V International Forum on Teacher Education

Local Lore: Does It Work in FL Class?

Iskander E. Yarmakeev (a), Tatiana S. Pimenova*(b), Albina R. Abdrafikova (c)

(a), (b), (c) Kazan Federal University, 420008, Kazan (Russia), 18 Kremlyovskaya street

Abstract

This study is the continuation of the authors' investigation of the topic raised in the article "Teaching Local Lore in EFL Class: New Approaches" by Yarmakeev, Pimenova, & Zamaletdinova (2016). Why again "local lore"? According to Safonova (2014), local lore in FL class pictures the "national map of the world", breeds love for homeland's culture and history, and fosters a well-educated person. In this paper, it is explained, first, how pragmatic knowledge can help students understand the national character and self-identity and, second, how to get younger learners assimilate local lore knowledge in L2. The following hypothesis was suggested: in FL class, teaching local lore can contribute to forming school students' understanding of their homeland's history and culture. Acting out and pantomime were chosen to be key teaching activities in FL class, for as Kolkova (2011) claims, students enthusiastically and purposefully fulfill the task if they see the practical and/ or theoretical significance of the anticipated results. Thus, in this study it is shown how there can be incorporated research into a lesson with the usage of teaching techniques in an appealing way, that help school students assimilate local lore knowledge in FL class. The paper mostly discusses practices of the studied topic and offers teaching tips for foreign language teachers.

Key words: drama teaching techniques, FL class, independent thinking, local lore, practical and/ or theoretical significance of the task, pragmatic knowledge.

* Corresponding author. *E-mail address*: *pimenova_ts@mail.ru*

Introduction

Sharing the viewpoint of a rather large group of Russian educational researchers who state that teaching local lore in FL class should be *a must* in the school curriculum, the authors of this paper highlight a methodological problem: what dynamic teaching techniques can present local lore to FL learners? Acting out and pantomime were spotted as leading activities to prove the authors' assumption that with local lore presented in FL class, school students can learn their homeland's history and culture in a captivating way. A pedagogical experiment was conducted in two secondary schools of the Republic of Tatarstan (Russian Federation). The number of participants who were enrolled into the experiment constituted 120 school students. The experiment had a traditional model:

- an ascertaining stage that allowed assessing students' knowledge of local lore in L2,

- a formative stage, which turned out to be the most challenging one that demanded the implementation of various teaching techniques and selection of the most attractive and effective ones,

- a control stage, which proved the above hypothesis.

The experiment was conducted in FL class with students of two ethnic backgrounds: Tatars, whose ancestors are Volga Bulgars, and Russians. After reading about Almus, the ruler of Bulgar State in the 10th century, students took a short comprehension quiz (true/false statements and short answer questions). Applying what they learned, students dramatized a scene imagining they were meeting the characters from the story. The prompts were such as "If you met Almus, what would you like to ask him about?" Then FL learners prepared a short presentation on the topic "What would you tell the people of that epoch about the present day of your home town?" Students were excited to perform the role of ancient heroes and to imagine the way historical figures lived. They considered learning local lore a key to understanding their past and present.

Materials and copyright teaching tips, offered in this paper, might equip foreign language teachers with classroom-tested tasks easily adaptable for use in any FL curriculum.

Problem Statement

Educators in Russia underline the importance of introducing local lore in FL class activities. Kurnova and Kelina (1989) assert that teaching local lore builds up a system of students' fundamental knowledge about the nation, the national character, and their world outlook. Vereshchagin and Kostomarov (1990), admitting the fact that two national cultures never fully coincide, spotlight the fact that accepting this difference allows breeding students' independent thinking, which is essential for comprehending new concepts. Trubaneva (1992) advocates the idea that implementing local lore in the educational process shapes tolerance and respect for the history, traditions, culture, languages of different ethnic groups within or outside their national-territorial formations. According to Tambovkina (1995), while studying local lore students are taught to get interested in local history, art, literature, culture, by which they raise their education level. Vagidullin (1996) and Mansurov (1998) both support the idea that the presence of local lore in the classroom assists in educating students' citizenship and preserving the cultural and spiritual heritage of the native land at large.

The seriousness of the formation of national self-awareness in order to preserve one's own unique culture, history and ethnic identity in modern Russian society are featured by Russian researchers Sysoyev (2001), Godunova (2006), Ivanova, Chudilova, & Vilkova (2006), Sorokovykh & Davydova (2007), Toplenkina (2007), Praded (2008), Karpovich (2010), Kartashova & Isaev (2011), Yarmakeev & Pimenova (2014), Valiakhmetova, Akhmadullina, & Pimenova (2017).

Having acknowledged the significance of teaching local lore, we started searching for engrossing teaching techniques that can be used in FL class. We considered acting out and pantomime to be as such. Alexandrova (2006), Nelzina, Panina, & Lugovtseva (2016) choose drama and theatre pedagogy as instruments to develop speaking and writing skills in EFL class. By Beth Taylor (2019), drama and pantomime get students to improvise together which is vital in forming such skills as communication, cooperation, quick thinking, and improvisation.

We found no in-depth investigation which deals with teaching local lore in FL class with the help of acting out and pantomime techniques.

Research Questions

The research questions raised in this study are as follows:

-          Does local lore work in FL class?

-          If yes, what teaching techniques can be implemented in the educational process so that to have learners assimilate local lore knowledge in L2?

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Purpose of the Study

In this study, there were set a few goals:

- to select local lore data / fact files from reference books, encyclopedias, textbooks and belles-lettres;

- to sort out interesting teaching techniques, appropriate for the implementation in FL class;

- to conduct a pedagogical experiment to prove the hypothesis that teaching local lore in FL class can form students' conception of their motherland's history and culture;

- to devise teaching tips on introducing local lore into FL class.

We assume that acting out and pantomime engage school students in learning history, art, literature, culture of their mother country in such a way that brings the past and the present real life into the classroom.

Research Methods

5.1 Students' Background

Number, age and gender characteristics: 120 school students of two ethnic backgrounds: Tatars and Russians, 16-17 years old, mixed who made up an experimental group.

5.2 Research Sites

Two High schools which are ranked among 100 best schools of Russia.

The leading research methods the authors executed in this study were acting out and pantomime. They are unique teaching techniques that allow students to freely express personal and cultural values, converse in a discourse atmosphere. These activities lend themselves to discussing values and opinions of any type, particularly in classes where students are having a difficult time seeing different sides of an issue. Moreover, these techniques encourage spontaneous speaking, group work and organization in a collaborative way. A teacher can choose to take a controlling role, giving directions or instructions at the front of the class or to take a less controlling role, monitoring learners as they work.

Findings

In accordance with the set objectives of this study, the experiment was conducted with the aim to

monitor, analyze and assess the effectiveness of acting out and pantomime techniques in the formation of students' awareness of local lore in L2.

The experimental training was conducted for students of the 10[th and] 11th grades during two semesters: Winter 2019 and Spring 2019 in two High schools.

120 High school students took part in the experiment: 63 students of the 10th grade and 57 students of the 11th.

The experiment consisted of three phases: ascertaining; forming; control.

At the ascertaining stage, a short comprehension quiz was offered to the students to reveal their initial knowledge of local lore in L2. The quiz consisted of 15 true / false statements and 8 questions. The obtained results showed students nescience of local lore knowledge in L2.

All these data were taken into account during the experiment in the organization of the educational process at the formative stage where various teaching techniques proposed by the authors were implemented into FL class.

Sample

Acting out technique

1. Students read short emotional texts with dramatic scenes.

2. Students analyze the nature of the scene. Make sure they understand their character and the scene's context. They start to rehearse.

3. Then they act out the scene in a controlled, dramatic fashion, giving a unique take on the drama.

4. The acting is done in such a way that the speech is clear and appreciable to the audience.

5. The emphasis should be on speaking, acting and movement, not on reading lines.

Pantomime technique

1. To get started, a teacher shows a silent film as an example of a pantomime, showcasing different personalities.

2. Students portray a scene from the extracts of texts using only their body without the use of speech.

3. Students' movements and facial expressions can be exaggerated to help convey the emotion of the scene.

4. To master this technique, students work in front of a mirror to perfect their movements.

The teaching tips were implemented in FL class during the formative stage of the experiment.

TEACHING TIP "VOLGA BULGARS' ANCESTORS"

Levels: Pre-intermediate to intermediate

Aims: Help students develop an understanding of local lore in L2 in real life

Class Time: 45 minutes

Preparation Time: 25 minutes

Resources: A classroom computer with the Internet access. Audiovisual equipment and handouts

Rationale

Developing local lore knowledge, films might be the initial source to challenge students to imitate the peculiar features of the given epoch. What is more, they are offering a sense of immersion. Moreover, by a subsequent acting out school students also have the ability to embrace a cultural immersion which is

always very important. The student activity receives a major boost here and students are enticed to further engage the stuff they like and enjoy it unlike never before.

Procedure

1. Surf the Internet for video episodes about Volga Bulgars.

2. Play the selected video in class and ask students what they understood it was about.

3. Elicit the language for further consolidation work (e.g. "Taboo" game).

3. Hand in a handout for each student with short texts on the given topic.

4. Organize a jigsaw game on fulfilling the missing information in expert groups.

5. Challenge students to select roles in expert groups.

6. Act out and pantomime the selected episode in class.

7. Ask students to analyze any of the dialogues and express their attitude in a form of an opinion essay.

Caveats and options

1. After students act out and pantomime the selected episode, they can share their ideas discussing it.

2. Have students vote for the best acting out.

References and further reading

Newkirk, T. (2014). *Minds made for stories.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

TEACHING TIP "LOCAL LORE IN THE DIGITAL AGE"

Levels: Pre-intermediate to intermediate

Aims: Help students develop an understanding of local lore in L2 in real life

Class Time: 90 minutes

Preparation Time: 30 minutes

Resources: A classroom computer with the Internet access. Audiovisual equipment and handouts

Rationale

The dramatization teaching method was chosen as a teaching tool that engages students through interactive activities. Teachers can use it to help students gain deeper insights into lessons, build on concepts and themes or as a means to test students' knowledge.

Procedure

1. Surf the Internet for famous lines of the Volga Bulgar rulers.

2. This activity could be done in parallel with the imminent words of 21 century rulers.

3. Divide students into groups to work on the chosen quotations (analysis, comparison).

4. Hand in texts, annotate them for meaning, performance and pantomime.

5. Challenge students to enhance their performance by adding "sound effects".

6. Record students' performances to add to a web-based video platform of a school web site.

7. Organize reflection in a class.

Caveats and options

1. Before analyzing the famous lines of the rulers, the teacher can prepare prompts for students to make a start.

2. Cloze exercises can be provided for texts that have difficult passages, or for lower level classes.

References and further reading

1. Galster, N. (2014). An educator's C.R.E.A.T.I.V.E. approach to learning. Retrieved from http://nathangalster.wix.com/creatinglearning

The control experiment was aimed at assessing the effectiveness of acting out and pantomime as teaching methods to teach local lore in L2. The updated diagnostic test was aimed at revealing students' knowledge on the above mentioned issues. The results of the updated diagnostic test in the experimental groups are shown in Fig. 1.
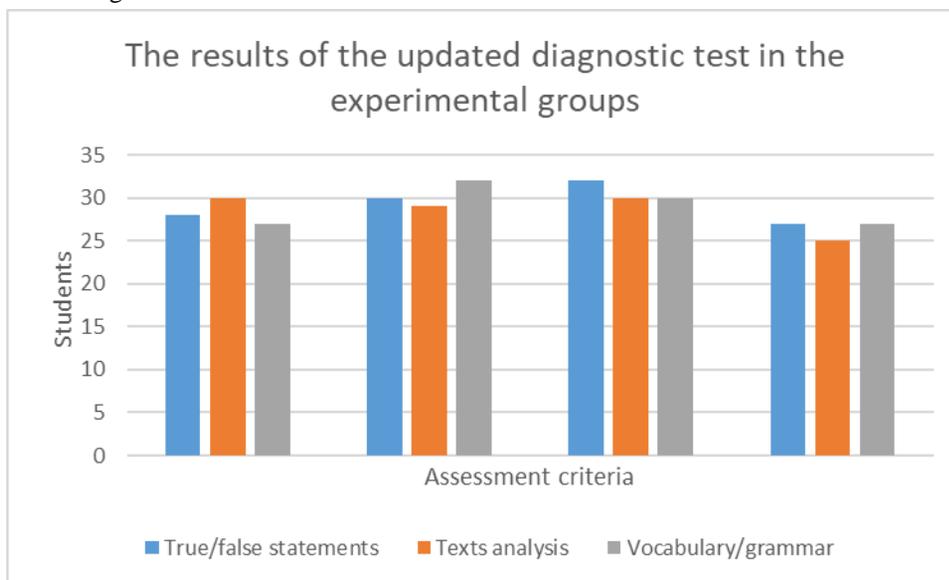

Fig. 1. The results of the updated diagnostic test in the experimental groups

The results of both (ascertaining and control) stages showed the positive trend in the improvement of students' speech and knowledge in local lore through such teaching tools as acting out and pantomime. Significantly, the quality of students' knowledge in the English language increased that, to some respect, can prove the formation of educational abilities and skills.

Conclusion

As shown by the results the implementation of acting out and pantomime can boost students' awareness of local lore in L2 that contribute to positive changes in students' speech in both qualitative (diversity of dialogical unities, partners' initiative, emotional expression) and quantitative (speech correctness, speech volume, fluency). Thus, these tools, on the one hand, are one of the most effective methods of implementation of the communicative principle in teaching a foreign language, on the other hand, are powerful tools of upbringing, particularly in the area of local lore.

We assert that via motivating activities students can investigate rather difficult but very important topics. Acting out and pantomime are highly motivating because they contain an element of a game and the unpredictability of their outcome. In addition, students can see the possibility of the situation, played out in the pantomime, in real life. They do not give a mechanical exercise in the use of lexical units and grammatical structures.

Summing up, we can say that our hypothesis was fully confirmed. The experiment clearly demonstrated the effectiveness of using acting out and pantomime in FL class as a way to teach local lore in L2.

Acknowledgments

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