Teaching Culture Using Authentic Video and Computer-Mediated Communication

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The currently dominant conceptual framework on culture learning and teaching are still within the traditional dichotomy between “Big C” and “little c” cultures with the recognition of culture merely as a fifth skill. This article argues for a new interpretation of culture which potentially challenges traditional views of culture and promotes critical perspectives such as meaning-making, multiple perspectives, transaction, and dialogue.

It then proposes a pedagogical framework to restructure curriculum around this new interpretation using authentic video and computer-mediated communication (CMC). Finally, a classroom investigation of a culture project that was designed on the basis of alternative theoretical perspectives and that employed authentic video and CMC as instructional strategies for fostering cultural awareness will be presented in order to illustrate how the proposed framework can be put into practice.

Key words: teaching culture, authentic video, computer-mediated communication

I. Introduction

English language teaching professionals have reached consensus that culture needs to be an integral part of English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching at college-level English programs. Formerly thought of as the fifth language skill (Damen, 1987), culture was once viewed as information conveyed by the textbook or EFL teachers. However, as the current view begins to define language learning as social practice, there is a renewed recognition that culture should become the core of EFL
instruction (Hinkel, 1999; Kramsch, 1993, 1998). The positioning of culture at the core of EFL study has led various researchers to propose an integrated model of language and culture accepting the notion that culture learning is "a dynamic, developmental, and ongoing process which engages the learner cognitively, behaviorally, and affectively" (Paige, Jorstad, Siaya, Klein, & Colby, 2000, p. 50). It follows that learning a language in isolation of its cultural roots prevents one from becoming socialized into its contextual use. Knowledge of linguistic structure alone does not carry with it any special insight into the political, social, religious, or economic system. As Seelye (1994) rightly points out, "the study of language cannot be divorced from the study of culture, and vice-versa" (p. 22).

From this perspective, the culture associated with a language cannot be learned in a few lessons about celebrations, folk songs, or costumes of the area in which the language is spoken or written. The study of culture must be an integral part of the foreign language study itself if students are to derive lasting benefits from their foreign language learning experience (Omaggio, 1986). Therefore, a foreign language course which disregards culture or addresses culture only in a few lessons will produce students who may know how to use the correct linguistic forms of the language or have discrete sets of cultural facts and behaviors but such a course tends to be sterile (Morain, 1997).

For EFL students in Korea, this suggests that in learning to perform appropriately in English, they should not stop at the cultural items or observable behaviors of the people in a target culture. It is more important for them to extend their attention beyond these surface phenomena to uncover the hidden significances embedded in the meaning systems of the target culture. In other words, not only should students know the "what" and "how" about a culture, but also the "why." In fact, it is the "why" that "enriches and sustains the memory about a second culture accumulated in the learning process" (Tang, 2006, p. 89). Only when the knowledge of "what" is reinforced by the knowledge of "why" can the EFL learners perform confidently and successfully in English.