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A Rationale for Global Education in EFL

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Abstract

This paper looks at what global education means. Its goals and objectives in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom are explored. Ten principles are presented for use in planning and practicing a global approach to foreign language education and the theoretical rationale that led to the formation of the ten principles is explored. The rationale for this kind of change stems from a combination of three different areas: Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theory and research, the politics of education, and teaching for a better world.

Keywords: global education, foreign language teaching, linguistic and non-linguistic objectives

Introduction

There is a need for global awareness and social responsibility to become part of education, including foreign language teaching, because our lives cannot be separated from the rest of the world. At many levels we are linked to the violence, poverty and environmental destruction taking place. We need to be aware that it is the individuals, that make up the whole, that create the world we live in. In the language learning process, for both the teacher and the learner, there has to be

room for personal growth and a better understanding of ourselves and the world we live in.

In this paper I look at what global education means and what its goals are. I present ten principles that I consider to be fundamental for planning and practice in a global approach to foreign language education and explore some of the theoretical works that lead to the formation of the ten principles. My perspective is based on adult classes using a communicative approach to EFL teaching in the classroom.

Global Education

For a definition of the goals and objectives of global education I like Robert Hanvy's general definition (cited in Lamy, 1990, p.53) that promotes five interdisciplinary dimensions:

Perspective consciousness: An awareness of and appreciation for other images of the world.

State of the planet awareness: An in-depth understanding of global issues and events.

Cross-cultural awareness: A general understanding of the defining characteristics of world cultures, with an emphasis on understanding similarities and differences.

Systemic awareness: A familiarity with the nature of systems and an introduction to the complex international system in which state and non-state actors are linked in patterns of interdependence and dependence in a variety of issues and events.

Options for participation: A review of strategies for participating in issue areas in, local, national, and international settings.

In the EFL setting, teaching methods are usually based on

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approaches that are structural, functional, or communicative in nature. Global education looks at a higher set of organizing principles than those that are purely linguistic or communicative.

Usually in EFL we look at matching the language being taught with situational contexts, and in terms of how interesting or motivating and meaningful materials are. The global approach takes this as a given, but adds that meaningfulness is much more than this. It implies the need to look at meaningfulness in terms of 1) the hidden curriculum of teacher or course writer assumptions and values, 2) the impact on students of the learning processes, 3) the type of content and the way it is structured, 4) the way these three interact with each other (Mark, 1990, p.13).

A language learning program needs to integrate linguistic objectives, the learning processes (the entire range of activities that students are involved in) and the non-linguistic, thematic content. The linguistic objectives will vary depending on the level of the students. The activities the students participate in help to develop self-esteem, autonomy, responsibility, cooperation and participation. The thematic content needs to be looked at in terms of oneself and others, and as a way of making connections between the personal, local, national, and global. The students' needs, abilities, interests, past experiences, and attitudes to learning need to be the points used to establish what the linguistic objectives, learning processes, and thematic content will be (Mark, 1990).

Through this approach, learners and teachers can raise questions about the way they look at themselves and what they do in the world, exploring, expanding and re-evaluating their experience.

Successful global education programs in the United States have generally structured their efforts around the following goals: To intro-

duce learners to large verifiable amounts of information that represent many cultural, historical, gender-related, and ideological perspectives: To allow learners to identify and explore their core values and beliefs which define their world view and compare this with the views of others: To introduce learners to a wide range of analytical and evaluative skills, that will enhance their ability to understand and react to complex issues: To introduce learners to strategies for involvement and participation in local, national and international affairs (Lamy, 1990, p.55).

Principles

In a Global approach to foreign language education there are ten principles that I consider to be fundamental for planning and practice in the EFL classroom:

- 1) To provide students with a rich source of comprehensible input.
- 2) To provide a safe, low stress environment for students so they feel comfortable taking risks, making mistakes, and generally experimenting with the language. A low anxiety setting reduces the students' affective filter, allowing more input to be comprehensible.
- 3) To involve students in the learning process so that they develop the attitude, skills and abilities necessary to continue to learn and grow on their own outside the classroom.
- 4) To provide an environment conducive to self exploration, cooperation and expression.
- 5) To address the issues and needs of the students in a student-centred environment.
- 6) To decide upon content through collaboration between students and teacher.

7) To provide opportunities for social interaction with meaningful communication, allowing students to use the language they are acquiring in ways they find creative and interesting,

8) To deal with the whole person, building self-esteem, autonomy, responsibility and cooperation, and to foster the ability to make informed, independent and responsible choices.

9) To develop in students an awareness of themselves and their world, and the effect they have on it with their actions, and responsibility to themselves and the world around them.

10) To foster a two way process, teacher as learner and learner as teacher.

I consider these principles to be the essence of what a language teacher needs to strive for in a global approach to the classroom. Unfortunately not all teachers are in situations in which they are able to incorporate all these principles, and so must work to the best of their ability within the practical reality of their particular school environment.

Rationale

The rationale for this kind of change stems from a combination of three different areas: Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theory and research, the politics of education, and teaching for a better world.

Krashen (1981) gives us five hypotheses from which he derives “The Fundamental Pedagogical Principle”, and “The Fundamental Principle in Second Language Acquisition”. The five Hypotheses are:

1) The Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis

Acquisition (“picking up”) is a subconscious process, similar to first language acquisition (FLA) and unaffected by error correction. Learn-

ing (rules or grammar) is conscious knowledge about language.

2) The Natural Order Hypothesis

Grammatical structures are acquired (not learned) in a predictable order, with certain structures tending to come early, some later. The natural order seems to be independent of the order of presentation in the classroom.

3) The Monitor Hypothesis

Learning has one function, it acts as an editor or monitor. Learning has limitations because certain conditions must be met before the monitor, can be used effectively:

i) Time: Students must have enough time to use conscious rules. This results in interference with communication.

ii) Focus on Form: Even given enough time students may not use their conscious grammatical knowledge. They may be more concerned with communication than with formal accuracy.

iii) Know the Rule: Linguists only know a fraction of the rules which apply to any given language, so how can we expect students to learn them all!

4) The Input Hypothesis

We acquire by understanding language that is a step beyond our level of comprehension ($i + 1$), and by understanding messages and not focusing on the form of the input. We can understand language that contains structures we have not yet acquired by utilizing context and extra-linguistic information (our knowledge of the world). Traditional approaches are different. They assume the opposite, first teaching structures, then trying to give the students practice in various activities and exercises. Speech cannot be taught directly, it is a result of acquisition, not a cause, and will emerge on its own over time. The best input should not be grammatically sequenced, it should not aim

deliberately at $i+1$. The input hypothesis claims that deliberate sequencing is not necessary and may even be harmful. If there is successful communication, if the acquirer understands the message contained in the input, and there is enough input, $i+1$ will automatically be provided in just the right quantities. There is a silent period. The input hypothesis interprets this as a time when students are building competence via input, by listening. When they are ready they start to talk.

5) The Affective Filter Hypothesis

The following affective variables are related to success in SLA:

- 1) Anxiety: Low anxiety relates to success in SLA
- 2) Motivation: Higher motivation predicts more acquisition.
- 3) Self-confidence: The acquirer with more self-confidence and self-esteem tends to do better in SLA.

From these hypotheses Krashen formulates two principles: The Fundamental Principle in Second Language Acquisition

“People acquire second languages when they obtain comprehensible input, and when their affective filters are low enough to allow the input “in”. Comprehensible input, delivered in a low filter situation, is the only “causative variable” in SLA. All other factors thought to encourage or cause SLA only work when they provide comprehensible input” (Krashen, 1981 p.57).

The Fundamental Pedagogical Principle

“Any instructional technique that helps second language acquisition does so by providing Comprehensible Input. If x is shown to be good for acquiring a second language, x helps to provide CI, either directly or “indirectly” (Krashen, 1981, p.59).

Nunan (1990) outlines a procedure for using learner derived infor-

mation to inform and guide the curriculum development process. The approach is based on the humanistic and adult learning movements and the development of communicative approaches to language teaching. The steps in a learner-centred design are: 1) the needs analysis to obtain objective and subjective information, 2) grouping learners for instruction according to proficiency and communicative goals, 3) task selection, 4) content specification, 5) assessment, 6) evaluation.

In major contrast to a more traditional approach to curriculum development this approach is more task-oriented, with tasks being established before linguistic content. Learners are trained in self-monitoring and self-assessment, and are involved in the course evaluation. It assumes that a localized curriculum will be more responsive to learners needs than a centralized one, but will also make more demands on teachers than a centralized one.

Tasks are meaning-focused activities, and Prabhu (1987) divides them broadly into three types:

Information-gap activities, which involve a transfer of given information from one person to another. One example is pair work in which each member of the pair has part of the total information and attempts to convey it verbally to the other.

Reasoning-gap activities, which involve deriving some new information from given information through processes of inference, deduction, practical reasoning, or a perception of relationships or patterns.

Opinion-gap activities, which involve identifying and articulating a personal preference, feeling, or attitude in response to a given situation (p.46-7).

Foley (1991) looks at the hypothesis of regulation put forward by Vygotsky, and suggests it offers a psycholinguistic framework to help us understand some of the principles underlying task-based approaches

to second language teaching. He takes first language acquisition studies within a Vygotskian framework and applies this paradigm to task-based approaches to language learning, taking into account the cognitive development of the language learner. Communication focuses on individuals maintaining their identity.

Maintenance of learner identity is achieved through three types of regulations in communication tasks: object-regulation, other-regulation and, self-regulation. The last, Vygotsky says, denotes mature linguistic ability. In first language acquisition the child moves through these three stages with the aid of an adult (Foley, 1991 p.). He argues that any formal approach to language teaching, with its emphasis on grammar and rules, provides little if any opportunity to gain self-regulation, instead it forces students to be object-regulated through drills and exercises, or at best to be other-regulated by the teacher. On the other hand he argues that a task-based approach is an enabling procedure for self-regulation, which is a necessary part of every individuals development.

Pennycook (1989) makes two basic claims, the first is that all education is political, and the second is that all knowledge is “interested”. He sees political as “involving all relationships within society, as concerned with all the fundamental inequalities, particularly those based in class, race, and gender differences” (p.590). Education is political because it produces and reproduces social and cultural inequalities.

Questions have been raised about the claims that knowledge produced through the positivist or scientific method is neutral, universal, and objective and that this method is the only type of valid knowledge. Pennycook (1989) argues, “that the fundamental challenges being made to the social sciences (questioning the paradigms of

research, the roles of intellectuals, and the nature of the knowledge produced) need to be addressed by applied linguists, since they raise serious doubts about [teaching English to speakers of other languages] TESOL, especially regarding the relationship between the production of academic knowledge and teaching practice... “(including a re-examination of) an understanding of the implications of the current tendency to trivialize content in [second language education] SLE” (p. 595-6).

In examining the concept of Method in second language teaching, he argues that relating the role of teaching theory to more general concerns about the production of interested knowledge, and the politics of language teaching, shows that Method is a prescriptive concept based on a positivist, progressivist and patriarchal understanding of teaching. He argues that new thinking needs to challenge the positivist and progressivist orthodoxies of linguistics and applied linguistics. Pennycook sees Method as a concept that has been imposed upon teachers under the guise of scientific objectivity, but that an analysis of both the history and the present state of language teaching suggests that it has little conceptual validity. In fact, if we study the development of language teaching we can see that there have certainly been shifts, but as Pennycook (1989) points out, “...these tend to be a reordering of the same basic options” (p.600).

As teachers we need to see ourselves “as professionals who are able and willing to reflect upon the ideological principles that inform practice, who connect pedagogical theory and practice to wider social issues, and who work together to share ideas, exercise power over the conditions of labour, and embody in teaching a vision of a better and more humane life “(Giroux & McLaren, 1989, cited in Pennycook, 1989, p.613).

Shor and Freire (1987) discuss the question; do first world students need liberating. They discuss dialogical education, which emphasizes the development of democracy in the school and society, and freedom. They also examine the culture of silence found in schools, an element of this is “the students’ internalizing of passive roles scripted for them in the traditional classroom... After years in dull transfer-of-knowledge classes, in boring courses filled with sedating teacher-talk, many have become non-participants, waiting for the teacher to set the rules and start narrating what to memorize. These students are silent because they no longer expect education to include the joy of learning, moments of passion or inspiration or comedy, or even that education will speak to the real conditions of their lives” (p.122).

They talk about the “symbolic violence” that silences students and is in the order of things in the form of “an environment of rules, curriculum, tests, punishments, requirements, correction, remediation... based on manipulation and subordination” (Shor & Freire, 1987, p.123). They discuss realistic goals for dialogical education, critical curiosity, some political awareness, democratic participation, habits of intellectual scrutiny, and interest in social change. Freire stipulates that a main task of adult education should be to invite people to believe in themselves and in the fact that they have knowledge. First the teacher must listen in order to discover who the students are both culturally and individually. Dialogue then leads to critical thinking and action. Education is a two way process.

While Krashen, Nunan and Foley come exclusively from the study or teaching of second language, Pennycook, a teacher himself, looks at the politics of language teaching, and Freire and Shor are both involved in the broader scope of the politics of education.

Discussion

I believe the differing rationales presented can be synthesized to create a solid foundation for instituting an EFL program with a global perspective.

Using information derived from learner experience and knowledge, can be a starting point for the generation of lots of comprehensible input (CI). As the CI is learner generated, it will be of interest and relevant to the lives of the learners. This input can be used to create activities and tasks that promote self-regulation. The development of the learner as a whole person is an important aspect. A learner-centred environment and a task-based approach are both elements of a holistic approach. They help learners to reflect on where they are in their lives, and to grow in all areas, not just linguistically. Combine this with a global perspective, which relates peace, human rights, developmental and environmental education, to the individual's life and the lives of all others, on a personal, local, national or international level. This creates an avenue for learners to explore the personal, as well as the political side of education, knowledge, and world affairs.

Global education makes content both meaningful and relevant to learners lives. It brings current issues into the classroom, connecting the classroom to the real world. Global education also encourages holistic learning. It calls for the education of the whole person.

I believe what has been presented here will lead to the development of the learner as a whole person, and the continuing evolution of their awareness, concern, knowledge, skills and commitment to being socially responsible world citizens.

Using a global approach in the EFL classroom has become more accepted in the teaching mainstream recently. The following exam-

ples give an indication of the seriousness with which it is being acknowledged.

In March, 1990, TESOL, with a membership of about 16,000 educators, was given official Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) status at the United Nations. To help raise UN-awareness among its members, TESOL arranged an official one day briefing session during the 1991 conference in New York. The session covered disarmament, the environment, human rights, and global development as it relates to refugees, women and education. It also introduced the possible uses of UN educational materials in the classroom.

Both the annual JALT (Japan Association of Language Teachers) conferences, with between 2-3000 educators in attendance, and TESOL conferences, with an attendance of between 5-7000 educators, have solid blocks of presentations on global issues in education.

These events point to a trend towards language education, not just in isolation, but for personal growth and understanding, and for social responsibility. It is a clear indication of the growing importance placed upon the introduction of global education into the English language teaching classroom. Although the importance is being acknowledged, it is still not a reality in the actual classroom, except on a teacher by teacher basis. As a beginning, teachers are working on this change at a personal teaching level, and are connecting with other teachers in an attempt to create change at the macro level.

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