I.C.C.T.F. and the Cross-Curricular Approach to EFL

Virtue is the perfection of reason. Reason is the source of the first principles of knowledge. Reason deals with the abstract and ideal aspects. Active reason makes the world intelligible

[Aristotle, Nichomachean Ethics]

Education is defined as a means for students to develop cognitive skills, morality and self-consciousness via knowledge and practice, in order to become independent and active citizens. Via the learning process, learners acquire the intelligence, mentality and skills required to manage effectively their lives on a personal, social and vocational level. New trends in education stress the role of foreign language learning as a means to access knowledge and enforce cross-cultural communication among individuals. Under this framework, English as a Foreign Language [EFL] becomes an integral part of a country’s national curriculum that needs to be taught interdisciplinary and cross-culturally. Modern curricula enable the integration of school knowledge according to contextual relevance among subjects, as fragmentary knowledge distribution severely damages the educational practice due to the fact that students show inability to perceive the unified nature of the physical and social world. Scientific findings acknowledge the fact that the separated fields of science show incompetence to explain and confirm new non-linear world theories and, therefore, all scientific areas need to function interdisciplinary.

The Cross Curricular/Thematic Framework (C.C.T.F.) for Compulsory Education (Government Gazette - FEK 1375/13-3-2003) aims at the development of qualitative learning environments which will enable learners’ smooth integration in society. While preserving their national identity, learners need also to develop awareness of their European citizenship in the global community. The upgrading of compulsory education - primary and junior high-school - in Greece also fosters to provide equal opportunities for all citizens and combat social problems. To this end, the new curricula should not be field-centred promoting passive and fragmentary learning experiences; they need to promote student-oriented, cognitive learning and active student participation in the learning process.

The interdisciplinary curriculum does not separate knowledge in segments, but unifies it in real world circumstances which enhance students’ cognitive skills. Contrary to traditional teacher-centred learning environments that promote sterile instruction, reproduction and memorization, the cross-curricular approach is student-centred constructing authentic learning experiences, which are meaningful and applicable to the real world. Crucial is the fact that the cross-thematic approach aims at developing those skills that promote problem solving, cooperation, creative thinking, imagination and positive attitude towards life-long learning and exploration. Within this framework, learners will be prepared to meet the demands of multicultural societies and become active citizens.

Using authentic materials has been considered essential in EFL, as a means for the students to acquire receptive and productive language skills in real-life circumstances in ways that motivate and attract learners’ interests. To achieve this, language teachers incorporate and adapt authentic resources to their students’ needs, cognitive abilities, preferences and level of competence. These resources stem not only from linguistic areas of interest, but also from various fields of science, art, current issues, practices and disciplines. The popularity of this approach is strengthened by the fact that current issues appeal to students’ interests and strengthen motivation. Gradually, EFL shifts from the sterile and usually dull close-ended lexicogrammatical activities to more productive and self-expressing cross-curricular projects, where students can practice their cognitive skills by adapting the knowledge they have acquired from various other curriculum subjects and the society to the needs of the EFL classroom.

II. The World of Advertising Lesson Plan

The objective is to build up a lesson plan that not only teaches English, but also entertains, motivates and arouses young learners’ cognition in order to make them realize how advertisements manipulate people. Apart from that, the subject-matter constitutes an everyday reality enhancing student motivation as learners are already familiar to - or victims of - advertising; this also implies that the lesson is going to have an explicit effect on students’ disposition towards “mass persuasion".

A Cross-Curricular Approach to EFL for Advanced Students: Project-based "Initiation" into the Advertising World

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Lesson Plan Outline

Level of Students: Advanced
Class: Senior High School, University
Age groups: Teenagers and adults
Time allotted: 3 to 4 teaching hours
Materials to be used: Printed advertisements distributed to the class, the Internet, multimedia
Class organization: individual, pair and group work
Methods to be used: task-based and project-based learning

Overall theme of topic planned: Understanding and using the persuasion and argumentation techniques of advertising.

Overall teaching aims:

a. develop students’ cognitive skills and reasoning,

b. encourage them to use multiple didactic and informative sources (the Internet, TV, magazines and books)

c. enhance dialogue and argumentation and promote group work.

Overall learning objectives:

a. become aware of the persuasion techniques used in advertising

b. practice argumentation skills

c. apply this knowledge in project-work [according to the constructivist and the sociocultural theories]

Some research on the subject-matter will help the teacher collect the materials needed to start a conversation about advertisements. The Internet is a great bank of information the teacher can consult in order to collect essays and reports on advertising and its techniques. Web sites, such as YouTube - http://www.youtube.com - provide easy access to video advertisements; newspapers and magazines in the target language have numerous advertisements that can be used in the classroom to arouse discussion.

To understand better how advertisements work, students need to be acquainted with some relevant terminology that will be useful in the class discussion and their home assignment:

• The Sign

"A sign is anything that can be used to tell a lie"
[Umberto Eco]

Students can be asked to explain what a symbol is and present examples. They can be also presented with well known symbols such as the heart and the cross and asked to find their meaning, e.g. love, Christianity. Then, students get the feedback that the symbol is called “signifier” and it is a concrete representation of an idea, a concept or other abstractions, which are called “signified”. Based on Valentino’s “Rock’n Rose” fragrance, the teacher can isolate the word “rose” and ask students to determine its signified. The word “rose” signifies a flower; it also signifies passion. The first signified - the literary meaning of the word “rose” - is called “denotation” and the second - the secondary, cultural meaning - “connotation”. Now students can discuss why connotation is so important in advertising and how male and female consumers are psychologically manipulated. At this stage, students should know how to analyse an ad in terms of its image and illustration. An excellent virtual tour in the world of semiotics and advertisements is available by the University of Vermont:
http://www.uvm.edu/~tstreete/semiotics_and_ads

• Language: Logic and reasoning

Persuasion is accomplished via "logic" and "reasoning". Logic is the study of reasoning, which all people should master as during communication - both oral and written - the aim is to persuade the interlocutor to accept or respect the others' view, deeds or intentions. There are two types of reasoning: the deductive which reaches a specific conclusion after having studied a general truth, and the inductive which reaches a conclusion by examining a sampling of information. More information can be found in Wikipedia’s entry:

• Language: Logical Fallacies

When the reasoning is valid, true conclusions are reached, whereas an error in reasoning forms a fallacy. A very popular fallacy used in advertising is the "False Dilemma" or the "Either/Or" fallacy. The teacher can present students with advertisements that make use of this technique, e.g. the BODYLINE ad. The beauty centre’s campaign focuses on the dilemma that either you pay for the services offered or you cannot lose weight. For a complete list of logical fallacies with examples visit the web site:
http://www.logicalfallacies.info

• Language: Figures of Speech

A figure of speech is a word or phrase that departs from its literal meaning. As such, figurative uses of words - usually metaphor, hyperbole, double meaning, irony, ellipsis, alliteration and assonance - are used in advertising in order to create false impressions, make a motto easily remembered, have humorous effects and/or form analogies. After being given specific examples, students may be asked to identify figures of speech in advertisements distributed to class or as home assignment. Students will enjoy finding alliteration - e.g. Ford. Feel the Difference - and assonance - e.g. coca cola - in brand names, mottos, slogans and jingles. Definitions and examples of the figures of speech are available at:
http://www.serve.com/hecht/words/fos.htm
• Whole Advertisement Analysis

After explaining key terms and concepts, an overall analysis of an actual advertisement can take place. The teacher can make learners guess a specific advertisement through the use of symbolism. Given the keywords “rural area, mountains, canyons and cowboys” students may easily guess correctly and joyfully that it is the Marlboro advertisement. They are able to understand the symbols and via cognitive processing make the correct estimation. Questions such as “Why is red the dominant color?”, “Why there is always a handsome cowboy?”, “Is there any false analogy between the cowboy’s physical strength and cigarettes’ insanitary consequences?”, “What is the target group of such an advertisement?” can lead to “conscience awakening” conclusions that the target group is strong, adventurous, young, fit and independent men and that the fit cowboy is used to subconsciously deceive the audience by implying that smoking does not damage health. A very informative analysis of the Marlboro Myth can be found at: http://www.eng.fju.edu.tw/Literary_Criticism/crit97_work/Marlboro.htm

III. Project-Based Assessment

The above lesson was taught in a language mastery class for university students. The final projects required students A) to write at home an extended analysis of an advertisement of their choice, at least three paragraphs in length, identifying the persuasive and argumentative elements the advertisement contained, and B) to present orally and in groups a real or imaginary product or service, using the techniques discussed in the previous lessons. Other classes may have an option between project A and project B which is collaborative and more creative. Students were motivated for both projects. However, project B inspired students to use their imagination and humor in order to create the advertising campaign for a product. Some students created posters [Fig. 1], whereas others prepared jingles and mottos which were presented orally in class - e.g. one group undertook the campaign of Coca-cola Zero. There were also imaginary products being advertised. The most humorous and impressive was the “ANTIKARAFLOFRAPON” [Fig.2], a pink-colored frappe that is a “trendy” treatment against hair loss. The students drew their own posters, used persuasion techniques and performed an argumentative oral campaign. Another remarkable project was the fragrance “Apocalypse” [Fig. 1]. This advertisement made use of a persona, the Greek singer Despoina Vandi, who was supposed to promote the fragrance. The motto was “Explore Yourself, Reveal the secrets...” which subconsciously encourages the target group - modern women - to explore their real selves. The bottle of the fragrance has the shape of a crown or a royal mace urging female consumers to unravel the queen, all women hide inside. To sum up, all students participated eagerly in both projects, but especially project B, which promoted self-expression and creativity, gained in popularity.

IV. Conclusion

The educator’s role in student’s life is multifaced. The aim is not only to teach students a specific subject-matter, but also to prepare them for their future socialization, equipping them with cognitive skills, social knowledge and moral values in order to produce active and “awakened” citizens and a future generation that will not be manipulated or tricked. To this end, lessons in every discipline need to be inter-disciplinarily enriched, offering students the opportunity to merge seemingly unfitting fields and collaborate with teachers and fellow-students, increasing their cognitive and metacognitive abilities. Students’ active participation and creativity during the learning process is considered very important and fruitful, as it is proven that our learners desire freedom of consciousness and pursue self-expression/exploration, rather than passive instruction and feedback.

For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them [Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics]

V. References

