English cultural teaching. It means that culture teaching still cannot get enough consideration during the teaching of English in high school.

According to the research survey, there are two main reasons for the above-mentioned situation. On one hand, the thoughts that the purpose of learning English in school is just for passing the college entrance examination and entering ideal colleges is highly popular. It is a traditional thought and practice in Chinese high school that English teaching mainly focuses on language points and grammar to adapt to the national college entrance examination system which is the only way for the students to enter the college. Although English educators have realized the necessity and significance of cultural custom and cultural teaching, they cannot teach culture well because of the lack of systematic guidance. On the other hand, it is highly popular for the majorities of students to hold the view that the learning English in high school is just for passing the college entrance examination and entering ideal colleges. There are less and less students learn English because of their interest in English. The students only lay much stress on the language skills. Especially they are passive to improve their culture literacy and pay little attention on the other countries' cultural customs and background.

With the process of globalization, the international exchanges and cross-cultural communication has become more frequent and common among different countries. Therefore, to cultivate teachers' cross-cultural awareness and promote students' cultural competences has become the main task for a large number of educators.

2. Importance of Cultural Teaching in High School English Class

Since the culture input is becoming more important and indispensable in the high school English teaching, teachers should not only teach students the knowledge of vocabulary, grammar and language skills, but also deliver the knowledge of culture to the students and try to help them enhancing their competences of reading comprehension and intercultural communication.

2.1 Culture and vocabulary

Some Chinese students easily create misinterpretations when they learn some English words or phrase expressions. Because some expressions have special connotation or have different meaning in different linguistic situation. For example, the word "ball" just has two different meanings: one "ball" refers to a round object used in games, such as football, basketball. It is originated from English. Another meaning of "ball" has the French origin which means a large formal social event at which people dance. Because in the history of English development, France even invaded England and brought large sum of French words especially some terms about social lives and culture.

There illustrated another phrase also convey certain etymologically meaning. For example: foreigners often used the expression "do me a favor" in their daily lives, and Chinese students quite easily understand its meaning but maybe they do not know it in fact copied from one phrase "do me wrong" which came from Shakespeare's work Merchant of Venice. In the earlier times of the Middle English period, there were active combination of words into inseparable units that later became set expressions or fixed idioms, such as "hold my tongue" (Ditto) and "had made waste of" (Merchant of Venice).[3]

If the students can get to know the cultural connotation of some English expressions, it is more easily for them to recite some words and arouse their interest in learning English vocabulary.

2.2 Culture and Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is a significant part in English class. With the help of the improvement of reading comprehension, English learners can communicate in English accurately and fluently. They also can understand different things in various ways. In order to improve reading comprehension competences, it is not enough for English learners to improve their vocabularies and master complex English sentence patterns, they also need to understand and master the cultural conventions and knowledge in the article. The key to improve English learners' reading comprehension competences is enhancing cultural teaching.

The cultural teaching will influence the advancement of reading comprehension competences. On one hand, English teachers should implicitly attach much importance to culture teaching in English class in high school. On the other hand, students should combine the cultural conventions and cultural knowledge with the analysis of sentences closely when they are doing reading comprehension. The foreign research on reading comprehension has experienced three periods, and one of the most important theories is Scheme Theory. The Schema Theory emphasizes the important of cultural background when students are reading articles.

For example, the Unit 3 My First Ride on A Train of NSEFC book1 [4] talks about a trip in Australia. So the teacher has the responsibility to introduce some cultural background information about Australia first before explain the article. Such as, the main cities in Australia, the main historical interests, the climates and the geographical features. The teachers may introduce the most interesting things to students, such as kangaroo, Great Barrier Reef and Sydney Opera House. After this cultural introduction, the students can have a deeper understanding of this reading comprehension.

2.3 Culture and Communication

Communication is the critical human connection. Language is the carrier of the culture. Everyone need to do sincere communication with others. it is essential for teachers to help students to enhance culture learning and cultivate communicating competences with foreigners. Although some top students are good at language skills, they are hesitant or timid to communicate with foreigners. The reason is they could not find a suitable topic to initiate the conversation. They are afraid of offending the foreigners because they know little about their habit, hobbies, or country background.

3. Ways to Enhance Culture Teaching under the National College Entrance Examination

For a long time, educators always fixed attention on the teaching of lexicon, oral English, grammar and sentence structures during English teaching while cultural teaching obtain less and less space in English education. English teachers have the pressure in helping their students to get higher scores and enter their ideal colleges under the latest national college entrance examination system. English learners and educators entirely ignore the meaning and importance of culture teaching. Therefore, the Government Education Department tried best to change the current phenomenon and appeal to all the English teachers and students to pay attention to the usages of English. According to the new schemes of entrance examination, English is one of the tests that everyone to take during the national entrance examination for Colleges and Universities except Chinese and mathematics. Each subject is marked out of 150 the same as before. Because scholars believe that National Educational Departments emphasize the significance of English test scores, the specific situation aroused a heated discussion among people. It is quite easy for you to find that the Government Educational Departments

are struggling to make some special efforts to change the current situation successfully.

3.1 To Raise Teachers' Culture Cultivation

Teachers' culture cultivation is a basic quality to be an outstanding teacher, since it is directly related to the teacher's cultural deposits, teaching faculty, professional ethics,. there is a great achievement has been made by the English teaching reform with the tide of renewing the curriculum. First of all, teachers should try their best to regularize their own professional ethics so as to be qualified and excellent teachers. furthermore, teachers should constantly enrich their human spirit and improve their teaching abilities, especially enriching their humanistic knowledge that include the knowledge of history, customs, beliefs, religion, politics and economy of different peoples. Thirdly, teachers should promote their teaching abilities. Teachers can easily deliver the cultural information naturally and interestingly to the students with certain teaching methods. Teachers should teach students to combine the new contents with the cultural background. Thus teachers must struggle to study hard and improve their culture cultivation during the process of daily teaching activities.

3.2 To Arouse Students' Awareness of Cultural Background

It is well known that cultural awareness in English language learning is usually regarded as being a fifth skill. The other four skills are the abilities of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Meanwhile, it is extremely impossible for English learners to learn English well without an awareness of that culture and how that culture relates to their own first culture or first language.

Before each lesson, the English teacher should arrange students consult some cultural material related to the text, such as the author, the social situation, the people's lives and thoughts. Through the investigation by the students themselves, they can get more information and also can have a more deeper understanding and interpretation of the lesson.

For example, in the SEFC (Senior English For China), one unit talked about American slangs. Here teachers should give more introduction about some college slangs Because this type of slang is closely related to the young people's lives. Slang has two obvious features that is brevity, and newness, Which is easily arouse Chinese students interests. Nowadays, many young people like to use concise, vivid substitution for the polysyllables or longer words.[2] Especially some internet slangs, such as OIC(oh I see), JK(just kidding), me 2(me too), sup(what's up),etc.

According to the definition of online encyclopedia Wikipedia “ Youth Culture generally refers to the ways young (adolescents and teenagers) differentiate themselves from the general culture of their community. The culture of teenagers is a typical characteristic of western civilization. [5] Generally speaking, the teenagers in the United States including high school students and college students, they are distinct in personality and they always pursuit independence. They created many new slang words in the process of searching for new things and rebelling against their parents and teachers. For college students, their life and experiences in college often use slang words to express. There are slang words about food, diet, relationship, alcohol and some places in the university. We can find out a lot of slangs in this young group to describe people in various types, especially the slang words used to describe the male students, such as: a class act (an excellent man), flamer (a man who plays as a woman in the love of gays), homey (friends or partners), dog (friend or partner, often refers to men), barney (a handsome boy), buster or chat (a comparative failure), hot carl (an attractive man), pansy (boys who

are coward , stupid and feminine), the pussy-boy is similar to it. The common slang words which are often used to describe the female students are peach and betty (attractive girls), hood-rat (vulgar sloppy women) , scalawag (gross indecency women), chick (refers to others' female friends who are beautiful and sexy). There are also vocabularies to describe not only male students but also female students. For instance, airhead and dipstick (the stupid or the fool), player (the person who are popular with the opposite sex but play or deceive the feelings of others), hep cat (refers to someone very fashionable and often walked in the forefront of the Times), baller (persons who can attract many people of the opposite sex), bopper (people who want to attract the opposite sex at any time), candy (very pretty or very handsome girls or boys), heart of glass (people who hurt in love easily), Jesus freak (refers to someone to worship Jesus quite seriously , too seriously). These slang words reflect the American young people's life and their attitude towards the society. Through learning these vivid slang expressions, the Chinese students can get to know more about American young people's colorful college lives through these vivid slang[6][7][8].

3.3 To Create an Intercultural Communicative Surrounding

In reality, one of the most difficult problems for Chinese learners is that most of them have the rare chances to intercultural communicate and full use of English in certain real situation. So schools and teachers should strive to create an intercultural communicative environment for the students. There are several suggestions for them to resolve the problem.

First, English teachers should provide culture-connoted materials for students. Through studying these materials, students can have a better understanding the culture and enrich their cultural knowledge. Second, schools and teachers could organize and arrange some activities to stimulate the students' interests and enthusiasm for learning English. such as hold English speech competition, set up discussion groups, or send students abroad, etc. third, teachers can project video or films for students to vividly introduce the culture knowledge. Fourth, schools should invite more foreign teachers to give lectures in high schools and communicate with Chinese students. These foreign teachers can provide the first hand information about the western culture.

For example, in the NSEFC book5[9], unit4 focus on the western Carnival. There are two ways to provide the intercultural communicative for the students. One is that the teachers could assign the students the preview homework to look for the materials and prepare the PPT presentations. Some students may find the different Carnival festivals hold in different regions or for different purposes, such as, Carnival in Brazil, Carnival of Venice, Carnival of Nice. The students may introduce the features about carnivals, that are precession in streets with cosmetic masks and dances. Another way is the school or the class can hold such kind of imitated carnival on campus. The students played the role to fully understand and experience the intercultural communicative atmosphere in the real created environment.

Through these ways to create the intercultural communicative environment, it is hoped that the students can enrich their cultural knowledge and broaden their humanistic knowledge.

4. Conclusion

In China, students' English learning is highly valued by the Chinese government education department. Chinese, English and mathematics are the main three subjects of the National Entrance Examination for Colleges and Universities. The importance of cultural teaching should receive increasing attention in high school English teaching. Schools and teachers should not only teach students the knowledge of vocabularies, grammar and language skills, but also teach students the knowledge of culture and try to help them enhancing their culture competences and intercultural communication abilities.

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