An Overview of the Goals of Cultural Instruction in Formal English Curricula in Taiwan

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ABSTRACT

This study employs metaanlysis to evaluate six culture-oriented English teaching programs in Taiwan in terms of Damen's six goals for cross-cultural and intercultural training as follows: (1) to expand cultural awareness of both the student's native culture and the target culture; (2) to encourage a seeking to understand the new and different cultural patterns; (3) to develop intercultural communicative skills in areas in which cross-cultural similarities occur; (4) to develop a perspective of cross-cultural awareness that recognizes cultural differences and fosters understanding of the strength found in diversity; (5) to increase tolerance and acceptance of the existence of different values, attitudes, and belief systems as part of a target cultures; and (6) to develop an attitude of acceptance toward change and personal adjustment; to foster personal flexibility in order to open avenues for learning and growth throughout a lifetime; and to understand that culture shock is a natural process. Results indicate need for improvement of those programs in terms of effectiveness and adequacy. Instructional topics of American-Anglo cultures were generally limited to concrete issues such as holidays and foods without addressing to spiritual attitudes, values and beliefs in the cultures. Local culture in Taiwan was either neglected or understated. Suggestions are made to cultivate in students understanding of their own culture and tolerance of appreciation of the others in formal English instruction.

Key words: culture, cultural education, cross-cultural communication.

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Introduction

Globalization has influenced the development of world politics, culture, technology and education. The advancement of information technology has also accelerated the process of globalization and made our world a "global village." Therefore, cross-cultural or intercultural knowledge and communicative skills are playing increasingly important roles in facilitating communication in the global village. The trend of globalization has made English a super dominant language, the global language, in the world. Learning English is a must for every modern civilian. The inevitable corollary of the phenomenon is the expansion of Anglo-American culture. However, the power of the expansion has cost the culture and language of some minority groups the destiny of extinction. In recent decades, governments in a growing number of countries have become aware of the risk of losing their own cultures at the expense of globalization and started to launch efforts to preserve their cultural heritage. The balance between globalization and localization is, however, no easy task. It requires profound understanding of and proper attitude towards one's own culture and other cultures. This demand makes cultural instruction at a premium. Taiwan, as a member of the global village, is also subject to the impact of globalization and has been fighting to be a stronger competitor in international economics. In the pursuit of economic growth, Taiwan is also facing the dilemma of embracing outer cultures or preserving her own one. People in Taiwan now are zealous in promoting their English proficiency levels. However, cultural instruction is not receiving due attention, and the balance between globalization and localization concerning culture issues is still dangling in the air.

The present study investigates the effectiveness and adequacy of cultural instruction in formal English curricula in Taiwan with an overall review on several academic research papers studying culture-related issues in formal English education. Through the perspectives of theoretical background and social situation in Taiwan,

these academic research papers are analyzed in terms of the goals of cultural instruction embedded in the English teaching programs or experiments in question. The results of the study are intended to foster understanding of the crucial role of cultural instruction in EFL classroom to balance the trend of globalization and the needs for localization.

Literature Review

Damen (*1987*) proposes six general goals that should be included in any cross-cultural or intercultural training as follows:

1. to expand cultural awareness of both the student's native culture and the target culture;

2. to encourage a seeking to understand the new and different cultural patterns;

3. to develop intercultural communicative skills in areas in which cross-cultural similarities occur;

4. to develop a perspective of cross-cultural awareness that recognizes cultural differences and fosters understanding of the strength found in diversity;

5. to increase tolerance and acceptance of the existence of different values, attitudes, and belief systems as part of a target cultures; and

6. to develop an attitude of acceptance toward change and personal adjustment; to foster personal flexibility in order to open avenues for learning and growth throughout a lifetime; and to understand that culture shock is a natural process.

The six goals can be divided into three categories. The first, third, and fourth goals are related to cultural knowledge and behavior; the second goal concerns research skills and interest; the last two involve an interpersonal process that aims at personal growth. The first goal emphasizes the equal status and importance of the source culture and the target culture. Kramsch (*1993*) points out that learning a culture requires one to consider his/her own culture in relation to another. Hence, the

process of learning about culture entails a reflection on one's own culture as well as the target culture. Mantle-Broomley (1992) indicates that learners are not able to set out to learn about others before they understand themselves. On the other hand, their understanding of their own cultures will be reshaped in the process of learning about others.　Valdes (1992) also proposes, "After the learners are guided to a recognition of the cultural base of their own attitudes and behavior, they are ready to consider others in a more favorable light (p.2).　In Taiwan, teaching culture is often considered as equivalent to teaching Anglo-American cultures, while teaching Chinese culture is more said than done.　Chang (2001) and Liu (2003) warned the dominant power of English language and culture as the consequence of globalization. They pointed out that a considerable number of languages and cultures, especially those of minority groups were extinguishing in the English empire.　In searching for economic growth and international competitive abilities, most countries in the world have recognized the importance of learning English as a global language.　However, few of them are aware of the impact of English frenzy on their own cultures. As a result, they are replacing their own cultures with Anglo-American culture deliberately or subconsciously.　Liu calls for "glocalization" to balance the education of source culture and target culture (p.2).

The second goal is to encourage a seeking to understand the new and different cultural patterns.　Active seeking of cultural information necessitates research skills, which are considered as an essential part of cultural instruction by Lafayette (1997) to update one's cultural knowledge.　This goal involves not only research skills and interest but also a personal discovery journey.　Not all learners are willing to launch into the discovery journey.　As Morgan (1998) explains in her research on cross-cultural encounters, behaviour and language are less easy to decode than the broader issues of value-systems and beliefs because they are experienced as more personal. We as a member of a culture group have established our identity by our different patterns of sociability and language.　Some may feel threatened in giving up the boundaries of their own identity in recognizing the validity of others.　In

Taiwan, some learners may be reluctant to seek to understand other cultural patterns in that they do not have much opportunity to engage in cross-cultural encounters. To encourage active seeking of culture learning, the teacher may introduce the four beneficial effects proposed by Brislin (*1981*): (1) worldmindedness, (2) decline in authoritarianism, (3) internal control, and (4) achievement values. The learners should be informed that even though they may not need to contact with people from other cultures frequently, they could still benefit from the discovery journey by increasing their self-confidence or even becoming creative mediators.

The third and fourth goals involve communicative and intellectual skills on comparison between the source culture and target culture. The fourth goal focuses on the communicative skills in areas in which cross-cultural similarities occur. However, I think communicative skills should not be restricted to similarities cultural elements. Because in most cases it is the difference that causes communicative blocks and requires further explanation. "The strength found in diversity" could be too abstract for the learner to grasp and therefore requires throughout explanation and guidance from the teacher. In his study on cultural codes for calls, Scollon (*1999*) advocates contrastive and comparative analysis of codes instead of isolated behaviors. To achieve a contextualized understanding, he proposes two steps: seeking the cultural codes and then placing them into the context to daily usage. The ultimate goal is to bring subconscious cultural codes to the level of conscious perception.

The fifth goal is to develop tolerance and acceptance of the different values, attitudes, and belief systems in the target culture. Respect to difference is the foundation for further development of cultural competence. The achievement of the goal demands extra instruction and guidance from the teacher, or the communicator. The teacher must cultivate empathy in the students and make them realize that people generally act the way they do due to some underlying reasons (*Seelye, 1997*). As pointed by Kramsch (*1993*), learning about a culture does not entail merely a presentation of facts but rather a process of trying to understand foreignness or otherness. Javidi A. and Javidi M. (*1997*) propose that mutual understanding of

cultural values helps to develop solid and effective interpersonal bonds and friendship and is thereby conducive to intercultural contact. They also reveal different cultural stratifications between western and eastern cultures' values under six categories: (1) self-concept versus group-concept, (2) doing versus being, (3) equality versus inequality, (4) informality versus formality, (5) heterogeneity versus homogeneity, and (6) activity-oriented versus person-oriented.

The sixth and also the last goal is to develop an attitude of acceptance toward change and personal adjustment; to foster personal flexibility in order to open avenues for learning and growth throughout a lifetime; and to understand that culture shock is a natural process. This is the highest level of cultural competence, as described by Meyer (*1991*):

> *transcultural.... (where) the learner is able to evaluate intercultural differences and solve intercultural problems by appeal to principles of international co-operation and communication which give each culture its proper right and which allow the learner to develop his own identity in the light of cross-cultural understanding (p.143).*

Valdes (*1992*) proposes, "the most successful language learners are able to take on the 'mindset' of the speakers of the second language, assuming the culture along with the language" (p.2). This goal calls for the highest degree of dedication and expertise of the teacher, especially in a foreign language environment like Taiwan, where contact with the target culture is limited and misunderstanding could be ubiquitous. The teacher bears the mission to serve as a culture mediator and to keep the learners from egocentric distortion of the target or over-responsive total acceptance of the target culture. S/he is also supposed to be a culture facilitator who is able to establish stable self-images and a sound cultural identity in the learners. Specific training may be necessary to allow teachers to ponder the issues such as "How can learners keep from losing their own identity as members of their own

culture while still establish appropriate cognitive and emotional relationships with it?" and "How can learners make their experiences a useful educational dimension for their own growth without alienating themselves or others and without withdrawing from the situation" (*Brislin & Pedersen, 1978*).

Besides the general goals of cross-cultural training, Damen (*1987*) proposes general objectives of activities relative to a target culture to foster:

1. discovery of salient cultural themes, patterns, and values orientations;
2. awareness of the affective and culture-specific attributions of given verbal and nonverbal behavior;
3. skill in forming appropriate cultural hypotheses related to behaviour, perceptions, and expectations;
4. skills of observation and information gathering that will facilitate all of the above;
5. maintenance of a posture of delayed evaluation of the new and strange;
6. an understanding that learning a new culture means taking risks, being willing to change, and enduring much discomfort.

Various goals have been proposed by other scholars. Lafayette (*1997*) suggests thirteen goals of systematic American culture instruction in which the learners are trained to:

1. recognize/explain major geographical monuments.
2. recognize/explain major historical events.
3. recognize/explain major institutions (such as religious or educational institutions.)
4. recognize/explain major "artistic" monuments.
5. recognize/explain "active" everyday cultural patterns (such as eating or greeting people.)
6. recognize/explain "passive" everyday cultural patterns (such as marriage or social stratification.)
7. act appropriately in common everyday situations.

8. use appropriate common gestures.

9. value different peoples and societies.

10. recognize/explain culture of target-language-related ethnic groups in the United States.

11. recognize/explain cultures of other peoples speaking the target language.

12. evaluate validity of statements about culture.

13. develop skills needed to locate and organize information about culture.

Seelye (*1997*) proposes six-goal framework modified from his original seven-goal framework for teachers to design an instructional unit and devise cultural-related activities.　The six goals are adapted with the attempt to make it easier to evaluate if an activity is culturally meaningful. The six goals are:

Goal 1: Interest. The student shows curiosity about another culture and empathy toward its members.

Goal 2: Who. The student recognizes how social variables such as age, sex, social class, religion, ethnicity, and place of residence affect the way people speak and behave.

Goal 3. What. The student knows what culturally-conditioned images are evoked in the minds of people when they think, act, and react to the world around them.

Goal 4. Where and When. The student recognizes that the situational variables and convention shape behavior in important ways.

Goal 5. Why. The student realizes that people generally act the way they do due to some underlying reasons (such as to meet basic physical or psychological needs), and cultural behavior and patterns are interrelated.

Goal 6. Exploration. The student can evaluate a statement about the target culture reasonably and has the skills to locate and organize information about that culture.

Lafayette's and Seelye's frameworks reveal the importance of two combined

approaches in culture instruction---providing cultural facts as well as cultivating students' cultural research skills. The former approach equips students with a basic repertoire of information about a culture, the latter enables the students the research skills to update their knowledge on the dynamic and ever-changing culture with new information. However, both of the frameworks put their spotlights on the target culture without concerning the native culture. Lafayette's thirteen goals focus mainly on the accumulation of idealized knowledge on the target culture, while only the last two goals are related to research skills. Compared with Lafayette's thirteen goals, Seelye's framework puts more emphasis on the development of personal skills in accepting and adjusting to a new culture. But nevertheless the native culture is not covered. Damen's model is more comprehensive and suitable to both ESL and EFL learners in that it encompasses the importance of preserving one's own culture, the mindfulness toward outer culture, and ultimately personal growth in lifetime.

Cultural Instruction in Taiwan

The following part the present study will analyze six culture-oriented English teaching programs in Taiwan in terms of Damen's six goals. Since cultural instruction issue has not received due attention in Taiwan's formal English language curricula, the number of related studies is scant. There are six included in the present study. In the six teaching programs or experiment, various materials and techniques are employed, including Sesame English, international e-mail exchange, children's storybooks, festival portfolio, a communicative language learning environment, movies, and interview project. Each of the studies will be analyzed to find whether their teaching programs are able to achieve the general goals proposed by Damen.

In her thesis, Lin (*2002*) reported the effects of communicative language teaching (CLT) on English and cultural learning of grade-six children at elementary school level. The content of cultural instruction included five Chinese holidays and festivals (Moon Festival, Teacher's Day, Dragon Boat Festival, Chinese Lover's Day,

and Chinese New Year), three American holidays (Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Christmas), and two international holidays (Valentine's Day and Easter). The teaching approach was learner-centered with cooperative learning activities. Games, chants, comics, children's songs, conversation, contest, conversation, and group discussion were employed to create interesting and motivating atmosphere of learning. Unfortunately, the teaching procedure was not clearly specified and the course design seemed to put more emphases on language use rather than cultural instruction.

This course design looked effective to achieve Damen's first goal (to expand cultural awareness of both the student's native culture and the target culture) in that it covered both the source culture and the target culture. It could not, however, achieve the second goal (to encourage a seeking to understand the new and different cultural patterns) because research skills were not instructed. Although this teaching experiment was claimed to be communicative, the activities were aimed at learning the vocabulary and expressions about culture (festivals) instead of the transmission or exchange of cultural information. Therefore, the students might progress in their general communicative skills, but not in intercultural communicative skills. It was not reported whether the teacher provided information of the spirits behind these festivals and systematic comparison between the two cultures. The teaching experiment failed to guarantee the achievement of the fourth goal (to develop a perspective of cross-cultural awareness that recognizes cultural difference and fosters understanding of the strength found in diversity) if s/he did not. To find the strength in diversity necessitates more dedication and enlightenment from the teacher. The fifth goal should be attainable since children are apt to have open attitude towards new information.

It seems reasonable that the teaching program did not serve to achieve the sixth goal, which involves personal adjustment and flexibility for learning and growth, since the students could be too young to be ready for this. However, it is widely accepted that cultural learning should started early or from the initial states of language instruction (*Cornfield, 1966; Bourque, J. & Chehy, L., 1974*). Therefore it is

plausible for the teaching program to integrate cultural issues with language learning. However, children are limited in their experience and knowledge and are not able to engage in high-level thinking to develop sophisticated concept of culture or self-education. Flewelling (*1994*) points ou some topics about understanding on American culture for beginning level: (1) properties for the foreign culture---The students are able to describe, or demonstrate physically how to behave in situations such as greeting, introducing a person, thanking, saying goodbye, and eating; (2) leisure-time activities--- The students are able to tell two of the common leisure-time activities in the foreign society; (3) literature---The students are able to recite traditional nursery rhymes and appreciate some easy Anglo-American children literature; and (4) songs---The students are able to sing some folk songs and traditional children's songs. Lin's teaching program satisfies most of the topics. One shortcoming in the program is the lack of systematic presentation of cultural information. The students might have obtained more fun than general idea of American culture.

Ko's thesis (*2003*) also focuses on the culture learning of children at elementary school. He surveyed 69 grade-two and 80 grade-four students' attitudes towards English learning and cultural awareness after watching Sesame Street videos. The results showed that Chinese translation was favored by the students and that the students' cultural awareness was promoted in the part of festivals and food.

Media units such as films and television programs are useful visual devices that provide information, generate questions, and develop cultural hypotheses. They can also be employed as materials for role play, analysis, and discussion (*Damen, 1987*). However, they are not a stand-alone system that offers all the cultural training that the students need. They are usually accompanied with interactive activities between the teacher and the students or among the students. Therefore it is insufficient to use media units such as Sesame Street videos alone for culture instruction. This is particularly true for EFL young learners. One reason is that they have only limited contact with the target culture bearers and if the teaching content is inadequate or

inappropriate there will be less chance to correct misconception generated in the cultural instruction. Another reason is that they are at beginning level of language learning and the transmission of the cultural information in the target language is very likely to be blocked by the children's limited language proficiency. The results of a questionnaire survey conducted by Chuang (*2002*) revealed that students' limited English proficiency was one of the difficulties encountered by elementary English teachers in teaching American culture. Although there is still no answer to the question regarding the language in which culture should be taught, the fast speech rate and dramatized pronunciation in the Sesame Street is likely incomprehensible to EFL children at beginning level. Besides, extra explicit instruction of a foreign culture seems to be necessary if natural learning environment of the target culture is absent. Cross-cultural training is only part of the teaching goals of Sesame Street and most of the cultural information might be indirectly presented. There is no way for children at age eight or ten to infer the information by themselves. In a word, explicit instruction is needed; even though it has to be done in their native language. It is not surprising to find in the results that the students favored the part with Chinese translation.

Lu's thesis (*2003*) investigated the effects of cross-cultural e-mail exchange on the development of linguistic skills and cultural awareness. The participants included 17 junior high school students in Taiwan, 23 e-pals in the United States (16 e-pals in Pittsburgh and seven e-pals in Illinois), and 22 e-pals in Sweden. The participants were requested to send at least a total of five e-mail messages to their e-pals every other week within 50 days on the following designated topics: (1) self-introduction, (2) school life, after school and home life, or a day in the life of the student, (3) factual information about his/her culture such as food, animals and plants, weather, holidays, places of interest, and (4) personal favorites and a thank-you notes. In addition, two snail-mail packages including junk mail, receipts, menus, tickets, stamps, postcards, knickknacks were also exchanged to enrich the project.

E-mail, as a new type of information technology, has been increasingly