



ELSEVIER

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](http://www.sciencedirect.com)

System

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/system

Developing English learners' transcultural skills through content- and task-based lessons



Maria Juan-Garau^{*}, Karen Jacob

University of the Balearic Islands, Ctra. Valldemossa Km. 7.5, 07122 Palma de Mallorca, Spain

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 30 June 2014

Received in revised form 23 April 2015

Accepted 26 April 2015

Available online 9 June 2015

Keywords:

Transcultural skills

Intercultural competence

EIL

EFL

Content-based language teaching

Task-based language teaching

CMC

Blogs

Language learning

CLIL

ABSTRACT

This article discusses the use of content- and task-based work in English-as-a-Foreign-Language (EFL) classroom contexts with a view to nurturing transcultural understanding between speakers of English from different cultural backgrounds. Three groups of EFL learners, one in Spain and two in Poland, aged 14 to 16, worked on a task-based unit of work about the African continent in their EFL class, which they subsequently discussed with their peers in the other two participating schools on a blog specifically set up to that end. By providing learners with the opportunity to voice their concerns on the topics discussed, the task-work sought to encourage their co-construction of new shared knowledge and the critical re-evaluation of their preconceived worldviews. Results suggest that the content- and task-based activities, along with a novel use of a virtual third space as a zone for transcultural learning and collaboration, fostered participants' transcultural competence and their ability to communicate effectively in the international arena through English as an International Language (EIL).

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

In today's increasingly multicultural societies, the urge to instil receptive attitudes towards the 'other'—i.e. speakers with other languages and cultures—in second language (L2) learners has become paramount (Jacob, 2013). In fact, one of the main goals of becoming a competent L2 user—particularly of English as an international language (EIL), which includes communication through English between non-native speakers in non-English-speaking environments (Matsuda & Friedrich, 2011)—is to be able to interact and share viewpoints with speakers from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds in the international arena. The terms 'intercultural' or 'transcultural' competence have become widespread to refer to such abilities (Kramsch, 2010, 2013). The importance granted to them has been mostly reflected in theoretical publications. However, there have been far fewer reports on actual classroom practice (Byram, Holmes, & Savvides, 2013).

Study-abroad language learning contexts are ideally suited for learners to practise the L2 while acquiring language socialisation and transcultural skills (Kinging, 2009). However, study abroad is not always a feasible option and, with the popularisation of Web 2.0 tools in L2 classrooms, 'internationalisation at home' has become a viable alternative, as Pérez-Vidal

^{*} Corresponding author. Tel.: +34 971172682; fax: +34 971172310.

E-mail addresses: maria.juan@uib.eu (M. Juan-Garau), karen.jacob@uib.es (K. Jacob).

(2015) emphasises. Thus, the present study puts forward a proposal to enhance L2 learners' communicative competence in EIL while engaging them in content- and task-based activities—including blog writing—with a view to promoting their transcultural skills.

2. Literature review

2.1. Transcultural competence

In order to characterise 'transcultural competence', we first need to refer to the closely related term 'intercultural competence'. [Byram \(1997: 34\)](#) defines it as the "readiness to suspend disbelief and judgment with respect to others' meanings, beliefs and behaviours" and a "willingness to suspend belief in one's own meanings and behaviours, and to analyse them from the viewpoint of the others with whom one is engaging". [Byram et al. \(2013\)](#) contextualise the current prominence of intercultural competence within the 'cultural turn' that started with the advent of the Communicative Approach in the 1970s. This cultural turn, which essentially involves the introduction of intercultural competence to supplement communicative competence, "has further refined the notion of what it is to be competent for communication with speakers of different languages and with speakers using a lingua franca" ([Byram et al., 2013: 251](#)). As a result, they argue, that teachers and learners need to become aware of other speakers' cultures and of their own.

Considering both the commonalities and distinctive aspects of 'intercultural' and 'transcultural' competence, [Ting-Toomey \(1999: 261\)](#) describes 'transcultural communicative competence' as "an integrative theory-practice approach enabling us to mindfully apply the intercultural knowledge we have learned in a sensitive manner". For this author, cultural 'sensitivity' is one of seven important skills for transcultural competence along with open-mindedness and respectfulness. In a similar vein, [Slimbach \(2005\)](#) identifies six relevant areas for achieving transcultural competence, including global awareness, world learning, foreign language proficiency and affective development, while [Jongewaard's \(2001\)](#) transcultural unification proposal is based on six cultural universals which include geographical and contextual global awareness, empathetic activism, and shared values.

[Thompson \(2011\)](#) amplifies the notion of 'transcultural communication' to the non-native speaker paradigm—since oftentimes the language used in transcultural contexts is an international language such as English ([Ives, 2010](#))—and contrasts it with 'intercultural communication'. She suggests that the prefix 'trans' in transcultural communication captures "a sense of multidirectional movement, flow and mixing", whereas the prefix 'inter' invokes "notions of bi-directionality, stasis and separation" ([Thompson, 2011: 207](#)). Similarly, [Pennycook \(2007: 6\)](#) understands transculturality in terms of cultural flows and regards English as a prominent vehicle of such flows:

English is a translocal language, a language of fluidity and fixity that moves across, while becoming embedded in, the materiality of localities and social relations. English is bound up with transcultural flows, a language of imagined communities and refashioning identities.

[Pennycook](#) uses the term 'transcultural flows' to explore how cultural forms are reinvented as they move backwards and forwards across contexts. In this way, he is not simply referring to the spread of cultural forms, but also to processes such as blending and borrowing. Thus, EIL can also be considered a social practice that is in a constant process of construction and reconstruction.

The growing use of EIL in multilingual contexts has led [Matsuda and Friedrich \(2011\)](#) to propose an English language teaching (ELT) curriculum that fosters familiarity with different varieties of English, other cultures, world issues, and knowledge of one's own culture in order to share the information with others. As [Matsuda and Friedrich \(2011: 340\)](#) themselves state, "we are advocating the empowerment of students with critical lenses that would allow them to use English effectively to meet their own needs while respecting the needs of others". Under this light, transcultural competence implies the adjustment of one's view of the world, as it forces one to consider oneself a member of a far wider and more complex community. This entails not only the use on many occasions of a lingua franca such as English, but also a re-evaluation of stereotypical knowledge ([Prieto-Arranz, Juan-Garau, & Jacob, 2013](#)).

2.2. Content- and task-based language teaching approaches

As defined by [Lyster and Ballinger \(2011: 279\)](#), content-based language teaching (CBLT) is "an instructional approach in which non-linguistic curricular content such as geography or science is taught to students through the medium of a language that they are concurrently learning as an additional language". According to these authors, CBLT learning contexts are best understood as points on a continuum that range from content-driven programmes such as total L2 immersion to language-driven programmes such as second/foreign language (FL) classes infused with thematic units or frequent use of content for language practice. The common constituent for these approaches is that they provide language learners with opportunities to further their linguistic abilities by working on specific contents or topics, often through task-based units. Such instruction allows the learner to use language for a 'real' purpose, which has been shown useful to improve motivation for language learning in students ([Grant, 2006](#)) and to accelerate language proficiency whilst broadening cultural knowledge ([Stryker & Leaver, 1997](#)).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/372927>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/372927>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)