

Teaching american civilisation to algerian students

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The purpose of the paper is to argue about the role of the teacher as an agent of transmission of a foreign culture to native students. The course of US civilisation emphasises the institutionalised aspect of American culture as geography, history and political institutions. This is done at the expense of another component of culture, the way and style of life of ordinary Americans.

The purpose of this paper is to speak about my experience as a teacher in American civilisation, to justify the need for a pluri-disciplinary approach, and the combination of socio-linguistics to reach the learners' motivation and understanding. The course in American civilisation aims at identifying the cultural characteristics inherent to the behaviour of the American community. The teaching of American civilisation equals a culture course which is addressed to Algerian students, particularly ignorant of or with a very limited knowledge of a foreign western culture. What is required is an understanding of patterns of thinking, values and assumptions which underlie the value systems and attitudes of members of a society. To be more specific, the teaching of such a module implies a focus on the functioning of institutions (family, groups, legal, religious and political institutions).

Aims of teaching civilisation to algerian students

The aims are diverse and change according to the context of teaching and learning. This module seems to be relevant to the context of language as a foreign language and may be used as a basis for developing a culture syllabus.

1. To understand the forms of organisations, concepts, and pattern of behaviour of the target culture community.
2. To understand institutional and individual aspects of the culture.
3. To acquire enough knowledge and understanding of the target culture with the purpose of developing a tolerant attitude.
4. To develop awareness of the differences and similarities existing between cultures and their implications.
5. To use one's knowledge and understanding of the target culture to value our own culture.

6. To use cultural awareness as a fostering factor for developing communicative competence in the target culture.

Syllabus content of the course

The content of the syllabus is based on the identification, and the analysis of forms of the cultural patterns, and their distributions. (The sources of information of the course: Anthropological and cultural studies of the target culture, history ...)

It is an integrated culture course which includes units introducing the culture of the community of the target culture (history, geography, political, religious educational and social institutions as T Unions), as well as units designed to provide the learners with information and opportunities to understand and experience the target culture.

The teaching of American civilisation is based on American reality which has diverse and interrelated aspects, as the elements that constitute culture. It is pluridisciplinary, and concerns different disciplines.

The teaching of Am civilisation to foreign students through the English medium can result in a failure which is due to the lack of motivation and misunderstanding. To get the insight into the lifestyle, values and beliefs of the American people, our students necessarily have to understand values and political traditions which are not theirs. If the teaching approach is not adequate or if it is far from the students' reality, the course will be too abstract and incomprehensible, even when the students know some aspects of US culture through films and magazines, and nowadays internet.

The teacher's responsibility is two-fold. He has to reach two goals. The first is educational and attitudinal since it opens the students to another culture. The second is that it makes the learning of language possible through the concrete themes. We can say that the motivation of students and their attitudes towards US culture is the teacher's responsibility.

The teacher can motivate the students by bringing US culture close to the student's own reality. The comparison of similar situations will prevent from misunderstanding, will develop awareness, and will get good results in the transmission of the message. In fact, the teacher plays the role of mediator between US culture and the Algerian students.

The pedagogical Techniques

These techniques have been selected and experienced in my class on the basis of effectiveness and potential of providing the learners with opportu-

nity of observing, understanding, and experiencing items of the target culture. Another advantage of these techniques is likely to help students develop awareness as a component of communicative competence.

1. **The lecture-discussion:** students are provided with an opportunity to discuss and understand better the information presented.
2. **The comparison technique** a way of fostering learners' awareness of the differences between the target culture and his/her culture.
3. **Stimulation and problem-solving:** a communicative activity which is often used in the class to get students to consider their own values and attitudes in relation to those prevailing in the target culture.

Implications

The implications of a civilisation course entail a number of certain repercussions for such a course to be effective. They are:

1. The need for teachers to provide motivation for learning about the target culture, but also aware of the risks that a prejudiced approach may cause. The teacher is in a position to understand and anticipate the reactions and prejudices of his/her students.
2. An identification of specific goals within the set of aims for the whole course, with the purpose of working towards the development of the learners' competence.