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People, Partnerships and Pedagogies

An open educational resource to teach language and culture

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Many studies on teaching language have shown that language and culture are closely related and are best acquired together (Brook, 1968; Brown, 2000; Kramsch, 2020; Kourdis & Zafiri, 2022). In an English language program (ELP), we use a variety of textbooks. These textbooks feature culture as part of the content (e.g., customs and traditions). However, the resources are typically information-focused which directs students to simply compare and contrast the similarities and differences between their own and the target cultures in a traditional way that is insufficient for the complexity of language and culture learning. Educators found that this type of traditional approach runs the risk of oversimplifying the richness and variety of a culture by reducing it to a few salient principles (Stockwell, 2018). Although language teachers have incorporated more culture in their lessons, the major concern is finding effective ways to integrate culture and language to prepare learners to engage and collaborate effectively in a global society by discovering appropriate ways to interact with people from other cultures. In addition, it may be very demanding for them to teach culture or be individually knowledgeable about other cultures to the extent required for a truly holistic English program.

The project introduces a reusable technology-enhanced learning resource in the form of an open textbook for use in an English for Academic Purpose programme. This resource aims to facilitate a general reduction in issues such as ethnocentrism, stereotypes, prejudice and similar issues that have a negative effect on intercultural communication in multicultural language classrooms, and to students' understanding of their own culture and other cultures through activities which require critical reflections and self-assessment. It consists of three modules and self-assessment tools for using critical reflections and assessing students' intercultural competence. Each module has main content, practice and performance tasks. Using multimodal resources and materials are provided that make student think, reflect and discuss the main concept of the module. Through these tasks, students are able to learn the main concept of each module regarding cultural knowledge and understand what they learned through the real situation and finally demonstrate awareness of the cultural knowledge in the module. The content will be shaped with technology-integrated materials to utilise the affordance and efficacy of the innovative technology.

The challenges posed by the disconnect between traditional teaching materials and a fulsome understanding of culture are met by the affordances of open pedagogy and the inclusion of open educational resources. The student-centred open pedagogy approach positions learners as co-creators of knowledge in the classroom, leveraging a constructivist learning design by providing students with opportunities to share and deeply reflect on lived experience of culture. The open textbook developed for the course provides opportunities for student revision, international peer-review of learning materials, and iterative development across multiple institutions. Furthermore, students enhance the text through web annotation, supporting peer learning.

This presentation outlines the transformation of an English language program aimed toward mature understanding of language and culture, enabled by open education, and will be of interest to educators in similar fields, and those planning to implement OER more generally.

The project also represents a partnership between the College and the Library, bringing together expertise in open educational practices, and student-centred learning and teaching approaches that result in more opportunities for learner engagement, and accessible, shareable content for the sector.

Keywords: Open Education Resource (OER), culture, EAP, partnership, intercultural competence

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