

Conceptualization of English Language Teaching *in Macau's New Era*

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A learner is able to acquire language through both psychological and cognitive processes within the social and instructional environments. The processes are, to an extreme extent, intricate as shown in a huge amount of research in this field. From the perspective of Wang, Q. (2006), language learning and acquisition can be attributed to "condition-oriented theories" and "process-oriented theories". The former is related to the human context in which language learning and acquisition occur and the latter emphasizes how the human's mind organizes new information such as induction, inference, hypothesis testing and generalization. I am trying to apply the notions to the practical circumstances of Macau.

As far as the human context in Macau is concerned, it can be said with certainty that, for local students, having a fluent command of English through formal instructions, not to mention acquisition, is far from easy because this enclave with a Sino-Portuguese culture, unlike Hong Kong, is not in a position to provide an ideal physical environment for using English. In spite of the fact that heavy investments from the U.S. have been injected into local tourism and gaming industries, over ninety percent of visitor arrivals have been from mainland China for years.

Aside from the context, a learner's internal factors deserve consideration. I hold the view that there is not any eternally effective teaching approach applicable to all language learners; nor is there any that takes effect upon the same learner all the time on the grounds that learning diversity, which includes learners' motivation, learning styles, maturity, past learning experiences and learning strategies, is often an interfering factor. (Spratt, M. et al, 2011).

From the above perspectives, it is easy to imagine that local ESL teachers with obsolete methods such as the grammar-translation method are facing a variety of challenges and problems in their English class, especially in their attempts to meet the urgent needs for nurturing the English language talents for various industries in Macau in the new era.

From my point of view, an ESL teacher in Macau's new era has to be equipped with the new constructs: (1) up-to-date knowledge concerned with the newest research findings on language teaching methodology and second language acquisition; (2) enthusiasm for shaping students' whole person development; (3) capacity for cultivating students' core competencies newly proposed by international educational organizations; (4) the ability to conduct action research to cope with ever emerging difficulties in the teaching process. Furthermore, the ESL teacher should be in a position to manage the relationship between accuracy and fluency. As Harmer, J. (2007) states, we need to make a clear difference between "non-communicative" and "communicative" productive activities - the former are generally intended to ensure correctness and the latter are designed to improve language fluency. It is generally agreed that successful expression must be achieved by means of correct forms, for instance, "I'm going to leave" would be misunderstood as "I'm going to live" if the student pronounced /i:/ in "leave" as /i/. This typical mistake may be caused by the lack of quasi-communicative (semi-controlled) tasks guided by the teacher in the English classroom while other quasi-communicative tasks like role play are indispensable to the development of language fluency.

In a word, Macau requires a team of ESL teachers with new constructs to ensure the enhancement of the learners' language competence to facilitate the development of the new era.



References

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