

A Practical Guideline to Teaching Culture in Ethical Framework: An Application of the Socratic Method in Discussion Tasks

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Abstract: This article tries to review the different types of discussions worth using when trying to teach culture aiming at raising cultural awareness of EFL/ESL learners within a moral framework, if topics, questions and answers are thoughtfully, authentically and, in particular, communicatively designed. Also, since the implementation of the present model is assumed to be process oriented, learners have to engage their cognitive abilities as analyzing, synthesizing, generalizing and reasoning, while being interactively involved. Moreover, they can engage their meta-cognitive abilities (Oxford) as planning how to learn and goal setting, if they are oriented and guided properly. Inspired with the Socratic model of genuine, creative, and interactive discussions, English instructors can also benefit from task-based instruction by prompting learners to look through culturally-rich charts and tables and obtain information by observing, comparing, and mediating between cultures then initiate to discuss. Besides, multiple intelligences like verbal, visual, interpersonal, intrapersonal and kinesthetic can be tapped to some extent as well as proposed by the researcher. Therefore, the purpose of the present study is to zero in on the crucial role of discussion and its efficacies in application of some of the mental and strategic procedures mentioned above to teach culture besides improving learner's behavioral patterns which should be an indispensable part of any learning environment to assist learners to discover and construct their own ideas and linguistic patterns.

Key words: discussions, cultural awareness, critical thinking, cognitive and meta-cognitive abilities, multiple intelligences, process oriented, task-based instruction, ethical framework, construct, discover

1. Introduction

According to Socrates: "There is no teaching, only recollecting information. Learning is remembering." Furthermore, one of the serious criticisms in schools is bombarding learners with lots of information which has a little practicality in real life and lacks some useful skills like higher thinking, creativity and meaningful learning. Therefore, the discussion task types are worth trying to teach culture through which many other learning factors are rehearsed (cognitive, meta cognitive, multiple intelligences, and learning strategies). The researcher in this article tries to delineate the importance of training for cultural awareness first, and then she verifies two very pervasive approaches (task-based and sociocultural) and reviews how effective they are in teaching culture over classrooms. Then she introduces different types of discussion followed by an authentic, classroom applicable examples focusing on ethical values to show how splendid and marvelous Socrates was in his ideas and how he

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was close to the present and modern ideas of today. Also, she reiterates why she chose the discussion task types proposed by Socrates as an exhaustive wonderful idea to introduce cultural norms to the language learners and how advantageous it can be over other approaches albeit not infallible. Finally, she summarizes all the outstanding and remarkable skills and strategies rehearsed by discussion task types in Table 2.

In this article, it's been tried to delineate that discussion tasks which take their origins from Socratic Method emphasize the genuine behavioral patterns on the learners' part while they are being engaged in learning language and culture.

Besides, the method introduces both negative and positive sides of cultural points that through learning procedures learners are aided by some moral clues to arrive at more ethical solutions. Moreover, topics, questions and answers should promote further inquiry, generate more meaningful interactions and should not provide learners with straightforward answers (Celik, 2007). Also, efforts have been made by the researcher to create a relationship between Socratic Method and the most modern technological advances like internet, You-tubes, and, power point. Although Socrates belongs to the antiquity, his ideas are still incredible source of many pedagogical inspirations, those matters that instructors are better not to miss in their educational settings.

2. Why Teaching Culture?

Many students in EFL classrooms learn the language without deep understanding of cultural norms, disciplines and behavioral patterns of people who speak that language. According to Brown (2007) the role that cultural awareness plays in language learning is so vital that its ignorance might even be lead to severe panic, hatred, loneliness and homesickness called as "culture shock". Stuart and Nocon (1996) contended that culture isn't an automatic by-product of language learning, but it's rather a demanding cognitive procedure and should be put under the scrutiny in each syllabus design for teaching. Tackling these issues, researchers have offered different ways to introduce cultural norms like culture capsules, culture assimilators, culture clusters and so forth that all have been deemed advisable so far (Omaggio, 2003).

Several large scale studies done by Oller (1977) showed that there exist a very strong relationship between attitudes and the level of obtained language proficiency, and it seems that EFL/ESL learners benefit from positive attitudes and that negative attitudes might be conducive to apathy in interaction. Hence, the result would likely be frustration in learning. Thus, teachers should make any effort to change learner's negative attitudes to positive ones by valuing and proper introducing the foreign languages and cultures. And perhaps for these reasons TESOL has always had as its goal the facilitation of communication among people who do not share the same language and culture (Kramsch, 1993).

3. Review of Some Related Studies

3.1 Teaching Culture in Task-Based Approach

This approach includes focusing on students to participate and cooperate in group discussions and role-playing to develop language learning (Kiet Ho, 2009). Also it advocates active participation of students in meaningful interaction with attention to language form where it's needed (Breen and Candelin, 1980).

Besides, the target language culture and the national culture can be introduced to learners while they are engaged with interaction through information-gap, reasoning- gap and opinion- gap (Freeman, 2000).

Proponents of Communicative Language Teaching advocate the use of authentic materials in task-based communicative activities and recommend that learners be given opportunities to put their language skills to practice in real life situations (Richards & Rogers, 2001). A task-based communicative activity involves students accomplishing the task with the target language, and the focus is not only on the product, but also on the process of learning. Moreover, learners practice their skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) while they are fulfilling a communicative task.

On the other hand, it is important to achieve cross-cultural understanding — awareness of students' own culture along with that of the target language (Tomalin & Stempleski, 1993). Kilickaya (2004) suggested for using authentic materials and cultural content in foreign language teaching too. To raise learners' cultural awareness, many task-based activities are being performed in EFL/ESL settings every day. For example, a task-based cultural activity was done as a research in Taiwan to teach both English and culture. The researchers (Chiung- Chu Huang & Bo-Ting Wang) chose the history of Dragon Boat Festival, when people wrapped rice dumplings in ancient Taiwan. Then the researchers used the power point to introduce this cultural point and conducted cooking class to instruct the recipe of wrapped rice dumplings in English.

While the learners were watching the scenes, they wrapped rice with the ingredients they had been provided with in advance. Also, the instructor explained the ancient cultural point in English and invited the learners to share their related knowledge or experience if they had any. Doing so, learners achieved both, practiced their English and raised their cultural awareness.

3.2 Sociocultural Approach in Teaching Culture

According to sociocultural approach, SLA involves a new reconsideration of mind, language and epistemology, and a recognition that cognition originates in social interaction and is shaped by cultural and sociopolitical processes (Watson & Gegeo, 2004).

In *Sociocultural syllabus design*, learners should develop an understanding of the culture of target language which they can use as a basis for informed comparison with other cultures. Also, cultural awareness is to that extent important that in other syllabus designs like *Language and cultural awareness*, it has been reiterated once more as the following: learners should develop an awareness of language and culture in everyday life so that they can understand the world around them in judicious ways (Carter & Nunan, 2002)

Also, mediation in the process of learning by sociocultural approach has drawn lots of attention to itself. This mediation contains the form of a textbook, visual aids, classroom discourse, interaction, instruction, or other kinds of teacher assistance. Social mediation in the form of interaction can be between a learner and a more capable one like an instructor or a peer. Moreover, teaching in the ZPD and scaffolding (guided assistance) is what teachers provide their learners with to assist them reach at more advanced levels of their learning. In Vygotskyian definition of ZPD, a learner's performance with assistance differs from a learner's performance without it (Lantolf, 2005).

There have also been some criticisms on sociocultural approach on the other hand, for the excessive emphasis on social interaction and ignoring the role of individual learner, learner's motivation, and experiential learning. As we see, although the abovementioned theories and approaches are outstandingly sophisticated and beneficial in their own place, neither of them serves as a mean for good character training. Also, they might focus on the discussion as a task in task-based approach or as a mean for social interaction in sociocultural approach, but neither of them has been as explicit as discussions to teach culture focusing on good character formation as in

Socratic Method. And it is exactly what makes Socratic Method to teaching culture as exclusive as ever possible.

Following are the different types of discussions as an effective way of teaching proposed by Socrates to promote critical thinking and cultural awareness. What has been emphasized is to seize the opportunity to discuss about positive sides of cultural points for ethical and moral instructions in EFL/ESL classrooms.

4. Different Types of Discussion Tasks

4.1 Guided Discussion Tasks

The goal of guided discussion tasks is to give learners a chance to develop critical thinking, clear oral expression, as well as experience in posing questions (Celik, 2007).

Stage 1: The teacher asks a discussion question or proposes a topic to the whole class. Guidelines are given by the teacher. Each learner gives an answer to the original question.

Stage 2: Learners offer responses or questions to each other's contributions.

Stage 3: Learners are left free to present their views or the views of their groups, at the end of the guided discussion task.

Some of these questions can be as follows:

- (1) How do you describe culture?
- (2) What is a culture shock?
- (3) Why do nations need to have culture?
- (4) What are the best/ worst things in your culture?

Look at the following example:

Facilitator (teacher): What is a culture shock?

S1: Means being shocked by a culture.

S2: A bad experience in a culture.

F: How do you help a person with culture shock?

S3: I try to explain about that cultural point.

F: And if you don't know anything about it yourself?

S3: I try to get help.

F: How?

S3: I might go through some books.

F: What about the others? How do you help a person with culture shock?

S4: I can search through the internet. It's both: faster and more complete.

S5: I get help from my parents and ask them for some ideas.

F: Can you give me an example of a culture shock?

S6: Cutting the head of a sheep as the sign of sacrificing in Islamic countries might be shocking for Europeans, or keeping dogs at home as dear as a family member may shock Moslems.

F: Excellent. How do you assist people who are hurt in such these cases?

Sx... .

4.2 Inquiry-based Discussion Tasks

This task helps learners acquire reasoning skills to analyze new information. The beginning stages are like

those in the guided discussion task, but in an inquiry-based discussion task, learners should bring issues from outside the textbook or classroom for discussion. Teachers can include moral tips in their posed questions and topics in a way that learners are provided with two sides of an issue: positive and negative.

Stage 4: The teacher asks a question that needs argumentative reasoning and elaboration.

Stage 5: Learners identify main issues relevant to the discussion. They test the validity of their ideas against their peers' ideas.

Stage 6: Learners synthesize supporting and opposing ideas that are related to the topics and questions.

Questions for this type of discussion can be:

(1) What would you do if you find a 10\$ bill in the street?

(2) What will you do with your Hijab as a Moslem if you travel to a European country?

(3) How do people find their spouses in different cultures? Which of the suggested ways are the best in your point of view?

Look at the following example:

F: You were driving your car in a highway when a man suddenly jumped into the road and you ran him over.

What would you do in such a case?

S1: I'd continue driving?

S2: Why?

S1: Because no one saw me.

S3: I'd stop to help, and would take him to the hospital if he needed.

F: And would you tell it were your fault?

S3: yes.

F: But police would arrest you.

S3: I did wrong and I had to pay for it.

F: Claps.....

4.3 Reflective Discussion Tasks

Teachers use this task to help learners become more aware of their learning process and to enable them to draw conclusions while they are learning language.

Stage 7: The teacher requires learners prepare a self-analysis of their contribution to the discussion process.

Stage 8: Learners analyze "how they learn" and think about what would help them be more effective in future discussions. They are advised to respond to introspective questions that help them to think about conditions that facilitated or hindered their learning processes.

Some of the related questions are:

When do you usually learn more and better?

(1) When my classmates accept or confirm my ideas.

(2) When my classmates reject or contradict my ideas.

(3) When the teacher does/doesn't interrupt me.

(4) When I'm given some time to reflect on the topic or question.

(5) When I have some information about the topic in advance.

4.4 Exploratory Discussion Task

This task assists learners to arrive at alternative explanations in a variety of real-world topics. Learners are

required to examine their personal opinions, assumptions and then suggest alternatives to these assumptions.

Stage 9: The teacher asks a real-world problem.

Stage 10: Learners assess their beliefs or opinions and evaluate their alternatives. Teacher might ask learners take a glance at the following table and try to compare and contrast the given information. As an extra activity and more rehearsal, learners can add their own cultural points for more comparison to have further opportunities to interact. Besides, to train moral patterns, instructors can emphasize on more valuable cultural points.

Table 1 Cultural Norms in Table Manners for Dinner in Britain and Vietnam (Kramsch, 1993)

Table manners in Britain	Table manners in Vietnam
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family style • Wait until the host starts eating when you are a guest • Ask another person to pass the food 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serving style • The host invites everybody to start eating • The host/hostess offers to serve the food for the guests

5. Discussion

The lack of certain moral patterns seems apparent in today's life, thus any opportunity can be seized to expose learners to genuine and deserved behavioral patterns. Dr. Le Quy Duc (2009) suggested that overseas Vietnamese learn several sets of common values such as liberty, democracy, solidarity, sympathy, equality, mutual benefit, respect and environmental protection which could be shared with other communities and nations.

On the other hand, since all the human beings need to act on the world around them within a moral framework, language and culture instructors may benefit any opportunity to integrate language and culture teaching with moral character education in their classroom talk.

Socratic Method which was ubiquitous centuries ago is still inspiring and can be considered as a relation to the *integrative models of moral character education* (Narvaez, 2006). Integrative models of moral character education incorporate virtue ethics and moral reasoning exercises within a caring environment. They (ethical skills) are as follows:

- Taking the perspective of others
- Responding to diversity
- Reasoning critically and ethically
- Unity
- Respecting others' beliefs
- Democracy and seeking freedom

Accordingly, applying Socratic Method in an ethical framework which embraces some outstanding skills and strategies in EFL/ESL interactive environment can be of great help and appreciation.

Taking a look at the following chart and examples, one might figure out those precious training trends as can be applied by the learner to learn both: a behavioral socio-cultural pattern and a foreign or second language.

The chart shows the different valuable skills and strategies that a learner might apply through the stages of language and culture learning practiced with Socratic Method. By thoughtful implementation of the stages of Socratic Method and discussion tasks to teach culture, instructors can assist learners to arrive at some certain level of autonomy and relying on self since they are exposed to both negative and positive sides of cultural points; therefore, it lies to the learners' choice to select the more valuable ethical patterns with indirect encouragements of instructors. Also, learners become enabled to construct their own meaning through social interaction and discovery learning (Kaufman, 2004).

Table 2 Skills And Strategies Practiced to Teach Culture in Ethical Framework

Rehearsed skills and strategies	Examples in discussion task types
Critical & creative thinking	(a & b)
Multiple intelligences	Verbal & logical (a & b), visual (d), Interpersonal (a, b & d), intrapersonal (c & d)
Meta- cognitive abilities	Self assessment, planning & goal setting in type (c)
Cognitive abilities	Analyzing, synthesizing, using resources to ask & answer the questions, reasoning, & making inferences, in all types
Self- autonomy & relying on self	all types & type (c) specifically
Pragmatic competence	All types
Good character formation	(a, b, & d)
Task-based & discovery learning, constructivism	All types

As we all know, the optimal consequences of any method depends on the knowledge and experience of teachers. Here, there are some tips to help instructors to accomplish the Method to the best advantage.

5.1 Facilitating a Socratic Lesson

- Give something of yourself, share something personal. Don't just take.
- Let the students know you don't have all the answers- that you too, have fears and insecurities.
- Take a nonjudgmental attitude to aid learners feel safe in expressing their ideas.
- Listen.
- Be honest with the students.
- Take the students seriously and show respect for their thoughts and opinions. When necessary, disagree respectfully. Don't be authoritative in making final decision (Conlon, 2005).
- Adjust topics for age.
- Teach for good character.
- Control the probable turmoil or hostility which might be the result of diversity of ideas in discussions (Elkind & Sweet, 1997).

5.2 Conclusion and Trends for Further Research

Implementing the extra- ordinary Socratic Method, instructors can do both, teaching language and culture in ethical framework. They can engage EFL/ESL learners in hypothetical situations where learners are assisted with moral guidelines to choose more ethical solutions in their problem- solving (Elkind & Sweet).

In fact, discussions should be in a way that learners are exposed to both positive and negative sides of cultural points and learners are helped to arrive at positive sides with the teacher's guidelines. Living in today modern world, teachers and learners can benefit the technological advances like internet and You-tube, while sticking to the Socratic Method discussion tasks as their original reference.

The marvels of the present study is revealed when cultural awareness is raised through the processes of cognitive, meta-cognitive and task-based learning strategies while being exposed to ethical issues of cultural points, through which the researcher hopes that learners accomplish some degrees of Constructivism and Discovery learning (Vygotsky, 1978; Kaufman, 2004) and become competent enough to construct and discover their own creative concepts of meaningful linguistic patterns through social interactions.

Two very pervasive approaches (task-based & sociocultural) were compared to underline the reasons why the Socratic Method was depicted as an exhaustive method to teach culture, and it was implied that it was exhaustive enough to bear the characteristics of all those approaches; furthermore, Socrates was highly persistent to educate

for more decent character.

Also, some tips were listed to facilitate the course syllabus based on Socratic Method discussions. Cognitive, meta-cognitive, multiple intelligences were also tackled through discussion tasks. The researcher on the other hand, tried to look at the topic from many aspects to reach learners at autonomy and self assessment. McNamara (2001) stated that self assessment encourages learner's autonomy and leads to positive wash back. The authenticity of the topics of discussions was considered so that learners become ready for real life skills. Moreover, since every human being needs to become familiar with some levels of moralities, discussion topics included ethics in cultures as many as possible.

The topics in discussions can be introduced through You-tubes, tablets and video-projection to be more interesting for learners and to tap learners' visual intelligence. Also, easier topics can be designed for lower levels and younger students. Moreover, to increase more cultural awareness, instructors can take trips to the target language countries to be trained in real situations instead of just reading books and having distance education. Also, researchers might implement the method with exclusive EFL learners in future, because the divergent cultural backgrounds in the same learning situation like classroom can be fantastic sources of topics for discussion for culture training. And in an EFL context, learners usually come from different cultural backgrounds.

Seemingly, these days' teachers can't confine themselves behind classroom walls without educating their pupils regarding their morals and social behaviors. Indeed, classrooms are best places to commence ethical issues with.

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