Pedagogical Approach to Enhance Self-concept

To the Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Classroom

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Abstract

The diversity of students in today's classrooms underscores the importance of developing curricula, teaching strategies, and policies to help all students succeed in school. Efforts should be exerted to welcome, understand, and affirm all students as equal. Students 'cultural and linguistic backgrounds should equally be valid and reflected in every facet of the school environment so as to enhance their self-concept. A major point of debate is whether or not to use the students 'first language, prior knowledge and culture in the classroom. Will they help the students learn effectively? Will they develop self-concept? The paper stressed the importance of viewing the issue in a new frame of mind; one that is not biased by stereotyped thinking. It argued for a scientific approach to the examination of the issue. An approach that take on board all possible hypotheses and assumptions and tries to search for answers that are based on vital data which, in themselves, are the result of solid facts and not just personal opinions or feelings

Keywords: Pedagogical approach, Self-concept, Linguistically, Culturally diverse classroom

1. Introduction

Every learner has her/ his own culture, learning style, linguistic background knowledge or individual pace of learning and developing.   Hence, the majority of foreign language classes ignore the students' knowledge, culture, and learning style (Richards, 1998).   In EFL settings of government schools, the quality of teaching is considered to be critical to success for students being exposed to poor out-of school environments (Shankweiler and Fowler, 2004).   Therefore, EFL teachers need to use instructional styles which promote active learning in order to cope with the linguistically and culturally diverse students to effectively maximize academic performance of all students (Epstein, 1985). The new trend is to advocate a more bilingual as well as multicultural approach to teaching, which would incorporate the students L1, and their cultures as learning/ teaching tool. A program that accepts and respects the language and culture of its students develops their self-concept and empowers them to feel confident to interact and to risk getting involved in the learning process.

2. The Statement of the problem

The researcher claims that most Sudanese English Language teachers prefer to teach English to the Basic school students completely in English and its culture. This method may not be fruitful because Sudanese students are linguistically and culturally diverse. Also the researcher claims that when teachers build on students' culture, prior knowledge, and skills and then provide appropriate scaffolding, students can move more easily from what they know to what they need to know. Building on students' culture, prior knowledge and experiences provides opportunities for authentic learning (Ladson-Billings, 1994) and also improves student engagement and Self-concept (Nieto, 2002).

3. Hypothesis

It was hypothesized that a school programme that build on students' prior knowledge native language and native culture develops students' self-concept.

4. Method

4.1 Apparatus

A pilot study in the form of semi-structured interview provided the items of the observation checklist. In-class observation [appendix] data used to be collected twice a week for 40 minute lesson. The particular class being observed was a Grade 6 (14-year olds) EFL class of public basic school, including 25 linguistically and culturally diverse students. Data were related to using of students 'prior knowledge, culture and their native language. Data

were taken in the form of written notes .A participant observation was carried out as the teacher who was teaching the lesson also took the notes.

4.2 The School Program

In the early 1990s, a new series was introduced. That was the SPINE series. SPINE stands for 'Sudan Practical Integrated National English'. This series was designed by a number of Sudanese experts helped by some experts who are native speakers of English and who helped in the designing an editing of the series. The series is composed of 6 books; 3 for the Basic Level and 3 for the Secondary Level. SPINE is the current course now and it has been in use since 1992. SPINE series was written with a different learner profile in mind. It was written in the early 1990s by authors who belonged to the traditional methods of teaching and syllabus design. They are not to blame for that. What they did was the state-of-the-art in those days.

4.3 The notion of self-concept

Innumerable studies have been published, and different definitions and theoretical frameworks have been proposed in an attempt to discover what makes individuals engage and persist in the language learning process. Self-concept has been defined in a variety of ways: as the belief that one is capable of performing in a certain manner to attain certain goals, as a person's belief about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives.

Self-concepts serve as regulators of human behaviors and they help individuals interpret their actions and experiences. As Oyserman states, it is what comes to our mind when we think of ourselves, which provides "incentives, standards, plans, rules, and scripts for behavior" a (Markus; Wurf, 1987, p.299). According to (Markus and Wurf 1987, p.307), The self-concept contains a variety of representations – cognitive or affective, in verbal, image, neural or sensory-motor form, representing the self in the past, future or the here-and-now, encompassing the actual or the possible self. For these authors, the *actual self* is the set of attributes that the individual believes he/she has in the present, while the *possible self* corresponds to the images of what the individual might become in the future, including the selves they could become (*desired selves*),and the selves they are afraid of becoming (*feared selves*).While the notion of self-concept contains core conceptions that define a person's identity that can be more or less stable over an extended period of time, possible selves have to do with the dynamic properties of the self-concept, such as motivation and social change, which give "direction and impetus for action, change, and development" (Markus; Nurius, 1986, p.960). In this sense, we can say that possible selves can stimulate individuals to learn an L2, especially when they differ from the attributes these individuals think they have in the present (actual selves). If learners see themselves as competent speakers, members of a global community, there are chances that they will exert effort and persist in trying to accomplish those attributes in the present.

4.4 The role of self-concepts in student's academic achievement

According to (Linguagem & Ensino, Pelotas. 2009) People can form positive as well as negative future representations, which in turn can have distinct consequences for motivation and achievement in educational settings. According to the self-theory, individuals can create as many possible selves as they wish, but their choices are influenced by the social context and their experiences. They can create both *desired selves*, such as the ideal, the creative, the successful, the admired self, as well as *feared selves*, such as the depressive, the lonely, the incompetent, the unemployed self (Dörnyei,1994). The types of possible selves individuals will generate may vary depending on the possibilities and choices available in the context that surrounds them. For example, in the educational setting, the teacher's style, methodology, attitudes, and motivation, may influence the extent to which students will put effort in achieving their possible selves. Specific teaching practices can either help students achieve their desired selves or push them closer to what they fear. Among the possible selves individuals project, (Higgins 1987, p.320) identifies two important domains of the self that can exert a great impact on individuals' behavior and motivation:

1. The *ideal self*, that is, "your representation of the attributes that someone (yourself or another) would like you, ideally, "to possess".

2. The *"ought to" self*, that is, "your representation of the attributes that someone (yourself or another) believes you should or ought to possess"

Although the ideal and the "ought to" selves seem similar, the ideal self focus on the person's wishes and aspirations in order to obtain pleasure or a positive result, while the "ought to" self emphasizes the avoidance of negative outcomes. In the later, there is a sense of duty and responsibility involved. (Higgins 1987, p.320) also identifies a third domain called *actual.* Among the determining factors suggested by different theories, learners' self-concept has proved to be a much more consistent predicator of behavior than any of the other closely related variables (Bandura, 1986). To quote Bandura,

"many students have difficulty in school not because they are incapable of performing successfully, but because they are incapable of believing that they can perform successfully, that they have learned to see themselves as incapable of handling academic skills" (p. 390). This view is supported by (Graham and Weiner 1996) who observed that the acquisition of new skills and the performance of previously learned skills have been related to efficacy beliefs at a level not found in any of the other expectancy constructs.   (Chamot 1993) reports that "one of the basic needs of language learners is having a high level of confidence in successfully completing a task". Students confident in their academic skills expect high marks on related exams and papers. Conversely, students who doubt their academic ability see a low grade on their paper even before they begin their exams. This would lead one to infer that research on achievement, on why students connaturally must focus, at least in great part, on students' self-concept beliefs.

4.5 The Role of teacher in developing Students' self-concepts

In order for the teacher to foster students' self-concept, he/she should try to create learning activities that are based on topics that are relevant to the students' lives e.g. prior experiences culture concepts and beliefs. Strategies include using local examples, teaching with events in the news, using pop culture technology (iPods, cell phones, YouTube videos) [appendix] to teach, or connecting the subject with the students' culture, outside interests or social lives (Brozo, 2005).

4.6 Establish a sense of belonging

People have a fundamental need to feel connected or related to other people. In an academic environment, research shows that students who feel they 'belong' have a higher degree of self-concept and academic confidence. According to students, their sense of belonging is fostered by an instructor that demonstrates warmth and openness, encourages student participation, is enthusiastic, friendly, helpful, organized and prepared for class (Freeman, Anderman and Jensen, 2007; Anderman and Leake, 2005).

4.7 The Role of prior knowledge in learning l2

Research has shown that a learner's prior knowledge often confounds an educator's best efforts to deliver ideas accurately. A large body of findings shows that learning proceeds primarily from prior knowledge, and only secondarily from the presented materials. Prior knowledge can be at odds with the presented material, and consequently, learners will distort presented material. Neglect of prior knowledge can result in the audience learning something opposed to the educator's intentions, no matter how well those intentions are executed in an exhibit, book, or lecture. (Wenden, 1999).

4.8 Effect of L1 knowledge on L2 learning

Anecdotal evidence suggests that some EFL teachers strongly believe that they should never use even a single word from the mother tongue in the classroom. These teachers are followers of the so-called „Monolingual Approach", and others who are somehow skeptical about the use of L1 or use it wisely in their classes are the proponents of „Bilingual approach". In addition to these two approaches, Nation (1997) introduces another approach called a „Balanced Approach". He believes teachers need to show respect for learners' L1 and need to avoid doing things that make the L1 seem inferior to English, at the same time, it is the English teacher's job to help learners develop their proficiency in English, here is that a balanced approach is needed which sees a role for the L1 but also recognizes the importance of maximizing L2 use in the classroom. Support for the Monolingual approach to teaching can be summarized as follows:

1. The learning of an L2 should model the learning of an L1 (through maximizing the exposure to the L2).

2. Successful learning involves the separation and distinction of L1 and L2.

3. Students should be shown the importance of the L2 through its continual use.

During its history, bilingual approach gained support and validation form many scholars and research findings. (Auerbach 1993, p.18) believes that "when the native language is used, practitioners, researchers, and learners consistently report positive results". In fact there has been a gradual move over the years away from the "English only" dogma that has long been a part of the British and American ELT movement (Baker 1994). (Mills 2004) advocates the use of Bilingual approach and discredits the monolingual approach in three ways: 1: it is impractical, 2: native teachers are not necessarily the best teachers and 3: exposure alone is not sufficient for learning. In support of the bilingual approach Atkinson proposes his theory called "Judicious use theory" (p. 21), in which he espouses that L1 works as a vital source and also a communicative tool both for students and teachers.

4.9 The role of culture in second language learning

Since its earliest conceptualizations in the 1960s, multicultural education has been transformed, refocused and reconceptualized in a constant state of evolution both in theory and in practice. Multicultural education is to affect social change. The pathway toward this goal incorporates three strands of transformation: the transformation of self; the

transformation of schools and schooling; and the transformation of society (Banks 1986). Multicultural education is intended to decrease race, ethnicity, class and gender divisions by helping all students attain the knowledge, attitudes and skills that they need in order to become active citizens. In this period the multicultural education was working through exploratory stage which was characterized by their interest to transmit positive personal and social behavior about cultural diversity in the classroom context. Multicultural education is type of education that enables people in diverse background to accept and cope their difference, to be non judgmental and to accept the right of all people developing their linguistic, cultural and religious expression. In addition, multicultural education also can be defined as educational policies and practices that recognize accept and affirm human differences and similarities related to gender, race, handicap and class (Sleeter & Grant, 1987).

5. Discussion

The findings of this study support the hypothesis that using of students prior knowledge, culture and native language may prove effective weapons in the hands of the teacher of the linguistically and culturally class. Several aspects of the results warrant emphasis. As regards for, sharing the personal histories of all in the classroom; compile these stories and use as classroom resources it was found that more than half of the students participate well and a sense of pride was detected among students. Incorporating popular culture (e.g., music, film, video, gaming, etc) into the classroom curriculum enhanced students' self-concept. As time passed, the students became increasingly used to discussing independently and to posing and answering questions, and contributed more spontaneously to discussions. However, they still relied heavily on the teacher prompts and questions.

Although teacher input was required to give focus and direction to discussions of all kinds throughout the project, there was a very obvious development during the course of the project, with children becoming noticeably more reflective and talkative. There The children's responses when working independently were shorter, more shallow, and less developed, though they were nonetheless able to express and develop their thoughts, and discuss their own reactions and understandings. It was noticed that on the fifth week the students were listening to each other, working together, building on what the others had said, taking more turns. They were particularly interested in the foods and history of the culture that they had chosen .The children shared their essays in a whole-class session. In general, the topics presented were new to the children. However, on a few notable occasions, someone shared what they already knew about the topic. In some cases, the children referred to difficult expressions which they could not understand, for instance 'Padang Rituals' in relation to Dinka. The discussions after each lesson allowed other children to offer their opinions. A few difficult ethical questions were raised: one of the student for instance, wondered how relief organizations could agree to help in times of famine in Southern Sudan when people refuse to eat cows, and this generated a great deal of interested debate. Occasionally, the children posed questions which the teacher did not know how to answer. In fact, some advocates of a cultural dimension to language teaching, such as (Byram and Esarte-Sarries, 1991), stress that the teacher does not need to be an expert on socio cultural knowledge or foreign cultures. Instead, the teacher and pupils can work together as co-ethnographers finding out information together. I felt on several occasions that my knowledge of ethnic minority groups and their cultures was limited. At the end of the project, several reported that they would have liked to spend more time on this task.

6. Conclusion

The study concluded that the school English language program ignores the native language and its culture and their prior knowledge whereas the results show that the use of Students prior knowledge, 'cultural and linguistic backgrounds develops learning and enhances students self-concept. The study ends with some recommendations that Schools' program should be redesigned in order to make schools to become places whose goal is facilitating the process of learning for life

They must be places where all learning is perceived as valuable and as a foundation on which more learning can be built; where everyone learns rather than simply be sorted and prioritized based on social background. Teachers and school programs designers are in the best position for 'creating a chance' to do so. This means developing conditions in schools that enable students know that they have the right to envision other possibilities beyond those imposed by traditional barriers of race, gender, or social class. Even more importantly, those barriers should not be viewed as impediments of learning.

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Appendix: The observation checklist domains

1. Week One

1.1 Respect for All Learners

1.2 Activities/Assignments

1.3 The Teacher

- Identifies and go beyond various cultural group holidays.
- Investigates and complicate our commonalities and differences as participants in the local and global communities.
- Develops an understanding of the history of our diverse cultural practices and rituals.
- Name, research and share the personal histories of all in the classroom; compile these stories and use as classroom resources.

2. Week Two

2.1 Funds of Knowledge

2.2 Activities/Assignments

- Develops units and classroom activities that grow out of and speak to children's interests and cultural backgrounds.
- Encourages students to research and document life in their homes and communities.
- Chooses texts that reflect the cultural and ethnic diversity of the nation. Incorporate popular culture (e.g., music, film, video, gaming, etc) into the classroom curriculum.

3. Week Three

3.1 Linguistic, cultural backgrounds and experiences

3.2 Activities/Assignments

- Talks to parents and students to learn about their linguistic and cultural backgrounds and experiences.
- Invites parents into the classroom to speak to all students on family life and cultural traditions, or to share an area of their expertise. Design action research projects that incorporate socially responsive methods and material.
- Have students write a "border crossing" essay about a time when they were the "other."
- Expects students to read and critique multiethnic and multicultural children's and YA literature (e. g., *House on Mango Street*; *The Color of Water*; *Miracle's Boys*; *Uncle Jed's Barbershop*).

4. Week Four

4.1 Variety of Experiences

4.2 Activities/Assignments

- Examines and critique popular culture as a voice for different cultural groups. Discuss the ways in which language is used to express feelings. Have students write their own songs or poems for posting on a website.
- Has learners read autobiographies of children their age and then write their own stories. As a group, compare and contrast their stories with the ones they read. Discuss what students have learned about themselves and others?
- Asks students to examine newspaper articles, television reports, and websites about their cultural group. Do they agree/disagree with the ways the stories have been told? What is another way the stories could have been told? Write the other way.

5. Week Five

5.1 Crossing Cultural Boundaries

5.2 Activities/Assignments

- Develops sustained contact with participants from diverse communities.
- Develops projects on different cultural practices.
- Accomplishes the projects above via audio and video tape interviewing; transcribing, studying, and compiling the stories of people from different cultures/places; collecting oral histories; all to be used as classroom resources.
- Uses documentary films from PBS, etc., as a resource, designing carefully-phrased pre-post viewing questions and activities.