

Successful Integration of Cultural Learning Into English Teaching: Curriculum Transformation and Implementation

Lou, Wen-ling

Lingnan Normal University, Zhanjiang, China

The purpose of this study was to investigate a case of curriculum planning and the integration of cultural learning into English teaching as well as the learning outcomes of the students. Through curriculum transformation and an application of task-based teaching, the researcher explored whether college students participating in an international cultural exchange activity could enhance their cultural learning and English language proficiency. This study is an example of qualitative research, with data collected through individual interviews, observations by the researcher, and field notes. The results show that transforming a curriculum and applying task-based teaching methods positively and deeply can help students culturally and bring success to their language learning. This study suggests that transforming a curriculum entails the capability of language instructors to reconceptualize the subject matter and textbook knowledge they possess for classroom teaching as well as a knowledge of the fundamentals of curriculum to cultivate a capacity for curriculum understanding and reflective teaching.

Keywords: cultural learning, English teaching, curriculum transformation, task-based teaching

Introduction

The study of culture has been referred to as if it resembled the subject matter in any other discipline, such as geography, mathematics, science, or linguistics (Moran, 2001), but that is hardly the case. The goals of teaching culture in the language classroom pertain to knowledge, awareness, and practice rather than acculturation and assimilation and simply making comparisons between two cultures. Moran defined culture in terms of *cultural experiences* that help students learn about a culture, including food, clothing, literature, music, films, and personal anecdotes (p. 13). *Cultural experiences* comprise cultural content with which students are engaged along with the outcomes intended or achieved, the learning context, and the nature of the relationship a teacher develops with students.

Many Taiwanese universities with a new sense of international awareness have attempted to reach out to outside institutions through international collaboration that includes programs for student exchange and for study abroad. Nevertheless, when Taiwanese students communicate with others in English, in the workplace, meet foreign visitors, and even study overseas in English-speaking countries, they can hardly express themselves in detail about their own culture because doing so has almost never been emphasized in foreign language teaching (Huang, 2006; Tsai, 2009) and is often completely omitted in most English classrooms in Taiwan. Tsou's (2005) study showed that most English teachers do not possess professional knowledge and skills in the teaching of

culture. Huang (2006) and Tsai (2009) advocated for language teachers' concern with teaching local and Chinese culture instead of focusing on teaching about cultures abroad.

How can culture be taught in an English language class? What is "best practice" for teaching culture? The answers to these questions essentially refer to thoughtful and holistic curriculum planning and its implementation through effective teaching methods. These answers may be the components most likely to increase interest among students and improve their learning motivation through this method, which constitutes a key element in teaching and also demonstrates students' performances and learning outcomes.

Amer (2017) stated that task-based language teaching (TBLT) was a successful teaching method in which the teacher activates the potential ability of learners to learn new knowledge by asking them to complete tasks. Cheng (2004) pointed out that a task emphasizes learning by doing. Long (1985) stated that tasks are a series of actions carried out by individuals or others and are closely related to daily life. Richards, Platt, and Weber (1985) viewed a task as an action or activity in which language is processed or understood. However, Crookes (1989) thought tasks activities with a specific purpose can be seen as an educational curriculum. From Crookes' viewpoint, tasks are required primarily by teachers for students to complete; thus, teachers are curriculum creators.

Some scholars have studied task-based language teaching as an effective method that can be applied in the four language skills of English. Many of these studies involved reading skills (Amer & Demirel, 2020; Jiang, 2019; Lin, 2017; Nunan, 1989), but few dealt with the integration of task-based language teaching with a holistic curriculum plan and its content. In other words, scholars have focused on the teaching methods most closely relating to students' learning outcomes, but reflection on the importance of curriculum planning and implementation has been lacking. Long and Crookes (1992) argued that classroom tasks must have a clear relationship with the real-world context of language use and language need. In this study the researcher, therefore, designed and implemented a unique curriculum in a cultural learning class, applying task-based teaching in an authentic context. Research on student learning focused on the process of English language use followed along with culture and English learning outcomes derived from a Chinese festival involving traditional folklore artistry.

To achieve the goals of students learning in culture and English, the researcher created a transformative curriculum.

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether this transformative curriculum involving TBLT was helpful for the participants' cultural learning, how an elaborated international cultural exchange task changed the students' learning perspective and student outcomes, and how they improved their self-confidence by communicating with others in English.

The following questions guided the research:

1. How helpful was the transformative curriculum for the students in learning culture?
2. What type of learning represents "best practice" for student learning?
3. How did the students improve their English language learning as a result of a cultural experience?

Some scholars use the terms "reconceptualization" and "transformation" interchangeably in the literature, and the same occurs in this study.

Literature Review

Second language acquisition (SLA) researchers and language teachers seek to elicit samples of language use from learners. These samples are needed to investigate how second language (L2) learning takes place. Krashen

and Terrell (2000) defined “language learning as ‘knowing about’ language, or ‘formal knowledge’ of a language” (p. 26). Language learning is a conscious process. In the case of teachers, these samples serve as the means by which learners can be helped to learn and as evidence that successful learning is taking place. This section opens with a review of literature on curriculum, followed by an introduction to the concept of a transformative curriculum and concluding with information on task-based teaching for both teaching and learning about culture.

Curriculum

Null (2011) argued that everyone who has discussed teachers, schools, or education has used the term “curriculum”, whereas few have considered what it means, what it takes to create a good curriculum, or the proper foundation for creating one. What is a curriculum for and how should teachers go about making curriculum decisions?

Curriculum traditionally has been seen as a statement or statements of purpose of “what should be” a course of study (Nunan, 1996). Walker and Soltis (2004) postulated that a curriculum’s purpose, content, activities, and organization are inherent components of a school’s educational program and classroom instruction. Curriculum can be thought of as students having an opportunity to learn under the auspices of schools (McCutchen, 1997). Graves (1996) stated that teachers are course developers sensitive to the process of curriculum development, stating that the plan or design of the course is not the course but merely a part of course development. To design a course, Sowell (2005) stated that, “Assessing needs enable teachers to continue improving the curricula in their classrooms” (p. 181). In fact, “Needs assessment is a tool that curriculum developers can use in the revision or modification of a curriculum” (p. 196).

Transformative Curriculum Orientation

The term “curriculum transformation” refers to the work of transforming subject standards, or the so-called “What should be taught” from textbook or published materials. The notion of “transforming the subject matter” is one in which teachers transform subject knowledge for teaching through the pedagogy of best practice for their students. The best practice here is that the teacher uses the “received” standards and translates or “constructs” them into a “set of design standards for achieving quality control in curriculum and assessment designs” (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005, p. 5); a beneficial learning goal is achieved when students can personally demonstrate how they can apply meaningful subject matter into practice.

Teachers also benefit from curriculum transformation. Bruner’s (1962) “conversion” and Schwab’s (1969/2004) “translation” are ideas that concern how refined disciplinary knowledge can be authentically transformed into or represented in curriculum materials suitable for use by teachers and students. The transformation process is informed by teachers’ knowledge and beliefs about the purpose of their teaching, about learners, and about the pedagogy that they use. By conceptualizing subject matter, teachers develop “ways of thinking and talking about something, including making distinctions, defining, naming and noting significant features” (Walker & Soltis, 2004, p. 39). Henderson and Gornik (2007) further stated that by reconceptualizing the standard, which includes a holistic balance between subject-matter understanding, self-understanding, and social understanding, teachers advance their professional goals.

In general, teachers should master a specific academic subject and become as expert in it as possible. However, this is not to accumulate a wide and specific body of knowledge. Instead, they should understand the major idea and concepts in that subject and how this subject connects to other studies and to real life. In other words, in classroom teaching, a teacher necessarily transforms his or her subject matter of an academic discipline

into the subject matter of a school subject, and further facilitates students' learning outcomes, which are essentially a curricular task in terms of constructing a school subject or a course of study.

Tasks

A task can be seen as a type of activity defined by many scholars who have undertaken research in second language teaching and learning (Ellis, 2003; Johnson, 1979; Leung, 2001; Long & Crookes, 1992; Nunan, 1989; 2004; Swales, 1990; Van Lier, 1996) as well as in culture teaching (Qix, 1999; Tomalin & Stempleski, 1993). A large number of publications have been dedicated to task-based learning and teaching (e.g., Bygate, 2001; Lee, 2000; Skehan, 1998b; Willis, 1996). Task types can be identified in a number of ways, including the two broad categories suggested Nunan (1989): real-world tasks and pedagogic tasks.

Willis (1996) also claimed task as the activity of learners to achieve communication results through the target language and proposed five implementation principles, dividing task-based teaching into three stages: pretask, task loop, and language focus. Likewise, Skehan (1998b) defined a task as an activity meaningful to the authentic world, emphasizing the priority of meaning, and evaluating its completion quality according to the results of the task.

Shehadeh (2005) synthesized task in language learning as an activity that has a nonlinguistic purpose or goal with a clear outcome, which uses any or all of the four language skills in its accomplishment by conveying meaning in a way that reflects real-world language use. These definitions were in fact influenced by Dewey's notion of experience and learning. An action and the approach called a "task" are, therefore, applied in second-language pedagogy (Samuda & Bygate, 2008).

Task-Based Language Teaching

The theory of TBLT is based on the study of language acquisition. English linguists Allwright and Hanks (2009) proposed that language learning can occur naturally if teachers organize activities to lead students to focus on language meaning and solve problems with foreign language communication. It initially emphasized fluency in communication at the expense of other aspects of language like accuracy and complexity as Krashen and Terrell's (2000) did natural approach. Shehadeh (2005) stated that TBLT is based on the interaction hypothesis, which is a form of the "negotiation of meaning, [and] provides learners with opportunities for both the provision of comprehensive input and the production of modified output, ... both [of which are] believed to be necessary for language development" (p. 21).

Researchers have approached task-based learning differently and from various perspectives. Some researchers have examined tasks from the perspective of interaction, whereas others have done so from the perspective of output. For example, Edwards and Willis (2005) pointed out that the practicality of the use of task-based instruction and authentic materials has been demonstrated by how learners made significantly faster progress and were also capable of "using a new foreign language in real world circumstances with a reasonable degree of efficiency, indicating that they were able to communicate effectively, after courses that were quite short" (p. 14), and all are convinced of its value. Other teachers and institutions have followed and highlighted key factors in understanding ways that tasks can relate to second language learning (Samuda & Bygate, 2008; Shehadeh, 2005).

Assigning a learning task involves a basic unit of learning contributing to sensitizing learners to their individual learning processes, thereby eventually facilitating their ability to choose what to do and how to do it in order to help themselves learn (Nunan, 2004). Students exercise autonomy, for example, through topics and

content selection to make choices in their tasks to practice their language skills and learn how-to-learn skills (Nunan, 1989).

Cultural Learning and Teaching

Many techniques and materials are available for teaching culture in the language classroom. In terms of curriculum design for a language and culture course, Moran (2001) advocated the effectiveness of using an experiential approach to teaching and learning about culture, proposing an approach to teaching culture that is an overall strategy for addressing culture with language learners. This approach involves integrating the culture content—products, practices, perspectives, communities, and persons with the process through a cultural experience. In addition, many language educators (Archer, 1986; Damen, 1987), interculturalists (Hess, 1994; McCaffrey, 1993; Weaver, 1993), and critical pedagogues (Auerbach, 1992; Freire, 1973; Wallerstein, 1983) have also proposed similar approaches by which learners engage in participatory cultural learning activities that are planned or unplanned and subsequently undertake a methodical description about their experiences in these activities. Taking curriculum action that is combined with cultural activities in the real world through setting up courses for teaching culture is example of effective and crucial curriculum decision making.

According to Henderson and Gornik (2007), a task-based curriculum would not only allow students to acquire knowledge in the subject of cultural learning but would also enable them to become active meaning makers highly motivated about their learning. Proponents of task-based language pedagogy have, therefore, recommended the use of tasks as a central component in the language classroom because they provide better contexts for activating learners' acquisition processes and promoting L2 learning. TBLT is thus based on a theory of language learning, rather than a theory of language structure (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Richards et al. (1985) and Nunan (1989) defined a task as an activity that necessarily involves language.

Just as many definitions of "task" exist, the task-based language teaching method has been implemented in various disciplines in a classroom. Distinguishing different types of tasks is important. In this study, the researcher drew on how Samuda and Bygate (2008, p. 196) outlined the keys to task-based language teaching as theoretical framework:

1. Task performance is a catalyst for focusing attention on form and not vice versa;
2. Assessment is made in terms of task performance;
3. Task selection is shaped by real-world activities of relevance to learners and their target needs;
4. Tasks play an essential role in engaging key processes of language acquisition.

The rationale for the researcher's use of Samuda and Bygate's (2008) outline was that the tasks served as core components in her language class. Tasks provided authentic contexts and real activities to foster the students' problem-solving skills and to examine their learning process as well as advance English language learning, which suit the purposes of this study. Therefore, tasks in this study were not teaching techniques; instead, the tasks were the focus of instruction on both the process of cultural learning and the language learning rather than the end result.

Methodology

Research Method

The researcher used a qualitative approach, collecting data from students' practical experiences in the form of interviews to establish connections between theory and a real-life practice. According to Van Maanen (1988), this approach enables addressing questions as they arise in a natural setting.

Participants and Setting

The Nan Yin International Folklore Festival took place at a university in southern Taiwan. The participants were six students, including five who majored in English and were enrolled in Cultural Studies and English Learning (CSEL), including Linda, who had studied in America for several years, and Ingrid, who spoke English fluently. The other four students included Evra, Jenat, and Grace, who were not confident about speaking English; and Melissa, a freshman majoring in athletics, enrolled in a general English class, and experienced in speaking with native English speakers. Melissa was asked if she was interested in a task pertaining to Chinese cultural learning and expressing herself about culture in English for an international cultural event. The participants' personal background appears in Table 1.

Table 1

Background of Participants

Name	Gender	Age	Year in school	Major	Studied abroad	
					Yes/No	
					Language academic institute program	
Janet	F	22	Junior	English		√
Grace	F	20	Junior	English		√
Ingrid	F	21	Junior	English		√
Vera	F	22	Junior	English		√
Linda	F	22	Junior	English	3 months	2.5 years
Melissa	F	18	Freshman	Athletics		√

Note. All names are pseudonyms.

Background of the Study

The Nan Yin International Folklore Festival is a biennial international festival celebrated in Tainan County, Taiwan, sponsored by the Tainan County Government since 1996. Every two years, many folkloric groups from all over the world, such as from France, Canada, Germany, Iran, Slovak Republic, Netherlands, Poland, Japan, Italy, Indonesia, and Belgium, have been invited to Taiwan to perform their traditional music and dance for the public in Tainan County. Individuals from over 100 countries, both English speaking and non-English speaking, have come to Tainan, Taiwan, for this biennial festival. Many public and private institutions and families in Tainan County have also revealed their interest in participating in its activities as friendship reception families while some elementary schools served as friendship reception schools.

The seventh biennial celebration took place when a course titled Cultural Studies and English Learning was offered during one semester. The researcher was instructor of this course; therefore, she attempted to create opportunities for students to effectively learn both culture and English language for implementation in a real-world context. Because the international culture event was to be held in Tainan at that time, the researcher thought this event might provide a practice opportunity for students to learn about culture and undergo English language learning at the same time. After discussing the details of this event, the officer in charge of the Tainan County Government was contacted to explain the course contents and requirements. Students in this course were requested to serve as volunteers during the festival, so that they could have the opportunity to talk to English-speaking guests in English during their service. The idea was approved, and a group of 11 Mexican-Americans visited the campus for a one-day cultural exchange event.

Designing a Task

A program and time for cultural exchange, during which the students were to engage in a task based on a guideline, were outlined. All were asked to apply their language skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening in a live context set forth as follows:

Pre-task: Before the cultural exchange event, each student:

1. Selected examples of quintessential traditional Chinese culture, for example, Diablo, Gyro, tea culture (with commentary), and cultural taboos as topics;
2. Organized a selected topic and writing a performance or presentation;
3. Practiced English speaking and expression proficiency to complement the written work.

During the cultural exchange event task, all actions, and performances, the students had to be interpreted in English by the students. Each one:

1. Presented the topic selected to the 11 Mexican-Americans using English;
2. Invited guest to interact with them in an English language environment and converse with one another;
3. Invited guest to participate in a section on sharing their own culture, folk dancing, and speaking to them, instead of merely sitting and watching the students' performances.

The goal of creating opportunities was for all of the students to express Chinese and local culture in English to native English speakers. These connections were relevant because "the process of socialization in higher education is such that broader social contexts greatly influence the attitudes and values of particular students" (Dey, as cited in Klak & Martin, 2003, p. 447). Moreover, asking the students to fulfill tasks or performances for cultural exchange enlivened the students' school lives, and excitement permeated the university campus, fostering an environment conducive to acquiring increased intercultural understanding and English language use. This task design responded to Shehadeh's (2005) definition and viewpoint indicating that "a language task is: (a) an activity; (b) that uses any or all of four language skills in its accomplishment; and (c) by conveying meaning in a way that reflects real-world language use" (pp. 18-19).

The Task Procedure

The entire process, including the participants' initially collecting cultural information, searching for sources from the Internet, outlining their presentation, and practicing English-speaking skills freely before the event, required one month. The components of this process were designed as meaning-focused activities to prepare for the task of staging a performance for the Mexican-American guests in a real context. This process allowed the participants to effectively immerse themselves in an intercultural climate and to experience intercultural training before the actual event.

Three students who are skilled at speaking English practiced English pronunciation and speech skills independently. Their pronunciation was verified only when necessary. Others were given oral training by the researcher. During this time, all of the participants developed selected topics and their supporting contents; in addition, they had to translate contents from Mandarin Chinese into English and practice English speaking. They also needed to consider the solutions to problems that they might encounter, for example, what type of topic they wanted to present, and how to best present their performances. During this phase, the participants might face problems related to organizing their presentation. When facing problems, they were encouraged to determine the solutions themselves.

The researcher's intention was to cultivate the participants' capacity for problem solving, which conformed to the requirements of a holistic task of learning by doing and decision-making practice. The contents of their final PowerPoint presentations and their presentation manuscripts were edited in response to Skehan's (1998a) argument that "a task-based instruction that meaning is primary, and there is some problem to solve" (p. 95).

Data Collection

The researcher conducted six individual interviews, the contents of which were integrated into the researchers' observations and field notes with a descriptive approach to analyze the data.

This process began with an informal conversation and open-ended questions with the participants. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) indicated that an interview is a "purposeful conversation" (p. 93). They preferred using the term "conversation", which suggested they thought interviews should be held in an informal manner that would put most subjects at ease. Because all the participants were Taiwanese students, the interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese and then translated into English for the research findings of this study.

The interview questions included the following:

1. Would you describe your authentic task experience in this event?
2. Have you faced any difficulty in this task process?
3. What impressed you the most in this intercultural exchange event experience?
4. What did this event do to change your attitude toward language learning?
5. Have you learned to understand more about your own culture and how to introduce it by using English?

The data derived from 30- to 35-minute audiotaped individual interviews.

The field observation occurred at various times and places. During preparation work of the pretask and during the task performance stages, the researcher observed the students' work and their actions. In addition, whenever the students approached the researcher and asked for directions or hints for designing their culture presentations, the researcher wrote notes after providing feedback to students.

Data Analysis

Creswell (1998) indicated that data analysis is a process; it is custom-built, revised, and "choreographed" (Huberman & Miles, 1994). From this process, a researcher discovers what is important, what is to be learned, and what they want to tell readers (Lou, 2008).

All of the interviews in this study were transcribed for the purpose of data analysis. The researcher read the transcripts in their entirety several times in detail, examined the interview transcripts closely (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011, pp. 142-143), and "tr[ied] to get a sense of the interview as a whole before breaking into parts" as suggested by Agar (1980, p. 130).

By applying the coding process to the transcript, the researcher followed the process in steps, using suggestions of Ely, Anzul, Garner, and Steinmetz (1991, pp. 150-151) on coding that provided a clear guide to the task of data analysis:

1. To read all the raw data repeatedly to develop detailed and intimate knowledge of them;
2. To note initial impressions of the data as later reference;
3. To list tentative categories and review the data in Step 1;
4. To refine categories by examining the outcome of Steps 2 and 3 and returning to the raw data of step;
5. To select verbatim narrative of participants' information to connect the raw data to the categories;
6. To study the results of Step 5 and revise them if needed;

7. To write each participant's experience from my best view by linking data across categories;
8. To integrate the findings about each person.

Trustworthiness

Qualitative research can be evaluated for its truth, value, usefulness, rigorousness, and credibility under the umbrella term *trustworthiness* (Creswell, 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). A member check occurs when the researcher "solicits participants' feedback, not only to confirm findings, but also to make sure the right questions are asked" (Patton, 2002, p. 561). Stake (1995) recommended that researchers ask the participants to examine their transcripts. Therefore, as the data were transcribed, transcripts and emerging findings were sent back to the students, so they could confirm the researcher had accurately represented their interview answers.

Results

The findings indicated that the application of a task-based teaching method relating to a transformative curriculum that integrated cultural studies into English learning led to significantly higher achievements in students' learning about both Chinese culture and English. The students' reading and speaking proficiency were enhanced more than in previous English courses. From the six interviews and from the transcript categories, the researcher developed four synthesized sections as follows:

1. Benefits of learning Chinese culture through participating in a real-context event;
2. The challenge of learning content-based subject matter using English and expressing it in English;
3. Improving English proficiency through a task;
4. Transforming curriculum to integrate subject learning.

The following sections illustrate the analysis from coded data with a descriptive approach.

Benefits of Learning Chinese Culture Through a Real-Context Event

The results of the individual interviews show that all of the students highly affirmed participating in this cultural exchange event as meaningful and unforgettable. Because of this unique experience, they enjoyed learning about their own culture through the events presented in this festival and introducing it to foreign visitors. The following are examples when they were individualized response on the process and the researcher's observation notes.

Ingrid told the researcher, "The most valuable aspect of the event for me was that I engaged in an authentic context to learn about Chinese culture and developed international insights at the same time. This won't happen by reading a book".

Similarly, Janet said, "I have had few opportunities to communicate with foreigners. It was great that I could talk to people in English people face to face, just like to friends through an event like this. It was a new experience".

According to Janet's reaction, the researcher wrote her observation notes: "Janet has become more confident about expressing herself although it was evident that she was still nervous but excited about being engaged in this real-life task. From her feedback, I am so glad to see her growth".

Challenge of Learning Content-Based Subject Matter in English and Expressing It in English

All of the students mentioned that they had difficulties deciding on the Chinese cultural phenomenon to present, and then translating it from Mandarin Chinese into English. They had struggled with looking up words

in an English dictionary, determining appropriate vocabulary, forming and correcting sentences, writing paragraphs, and then practicing them by reading them aloud in order to express them well in public. Most of them, however, eventually acknowledged that they had a meaningful achievement outcome because of their efforts to prepare for the whole event.

Melissa said:

I am glad to have participated in this cultural event. I had a hard time making a decision for my topic and preparing all of the materials before outlining them together in a presentation paper; however, I had the chance to challenge myself. I was able to find out about my own culture, learned it well, and also practiced my English writing, reading, and speaking.

Melissa's case presented a reality that the task assigned to her was a challenge. Her case also showed that she might face some problems related to information gathering and decision-making. At this point, the researcher wrote in her observation note: "Melissa seemed to have problems with gathering information of Chinese culture and organizing her presentation what she will perform. However, I cultivated her capacity for problem solving by providing her with individual instruction, which is helpful for her".

In addition, Linda mentioned that she is familiar with Chinese culture and its history but not how to express herself about them in English. Participating in this task, she challenged herself and has been confident about using English to introduce Chinese culture and eventually present it in public.

The researcher wrote notes based on Linda's comments:

Linda is proud to have studied in America for years. She thought it was not a problem to speak English to native English speakers; however, she still was struggling with English expression for the topic she had prepared. I can see her hard work to show her confidence.

Improving English Proficiency Through Task-Based Teaching Method

All of the students acknowledged that they improved their English in terms of not only their speaking skills, but also their confidence in speaking in front of native speakers of English. Some specific comments included the following:

Vera:

Certainly, my English ability has improved because I spent lots of time preparing information about Chinese culture and practicing it in English. When I have problems with writing in English and using vocabulary, I have to find the answers and solve problems by myself.

From the point of view of the task-based language learning, Melissa had an impressive personal experience from the event. She said:

I was able to correct some English vocabulary and sentences, which I used to say incorrectly. For example, during the buffet, I mentioned the food and said "good to eat" to our guests. One of the guests responded to me with the sentence, "Tastes good." I was very impressed and knew how to say it afterwards. I will not forget this language learning experience.

Melissa's case was an interactive action in which she was given opportunity to interact with English speakers and reflect on what she had learned which is consistent with Nunan's (2004) principle of reflection for task-based language teaching. Her case also reflected Research Question 2: What type of learning represents the "best practices" for students' cultural and English learning? The answer is the task-based teaching method. Both Melissa's and Vera's comments also answered Research Question 3: How did the students improve their English language learning as a result of a cultural experience?

Meanwhile, all of the students practiced learning by doing, learning by using a foreign language through live communication, helping them to become independent learners outside a classroom setting. This process reflected Cheng's (2004) argument that a task emphasizes learning by doing and learning by using language

Transforming Curriculum to Integrate Subject Learning

In terms of curriculum design and transforming subject content, all six students in the study strongly believed that it is crucial and essential to incorporate authentic materials and events into a curriculum. They all acknowledged that these benefit students' learning outcomes and practicality. Some of their feedback included the following. Grace said:

Of course, authentic tasks are great. They help students learn problem solving skills and learn contents in a more in-depth manner because integrating tasks into curriculum content keeps the course lively. I am very impressed about being involved in this type of learning process. Information learned this way is strongly embedded in my mind.

Ingrid stated, "Integrating real activities into curriculum content is really what both teaching and learning are all about. Learning becomes the student's property, and they will remember it forever". Grace's and Ingrid's comments about this activity thus expressed their aroused interest about cultural learning.

When the researcher saw Ingrid's hard work, she wrote in her observation notes: "Ingrid is a tough student. She always challenges herself and makes everything to be perfect. I believe that this experience of culture course will bring her potential in English development now and in the future".

All participants' English language learning from the tasks designed by the researchers was successful. They became involved in the curriculum process in tasks like cultural content selection and practicing using English. These all conformed to Nunan's argument that a "language learning process is considered to be an active, intelligent, rule-seeking, problem-solving process" in which learners examine how the target language functions (1992, p. 233).

Discussion

In the previous section, the researcher offered a descriptive report of the findings drawn from the data collected. This section includes a discussion of the findings presented in three parts: (a) transforming subject matter and improving learning outcome; (b) teaching Culture in English as Foreign Language course; and (c) fostering the capacity for transformative curriculum.

Transforming Subject Matter to Improve Learning Outcome

According to Doyle (1992), producing both curriculum and pedagogy involves transformation of subject matter in various ways. Within a school context and support, curriculum as a whole expresses what schooling should be in conformity to society while content as selected and defined should be consistent. Hosting an intercultural exchange event can be a type of curriculum reconceptualization from the textbook to an authentic context of cultural learning in which students learn about cultures by participating in university event. Thus, students learn things outside books as well as how to socialize. The idea of teaching culture in a real context of English speaking, learning, and practice, in fact, was a type of transforming curriculum and implementation. A Taiwanese buffet was arranged during the cultural exchange time, and the students conversed with the English-speaking guests; interacting with them was also another means of reconceptualizing subject matter into teaching practice.

With task-based teaching method, an English language class became part of a content-based curriculum designed for English language instruction and cultural learning while curriculum transformation played a key

role. Prior to this study, the researcher designed an international cultural exchange event to provide colleges and universities with an opportunity to learn about their own culture in an English class. Students then prepared cultural issues for a class and shared them with foreign visitors. This campus and community-based collaboration yielded interesting results among university students who participated in this one-day event. All participants mentioned that by being afforded the opportunity of performing situated tasks in this experience, they improved their English proficiency and cultural awareness to some degree. These phenomena of improvement and change confirmed the contents of Nunan's (1999; 2004; 2007) work on the application of a task approach in second language learning.

Teaching Culture in English as a Foreign Language

In conjunction with the cultural event held at a university campus, a curriculum transformation design was implemented, and a task-based teaching method was used. The goal was not only for the students to gain content knowledge about Chinese culture through complex—and often socially meaningful—tasks but also to experience a real-world context in which they were engaged in problem-solving independently and thereby took charge of their English learning process. Preparation for the tasks and then their implementation involved separate parts of the process of task-based learning and teaching.

Curriculum and teaching are synchronized. How one teaches and what one teaches are inseparable. Teaching culture should move from textbooks and materials out of the teaching menu and a self-contained classroom into the realities of public life. Eisner (2002) provided a useful definition of curriculum and teaching: “curriculum is the content that is taught and teaching is how that content is taught” (p. 166). He further emphasized that this simple difference is important because all curriculum planning, insofar as it precedes its actual use in the classroom, requires a transformation of a set of plans or materials into a course of action. This transformation is what is to be regarded as contributing to effective teaching. This purpose was served by engaging students in a real-life context of culturally relevant experiences and expecting them to operate independently after being first prepared for this task. In other words, transformation is both a curricular and a teaching task.

Fostering the Capacity for a Transformative Curriculum

Teaching is essentially a learned profession. Teachers must understand the structures of subject matter, and the notion of reconceptualization that helps answer two questions: What are the important ideas and skills in this domain? And How are new ideas added and deficient ones dropped by those in this area? That is, what are the rules and procedures of good scholarship, or what should they be for reconceptualizing? Eisner (2002) stated teachers ought to plan events that have an impact on students' thought processes while designing a curriculum activity. Thus, how curriculum activities are designed to exert this impact along with the forms of representation that are presented or what students are given permission to use will all play a role in their thinking related to these activities. Teachers who can reconceptualize curriculum or lessons that will actively promote meaning making while the students are engaged in a task can use a task-based curriculum not only to allow them to learn about a subject involving intercultural learning, but also to enable them to become active meaning makers very motivated about their learning and capable of moving beyond subject understanding to awareness of how the subject affects their futures (Henderson & Gornik, 2007).

Classroom teachers are expected to work with and transform the subject matter of an academic discipline into the subject matter of a school subject embodied in various pedagogical representations, instructional tasks, and activities. According to Deng (2007), transforming entails the capacity of a teacher to convert the subject-

matter knowledge they possess for classroom teaching. He asserted that in classroom teaching “a teacher necessarily transform[s] the subject matter of his or her academic discipline into the subject matter of the school subject” (p. 282).

Conclusion

The findings provided answers to the following research questions in the current study about culture learning tied to an implementation of transformative curriculum with task-based language teaching:

1. How helpful was the transformative curriculum for the students in learning culture?
2. What type of learning represents the “best practices” for students’ learning?
3. How did the students improve their English language learning as a result of a cultural experience?

Graves (2000) noted that language teaching involves people. Planning and thinking are elements, but this “is not an enterprise that can be easily quantified, codified, and replicated. Rather, teaching is an organic, unpredictable, challenge, satisfying, and frustrating process” (p. 7). Transforming a curriculum or course is a complex endeavor that requires a well-informed discussion about the subject matter of the school curriculum or course. Such discussions and considerations are possible only when subject matter is regarded as a curriculum inquiry and deliberation (Henderson & Gornik, 2007). A lack of knowledge about one’s own culture or that of others is a key reminder about what needs to be done in Taiwanese English education.

Transforming a curriculum and developing it for task-based teaching in second language learning and teaching may have important implications for Taiwanese English language teachers. By reconceptualizing the curriculum of a culture studies English course, all students improved their English skills through participating in the international cultural exchange event. They have some positive memories of the event and were also impressed by it, making this learning experience enjoyable and educational and appealing to the students’ personal interests and learning motivation as well as evoking their self-confidence. They learned how to talk about Chinese culture in English, interacted with English-speaking people, and improved their English language skills at the same time.

Nunan (1989) suggested that the purpose of the task-based teaching method is to provide an authentic real-world task related to something that the students will have to do with the language. Although some gains were revealed in listening skills, the participants’ experiences in this authentic event revealed greater English-speaking proficiency and improved reading and writing skills. The six students all believed that it was a significant and meaningful activity that should occur regularly. By learning about their own culture in English and expressing themselves about it in English simultaneously, students will learn both knowledge and skills. One student mentioned, “I felt much more confident about talking to English-speaking people and introducing my own culture since I participated in the international cultural exchange”.

This reflection from the student justified the language learning task: “an activity with a clear outcome and conveyed meaning in a way that reflects real-world language use” (Shehadeh, 2005, p. 19). It confirmed earlier published evidence that task selection is shaped by real-world activities of relevance to learners and target needs because tasks play an essential role in engaging in the key processes of language acquisition (Samuda & Bygate, 2008). It also responds to the research question involving task-based teaching method as “best practice” for students’ learning.

Besides, cultural learning and teaching does not take place only in the classroom. It truly needs to be done innovatively in practice, thereby offering a challenging and rewarding alternative to conventional teaching

methods. The Nan Ying International Folklore Festival, a campus event of cultural exchange, which took place on just one day following a month of preparation, is a good example for teachers who teach about culture. Although the six participants encountered communication practice difficulties that challenged their language limitations, the findings from this study indicate that all of them acknowledged an improvement in English proficiency, answering Research Question 3. Thus, integrating Chinese culture into English teaching tied to curriculum transformation and a task-based teaching method are beneficial and can be successful in language learners' learning about culture while also learning a foreign language.

References

- Agar, M. H. (1980). *The professional stranger: An informal introduction to ethnography*. New York: Academic Press.
- Allwright, D., & Hanks, J. (2009). *Second language acquisition studies and the learner*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Amer, N. (2017). The effects of task-based language teaching (TBLT) on the reading comprehension in EFL classes. *International Journal of Sciences: Basic and Applied Research*, 36(3), 123-130.
- Amer, N. B., & Demirel, Ö. (2020). The impacts of task-based language instruction on the development of learners in language schools. *Revista Argentina de Clínica Psicológica*, 29(5), 977-984.
- Archer, C. (1986). Culture bump and beyond. In J. M. Valdes (Ed.), *Culture bound: Bridging the gap in language teaching* (pp. 170-178). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Auerbach, R. (1992). *Making meaning, making change: Participatory curriculum development for adult ESL literacy*. Washington: Center for Applied Linguistics.
- Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (2003). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods* (4th ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Bruner, J. S. (1962). *On knowing: Essays for the left hand*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Bygate, M. (2001). Effects of task repetition on the structure and control of oral language. In M. Bygate, P. Skehan, and M. Swain (Eds.), *Researching pedagogic tasks: Second language learning, teaching, and testing* (pp. 23-48). London: Longman.
- Cheng, X. T. (2004). *Task-based language teaching*. Beijing: Beijing Higher Education Press.
- Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. London: Sage.
- Crookes, G. (1989). Planning and interlanguage variation. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 11, 367-383. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263100008391>
- Damen, L. (1987). *Cultural learning: The fifth dimension in the language classroom*. Boston: Addison-Wesley.
- Deng, Z. (2007). Transforming the subject matter: Examining the intellectual roots of pedagogical content knowledge. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 37(3), 279-295. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-873X.2007.00386.x>
- Doyle, W. (1992). Curriculum and pedagogy. In P. W. Jackson (Ed.), *Handbook of research on curriculum* (pp. 486-516). New York: Macmillan.
- Edwards, C., & Willis, J. (Eds.). (2005). *Teachers exploring tasks in English language teaching*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Eisner, E. W. (2002). *The arts and the creation of mind*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Ellis, R. (2003). *Tasks in SLA and language pedagogy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ely, M., Anzul, T., Garner, D., & Steinmetz, A. M. (1991). *Doing qualitative research: Circles within circles*. London: Falmer Press.
- Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. I., & Shaw, L. L. (2011). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes* (2nd ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Freire, P. (1973). *Education for critical consciousness*. New York: Seabury.
- Graves, K. (1996). *Teachers as course developers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Graves, K. (2000). *Designing language courses: A guide for teachers*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.
- Henderson, J. G., & Gornik, R. (2007). *Transformative curriculum leadership* (3rd ed.). Hoboken: Merrill/Prentice Hall.
- Hess, J. D. (1994). *The whole world guide to culture learning*. Yarmouth: Intercultural Press.
- Huang, Z. J. (2006). New thinking on education localization. In Curriculum and Instruction Society of the Republic of China (Ed.), *Localization and globalization of curriculum teaching* (pp. 1-24). Taipei City: Yangzhi Culture.
- Huberman, A. M., & Miles, M. B. (1994). Data management and analysis methods. In N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 428-444). London: Sage.

- Jiang, L. (2019). The application study of TBLT in English reading in high school (Unpublished Master's thesis, Guizhou Normal University).
- Johnson, K. (1979). *Language teaching and skill learning*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Klak, T., & Martin, P. (2003, July). Do university-sponsored international cultural events help students to appreciate "difference"? *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 27(4), 445-465.
- Krashen, S., & Terrell, T. (2000). *The natural approach: Language acquisition in the classroom* (3rd ed.). Harlow: Pearson Education Press.
- Lee, J. (2000). *Tasks and communicating in language classrooms*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Leung, C. (2001). Evaluation of content learning in the mainstream classroom. In B. Mohan, C. Leung, and C. Davison (Eds.), *English as a second language in the mainstream: Teaching, learning and identity* (pp. 205-231). Harlow: Pearson Education.
- Lin, Y. B. (2017). Research on the theory and practice of task-based teaching in English reading class in secondary vocational schools (Unpublished Master's thesis, Zhejiang University of Technology).
- Long, M. H. (1985). A role for instruction in second language acquisition: Task-based language teaching. In K. Hyltenstam and M. Pienemann (Eds.), *Modelling and assessing second language acquisition* (pp. 77-99). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Long, M. H., & Crookes, G. (1992). Three approaches to task-based syllabus design. *TESOL Quarterly*, 26, 27-56. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.2307/3587368>
- Lou, W.-L. (2008). Cultivating the capacity for reflective practice: A professional development case study of L2/EFL teachers (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Kent State University).
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2006). *Designing qualitative research* (4th ed.). London: Sage.
- McCaffrey, J. A. (1993). Independent effectiveness and unintended outcomes of cross-cultural orientation and training. In R. M. Paige (Ed.), *Education for the intercultural experience* (pp. 219-240). Yarmouth: Intercultural Press.
- McCutchen, G. (1997). Curriculum and the work of teacher. In D. J. Flinders and S. J. Thornton (Eds.), *The curriculum studies readers* (pp. 178-197). London: Routledge.
- Moran, P. R. (2001). *Teaching culture: Perspectives in practice*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.
- Null, W. (2011). *Curriculum: From theory to practice*. London: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Nunan, D. (1989). *Designing tasks for the communicative classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nunan, D. (1992). *Research and methods in language learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nunan, D. (1996). *The learner-centered curriculum*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nunan, D. (1999). *Second language teaching & learning*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.
- Nunan, D. (2004). *Task-based language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nunan, D. (2007). *What is this thing called language?* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). London: Sage.
- Qix, M. H. (1999). Comparison of Chinese and Western cultures in English teaching. *Journal of Soochow Foreign Languages*, 14, 193-216.
- Richards, J. C., Platt, J., & Weber, H. (1985). *Longman dictionary of applied linguistics*. London: Longman.
- Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (Eds.). (2001). *Approaches and methods in language teaching: A description and analysis* (2nd ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rossmann, G. B., & Rallis, S. F. (2003). *Learning in the field: An introduction to qualitative research*. London: Sage.
- Samuda, V., & Bygate, M. (2008). *Tasks in second language learning*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Schwab, J. J. (2004). The practical: A language for curriculum. In D. J. Flinders and S. J. Thornton (Eds.), *The curriculum studies reader* (2nd ed., pp. 103-117). London: Routledge Falmer. (Original work published in 1969)
- Shehadeh, A. (2005). Task-based language learning and teaching: Theories and applications. In C. Edwards and J. Willis (Eds.), *Teachers exploring tasks in English language teaching* (pp. 13-30). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Skehan, P. (1998a). *A cognitive approach to language learning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Skehan, P. (1998b). Task-based instruction. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 18, 268-286. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190500003585>
- Sowell, E. (2005). *Curriculum: An integrative introduction* (2nd ed.). Harlow: Pearson/Merrill/Prentice Hall.
- Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. London: Sage.
- Swales, J. (1990). *Genre analysis: English in academic and research setting*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tomalin, B., & Stempleski, S. (1993). *Cultural awareness*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Tsai, Y. (2009). Explore the feasibility of integrating cultural learning into foreign language education in Taiwan. *International Cultural Studies*, 5(1).
- Tsou, W. (2005). The effects of cultural instruction in foreign language learning. *RELC Journal*, 36(1), 39-57. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688205053481>
- Van Lier, L. (1996). *Interaction in the language curriculum: Awareness, autonomy, and authenticity*. London: Longman.
- Van Maanen, J. (1988). *Tales of the field: On writing ethnography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Walker, D. F., & Soltis, J. F. (2004). *Curriculum and aims* (4th ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Wallerstein, N. (1983). *Language and culture in conflict*. Boston: Addison-Wesley.
- Weaver, G. R. (1993). Understanding and coping with cross-cultural adjustment stress. In R. M. Paige (Ed.), *Education for the intercultural experience* (pp. 137-167). Yarmouth: Intercultural Press.
- Wiggins, G., & McTighe, J. (2005). *Understanding by design* (2nd ed.). Washington: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Willis, J. (1996). *A framework for task-based learning*. London: Longman.