

Chapter 22

Introducing an Identity Based Model of Teaching and Facilitating Intercultural Communication: A Learner Centered Approach

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ABSTRACT

The chapter discusses a novel learner centered approach to teaching and facilitating intercultural communication drawing on post-structuralist identity research and using English as a lingua franca in a multicultural classroom. The 14 participants came from five countries, and six different cultures were scrutinized drawing on Moran's framework to teach culture. Data were collected via questionnaires completed by students preceding and following culture presentations, the course syllabus, and the teacher's journal. The findings of the mixed methods classroom research project led to the development of an identity based model of teaching and facilitating intercultural communication. Encouraging students to voice their various identities triggered positive psychological responses, which, in turn, facilitated their investment in their identities via learning. The process resulted in more intercultural exchanges and cross-cultural learning that acted on students' identities and changed their attitudes towards new cultures favorably.

INTRODUCTION

In culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms where students come from various linguacultural backgrounds, teachers can exploit linguistic and cultural learning opportunities while they also face challenges due to learners' linguistic, cultural, and psychological differences that may lead to communication

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breakdowns, misunderstandings, and mismatched expectations. Learners' individual differences (IDs), describing their different psychological attributes, make teaching a process of constant adaptation to learners' different needs. Therefore, teaching monolingual learners already requires teachers to employ versatile teaching methods and techniques to ensure equal learning opportunities for learners with different psychological features. This is further complicated when instruction takes place in a second language (L2) that is different from learners' mother tongue (L1). In response to second language acquisition (SLA), learners inwardly generated identity associated with the L2 shapes their linguistic and cultural identities, since language and culture are interwoven in SLA (Fekete, 2020a, 2020b; Kramsch 1998). In addition to using the L2 in the classroom, learners may come from different countries speaking diverse mother tongues, which makes the L2 classroom a truly multilingual and multicultural place presenting opportunities and challenges to teachers and learners alike.

The chapter presents an innovative mixed methods classroom research study examining how fostering learners' various identities in a multilingual and multicultural classroom can facilitate intercultural communication and cultural learning. The chapter takes a novel research approach by providing a link between holistic identity research and intercultural communication (IC). On the one hand, IC in education is usually studied in relation to intercultural communicative competence (ICC) (Byram, 2008; Dombi, 2021; Wagner & Byram, 2017), pragmatics (Dombi, 2020; Romero-Trillo, 2019), English as a lingua franca (ELF) (Gu et al., 2014; House, 2022), and individual differences (Dombi, 2021). On the other hand, students' attitudes in the process of SLA are usually addressed by research into motivation. For example, attitudes towards the L2 culture are embedded in the construct of integrative motivation (Gardner, 1985), while attitudes towards making new friends or pursuing a hobby via the L2, or travelling the world are related to instrumental motivation (Gardner, 2006) and international posture (Yashima, 2009). However, these approaches tend to focus on certain learner characteristics and learner processes in isolation. By contrast, the post-structuralist approach to identity research (Kramsch, 2009; Norton, 2013; Fekete, 2020b) examines language learners and their learning processes holistically, thus scrutinizing phenomena in their complexity and entirety. Post-structuralist research into identity and SLA has addressed learners' emotional responses to SLA (Fekete, 2020b; Kramsch, 2009), their narrative and identity construction (Fekete, 2016, 2018, 2020b; Williams, 2020), the ecological perspectives of SLA (Fekete, 2020a; Kramsch, 2002), the sociological aspects of SLA and identity (see investment: Norton, 2013), multilingualism and agency (Pavlenko, 2011, 2013), gender issues in the classroom (Pavlenko, 2004; Pavlenko & Piller, 2007), and English learners' attitudes towards speaking ELF or English as a foreign language (EFL) (Fekete, 2018). With English becoming a lingua franca (LF), learners' attitudes towards and preferences for different English varieties and accents (Fekete, 2014; Pickering, 2006; Pilus, 2013) and English teachers' (Fekete, 2016; Jenkins, 2007) and learners' (Fekete, 2018) attitudes towards speaking ELF or ELF have come to the fore. However, the holistic post-structuralist approach has not been employed to date to facilitate intercultural communication and cultural learning in the classroom.

Therefore, the chapter fills two gaps in the fields of applied linguistics and education. First, despite its applicability, post-structuralism is not a widely used approach in applied linguistics and education, and identity research is still a marginal scope of both fields compared to widely researched topics such as motivation, cognition, language testing, corpus linguistics, or discourse analysis. Second, although fostering learners' identities in the classroom has been found conducive to facilitating higher language attainment (Norton, 2013), this approach has not been employed to facilitate intercultural communication and cultural learning in the classroom.

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