Journal of Education and Educational Research
ISSN: 2957-9465 | Vol. 2, No. 1, 2023

An Exploration on the Cultivation of Intercultural Communication Competence in High Schools English Reading Based on the "The Third Place"

Yiwen Cheng

School of Foreign Languages, Sichuan Normal University, Chengdu, Sichuan Province, P.R China

Abstract: The Ministry of Education promulgated Curriculum Standards for Ordinary High Schools (2017), which regulated that it is necessary to cultivate highs school students with the intercultural communication competence and the ability to spread Chinese culture. The traditional intercultural communication teaching, which is target-language oriented, has caused the phenomenon of "Aphasia of Chinese culture". Meanwhile, the intercultural communication cultivation in high school English teaching was also simply understood as the instruction of foreign knowledge. In order to solve the problems, the idea of "the third space" theory has been chosen as the theory of cultivating students' intercultural communicative competence. "The third space" is neither composed of the native culture nor the target language culture, but an innovative space born in the process of dynamic contact, collision and interaction between the two cultures. Based on this theory, this paper summarizes the research status of intercultural communication competence and clarifies its specific connotation, reviews the cultivation of intercultural communication competence in high school English teaching. It takes A Child of Two Cuisine (a passage from unit 1, book 2 of English textbook of FLTRP Edition) as an example to state how to apply "the third place" to the lesson design based on the activity-based English learning. But due to lack of conditions, the argumentation of this paper lacks empirical research to test its effectiveness.

Keywords: Intercultural Communication Competence; High School English; The Third Place.

1. Introduction

In 2012, China explicitly made a proposal: we need to build a community with a shared future. To achieve this idea means that the intercommunication among all human beings coming from different cultures are necessary.

Kramsch (1993) mentioned that culture is a feature of language itself. Jia (1997) proposed that in general, culture refers to the synthesis of people's thinking, language (including non-verbal language), behaviors and thoughts. Culture is closely related to language, and language is the carrier of culture.

According to English Curriculum Standards for Ordinary High Schools (2017 Version) (hereinafter English Curriculum 2017), cultural awareness refers to the understanding of Chinese and foreign culture, recognition of fine cultures, and students' intercultural cognition, attitudes and behavior orientation under the background of globalization. By cultivating high school students' cultural awareness, they can finally possess intercultural communication competence (hereinafter ICC) and spread Chinese culture.

However, the current situation of the cultivation of high school students' ICC leaves much to be desired. One major problem is the "Aphasia of Chinese culture". Zhang and Liang (2021) did research on this problem in high school English teaching via questionnaires, interviews and tests. The research results show that despite their positive attitudes to Chinese culture, both high school teachers and students have Aphasia of Chinese culture, especially students have rather poor ability of Chinese culture.

The relationship of Chinese culture and Western culture are not incompatible. The excessive emphasis on each side will bring nothing but interfere the cultivation of students' ICC and development of high school English teaching. Therefore, this paper aims to introduce the theory the "third place" and its related research, discuss its importance to English teaching in high schools and the ways to cultivate high school students' ICC based on this theory.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Definition and Components of ICC

ICC itself is a complicated problem for scholars around the world put forward different definitions.

Ruben (1976) proposed that communicative competence is the ability to function in a manner that is perceived to be relatively consistent with the needs, capacities, goals and expectations of the individuals in one's environment while satisfying one's own needs, capacities, goals and expectations. Byram (1997) stated that "someone with ICC is able to interact with people from another country and culture in a foreign language. They are able to negotiate a mode of communication and interaction which is satisfactory to themselves and the other and they are able to act as mediator between people of different cultural origins." Spitzberg (2000) stated that ICC is considered very broadly as an impression that behavior is appropriate and effective in a given context.

It is generally accepted that "ICC refers to the competence in appropriate and effective communication with people from different cultural backgrounds" (Hu, 2013). This paper will take this definition as the foundation of further discussion.

Effective and appropriate communication contains different components. Byram (1997) discussed the factors involved in intercultural competence: skills, knowledge, attitudes and critical cultural awareness. Jia (1997) proposed that effective ICC includes the system of basic communication competence, affective and interpersonal competence, episodic competence and communicative

strategy competence.

It can be concluded that cognitive component, affective competence and behavior competence are the same in their research, which are also the foundation of further discussion in this paper.

2.2. A Review of the Cultivation of ICC in China's High School English Teaching

In the earliest time, scholars mainly discussed the strategies for the cultivation of students' intercultural communication. They suggested that teachers to enhance the introduction of cultural background knowledge, carefully analyze the teaching materials, compare the difference between Chinese and Western cultures and carry out outside-school activities (Hou, 2004; Li, 2007; Xue, 2007). Based on these strategies, Ji (2011) suggested that the evaluation of intercultural competence should be taken into consideration in the whole formative evaluation.

The analysis of teaching materials is also important in this area. Zheng and Cheng (2015) took the English textbooks (PEP edition) as research objects and systematically analyzed the distribution situation of intercultural communication contents in each unit from different aspects.

In recent 20 years, studies on the cultivation of ICC are abundant; various research directions also manifest the active situation of this area, but some existing problems cannot be ignored.

There are a lot of research on the strategies to cultivate students' ICC, but some earlier research focused more on the introduction and transfer of cultural knowledge. Increase of knowledge does not equal to the change of attitudes and emotions, let alone the acquisition of competence.

Scholars then have realized the importance of the cultivation of the other intercultural competences and the necessity to introduce more Chinese culture, but it is necessary to probe the path of balancing the teaching proportion of Chinese and foreign culture, helping students cultivate Chinese feelings and form correct values of treating foreign culture, and integrate Chinese culture with more foreign culture in a harmonious way with the help of some meaningful and practical idea.

2.3. "The Third Place"

Claire Kramsch first proposed the concept of "the third place" in her book Context and Culture in Language Teaching in 1993. She thought that the only way to start building a more complete and less partial understanding of both C1 (native language culture) and C2 (target language culture) is to develop a third perspective, that would enable learners to take both an insider's and an outsider's view on C1 and C2. This idea was further developed by Lo Bianco and Australian educational department. "The third place" is an intermediary place between one's own cultural frame or the interactant's cultural frame. It is a point of interaction, hybridity and exploration (Lo Bianco et al. 1999).

Chinese scholars have introduced the idea of "third place" and did a series of research. Ye and Hay (2010) first discussed the necessity and possibility of the construction of "the third culture" which can help protect Chinese linguistic culture as well as absorb the essence of foreign linguistic culture. After joined a national education research project in Australia, Ye (2012) expounded their exploration to "the third place" including its principle and the critical meaning and function to foreign language teaching.

Based on these theoretical studies, Gu (2019) realized the shortage of empirical studies in real English teaching; therefore, based on "the third place", he used a cultivation model in real class so as to focus on the construction of "the third place" in different teaching procedures.

"The third place" is the process and method of foreign language teaching as well as the objectives and product of foreign language learning. However, "the third place" is not an eclectic cultural made dish but a kind of innovation, in which people can freely and successfully communicate with each other (Ye, 2012). "The third place" emphasizes a dynamic integration of C1 and C2 and provides people an intersection in which multilingualism and multiculture coexist.

According to the research status, most of the studies of "the third place" in English teaching center on higher education, but there are few studies about its guidance and application in high schools. Therefore, this paper will focus on the area of English reading teaching in high schools.

3. "The Third Place" in High School English Reading Teaching

The English textbook is FLTRP edition (2019 version). "A Child of Two Cuisine" tells a story happened in a transnational family (a Britain father, a Chinese mother and a boy of mixed blood). The story teller is the child and he introduce the typical Chinese and Britain cuisines and some interesting stories happened in the process of the conflicts and fusion among their eating habits. This lesson embodies the real process and ideal results of people's intercultural communication, and the topic (cuisine) itself has meaningful connotation with close relationship with culture.

3.1. Learning and understanding

This part two main steps: to guide students to learn unusual and weird food in different countries, and to learn typical Chinese and Britain food and summarize the family members' attitudes.

1). Activity 1: lead-in

Teachers can show students a video about some unusual and weird food in the world which often smells stinky and looks awful, such as the black pudding, the blue cheese, haggis and fried spider etc. Meanwhile, teachers can ask students to discuss the following questions in groups: (1) Did you use to taste any kind of some "dark cuisines" from other countries? (2) What's your attitudes toward people who are fond of these cuisines? (3) Did you ever think about the reasons behind the emergence of these cuisines?

This activity aims to arouse students' interests, help them think about the hidden culture behind cuisines and their attitudes when facing with people of totally different appetite, that is to say, cultural backgrounds. Teachers do not need to directly point out the relations between cuisines and culture in the perception part, but can take some measures to guide students to think about the reasons and provide them with some choices: different geographical conditions, material situation, manners and customs, etc. so as to lay foundation for further study.

2). Activity 2: Reading

Students need to sort out the basic information in the passage: (1) What typical cuisines are mentioned? (2) What are the three family members' attitudes toward them? (3) What is the main idea of the passage?

In the reading part, students can learn some intercultural knowledge, such as typical Chinese and Britain cuisines, different eating styles and the family members' communicative behaviors.

Activity mainly focuses on the level of intercultural knowledge. Teachers guide students to sort out the facts in the passage, especially some facts which show lack of understanding among the family members and seem usual but are worthy of more exploration. For example, the Britain father cannot accept to eat some parts of an animal, such as chicken feet.

Teachers do not have need to explain the reasons behind this situation but just guide students to sort out all of these similar facts. During this process, students may feel curious and consciously think about the reasons.

3.2. Application and practice

In the part of application and practice, teachers and students need to deduce the reasons behind all of those conflicts and their attitudes towards the conflicts: (1) Why does the Britain father refuse to take things like chicken feet? (2) Why does the Chinese mother say they'd better not eat too much roast food? (3) Could you summarize the cuisines that each person dislikes and their attitudes towards the food other family members like? (4) What are their solutions to those conflicts? (5) Could you find out the common values behind all of their attitudes?

After students deeply analyze the passage under teachers' guidance, they realize that different eating habits actually represent different cultural values, and it is not so easy to compromise with other people for one man's meat is another man's poison. Therefore, teachers should use question chains to help students think about their responses to such conflicts and then summarize the communicative strategies in this step.

Students now have established a system of intercultural communication knowledge in this lesson; therefore, teachers can design communicative activities and construct a simulative intercultural communicative environment which aims to help students use the linguistic knowledge, cultural knowledge and communicative strategies. The activities can be role play, dialogues adaptation and students can cultivate the ability in the construction of "third place".

Here is an example of role play. Students can be divided into groups of 3. Teachers provide different plots of intercultural communication conflict in this passage. Students choose, adapt and act out one plot and in the process, other students are required to record their solutions and give their suggestions.

In this part, students cannot only improve their language competence but also develop the intercultural awareness and attitudes and show their empathy. In the communication process, students can construct "the third place", give up the thinking path of ethnocentrism, actively understand the motivation of others' actions, put themselves in others' shoes to analyze the reasons behind the conflicts and meanwhile, they can effectively express the motivation of their own behaviors so as to let others understand their own culture (Gu, 2019).

After the role play, teachers can combine students' performances with the child's attitude in the passage to make a summary: although we are from different cultures, we should respect others' cultures and negotiate to find a place where everyone can communicate equally.

3.3. Transfer and innovation

In this part, teachers need to help students transfer their intercultural knowledge, attitudes and skills to a new environment so as to learn to solve problems. They should realize the necessity to adapt to communicative environment, adjust their own behaviors and establish cultural identity (Gu, 2019). In this class, students are hope to understand the different food culture in the whole word and understand and embrace the diversity.

But teachers should also realize that the cultivation of ICC is a very hard and complex task so that it is not possible for students to quickly reach all of the goals in a single lesson. This process needed to repeated again and again and it should be a life-long project for students.

Teachers can also design the self-assessment checklists for students to see if they have formed correct values when facing with a food culture that is totally different to their own and whether they have the conscious to build a third place through communication and negotiation.

4. Conclusion

On the basis of the literature review of the cultivation of ICC and the review of "the third place", this paper explained how to combine the idea of "the third place" into the reading instruction in high school English teaching an example of lesson design.

The idea of the "third place" is significant because it echoes the educational values of English curriculum and can function as a supplementary design principle. It can solve the problem of aphasia of Chinese culture and blindly excessive ethnocentrism. Moreover, it emphasizes the humanistic nature of language teaching. It frees both teachers and students from the burden of scores.

However, this paper lacks the empirical study which can assess its effectiveness validity, and lacks a systematic probe into the design of reading materials in all the textbooks. It is necessary to find out the cohesive relationship among different themes.

References

[1] Byram, M. (1997). Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence (Multilingual Matters). Multilingual Matters.

[2] Kramsch, C. (1993). Context and culture in language teaching: Oxford university press.

[3] Lo Bianco, J., Liddicoat, A. J., & Crozet, C. (1999). Striving for the Third Place: Intercultural Competence through Language Education: ERIC.

[4] Ruben, B. D. (1976). Assessing communication competency for intercultural adaptation. Group & Organization Studies, 1(3), 334-354.

[5] Spitzberg, B. H. (2000). A model of intercultural communication competence. Intercultural communication: A reader, 9, 375-387.

[6] Gu, X. (2019). Applying the intercultural communicative competence training model in EFL teaching: The Third Space perspective. Foreign Language World (04), 67-75+96.7

[7] Hou, Y. (2004). The Cultivation of Intercultural Communication Competence in Senior English Teaching. Journal of Fujian Institute of Education (08), 38-39.

[8] Hu, W. (2013). On the positioning of intercultural communication competence in China's foreign language teaching. Foreign Language World (06), 2-8.

[9] Ji, Y. (2011). Strategies for Cultivating Intercultural Communicative Competence in New Curriculum Senior High School English Teaching. Education Exploration (09), 48-49.

[10] Jia, Y. (1997). Intercultural Communication. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.

[11] Li, X. (2007). Cultivation of High School English Intercultural Communication Awareness and Ability. Jiangxi Education and Research (01), 122-123.

[12] Xue, Y. (2007). Analysis of the relationship between intercultural communication and English teaching in senior high school. Theory and Practice of Education, 27(S2), 124.

[13] Ye, H. (2012). Intercultural language teaching and research in postmodern era. Foreign Language Teaching and Research, 44(01), 116-126+160.

[14] Ye, H., & Hay, T. (2010). Chinese Cultural Protection and the Intercultural "Third Space". Seeker (07), 44-46.

[15] Zhang, J., & Liang, S. (2021). Study on the Chinese Cultural Aphasia in High School English Teaching. Journal of Fuyang Institute of Technology, 32(02), 99-103.

[16] Zheng, Y., & Chen, X. (2015). Exploration of senior high school English textbooks from the perspective of cross-cultural communication: Take the compulsory modules of the People's Education Edition as an example. Journal of Teaching and Management (07), 43-45.

[17] Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. (2018). English Curriculum Standards for Ordinary High Schools (2017 Version). Beijing: People's Education Press.