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The Cognitive Therapy Technique (CTT) in adult EFL classes

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By pointing out dimensions of adult learners and teaching, this article aims to discuss a way of strengthening the awareness on and through learning and self-esteem in adult language classes. The cognitive therapy technique emphasizes the importance and necessity of informing the learners of basic aspects of learning and language learning in

order to aid them to build up their learning strategies effectively and consciously. Also it is claimed that an awareness on personal learning process contributes effective learning and raising self-esteem. Some CTT activities and awareness sessions are presented and a sample lesson plan is designed to bridge the gap between theory and practical use .

Introduction

When the language teaching literature is read at a glance, in last decades, it can be observed that the field has focused its attention on some studies in Humanistic/Analytic Psychology, and has been searching for the ways of effective language teaching models in view of universals of human cognition and psyche. Also many of the innovative language teaching methods and approaches have been benefiting from humanistic psychology. These teaching methods express the interest in the total person and not simply the intellect and offer to provide a blend of the cognitive and affective way of teaching in EFL/ESL classes.

Many of the studies on language learning underline the importance of raising self-esteem and awareness in our classes, which means that we can not talk about a successful language class in which the students feel insecure and discouraged. Haycraft notes (1999) that teaching English successfully is not just a question of method. I have observed many classes where teacher's techniques were superb, but where the students were reluctant to learn because the teacher was not interested in them as people, and the lesson developed like the workings of a machine, functioning in isolation.(P.6)As Haycraft emphasizes, the best lesson may fail due to the fact that the personal diversity and needs are underestimated. Moreover, when we think of a class in which the audience is willing to participate in, speak and produce yet they can not break their walls, Haycraft's picture can be seen so optimistic.

There are many similarities and differences between adult and younger learners. Perhaps the greatest difference is that the former come to class with a long history of learning experience.(Harmer 1999) Learning experiences of adults maybe both full of glories and failures which possibly leads them to anticipate how teaching and learning should be carried out. It can be said that most adult learners have a definition of learning. Also we should recall adults are more nervous of learning than younger learners are.

When we reorganize the picture of adult classes that we have reviewed up to now, a need for CTT can be emphasized : Let's imagine a class where most of the students have an idea of learning, and bring a great record of learning experience which is full of success and failure and where they are nervous of making mistakes just in front of the beautiful ladies and handsome gentlemen. One of the most appropriate solution is that we must lead them to learn about learning itself so that they can monitor their learning process consciously and of course, can make some changes in their definition of learning. This awareness merely itself is a cognitive therapy since if one can observe her/his own learning process, s/he also consciously or unconsciously knows that s/he can learn a language successfully. An awareness about learning process will both assist learners to build up their learning strategies effectively and redefine their values and beliefs on language learning.

ADULT EDUCATION

"If the education is life, then the life is also education."

Linderman

In the 1950s, the attention on adult education had researchers to identify the differences between young and adult learners. In the following decade, educators reached a consensus on the concept "Andragogy" (Knowles) referring to adult education. The studies on adult education can be classified in two main streams : the scientific stream and the other the artistic or intuitive/reflective stream (Knowles 1998:36). In his book, Thordike notes that the scientific stream seeks to discover new knowledge through rigorous (and often not experimental) investigation. On the other hand, the artistic stream seeks to discover new knowledge through intuition and the analysis of the experience. Very similarly to this study, another educational pioneer, Carl Rogers (1969) distinguished two types of learning : Cognitive (Meaningless) and Experiential (Significant). Cognitive learning refers to academic knowledge while the experiential equates to personal change and growth. Also Rogers states that all human beings have a natural ability to learn. The nature of experiential learning is :

- * Setting a positive climate for learning
- * Clarifying the purposes of the learners
- * Balancing intellectual and emotional components of leaning
- * Sharing feelings and thoughts with learners but not dominating
- * Organizing and making available learning results

As the experiential learning suggest a personal change and development process, it is clearly a mere fact that learners should feel safe in the classroom. Also clarifying the purposes of the learners and organizing and making available learning results can be fulfilled effectively if this process is linked to learn about the learning. We will discuss this issue in detail in CTT class techniques.

In order to take a closer look at adult education, the brief summary of Linderman should be underlined, as follows :

1. adults are motivated to learn as they experience the needs and interests that learning will be safe.
2. Adults' orientation to learning is Life-Centered .
3. Experience is the richest source for adults' learning.
4. Adults have a deep need to be self-directing.
5. Individual differences among people increase with age.

One important issue is that most of the studies on pedagogy and andragogy dichotomize adult versus youth education. However, Linderman draws a line between adult versus conventional education.

In a recent theory, Cross (1981) developed the Characteristics of Adults as Learners (CAL model). The CAL model integrates the previous studies on adult learning such as andragogy, experiential learning and lifespan psychology. The CAL model consists of two variables, personal and situational. The former include aging, life phrases, many sort of stages such as marriage, job changes and retirement. Situational characteristics include part-time versus full-time learning, and voluntary versus compulsory learning. The CAL model of adult learning aims to provide guidelines for adult instruction programs. The principles are as follows :

- * Adult learning programs should adapt to the aging limitations of the participants.
- * Adults should be challenged to move to increasingly advanced stages of personal development.
- * Adults should have as much choice as possible in the availability and organization of learning programs.

Among all these theories, one can easily anticipate that one of the major role of an adult

education policy and program is to build up an experience process that they can reflect upon their own development, and go through this program by cooperating with other adult learners.

ADULT LEARNERS

" The experience is the adult learners' living textbook."

Linderman

There are many factors that must be taken into account to establish a productive learning and teaching situation in adult classes. However, we should first recall who an adult learner is. According to Knowles(1976),a prime characteristics of adulthood is the need and capacity to self-directing (P.182). Also adult learners have some characteristics which can sometimes make learning and teaching problematic. In some cases, unfamiliar teaching patterns and innovative activities may make them feel uncomfortable since their previous learning experiences get them to be critical of these teaching methods. Moreover, many other adult learners worry that their intellectual powers may be diminishing with age-they are concerned about keeping their creative powers alive, maintaining a "sense of generativity"(Williams and Burden 1997:32). Needless to say, this generativity is directly related to how much learning has been going on in adult life before they come to a new learning experience.(Rogers 1996:54)

As we have mentioned the problem of self-esteem and inhibition in adult learners, it will be beneficial to recall a study to see the other side of the coin: A survey by Child-Line shows that a sample of 1000 secondary school pupils were worried more about doing well at school than anything else in their lives. Children as young as twelve were worried about university entrance(Fletcher 2000:63) The report concludes:

Examinations involve a judgement delivered publicly, by others, of someone's performance. The fear of being judged is anathema to the sensitive or those with a fragile self-esteem. Parents and tutors should watch out for symptoms which suggest possible psychiatric storms ahead and make every effort to ease the ordeal for the child or undergraduate.

Whereas the main concern of this article is not the young learners, it should be considered that adulthood is not a promotion or a medal of maturity. Naturally, adult learners also go through such educational jungles, processes, given above and the ones who are more sensitive or having a fragile self-esteem fulfill their beliefs and values on learning through those experiences. This survey is a notable evidence to convince us of importance of strengthening the self-esteem and encouraging the personal relations in our classes, whether our students are very young learners or socially accepted mature adults.

HOW ADULTS LEARN

"Self-esteem is the jet fuel of motivation"

Murray White

A study by psychologist David Kolb on the question "How adults learn? " shows that when the adults undertake to learn something through their own initiative, they start with a concrete experience. Then they make observations about the experience, reflect on it and diagnose what new knowledge or skill they need to acquire in order to perform more effectively. Then, with the help of material and human resources, they formulate abstract concepts and generalizations which they deduce what to do next. Finally, they test their concepts and generalizations in new situations, which refers to the new experiences.

Figure 1 shows the cyclical process of experiential learning theory :

KOLB'S EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING THEORY



Also when we pool our thinking to seek a connection between Kolb's research and studies of previous educators, it can be observed that Experiential Learning Theory is strongly related to Linderman and Roger's studies. For example, Linderman and Eduard emphasize that adult education is a process through which learners become aware of significant leads to evaluation. Meanings accompany experience when we know what is happening and what importance the event includes for our personalities.(1926:1691) Consequently, we can assume that an adult learning program should construct a safe experience road on which the signs show the destination clearly and how to go through this road more effectively.

MAKING THEM BE AWARE OF THEIR LEARNING

*** CTT and its practical use**

Adult learners can be critical of teaching methods. In some cases, it can be observed that some of the adult learners ponder over doing the classroom activities. The question " Why do we have to fill in this ticket order form ? "or many of other questions are familiar with the language teachers. In such cases, the teacher may underline the importance of developing language skills, or draw a distinction between knowing about the language and being able to use language communicatively. Even talking about the three dimensions of grammar (Celce-Murcia, Larsen freeman) maybe helpful to convince the adults to involve in the activities. The figure 2 shows the three dimensions of grammar and possible answer for confused learners.

THE THREE DIMENSIONS OF GRAMMAR

Figure 2



This figure may be drawn on the board and presented to our language learners . A brief explanation will help them figure out the importance of purposeful communication in the target language and necessity of skill activities. Actually, one does not have to be a language teacher or a teacher trainee to recognize the use of language. Also the teacher may response (in L1 or in L2) as :

T : To know the grammar rules is not enough to achieve a communication. We should also learn how to use these rules. As an example, a grammatically correct sentence can be inappropriate, even rudeness in a situation. That's why these (addressing the language activities) are useful for us to learn how to communicate in English.

Many of the adult learners do not attempt to speak in English in the class for fear that they can make a mistake. A cognitive therapy for those is a funny one.

T : Where did you learn your first language ? Was it a good language course or did you attend to private lessons ?

Their response is worth seeing and a relaxing one. The aim of this question is to make them recognize that learning a language is a natural behavior of us, and if the walls in front of this natural behavior are broken, the learning will be more effective. These information activities are called "Question and answer sessions".

Instead of verbal responses, the teacher can use some CTT activities to enhance the learning process. In some lessons, 5-10 minutes can be spend for Making Mistakes Time (MMT) activities. In MMT activities, the learners make mistakes in L2 consciously, and these activities creates a precious time to speak in English for adults having fragile self-esteem. Some MMT activities are :

- 1. Pronunciation Games :** All fluency-speaking activities can be modified as a MMT pronunciation games. During these activities the learners can make pronunciation mistakes. If the activity is recorded and listened for feedback session, it will be useful. Also the teacher may lead the learners to do the delayed correction.
- 2. Tense Free Games :** These are both fluency and accuracy activities and can be fulfilled as writing and speaking skill practices. All the writing& speaking activities can be used as Tense Free Games. The students are free to make mistakes in using tenses through activities. At the end of the activity, the students may do a peer correction activity in group works.
- 3. Jumbled Words Games :** All free-speaking & writing activities can be modified .In

these activities, structural rules are not important. The students can make any sort of structural mistake. However, they should transmit their messages effectively. A delayed peer correction in groups or teacher's feedbacks will be useful.

We must draw a line between free-speaking activities and MMT activities : In free-speaking activities, the teacher does not correct the students immediately so that the communication in the classroom is not interrupted. Nevertheless, the role of the teacher in these activities is sometimes not enough to diminish the stress. However, the important aspect of MMT activities is that the teacher asks to the students to make mistakes in L2 through activities, which means they can easily involve in the activities without the fear and the anxiety of making mistakes.

* Witnesses of a Miracle

Another useful CTT is to inform the learners about the MI theory and NLP. This information process, called "awareness sessions", will be more effective if it is done through activities that create a time for learners to identify and observe their learning styles. The aim, or theme, of awareness sessions is to make them understand that they can learn a language and this is scientifically a fact, and also show the students underlying principles of language activities. There are many MI and NLP activities both on internet and in books that tests personal aptitudes. A sample lesson plan is designed, as follows :

" AN AWARENESS SESSION " A SAMPLE LESSON PLAN FOR CTT

Aim of the lesson : At the end of the lesson, the students will become aware of their intelligences through the activities.

Materials needed : " Find Someone Who" handouts (Figure3), MI test(Figure 4), Visuals showing 8 Intelligences.

PRE Warm up : Free-Speaking --- Talking about the talents and hobbies.

Lead in : The teacher asks to the students whether they 'd like to learn about their intelligences.

WHILE activity :

1- controlled-integrated skills activity : Find SMN Who...

The students mingle in the classroom and perform the activity.

2- Free-integrated skills activity : Reflection of the activity. The students work in groups and discuss the results.

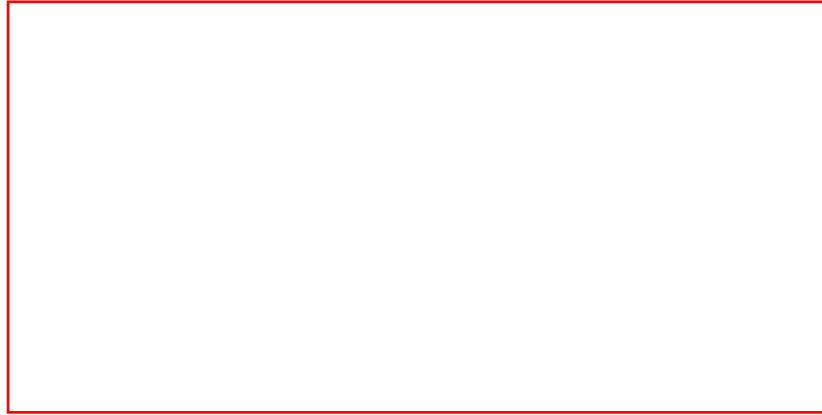
Lead in : The teacher asks to the students whether they'd like to learn more about their intelligences and MI.

3- Reading activity : The MI test

The students read about their multiple intelligences.

POST activity : The teacher sticks the MI pictures all around the class and asks, students to share their opinions.

MATERIALS



If necessary, the teacher may prepare an extra reading activity on MI .

"Why do we have to speak in English?" or "Why do you teach in English?" are the famous questions of EFL classes. Besides, in the first months of a long-term and extensive language courses, the students may be disappointed due to the fact that they still can not communicate in L2 successfully. Such cases can be overcome by pointing out Krashen's "Input Hypothesis and Silent Period", as a question and answer session. The aim of this cognitive therapy is to show them that the reason of their failures in L2 communication is not the problem of their skills and abilities, but just a process.

The CTT activities can be dichotomized in two main parts. The information sessions that are held in both class or in one to one conversations are called Question-Answer sessions. Aim of these sessions is to give the merely the wanted information to the class or individual. The second one is the awareness sessions that are fulfilled in class. The nature of the awareness sessions is to associate the language teaching with learning. In other words, awareness sessions and CTT language activities are done in the context of language teaching and the primary aim is to make the learners recognize their potentials and abilities and observe their learning styles. Also many of the activities can be modified as CTT activities. MMT is an example given in the article. In Figure 4, CTT summarized as follows :

Cognitive Therapy Technique

1. Question-Answer Sessions



2. Awareness sessions



• Conclusion

An important issue is that the information presented to our students in CTT activities shall be as simplified as possible. It is unnecessary, even harmful, to load their minds and confuse them with boring theoretical issues. It should be just like talking about quality of a sports car; natural and worth listening. The cognitive therapy will be precious if it is comprehensible.

The activities and the lesson plan are designed to show the CTT in practical use. It is clear that hundreds of activities and various therapy themes can be generated by enthusiastic teachers. However, the main point is that CTT activities are aim to link class activities to nature of learning and help adult learners observe their own learning styles through tasks. In brief , it is important to make our students be aware of their learning abilities and capacities, but not beware of learning and this is all about CTT.

The MMT activities, question-answer sessions and awareness sessions given in the article, and some other CTT lessons have been performed at Gazi University, Preparatory department. The undergraduate students and adult EFL classes have been observed and their reflections are positive through CTT activities.

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