

A Study on the Teaching Model of Cross Culture and Speculation on EFL Writing

Yan Yuan*, Jiong Ren, and Fang Lyu

Abstract—Under the background of post critical pedagogy, teachers should pay attachment to the awakening of students’ self-identity consciousness and the cultivation of critical thinking skills. The teaching model of writing course adopted by the author is as follows: firstly, the writing course is equipped with a dedicated reading manual. It is compiled to establish cultural reading materials which include 12 theme reading passages to introduce Chinese and American culture and 12 writing sharing to promote identity thinking based on the relevant theories of Constructivism and Output Hypothesis by using the Flesch Kincaid Readability Test. The teaching process emphasizes the integration of students’ vertical and horizontal knowledge. Referring to the Knowledge Transformation Model of Writing proposed by Bereiter and Scardamalia, the teaching model vertically emphasizes the integration of pre-class cultural reading, in-class skill training, and post-class thinking reinforcement; it horizontally emphasizes on the integration with reading courses, cultural courses, and speculative courses. Overall, the model stresses the cultivation of cross-cultural communication skills. It emphasizes understanding oneself and the other and stimulates students’ writing interest in cultural reading; it emphasizes that the other is for my own use and enrich students’ cultural illustrations in skill training; it emphasizes that I see the world and reflect on my own learning, life, and social hotspots in theme writing. In short, the author actively explores “playing” with learning, “stealing” with learning, and “using” in learning.

Index Terms—Action research, cross-cultural mode, speculation, teaching EFL writing

I. INTRODUCTION

There has been a large amount of research on teaching EFL writing both domestically and internationally, such as the Product Approach based on behaviorist psychology and Process Approach based on cognitive psychology. In addition, the Content-based Instruction advocated by Jodi and Tucker and the Genre Approach proposed by the “Sydney School” abroad [1] have reached a considerable scale from empirical research to theoretical analysis, and the research conclusions have also been recognized and applied in the linguistic field. However, in order to create a perfect work, writers should establish a comprehensive foundation of language knowledge and accumulate and enrich relevant knowledge related to different cultural backgrounds through various channels. He *et al.* [2] pointed out in *Several Opinions on the Reform of Undergraduate Foreign Language Education* that “language skill training often emphasizes imitation and memory, but competence, problem analysis competence, and

independent insight competence.” What’s more, professional education neglects the cultivation of students’ thinking competence, innovation under the background of post-critical pedagogy not only emphasizes students’ acquisition of static linguistic knowledge such as sentence patterns, paragraphs and chapters, but also attaches importance to the cultivation of students’ awareness of self-identity and critical thinking skills [3–6]. As an output skill course, the teaching of basic EFL writing is very important for improving students’ cultural awareness and communication skills [8]. As a result, the key problem in teaching EFL writing is how to cultivate students’ comprehensive competence through the single writing course which takes writing skills as the core of training, and meanwhile runs through reading and text analysis, planning and critical thinking, communication and cross-cultural awareness (see in Fig. 1). In this paper, the author tries to carry out action research on the teaching model of cross culture and speculation on EFL writing. It focuses on the necessity of teaching reform of EFL writing, the emphases of teaching EFL writing and the core of action research. They are explained from three aspects: trend and mend in EFL writing, self and world in cross-cultural consciousness, copy and steal in action research.

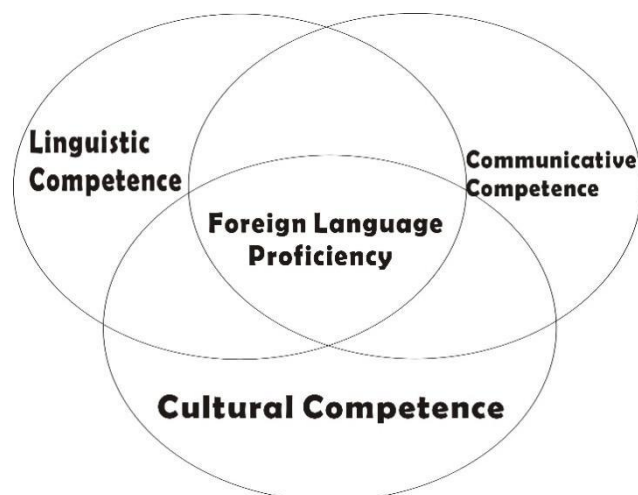


Fig. 1. Model of EFL writing learning.

II. CURRENT SITUATION

A. Favorable Objective and Subjective Factors for Success in Teaching EFL Writing (Trend and Mend)

English Professional Teaching Syllabus [5] emphasizes the cultivation of students’ cross-cultural communication competence, while Post-critical Education [9] also emphasizes the awakening of students’ self-awareness and their ability to critically understand society. However, there is a separation of reading, writing, and thinking in present

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teaching of EFL writing because traditional writing class ignores the fact that both linguistic and nonlinguistic factors can affect English writing proficiency. Accordingly, simply emphasizing language skill training often leads to the deviated teaching focus on imitating memory, while neglecting the cultivation of students' thinking competence, innovative competence, problem-solving competence and independent insight competence. Among them cultural background knowledge is the most difficult obstacle for writers to overcome. In fact, students tend to use too many template sentences in their writing, resulting in vague content and low scores in various national exams. This reflects a weakening of students' self-awareness and critical spirit in writing tests. When there is a contradiction between the guiding spirit of cross-cultural communication and the teaching status of mechanical writing, experts in diverse fields try to innovate writing teaching from various aspects, such as teaching process, cultural reading, read-write relations and action research [10, 11].

When the guiding principle of EFL writing teaching is disconnected from the current teaching situation, the author makes a supplement (MEND) inspired by scholars. She tries to integrate cultural reading, reading to promote writing and action research in order to construct a teaching model of cross-culture and speculation in EFL writing that focuses on writing skills, and takes critical thinking as a continuation from the viewpoint of interest. To be exact, the author explores how to take writing skills as the core of cultivation, run through reading and discourse analysis, conception and critical thinking, communication and cross-cultural awareness, and thereby complete the cultivation of students' comprehensive ability by single disciplinary education.

B. Awakening and Criticism of Cross-Cultural Awareness (Self and World)

As shown in the Foreign Language Teaching Syllabus released in the United States in 1996, language training includes three aspects: cultural awareness, language competence and communication skills. The cross-cultural teaching model of EFL writing should serve three functions: stimulating cultural interest, improving writing skills, and strengthening critical awareness.

Among them, cross-cultural awareness includes awakening of cultural awareness and dialogical relations. Benesch [9] emphasized that the awakening of cultural consciousness is a re-understanding of personal identity and view the world more objectively. Martin-Baro [4] proposed that critical attitude is the attitude of individuals in interacting with society, and communicating with the world on equal terms. The core of cross-cultural awareness lies in individual consciousness (SELF) and equal interaction with society (WORLD). Teaching EFL writing should use cultural reading to help students awaken their personal cultural identity, and thus interact critically in writing form on equal terms. In this paper, the author attempts to explore the compiling of cultural reading materials and the reform of writing teaching mode.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Imitation and Integration in Action Research

The author compiles cultural reading materials on the basis of pilot research and conducts action research on SL writing guided by cultural reading in order to explore the cross-cultural and speculative teaching model of EFL writing. As Picasso emphasized when discussing art: good artists copy; great artists steal. The cultural reading section is a compilation of real materials under certain principles, reflecting the spirit of Copy and Steal. Similarly, students' classroom activities and writing are the sublimation and criticism of writing topics based on the vocabulary and syntax of reading materials, reflecting the spirit of Copy and Steal.

B. Cultural Reading Material Collection

Inspired by the Post-critical Pedagogy theory, Constructivism and Output Hypothesis and the domestic masters in the field of writing, the author uses the Fesch-Kincaid Legibility Test to compile cultural reading materials known as Connecting Cultures with Readings for Beginning Learners, which includes 12 themes to introduce Chinese and American culture and 12 writing sharing to promote identity thinking. These twelve themes are closely related to students' lives, including interest introduction (The recognition of learning and writing before the class), social attention (expression of culture and society in the class), and personality development (subsequent development of knowledge and skills after the class). They aim to stimulate students' interest in writing, deconstruct reading and reconstruct writing, and cultivate students' critical thinking skills.

Material compiling focuses on the fun of online reading topics, the relevance of reading and writing, and the contemporary writing topics in the writing process. Firstly, the topic of reading should be guided from writing and learning methods gradually to a cultural introduction to the United States, then transition to the cultural spirit of China, and finally guided by the practicality of business and the cultural value of literature for subsequent learning. Secondly, there is a strong correlation between writing and reading. For example, when students finish reading the three articles in the fifth part, Gold Rush, Business Heroes and Business is Business, they are told to express their views on the news of the sudden death of a Taobao store owner by writing Will I Cost Health for Wealth. Afterwards, teachers should guide students to think about the negative impact of American business society and reflect on the balance between health and wealth. In the end, the writing topics are all steered away from hot social topics to the ones that students are familiar with so that they have strong writing motivation. The following figure is an excerpt of the chapter catalog, which roughly shows the relevance and timeliness of the topics. In short, the process of compiling materials by the author is the process of Copy and Steal.

The following is an example of compiled materials shown in Table I.

TABLE I. CULTURE THEME READING MATERIALS

No.	Grammar	Theme	Reading	Writing
IV	Write what American study	A Big I	Critical Thinking	Speaking Vs. Writing
V	Write how American work	A Big Dream	The Crisis of Credit	Will I cost health for wealth?
VI	Write how American play	A Big World	That's Why I Choose Yale	Balance study and play?
VIII	Write what Chinese inherit from ancient sages	A Harmonious Life	Are You Happy? 2012	Simplicity—Key to Happiness
VIV	Write how Chinese impress the world	A Persevering Spirit	A Need to Learn Chinese	Topic on Chinese Culture
X	Write how Chinese engage the world	A Refreshing Image	Creative Games	I'm like a ...

C. Analysis Procedures

The writing course is equipped with a cultural manual of cultural theme reading materials to promote students' identity thinking competence. The establishment of the manual is based on the relevant theories of Constructivism and Output Hypothesis by using the Flesch Kincaid Readability Test, which covers Reading Ease Test and Grade Level. Each readability test is graded based on the average number of syllables per word and the number of words per sentence. The following section describes how each test evaluates the readability of files. The Flesch Reading Ease Test scores text on a scale of 100. The higher the score is, the easier it is to understand the document. For most standard files, the formula for the Flesch Reading Easy Score is:

$$206.835 - (1.015 \times ASL) - (84.6 \times ASW)$$

where: ASL=average sentence length (number of words divided by each word)

ASW=average number of syllables per word (number of syllables divided by each word).

The Flesch Kincaid grade level test scores the text at the school grade level in the United States. For example, a score of 8.0 means that eighth graders can understand the document. For most documents, the target is a score of approximately 7.0 to 8.0. The Flesch Kincaid formula for grade level scores is:

$$(0.39 \times ASL) + (11.8 \times ASW) - 15.59$$

Regarding Flesch Kincaid readability and level scores, each readability test is graded based on the statistical method of Dr. Flesch in the United States. Values between 0 and 100 indicate that the larger the number is, the easier the article is to read.

The calculation formula is as follows:

$$4,71 = \left(\frac{\text{characters}}{\text{words}}\right) + 0.5 \left(\frac{\text{words}}{\text{sentences}}\right) - 21.43$$

Table II is the readability result of one of Cultural Theme Reading Materials which is calculated by using Fesch-Kincaid Readability Test.

The value of Flesch Reading Ease is 30.7 and Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level is 15.7, which indicates the proper readability level of Cultural Theme Reading Materials complied.

TABLE II. READABILITY RESULT OF CULTURAL THEME READING MATERIALS

Readability Statistics		
Counts	Words	357
	Characters	1,784
	Paragraphs	11
	Sentences	11
Averages	Sentences per Paragraph	1.2
	Words per Sentence	31.4
	Characters per Word	4.8
Readability	Flesch Reading Ease	30.7
	Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level	15.7
	Passive Sentences	9.6%

IV. CROSS-CULTURAL AND SPECULATIVE TEACHING MODEL FOR EFL WRITING

As is shown in Fig. 2, the Cross Culture and Speculative Teaching Model on EFL Writing emphasizes the reading and appreciation of authentic language materials before writing, in order to stimulate students' interest in writing topics and imitate language structures. It emphasizes the expression of one's own observations and opinions on society in writing. Attachment on layout and main idea of writing is paid to diversity and critical thinking. Post writing stresses peer evaluation and self-reflection, gradually improving one's writing skills. Cultural materials can play their roles of imitation (COPY) and creation (STEAL) in three stages: pre writing reading, peer review, and post writing reflection. Students are required to complete the reading of cultural materials before class, and record the theme, keywords, word groups, and special usage of sentence structures (COPY). Students provide positive feedback on peer learning in language, content, and ideas in class (STEAL). In the post class writing reflection, we also focus on the reference of the above points. This classroom teaching process draws on the Knowledge Transformation Model of Writing proposed by Bereiter and Scardamalia [12]. In this model, the author places more emphasis on discovering improvement space based on existing knowledge, and therefore achieving innovative writing. This model coincides with the view of American writing expert Langan [13], that is, writing is a process of repeated deliberation and continuous improvement of thinking.

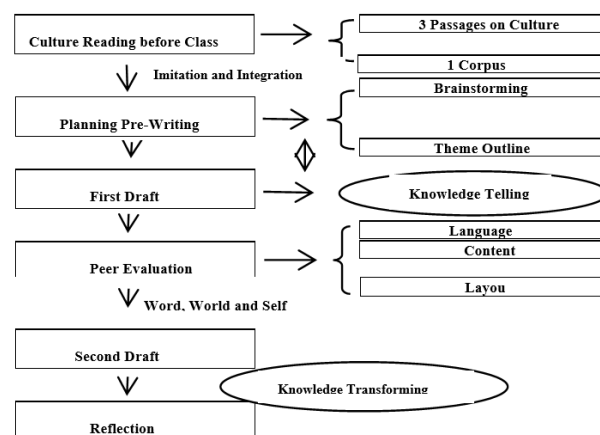


Fig. 2. Cross culture and speculative teaching model on EFL writing.

V. EFFECTIVENESS

The Teaching Model of Cross Culture and Speculation on EFL Writing gradually achieves: (I) to Write with Fun. The writing teaching model based on cultural theme reading can

effectively improve students' writing interest, make their writing attitude more positive, and make the writing process more efficiently; (2) to Copy and Steal. Teaching model of EFL writing based on cultural theme reading can effectively promote writing skills, which encourages students' significant progress in content, structure, vocabulary, and language accuracy in EFL writing; (3) to Write the Word and the World. The teaching model of EFL writing based on cultural theme reading can promote students' critical thinking, enable them to observe social phenomena with a more open attitude and reflect on their self-identity.

VI. CONCLUSION

The author tries to explain that the trend of post-critical education which increasingly emphasizes intercultural communication ability, mends between action research and reading experts who promote writing by reading. The author tries to trial a new cross-cultural teaching model of writing. Emphasis of this model is placed on students' use of cultural reading materials to draw on the expansion methods of themes, structure design patterns, and accurate expression of words and sentences (COPY). By this way the model can complete reflection on culture and critical interpretation of society (STEAL). The entire process inspires students to awaken cross-cultural awareness (SELF) and critically observe and record society (WORLD). To summarize, the Teaching Model of Cross Culture and Speculation on EFL Writing truly presents the professional education goals of the post-critical education era.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Jiong Ren collected the cultural reading materials; Fang

Lyu analyzed the readability of the cultural reading materials; Yan Yuan wrote the paper; all authors had approved the final version.

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