Creating an Inclusive Syllabus to Engage International Students and Local Students

CELEBRATION OF EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH + CREATIVE ACTIVITY 2021

Alyssa Schroekenthaler, Xiaoxue Liu, Yutong Yin, Advisor: Dr. Kaishan Kong | Department of Languages

The generous support for the project came from the Summer Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) Grant Program, funded by Blugold Commitment Differential Tuition

INTRODUCTION
As study abroad programs increase in popularity, the population of foreign exchange students increases across universities around the world. The main topic of this research project is peer-scaffolding in Chinese-English language learning. We looked at interview feedback from domestic and international students alike taking the Chinese language class to observe common benefits and challenges of learning and working together. This study was informed through the Sociocultural theories (Vygotsky, 1978), Language-Related Episodes (Ellis & Rod, 2009) and the Intercultural Communicative Competence (Davidsdottir, 2006).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS
- In what way(s) does tandem learning help with students’ language improvement?
- In what way(s) does tandem learning help students deepen their cultural knowledge?
- What are essential and applicable elements in a syllabus to create an inclusive and diverse learning environment?

METHODS
The study was conducted at the University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire in the Chinese language classes. Data was collected from interviews ranging from interaction between American students, international students from China, and a combination of both. Questions mainly focused on the participants’ feedback and reflection on classroom tactics and environment.

Hearing from participants allowed us to draw connections to the commonalities among them. The mutual views they have on how peer-scaffolding functioned in the classroom helped us find common themes and provide suggestions to improving classroom learning environment. Gathering intel from students provides valuable information for improvement since they are the ones obtaining the education.

FINDINGS

ENHANCE & RECALL KNOWLEDGE
Learning based on existing knowledge can improve students’ language proficiency. First, this is prominent to developing complexity. Secondly, it helps learners consolidate their memories, whether they are at higher or lower levels. However, this also contains some flaws because learners might not always be completely accurate in their memory.

LEVELS OF CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK
Providing peer corrective feedback has advantages and limitations. The partner with more advanced Chinese can inspire the other or teach the other a new way to express something. In this way, students can remember knowledge points more clearly. However, not all corrective feedback provided by partners is necessarily correct. This could be due to limited knowledge or mistranslation.

TIME EFFICIENCY
Time efficiency has its advantages and disadvantages. Each student has their own schedule which can make it difficult to find mutual times to work together. However, once a time is established, students found working with partners/in groups beneficial to time efficiency by easing the workload and distributing parts of the assignment or project equally.

EXPLORE NEW KNOWLEDGE
Peer learning can help students discover things they did not know before. When a native speaker and a learner are grouped together, the native speaker often teaches the learners some more current ways to express, which also helps the learner broaden her/his horizon. Students may also exchange cultural knowledge as well.

SUGGESTIONS FOR PROFessORS
- Provide reliable sources of information.
- Give timely feedbacks.
- Assign students to the ones they are more familiar with.
- Motivate students with culture-based activities.
- Guidance on giving feedbacks.
- Engage international students by asking for feedbacks/opinions.
- Tandem learning strengthens the bond in the long-term.

SIGNIFICANCES
- Benefits:
  - Memory and knowledge is deepened
  - Friendship between partners is developed
  - Culture exchange between native speakers and language learners has achieved
  - An unforgettable college experience by receiving the chance to share each other’s cultures and make friends with students from another country.
- Significance for campus:
  - Our campus is inclusive towards all cultures and every student is valued here
  - Suggestions:
    - Based on input from active college students
    - Professors could implicate the suggestions in their own classrooms
  - For us as students:
    - This research allowed us to practice for future opportunities
    - We gained valuable knowledge and skills that will be able to carry with us as we continue our studies

CONTACT INFORMATION
To find out more about our research, contact us via email at: aschroeckent@wisc.edu
yiny5229@uwec.edu
liux1563@uwec.edu

We thank the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs for supporting this research, and Learning & Technology Services for printing this poster.