The Application of Holistic Education in the Foreign Language Education

Jia Suo
Department of Foreign Languages, North China Electric Power University, Baoding, Hebei, China
suojiasj@163.com

Abstract
The foreign language education (FLE) in China only focuses on the training language skills, neglecting the students’ all-around development, resulted in the students’ lack of creativity, critical thinking ability, collaborative ability, healthy values and positive attitude. Holistic education, an approach of teaching to include the physical, social, emotional, cultural, and cognitive dimensions of a person’s growth, aims to nurture healthy, whole, curious persons who can learn whatever they need to know in any new context. Therefore holistic education should be applied to FLE in China.

Keywords
Holistic Education; Foreign Language Education; All-around Development

Introduction
According to a survey conducted by an International assessment organization in 2009, Chinese students’ computing ability ranked first among children in 21 countries, but their imagination ranked the last, and their creativity fifth from the last. Another survey published by “China Youth Daily” found that 34% of the interviewed students regretted studying in the university, among which 51% students thought they had got nothing valuable in the university. These figures prove that the education in China is in great crisis, awaiting reform.

The foreign language education in China is no exception. Our FLE focuses on the skill training of listening, speaking, reading and translating, neglecting the development of students’ comprehensive capabilities, particularly the critical thinking ability. Students’ learning motivation is to pass tests, such as CET-4, CET-6, TOFEL and etc. Regarding English only as a tool, hardly can they experience the pleasure in English study, the spiritual guidance and the cultural contagiousness English articles bring them. The traditional courses in FLE are KSA --- knowledge, skill and attitude. As it can be seen, knowledge comes before skill; attitude is the least valued. However, in the real work and life, attitude is everything. For a meaningful life and successful career, attitude is much more important than skill. This fact can be supported by the most frequently used words in the fortune 500 companies’ recruitment advertisements: responsible, integrated, determined, initiative, cooperative, communicative, flexible, creative, updated and productive. Secondly, among knowledge, skill and attitude, skill is more desirable than knowledge because we are now living in “a learning society”. With the rapid development of science and technology and the upsurge of knowledge and information, the update cycle of knowledge is shortening, and the frequency of innovation is accelerating. Therefore withdrawing knowledge from the brain is not as important as it was. People need to learn constantly the continually updating knowledge. Lifelong study is a must. Just as American futurist Alvin Toffler put it: “Illicitates in the future will not be just people who cannot read, but also who did not learn how to learn”, learning skill is essential in helping people keep up with the flow of knowledge. In conclusion, they are ASK courses that we need now---attitude, skill and knowledge.

The 46th Annual International IATEFL Conference held by British Council put forward 4Cs needed to be embraced by students in the increasingly complex, demanding and competitive world– communication, collaboration, critical thinking and creativity. It also appealed for the redefinition of the goals of general education for today’s world.

Holistic Education
To develop the 4Cs in students, to alter the current situation of English teaching in China, and to enhance the
Chinese students’ competitiveness in the world job market, foreign language education should be “holistic education”, which was firstly given the name by Ron Miller, an American educationist. According to the New Zealand Ministry of Education, holistic education is defined as an approach of teaching to include the physical, social, emotional, cultural, and cognitive dimensions of a person’s growth. It is a rich experiential journey of discovery, expression and mastery where all students and teachers learn and grow together. Its aim is to nurture healthy, whole, curious persons who can learn whatever they need to know in any new context. It will enrich the mind, warm the heart and awaken the spirit. The learning process in holistic education is: dialogical, collaborative, experiential, reflective, inquiry based, inspirational, transformative, meaningful, creative and flexible. As a result students will become more: curious, creative, empathic, joyful, innovative, mindful, compassionate, resilient and competent.

**The Integration of Holistic Education and Foreign Language Education**

The integration of “holistic education” and foreign language education (FLE) means that FLE should not be limited to “language” teaching. It should involve not only the teaching of linguistic skills, but also the development of the learner’s learning skills, work skills and life skills. How to apply “holistic education” to FLE?

1. FLE should emphasize both materiality and spirituality. Nowadays, students lack humanistic care and healthy values, ending up tools of material production because too much importance is attached to practical knowledge. FLE can play a vital role in altering such situation, because the English articles filled with positive outlooks that can give students spiritual guidance. In foreign language teaching, the teacher should not take the student only as a communication tool with only knowledge of grammar and language points, but as being: thinking being, emotional being, creative being, productive being, intelligent being, social being, cultural being, global being, and most of all, human being. In other words, foreign language education not only means the transmission of knowledge but also the student’s all-around development, namely the growth of their intellectual, emotional, social, physical, artistic, creative and spiritual potentials.

2. FLE should focus on life experiences instead of the limited knowledge in the textbook to broaden the learner’s horizon. Because language is the carrier of culture, FLE should provide students with more opportunities to explore the rich cultures in the world. A balance must be stricken between general education and special education.

3. FLE should make the cultivation of the learner’s creativity and critical thinking ability as one of its missions. FLE should encourage learners to critically approach the cultural, moral and political contexts of their lives and to commit themselves to the reform and creation of human civilization. Not only should the learner inherit the existing culture, but they are also expected to make enormous breakthrough. Therefore the teacher should give students more “open questions” instead of “close question” to inspire their reflection.

4. The relationship between the teacher and the student in FLE should be equal, open and dynamic. However, in Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC), open teacher–student and student–student interactions are not as common as they are in the social constructivist model found in the Anglo-Saxon culture. CHC values social harmony, teachers’ authority, and silence to avoid confrontation. Therefore the teacher must transform his idea about the teacher’s role to guarantee the application of holistic education in FLE. The teacher should regard himself more as a friend, a mentor, a facilitator, or an experienced traveling companion than a person of authority who leads and controls. The teacher should actively engage students in the teaching/learning process and encourages personal and collective responsibility. Schools should places where students and adults work toward a mutual goal. Open and honest communication is expected and differences between people are respected and appreciated. Cooperation is the norm, rather than competition.

5. A process-oriented evaluation system should be set up in FLE. In China, the students’ academic performance is determined by his final exam scores to a large extent. This has a negative effect on the students’ progress, because students cannot keep studying as hard as they can during a semester without the supervision of process evaluation. Holistic education sees study as a process of growth and constant self-improvement, and most importantly, a process of becoming a “whole being”, therefore even the tiniest progress made by the student should be given enough recognition and credit. The teacher should attach more importance to the healthy growth
of a student as a “whole being” than on his academic performance.

**Conclusions**

FLE should go beyond the conveyance of knowledge and the training of linguistic skills focusing on the students' all-around development. The application of holistic education in FLE is imperative!

**ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

The research is supported by “The Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities” and “The reform project of undergraduate education” in North China Electric Power University (Granting Number: 2014 MS180).

**REFERENCES**


