

Cultivation of Intercultural Communication Competence via College English Extra-Curriculum—Taking Shakespeare Drama Club of USST as an Example

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Modern technology has exerted great influence on the development of transportation and communication systems, which further accelerates the intercultural contact between countries. Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC) prepares the foundation for and determines the efficiency of foreign exchange and cooperation. In order to improve the ICC of university students, most colleges and universities have established College English Extra-Curriculum. By taking the Shakespeare Drama Club of USST as an example, this paper aims at exploring the significance and efficiency of the College English Extra-Curriculum in improving the ICC of English majors, which may provide reference for foreign language teachers in cultivating students' intercultural competence.

Keywords: intercultural communication, Intercultural Communication Competence, College English Extra-Curriculum, Shakespeare Drama Club of USST

Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC) and College English Extra-Curriculum

The study on ICC originated from the United States around 1960s. Deardorff (2004) defined ICC as “the ability to empower individuals to be effective and communicative in intercultural contexts based on the intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes of an individual” (p. 194). If the individual is ready to participate in intercultural communication, and better adapt to the global multi-polarization, he must develop multicultural awareness and form an open and inclusive attitude. The development of technology has facilitated and accelerated the present intercultural communication between countries. Lazar (2012) asserted that “rapid and important relations have developed between intercultural communication and social media with globalization” (pp. 291-294). With globalization becoming an irreversible trend, intercultural communication is becoming evitable and the ICC, which determines the quality and efficiency of intercultural communication, is of increasing significance.

College English Extra-Curriculum is designed as the supplement to the traditional English teaching curriculum. Colleges or teachers, on the basis of the completion of in-class teaching requirements, design and lead students to carry out various meaningful practical activities. Based on the individual difference of students, College English Extra-Curriculum, which is students-centered, adopts varied teaching methods and syllabus in different grades, and can satisfy the diversified practical needs of students who possess different talent. As an

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integral part of the whole College English teaching, it is characterized as being “rich, flexible, open, practical, interactive, and creative”.

Compared with traditional College English teaching, which is always restricted by textbooks and educational syllabuses, the teaching methods of College English Extra-Curriculum are more flexible. Traditional teaching methods are that students sit in the classroom and focus on textbooks and lectures, whereas in the College English Extra-Curriculum, the teacher’s job is to help students discover, explore, and grapple with knowledge and skills. Task-based learning method and communicative approach are emphasized for improving students’ ICC.

Simultaneously, the teaching contents of College English Extra-Curriculum are richer and more colorful than the traditional one, including English Corner, Drama Festival, and various English Competitions, such as English Speech Contest or English Writing Competition. All of them focus on learner-centered instruction. The construction of knowledge in which students engage is best completed through the use of active learning strategies which are advocated in College English Extra-Curriculum (e.g., problem-based learning, simulation, think-pair-share). The main learners in the class are students themselves and they can take their initiative to participate in the teaching activities consistent with their interests and cognitive level.

College English Extra-Curriculum provides students with an immersive language environment to improve their ICC. It helps them establish the habit of using their second language in daily lives, deepens their understanding of language acquisition in listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and develops the ability to think authentically in English.

The Cultivation of ICC and Shakespeare Drama Club

The Brief Introduction of Shakespeare Drama Club of University of Shanghai for Science and Technology

Shakespeare Drama Club of University of Shanghai for Science and Technology (Shakespeare Drama Club for short), founded in 2019, is one of the various forms of College English Extra-Curriculum. Shakespeare Drama Club has more than 40 members and eight advisers. It carries out the ideological and political construction of the curriculum with the aim of implementing comprehensive education based on English Literature course. Every year, Shakespeare Drama Club selects two to three classic Shakespeare plays or modern Western drama works. After a script is selected, students audition for specific roles, such as the cast members, who are the performers of the show or the crew, who are responsible for staging, sound, lights, video, and editing. Shakespeare Drama Club often invites former members with performance experience to train the new members. At the same time, experienced students will be encouraged to give lectures on stage design, and activities, such as group viewing will be held regularly for students to communicate and analyze the art of the stage design in the drama.

The Development of ICC Through Shakespeare Drama Club

Shakespeare Drama Club, as one form of College English Extra-Curriculum, can help to cultivate students’ intercultural communicative competence from the following five aspects.

Improving linguistic competence. Hymes (1974) defined communicative competence not only as an inherent grammatical competence, but also as the ability to use grammatical competence in a variety of communicative situations. In Shakespeare Drama Club, students can improve their linguistic competence through language practice. By reading, analyzing, and discussing the script with their partners, students can have a better

command of vocabulary, the rules of word formation, pronunciation, spelling, and sentence formation. Dramatic productions take time, which increases the effect of being engaged and improving linguistic competence in interactive forms.

Understanding culture differences deeper. Shakespeare Drama Club provides a platform for students to embrace and appreciate cultural diversities. How to recreate the forest setting in *As You Like It* through action on a simple stage? How does Lady Macbeth balance “femininity” with “brutal ambition”? From the overall presentation to repeated rehearsals of expressions, actions, and lines, teachers and students ponder over together, looking for sparks in the collision of Chinese and Western cultural exchanges. In the process of rewriting the script and searching and verifying the specific Western culture involved in the script, students can have a profound understanding of differences between Chinese and Western culture through cooperation with others, which is conducive to being familiar with the Western thinking mode and values. Such a good language exchange atmosphere not only helps students achieve culture mutual learning in cross-cultural communication, but also enables them to enhance cultural appreciation and artistic aesthetic ability through drama performances and to improve their comprehensive cultural literacy.

Developing comprehensive ability. Shakespeare Drama Club aims at not only developing language learners’ conversational proficiency, but also providing them with opportunities to gain confidence and teamwork skills. For example, students complete a mix of individual and group ideas during the rehearsal, contributing to their teamwork abilities. The feedback phase also offers a unique opportunity for students to reflect on others’ work constructively, alongside strengthening their collaboration and communication. Better still, acting provides students with an opportunity to develop empathy and imagination. Through a deep understanding of their characters—both their motivations and emotions—they are able to transform their thinking.

Developing multiple intelligence. Shakespeare Drama Club pays attention to the diversity of teaching forms, and encourages students to promote the development of multiple intelligences through communicating, exploring, creating, imagining, solving unpredictable situations, and thinking out of the box. Multiple intelligences (MI), an area of educational psychology, was introduced by Howard Gardner in 1983. The American educational psychologist introduced nine intelligences: “verbal-linguistic, logical-mathematical, musical, visual-spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalist, and existential” (Gardner, 1999, p. 116). The activities mainly promote the development of students’ verbal-linguistic intelligence and interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence, which not only strengthens students’ communication skills, leadership skills, and coordination skills, but also helps students realize their inner hobbies, emotions, and self-esteem, and cultivate their abilities to think independently.

Enhancing students’ constructive learning ability. Shakespeare Drama Club serves as a practical tool to cultivate students’ constructive learning ability. Constructive Learning Theory is the interpretation through different structures (Garmston & Wellman, 1994, p. 84). Under this notion, knowledge is acquired by means of meaning construction with the help of teachers and learning partners in the process of acquiring knowledge in a certain context, i.e., social and cultural background. In Constructive Learning Theory, the subject of cognition is the student who actively constructs the sense of knowledge while instructors act like facilitators or organizers who just help and promote the construction. Shakespeare Drama Club adheres to the principle of “students are the center of learning”, while teachers should act as organizers, facilitators, and evaluators to create certain situations to stimulate students’ interest and motivation. From the analysis of drama works, role assignment, rehearsals, to designing costumes and props, students are self-directed. As the organizers, facilitators, and

evaluators, teachers guide the students to carry forward the positive drama culture, encourage the students to rehearse independently, and to make PPT and music for their own works. After watching the rehearsal process, teachers will make detailed comments on each group's performances, and lead the students to make reflections.

Conclusions

With the rapid development of economy, the communication and exchange between countries are gradually deepening. College English Extra-Curriculum, as an effective complement to traditional teaching, contributes a lot to improving ICC. Focusing on students-centered instruction, the immersive language environment enhances students' intercultural sensitivity and intercultural competence in the aspects of attitudes, skills, and knowledge.

Inspired by the benefits, Shakespeare Drama Club of USST, one form of College English Extra-Curriculum, follows the principles of Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences and Constructive Learning Theory. Taking part in the club is conducive to improving students' linguistic competence, cultivating deeper understanding of culture differences, developing comprehensive ability and multiple intelligence, and enhancing students' constructive learning ability.

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