

The Importance of Teaching Intercultural Communication
In ELT within South Asian & Pacific Context
Through Their Children Literature

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I. Introduction :

Le Luong Minh, the Bloc's secretary-general argued that ASEAN is the nucleus of an emerging Asia. Further Minh, who was Vietnam's former ambassador to the United Nation, said that the growth is robust in Asia and in this regards there is no other region is as well-positioned as ASEAN as a hub to showcase the prospect of an Asian century.He said this in his speech Thursday May, 15, 2015 at Nikkei's Future of Asia Conference. This statement indicates that ASEAN will be leading for its economics which is needed to be supported by peace through intercultural understanding communication through education , especially for the young learners as the future generations who will determine the success of this economic growth.

One of the proper pedagogical approaches for the young learners to face the above statement on the future ASEAN century is the Education for International Understanding. This pedagogical approach integrates knowledge and understanding with the development of values and attitude underpinning a culture of peace. Further, the principles concept of Education for International Understanding encompasses peace, human rights, intercultural understanding, and sustainability in a holistic manner. Nevertheless, the intercultural understanding is implemented practically by applying the intercultural communication in English language teaching.

It cannot be denied that English is used as the lingua franca for interaction and communication among the Southeast Asian (SEA) countries since most of those countries

are multicultural and multilingual societies. Consequently, English is allocated in the curriculum of the schools from level K1 to Higher Education, either as compulsory or elective subject in almost schools in SEA countries. The teaching of English cannot be limited only to its linguistics skills but also a range of intercultural skills and attitudes to accomplish the principles of the intercultural communication in creating peace and sustainability among the SEA countries. This is in line with the growing international awareness of the cultural education, and language education in particular, has to play important role in developing tolerance and understanding among people from different cultural backgrounds who live together in increasingly multicultural and multilingual societies, like in Southeast Asian countries.

The cultural knowledge strand is of equal to the language knowledge strand. With both supporting strands the communication becomes highly effective. This concept emphasises communication as the primary goal of language learning, sees culture and language as closely linked; recognises that culture is always present when language is used, sees cultural skills as important as language skills in language learning. Apart from this, it emphasises the development of a deeper awareness of one's language and culture as one is learning the target language and culture, and understanding the dynamic interplay between them. Language is in this case embedded with literature. As culture and language are seen as closely interrelated, culture is also seen inseparable from literature.

The teaching and learning intercultural communication through literature encourages the learners to 1). Communicate, interact and negotiate across language/literature and cultures, 2). Understand their own and other's languages and literature, 3). understand themselves and others, and 4). Develop mutual understanding and mutual respect to accept diversity. Nevertheless, those four essential functions of teaching and learning intercultural communication develop the learners' cognitive, affective and psychomotor competencies by applying specific teaching materials related to SEA children literature artefacts. Apart of these aspects, the awareness of cultural constrains in teaching and learning intercultural communication is indispensable element to be acquainted.

II. Analysis

The four fundamental roles of teaching and learning intercultural communication through children literary works are one whole related supporting aspects. This means that one aspect connect and support each other as inseparable relations.

(1). Communicate, Interact, and Negotiate across Language & Literature

The main paradigm of the above pedagogical approach shows that cultural awareness which is built in the intercultural communication plays an important roles in teaching and learning language, including literature. By universal standards, literature is essential to be designed in school curricula since literature develops the students' multicultural awareness and cross-cultural understandings. This concept is supported by Alwasilah who states that literary works embody the best of writing, but most importantly it represents cultures (2001:38). By knowing and understanding one's culture through learning literary works make the "students share the problems, concerns, values, and issues common to all human beings" (2001:38). Impliedly, this statement reveals that the learners are educated to be more sensitive towards issues of humanity through reading folktales, prose, poem, and drama. In Southeast Asian context those literary works relate to the humanity develops around Asia which is taken for granted is already understood by the younger generations. In fact, most of the literary studies are dominated by the western strand. To balance this situation Asian Children literature becomes a need and challenge to be implemented from the early education in order to generate sophisticated communication, interaction, and negotiation among SEA people in the Asian century.

(2). Understand their own and other's Languages & Literature

Developing the intercultural communication in language/literature teaching involves recognizing that the main purposes are to give learners intercultural competence as well as linguistic competence, to prepare them for interaction with people of other cultures, to enable them to understand and accept people from other cultures as individuals with other distinctive perspective, values and behaviors, and to help them to see that such interaction is an enriching experience.

To fulfill the above aims the children are required to understand firstly their own literature through their language skills competence. To comprehend the literary works, the children are implored to master the language skills according their level of competence, in

this case not only their own mother tongue but also national language, as well as English. The mastery of those languages contribute to apprehend literary works, such as folktales, fairytales, and other traditional literature and also the modern ones.

Children literature can encourage the young learners to focus on themselves as cultural beings in order to go beyond the typical activities on "Who am I". Many pictured books related to this theme which the characters struggled with their identities are introduced to them. The learners may respond to these books by exploring their cultural identities in different ways. They can bring in artifacts reflecting their cultural identities, draw memory maps of their neighborhood countries to identify stories or folktales from their childhood, design mosaic on aspects of their culture that are evident to others, such as language, ethnicity, gender, religion, and the inside with the values and beliefs they hold in their hearts. By perceiving their own and other languages and literature, the learners are supposed to be more sensitive towards the issues of humanity in multicultural society in their own country and SEA surrounding as they are part of the SEA community.

(3). Understand themselves and Others'

The logical consequences of the above proficiency, the young learners are educated to understand themselves and others' languages/literature and cultures. In other words, they obtain the sensitivity of the important knowledge which embedded literature and culture as the media of intercultural communication. By reflecting their understanding on their own literature, these young learners not only understand the behavior, attitudes, and values of their own culture but also others'. Through a better understanding of themselves and others, the young learners can cross boundaries of language, culture and communication that divide them and experience a sense of true community, an awareness of themselves as interconnected beings sharing the same continental. In the long term, it has more advantages towards the establishment of peace among the SEA countries as it is needed to path the ASEAN century. This long term benefits are ensured by Strasheim (1981, cited in Hadley 1993) who affirmed that literary and cultural sensitivity play a vital in the security, defense and economic well-being of the country and that global understanding ought to be mandatory component of basic education (45–49).

The intercultural communication supports the multicultural education by accepting and understanding communication between people of different cultures. By definition, cultures are different in their languages, behavior patterns, and values. Because cultures embody such variety in patterns of perceptions and behaviors, approaches to

communication in multicultural situation encourage the consideration of differences. Thus it is seen here that the intercultural communication is difference-based. Further Neito (2010:9) suggests that multicultural education needs to be understood as 'arrogance reduction'; that is as encompassing both individual and structural changes that squarely confront the individual biases, attitudes, and behaviors of educators, as well as the policies and practices in schools that emanate from them.

(4). Develop Mutual Understanding and Respect to Accept Diversity

The above paradigm establishes the young learners to accept and comprehend differences and diversity that lead them to mutuality on understanding and respect. The young learners at the stage of acceptance delighted in recognizing and exploring cultural differences. They realize that they are part of the culture as they are cultural being. They enable to tolerant of ambiguity since they realize that there is no absolutism, instead there is relativism in culture. Moreover, Tolinson believes that an increased cultural awareness through multicultural education helps learners broaden the mind, increase tolerance and achieve cultural empathy and sensitivity (2004: 3). They consent to the viability of different cultural ways of thinking and behaving, even though they might not like them. However, they develop mutual understanding and respect towards differences and diversity to avoid miscommunication, confusion, disorientation, and hostility.

III. Cultural Constraints

In teaching and learning intercultural communication the learners should have the cognizance on the knowledge of cultural constraints. This awareness lead the learners to understand cultural problems might emerge that are represented in the literary works. Those cultural complications consist of cultural identity and cultural conflicts.

Kumaradivedu states that cultural identity is likely to diverge based not only on learners' national and linguistics background but also their ethnic heritage, religious beliefs, class, age, gender, and sexual orientation (2003: 18-19). This paradoxical cultural constrain might be lessen by stressing the learners' comprehension of the relativism of culture and by explaining the negative impacts of ethnocentrism. The other constrain that has to be noticed is the culture conflicts that occur as a result of misinterpretation, ethnocentrism, stereotypes, and prejudice (Levine, 1982 : 46). These cultural conflicts can be prevented by increasing awareness of our own attitudes as well as sensitivity to cross-cultural differences.

By conducting these attitudes, the awareness of our own cultural identity does not mean to be lost.

Moreover, Levine recognizes the dangers of ethnocentrism and bias in the representation of teaching literature and claims about four problems of commission that may occur in discussion of culture. One of the problems is stereotyping that consists of over generalization some characteristics of the culture of the people. It is obliged to differentiate between common traits and stereotypes. The second is the separation of the culture from the meaning of its context. Culture and meaning are closely related which can not be separated. Because of this characteristics, the cultural comprehension is depends on the meaning embodies in the culture. The third is the political bias that can result selecting certain elements of culture while ignoring others. This imbalance perspective might cause cultural bias and shock. The last one is the incompleteness that relates to leaving a whole subculture or other crucial part of culture out of the learning process (1982: 96-97). A course, for instance, on Indonesian or Malaysian literary works that focuses only on Islamic culture, and leaves out consideration of Hindu, Buddhist, Christians, and other minorities shows the problem of incompleteness.

IV. Culture Teaching

According to Stern (1992) culture and literature teaching and learning have generally included cognitive, affective and behavioral components. The cognitive components relates to various forms of knowledge focusing on the concept or theoretical aspects that might refer to geography, history, society, economics, politics as the resourceful background. Those knowledge contribute to a better understanding to the targeted culture. Apart from these, knowledge about differences in the way of life as well as understanding of values and attitudes in the targeted culture are related to the cognitive components. The affective component relates to the learners' curiosity about and empathy for the target culture. The behavioral components is shown by the learners' ability to interpret culturally relevant behavior and to conduct themselves in culturally appropriate ways (1992: 57-58).

Mustafa argues that teaching culture through literary works has to be viewed as a process that is, as a way of perceiving, interpreting, feeling and understanding. This perspective views culture as part of the process of living and being in the world, the part that is necessary for making understanding meaning (2008:207-208). However, cultural awareness is taught by having comprehension on cultural similarities and contrasts. The

application of these similarities and contrast knowledge to teaching practices may serve as advantageous learning tools (Tomlinson, 2004: 99).

V. Teaching Materials and Techniques

The offered alternative teaching materials on Southeast Asian literary works that represent the SEA cultures relate to universality refers to the *Telling Tales from Southeast Asia and Korea* (2010) which is suitable for children literature. This teaching material is a book of a collection on Southeast Asia countries' folktales which mainly reveal the universal themes on cultural values such as "love, compassion, and justice". They represent the cultural attitudes which are recognized as pillars of education refer to "learning to live together" that is taught by educating children on how to live with integrity and peacefully with others (Kim, 2010 : 2). This teaching material consists not only collection of folktales from the eleven Southeast Asian countries but also teacher's guide book and 12 packages of flashcards of picture story related to the narration of the folktales.

The teaching techniques offer various ways in applying those flashcards. After the teacher tells the folktale and reveals the cultural values of the folktale, the teacher can put the flashcard on told folktale in random and ask the students to arrange the flashcard in order based on the sequence of the folktale story. Apart from this technique, the teacher can ask the students to retell the folktale by showing the flashcards to the other students.

Wajuppa Tossa suggests the familiar techniques such as reading aloud, role-play, music and drama (2010: 6-7). In other words, this technique refers to reader's theater that allows many children in the class to participate the telling of the stories. Apart from this, she also encourages teacher to use shadow puppetry in retelling the folktales. Some SEA countries are having their own style for this puppetry, such as Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam. In some cases, videotaped of traditional puppet performance could be shown to the children as a model. Afterwards, the children will create their own puppet from hard paper to narrate one of the Southeast Asian folktales. Another interesting alternative teaching technique is by using Kamishibai Theater, which uses illustrated paper scrolls and cards propped on a small stage to tell the folktales. Similar to this is the making picture-book is also another challenging teaching technique that could be incorporated in the use of this folktale collection.

Another recommended rich collection of stories from different countries around SEA and Pacific region is *Journey Around Asia*. This anthology of modern Asian children literature present themes on contemporary and global issues, such as peace, sustainable development, diversity, human rights, environment and humanitarianism. Those themes offer multicultural perspective that promotes Education for International Understanding and a Culture of Peace. Those education are supported by the learning and teaching intercultural communication.

Regarding alternative teaching techniques, Shibata proposes case study, small-group discussion, interview, and watching movie (Shibata, 1998: 112-115). The goal is nurture learners' ability to empathize with other groups. The case study is implemented by giving a case on similar issues represented in the literary works related to human rights and the learners are required to find out the solution on the rights of the poor boy to have education accesses as he lives in remote place. This study case can be shared in the small-group discussion. As a final project, the learners are assigned to interview their parents about their best Asian Children literary work and ask the reasons to choose the best SEA children literature. The parents are appeal to elaborate the cultural values and meaning of the SEA children literature they choose in answering the interview of their children.

VI. Conclusion

In conclusion, the intercultural communication in teaching literature to young learners is essential as they are the future generation who are going to develop the Southeast Asian community that is the on-going process by the present generation. From early childhood, the Southeast Asian young children are educated to enjoy, appreciate and understand their neighboring countries' inseparable culture and literature. By teaching literature to the young learners of the Southeast Asian community it educates the cultural awareness on the Southeast Asians' values, beliefs, norms and traditions. In spite of teaching the advantages in creating peace, justice and integrity and equality, the teacher has to be aware of the cultural conflicts that may occur in the learning process. Nevertheless, the various teaching techniques may enrich the cross-cultural understanding and the multicultural communication to establish mutual respect and mutual understanding. These techniques endorse the emphasis on a pedagogical approach to Education for International Understanding.

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