DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL AWARENESS FOR PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS IN THAILAND

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Abstract

This paper examined intercultural awareness as a learning outcome of the pedagogical design targeting intercultural competence (IC) development among pre-service teachers in a teacher education program in Thailand. The instructional design activities aimed to develop the pre-service teacher's intercultural awareness toward the cultural aspects that learners may not be aware of. The study followed the action research cycle to develop the instructional activities over the period of two semesters. Data regarding the students' intercultural awareness findings were elicited from 50 students taking the course. The result showed that the pre-service teachers reshaped their beliefs and values throughout their intercultural experiences in the IC-enhanced course by displaying awareness of the renewed understanding of culture, accepting multiple perspectives, and developing sensitivity and respect towards cultural differences. The suggested pedagogical activities are hoped to be shared to other professionals, especially those in teacher education programs.

Keywords: Intercultural awareness, teacher education, culture and language

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

Teachers in the 21st century must be prepared with competence and knowledge due to the increasing diversity among the student population. Teachers, as agents of change, are expected to be aware of, understand, and respond to the cultural diversities. In 2013, the Teachers' Council of Thailand (TCT) announced new standards for the knowledge and competencies of professional teachers to replace the previously-operated nine standards. Based on the new standards, the teacher education program must incorporate "culture" as a competency requirement to prepare all teachers regardless of what subject area they teach. This reference to culture represents a perspective change from the

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previous standards, according to which "language" was seen as an instrument to gain essential knowledge and skills. However, the new teachers' standards targeting language and culture competencies specifically provide guidelines for teacher institutions to prepare future teachers to have the following: 1) Thai language and cultural knowledge for teaching, 2) foreign language (English) skills for professional development, and 3) language and culture competencies to promote peaceful and harmonious coexistence. The third element of the guidelines above particularly focuses on the teacher's competence to have shared responsibility as a global citizen.

From my understanding, the TCT's effort is a timely response to a call from UNESCO regarding intercultural competences. UNESCO's (2013) official document on "Intercultural Competences: Conceptual and operational framework" states that action needs to be taken:

> to provide expertise to existing pedagogical centers/teacher training institutes on intercultural competences, so to equip teachers with supportive content and current techniques. Current teacher education must be expanded to prepare students for life as active, responsible citizens in democratic societies. (p.28)

Therefore, the role of the teacher institutes is to train teachers to be able to prepare future citizens of the world. After the new TCT standards were launched, I have been assigned to develop a language and culture course that corresponds to the new guidelines for pre-service teachers. However, it is less clear among the teacher institutions about the intent of the new standards resulting in the different emphases and contents of the course depending on what perspectives the

instructors and curriculum developers brought to the course content. These variations could be a result of the different frameworks used to deliver the content and the pedagogical approaches regarding the understanding about the role and nature of language and culture. As a teacher researcher, I realize the urgent needs to develop the language and culture course so that the intent of the curriculum can be met. The main issue in the course particularly involved the concept of culture and its relationship with language as well as the introduction of several intercultural-enhanced activities so the pre-service teachers are well prepared to become interculturally competent teachers. This paper, therefore, aims to investigate intercultural awareness among pre-service teachers after completing the IC-enhanced instructional activities over the course of the semester based on a synthesized framework drawn from contemporary theories concerning language and cultural teaching.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to determine instructional activities to promote language and cultural competencies, it is important to first establish the meaning of culture as well as the stance/lens adopted to view language and culture and their interrelated relationships. Culture is seen an integral part of language and *vice versa*, so both language and culture are closely intertwined (Ho, 2009; Mitchell and Myles, 2004; Moran, 2001). It is well known that the meaning of culture is complex and difficult to define, especially when the concept of culture has been drawn from many disciplines and perspectives (Wintergerst & Mcveigh, 2011). In English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms, it can be unclear what cultural aspects should be taught when there are many

cultural practices operating under one language when English is used as lingua franca (Kramsch, 2012). The well-known work related to cultural meanings, such as Weaver's concept of the cultural iceberg (1993), Halliday's big cultures and small cultures (1999), Barrett, Byram, Lázá, Mompoint-Gaillard and Philippou's three categories of culture (2013), Moran's five dimensions of culture (2001) are reviewed here to establish a common ground and to indicate that the meaning of culture has expanded beyond things that are fixed, static, and superficial.

The idea of the cultural iceberg (Weaver, 1993) explains the expanded meaning of culture by using the iceberg metaphor. A large, unseen proportion of culturally-shaped knowledge, including beliefs, values, ways of thinking, are "under the water," while what we see at the tip of the iceberg is the so-called material culture, such as food, clothing, artefacts, etc., because this concrete aspect can be easily noticed. These invisible belief systems and values, in fact, underlie all of the visible parts of the culture; we cannot see what is hidden unless we are aware of it. This metaphor is in line with what Halliday called big cultures and small cultures (Halliday, 1999). Big cultures refer to material culture such as clothings, foods, holidays, etc., while small cultures refer to the invisible aspects of culture such as attitudes, norms, and values. In spite of the names, big/small cultures do not suggest anything related to size, nor are they directly related to any ethnicity, national, or international entities—they are rather associated with any cohesive social groupings (Halliday, 1999).

To further detail the meaning of culture, Barrett et al. (2013) categorized culture into three groups: material culture, social culture, and subjective culture. Material culture consists of physical artefacts such as goods, foods, and clothings which are similar to Halliday's big cultures. Social culture consists of the institutions of social groups such as language, religion, laws, folklore, etc. Subjective culture, which is the "fuzziest" of all three, consists of the beliefs, norms, values, and discourses of group members in making sense of the world. Barrett et al. (2013) further explains that the meaning of culture should include the combined aspects of all three. Similarly, the three aspects of culture are also found in the PPP approach to culture, which includes, practices, products and perspectives. Cultural practices are similar to Barrett's idea of social culture, which refers to non-verbal forms of communication, and traditional holidays and festivals. Cultural products can be both tangible and intangible objects as with material culture, for example crafts, tools, music, and dance. Cultural perspectives involve values, beliefs, attitudes (Reynolds, 2015; Cutshall, 2012). These three aspects are not viewed as isolated components; instead, they are interrelated.

Moran (2001) offers a comprehensive model of cultures that include 5 dimensions: products, practices, persons, communities, and perspectives. Cultural products refer to all artifacts made by the members of the culture such as tools, clothings, documents, buildings, plants, animals. Moran also includes family institution, language, music, economy, etc. in this category. Cultural practices are defined as actions and interactions that members of the culture engage in such as taboos, notions of appropriateness, and notions of time and space. Perspectives represent a worldview of the members of the culture. Communities include the specific social contexts, circumstances and groups in which members carry out cultural practices such as language, gender, race, religion, socioeconomic class,

etc. Persons refer to the individual members who influence or are influenced by other dimensions of cultures. Moran's model offers insight into how each dimension is interrelated and influenced by one another. Also, the Cultural Persons dimension emphasizes an important point of culture that is not stressed in other models. Moran (2001) states that culture resides in persons and each person's identity is shaped by family values, social organizations (schools), and ethnic groups, so individual members of the cultures have their own unique identities. It is important to make people aware of this cultural dimension because it reflects the complexities and multiplicity of the real world. Knowing about an individual's uniqueness helps people to recognize overgeneralizations, or making stereotypical judgments about others.

Approaches to Cultural Teaching

It is considered easy to teach cultural knowledge by simply exposing learners to cultural products and artifacts that are concrete and tangible. However, teaching only one aspect of culture such as the material culture may lead to superficial knowledge and oversimplified conceptions because it creates an idea of a fixed entity and a narrow meaning to the term "culture." As Cutshall (2012) says, "it is not pedagogically enough to offer "Culture Fridays" or to think culture is taken care of by celebrating a holiday, learning a few dances or tasting some authentic food now and then" (p.33). Teaching a fixed national culture does not stimulate students' critical analysis that helps learners become culturally competent persons (Godwin-Jones, 2013). Teaching culture should go beyond the knowledge of cultural activities and practices; instead, teachers should provide opportunities for students to

examine the belief system/world view underlying the language used by the target language speakers (Conway, Richards, Harvey and Roskvist, 2010; Halliday, 1999).

When culture is emphasized as a major component of educational standards, teachers become aware of the individual learners' differences and what cultural background learners bring to the classroom. Therefore, it has become a current trend to develop intercultural awareness in teacher education programs in many parts of the world (Newton, Yates, Shearn and Nowitzki, n.d). Large professional organizations involving foreign language education programs have all developed standards that include culture as a major component in the teaching profession for the 21st century. For example, according to TESOL/NCTE standards and ACTFL standards, culture functions as a separate domain that requires specific knowledge and understanding. TESOL/NCTE specifies two standards for the cultural domain: the nature and role of culture and cultural Groups and Identity. In terms of the nature and role of the culture, teachers need to "know, understand, and use the major concepts, principles, theories, and research related to the nature and role of culture in language development and academic achievement that support individual students' learning" (TESOL/NCTE Program Standards, n.d. p.17). The guideline brings a broader meaning to the term culture to include contemporary theories and concepts related to culture, especially the perspective that focuses on the interrelationship between language and culture. Language is used to maintain cultural ties among group members. One's lived experiences are shaped through the social interactions that an individual experiences and those social interactions include language as a main part. Based on this

view, language is seen as a system while the content of the culture, as defined by TESOL, includes "values, beliefs, expectations, role and status, family structure, function and socialization humanities and the arts; assumptions about literacy and other content areas; communication and communication systems; and learning styles and modalities" (TESOL international organization, n.d., p.18). Teachers equipped with this knowledge should be able to understand student's cultural differences. On the other hand, not every professional organization classifies culture as an additional domain. For instance, the Cambridge English Teaching Framework (2014) does not categorize culture as a major component in its standards for English teachers. The cultural aspect, based on CETF, is integrated into the component of managing language learning, which includes responding to learners by understanding learners' differences, styles, preferences, and difficulties as elements in the unit of competency. The CETF views on culture can be translated into typical classroom practices, such as wait time, individual or group response, feedback, eye contact, question and answer format, and volunteering (Cloud, Genesee & Hamayan, as cited in TESOL International Association, n.d.). These practices pave ways to develop the sensitivity and awareness of students regarding differences that can actually be applied within the classroom walls. However, I argue that culture can be explicitly and implicitly taught, and not necessarily only in the language classrooms.

Intercultural Competence

Intercultural competence (IC) comprises the knowledge, attitudes, and practice to be able to effectively and harmoniously live in today's diverse societies. However, having knowledge of different cultural groups is not sufficient to be an intercultural person. According to Barrett et al. (2013), intercultural competence refers to a combination of attitudes, knowledge, understanding and skills that allows a person to understand and to treat people with cultural differences with respect. Intercultural competence includes the ability to "perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself" (Fantini and Tirmizi, 2006 as cited in UNESCO, 2013).

Intercultural Awareness

An important aspect of the intercultural competence development involved intercultural awareness. Scholars in the field agreed that intercultural awareness plays a major part for the development of intercultural competence (Bennett, 1993; Byram, 1997; Barrett et al. 2013). Intercultural awareness can be defined as sensitivity to, understanding of and respect towards people of different cultural affiliations (Barrette et al., 2013). Intercultural awareness is directly connected to attitudes which are considered the foundation and the first step in intercultural communicative competence development (Byram, Gribkova, and Starkey, 2002). In order to develop IC awareness, it is important to give learners an opportunity to critically examine their own belief systems that are reflected through social practices. Lesson plans must be built in a way that the students become aware of their own biases and cultural practices. By making this happen, it is helpful to use a comparative approach to teaching language and culture by comparing one's own culture with someone with a different cultural

background. Students come to an understanding that culture is multifaceted, rather than monolithic (Reynolds, 2015). In order to implement such an understanding about culture, teachers should invite students to deconstruct and reconstruct the target culture and their own cultures (Drewelow, 2015).

My aim for this class is for the students to uncover their ideologically-constructed self and to discover and raise their IC awareness of their differences. It is important to establish the ground that an individual belongs to multiple cultures so that cultural affiliations are fluid and dynamic (Barrett et al., 2013). Any person's lived experience is unique and personalized and depends on the historical, social, and educational institutions in which they participate. Therefore, the pedagogical approaches must be created to bring about the individual-oriented experiences and self-exploration.

METHODOLOGY

In designing the instructional activities, I followed the principle of action research that aims to improve practitioner's practice through self-reflection process (Ketsing, 2013; Carr and Kemmis,1986). Throughout the two semesters, I followed the cycle of classroom research that consists of planning, action, observation, and self-reflection (Ketsing, 2013; Carr and Kemmis,1986). During the first cycle, I implemented the IC-enhanced instructional activities with a group of 30 students. The activities were revised and adapted based on the feedback from the learners. The data collection went on until the second cycle in which I tried the same instructional activities again with another group of 50 students. At the end of second phase, I conducted self-evaluation on my own practice,

students' written assignments, weekly journals, and the end- of -course reflective journals. The pretest and posttest aimed to find out the changes in their perceptions regarding the intercultural awareness at the beginning and end course. In their final journals, I asked them to answer open-ended questions about the knowledge, attitudes, and practices they learned from the class. Their journals were analysed using the content analysis method to find out which themes emerged from the data. The students' excerpts were examined to find meaningful patterns, then they were coded and grouped based on similarities. Several revisions were made to make sure that each theme reflects different aspects of intercultural awareness.

Participants

The participants being investigated for their intercultural awareness were a total of 50 pre-service teachers majoring in physical education and mathematics education. Sources of data came from students' reflective journals and class online discussion scripts. The data were analyzed to find the emerging themes related to their intercultural awareness.

Instructional Activities Design to Enhance IC Awareness

The principles for IC awareness, content, and instructional activities to enhance IC awareness are summarized in Table 1. The principles for raising IC awareness are drawn from the review of literature. The content and instructional activities have been tried and revised before the implementation.

Principles for enhancing IC awareness	Content	Instructional activities
• Knowledge of other cultures and their own cultures. • Know the difference between each dimension of culture • Stress the interconnection between language and culture	Introduction to the concept of language and culture Inviting learners to think about the term "culture" and how they defined it.	1) Defining culture through a video clip that includes different meanings and interpretations of culture from people from different walks of life. 2) Discussion about each dimension of culture. 3) Providing a lot of examples that identify the interconnection between language and culture such as linguistic systems, namings, greeting customs
• Develop linguistic skills to communicate effectively • Guide students as they interpret their experience of the target culture and language	Verbal vs. Non-verbal communication	1) Comparing various forms of non-verbal communication across different cultures 2) Invited guest speakers who have different cultural backgrounds (ethnicities, sexual orientation, religious background)
• Encourage reflective dialogue alongside experience • Encourage self-awareness	Cross-cultural experiences, stereotype, sexism, classism, racism	1) Case studies, class discussions of socio-cultural issues such as immigrants, gender. A movie of Matthew Shepard story 2) Identity-tag game 3) Autobiography writing

This section elaborates on the instructional activities in the above table. The first set of activities was done by inviting learners to think about the term "culture" and how they defined it. As the first step, the students learned to redefine the meaning of the culture by watching a short clip of a Thai TV program that problematizes the term "culture" from historical, social, and political perspectives. In this movie clip, the show hosts interviewed people, from street vendors to college students, visitors, university professors, as well as the Minister of the Cultural Ministry of Thailand, about what they thought of the concept of "culture" should be. The clip also provides some historical information regarding of the origin of the term and how the Ministry of Culture was founded. The clip invites the students to "unpack" the previous knowledge and common beliefs they have been taught in school about the meaning of culture which often stressed the importance of a "cultural pattern" as a fixed, and static entity. The second step is to critically examine the students' experiences with local cultural practices, which learners never thought about nor reflected upon. From this video clip, the students understood the historical narrative about "Thai culture" that was established over 150 years ago to protect the country from being colonized by western cultures through diplomatic and military forces.

The second set of instructional activities involved students' exposure to different social and cultural backgrounds by inviting guest speakers to come to the class followed by discussions about stereotypes, prejudices and intolerance. The discussion about socio-cultural issues that I selected for exploration for my pre-service teachers is the tradition of freshmen initiation of Thai college students

because it was relevant to these first year pre-service teachers, who were forced to go through a series of freshmen welcoming events that, in some institutions, were similar to hazing rituals. Information from different sources of media, be it in a newspaper, news clips, or graphical images of controversial hazing behaviors, helped the students to critically examine the beliefs and values surrounding the college's traditional ceremony, which emphasized seniority and social order. Different perspectives are offered by some sophomore or junior students so that they could learn through conflicting ideas from both the opponents and proponents. At the end of the class discussion, the students were asked to work together on a plan to modify the traditionally-held custom in college and how to work out the plan accordingly. This activity also aimed to encourage learners to explore "multiperspecitivity" (Barrette et al., 2013) regarding hotly-debated socio-cultural issues which can bring about different perspectives. The topic of Myanmar immigrants, for example, is a current socio-political issue in Thai society that is complex and requires critical analysis of the problem.

The last set of the activities involved verbal and non-verbal communication by showing them various forms of verbal and non-verbal communication such as hand gestures, facial expressions, concept of punctuality, politeness, etc. I also asked them to write their autobiography as a way for them to reflect and be aware of their social identities and values.

RESULTS

This section highlights the main findings after implementing the aforementioned

instructional activities. First, the pretest and posttest results were presented to show the changes of the students' intercultural awareness. The items on the tests included six scenarios to assess how the students reacted or responded when coming across intercultural encounters such as different ways of greeting, attitudes towards immigrants, and gender issues etc. Twenty-six students' written responses were coded based on the framework of the intercultural awareness from being negative, judgmental, and having a stereotypical view, to the development of cultural sensitivity, having empathy and open mindedness. Figure 1 shows the differences (or changes) between the results of the pretest and posttest scores. The students made progress in their awareness of different cultural aspects over the course of the semester by making the more positive scores in their responses towards cultural awareness.

Besides the pretest and posttest, I qualitatively analyzed the data from their reflective journals. The main findings were organized by emerging themes relevant to intercultural awareness, namely the renewed understanding of culture, accepting multiple perspectives, and valuing the attitudes and beliefs of others. These themes emerged from the students' reflections at the end of the course. The discussion is integrated into each theme.

Awareness of the renewed understanding of culture

This theme emerged throughout the course of the semester and it is an important first step to the profound meaning of IC to include other intercultural dimensions. Originally, the majority of the students believed that "*Culture is what has been traditionally passed down from generations to generations*". Most students
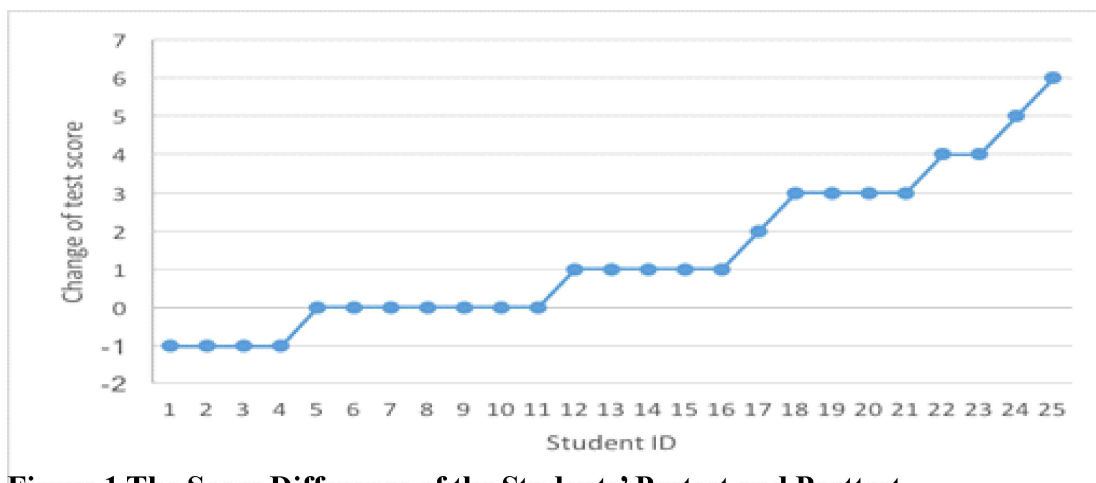

Figure 1 The Score Difference of the Students' Pretest and Posttest

showed understanding of big cultures that are concrete and visible such as "*national costumes, national holidays, food, etc.*" More importantly, many students believed that "*Culture (Thai) is concerned with prosperity and excellence*" which is in line with the definition given by the Thai Royal Institute Dictionary (2011) as "*things that bring prosperity to the members of that particular culture*". Obviously, the students had been conservatively taught to memorize that Thai traditional culture must always be tied to "good virtue" to foster the sense of patriotism. This is exactly what Kramsch (2012) points out—that "teaching the national cultures is always tied with notions of the 'good' and 'proper' way of life to elicit pride and loyalty" (p.65). Out of 60, only 15% of the students originally stated that culture is a way of life that may be changeable.

After I challenged the students to think further by providing some taken-for-granted cultural practices and perspectives in Thai society that are beyond the big cultures, such as a freshmen ceremony, drunk-driving during Songkran holidays (Thai New Year holidays), etc., I asked them to come up with other common beliefs among Thais that are deep-rooted and ingrained so that they had an opportunity to reflect on their own culture. One student responded with the idea of superstitious beliefs and practices among Thais such as the bumper stickers that identify the desired color of the car (regardless of its actual color) which is believed to bring good fortune to the car owners. The explicit discussion of the small cultures broadened their perspectives on different aspects of Thai culture that are intangible and fluid such as values, attitudes, and norms. By having an explicit class discussion about the concept of culture,

learners begin to become aware of what has been taken for granted. At the end of the course, students started to realize that culture is fluid. "*Thai culture is not necessarily defined as something that is prosperous, but it is something we involve in daily lives and it's changeable.*" (Student's reflection) They eventually understood culture as a 'shared way of life' (Byram, Gribkova, and Starkey, 2002).

It is noteworthy that even though many students can distinguish different dimensions of cultures, they were not able to clearly see the interrelationship between language and culture. They understood that language is culture, but not vice versa. In their understanding, language is seen as a subset of culture. "*Language is a cultural product of each country, region.*" "*Language reflects the uniqueness of such and such culture.*" Students visualized that culture holds the big circle containing smaller components and language is one of those components. In fact, in order to continually develop the intercultural competence, language must be seen as a main instrument allowing people to have social interactions and creating cultural practices. At the same time, language influences and is shaped by cultures and, at the same time, affects a person's cultural and social identity (Nugent & Catalano, 2015, Byram, Gribkova, and Starkey, 2002). I realized that in order to make the students see the interrelationship between language and culture, activities focusing on the small cultures such as beliefs and norms should be made more explicit.

Accepting Multiple Perspectives

Over the semester the students were exposed to different cultures through

nonverbal communication activities, critical incidents, and direct experiences with guest speakers. They started to be more open to different perspectives. In learning about nonverbal communication, even one hand gesture can be interpreted in many different ways. I showed the students the pictures of different hand gestures, for example, a picture of a person crossing fingers and asked them what they thought the gesture meant. In Thai culture, it could mean that the speaker was lying or joking while it means "good luck" in many different parts of the world. So at the end of the lesson a student wrote, *"I learned a new thing that there are multiple meanings to the use of particular hand gestures depending on the different cultural practices."* At the beginning, they expressed the feeling of fear, negative feelings and frustration when discussing the issue of immigrants. In one activity, I divided them into two groups. One read a piece of news about a foreign worker killing his employer. The other group read another piece about the help Thailand received from a neighbor country during the flood crisis. Then I asked the first group to share their thoughts on what they just read and what impression they had for that foreign worker. All of them said the article reinforced their negative image of the foreign immigrants. Next I asked the other group, the students felt differently. They were surprised to learn that the Myanmar government made a generous contribution to Thailand because in their view, Myanmar is seen as a poorer country. They had more positive feelings towards the people from the neighboring country. So the different sources of news yielded different portraits of immigrants and neighboring countries. A lot of them stated that they might have stereotyped people before,

but now they know how to suspend their beliefs and be more open to different perspectives. At the end of the semester, all of them showed an awareness of cultural diversities and learned to accept those differences. In the students' journals, accepting differences is one of the common themes as seen in the excerpt below:

What I learned in this course was to accept the differences which do not happen only among people from different countries, but the differences among people from the same country or even among people within the same classroom. We're practically not the same. That's why we have to learn to respect each and every one because different cultures could lead to misunderstandings and conflicts. Learning how to live together can reduce the possibility of conflicts."

Valuing the Attitudes and Beliefs of Others

The dominant discourse in Thailand is often based on the perception that the increasing influence of foreign cultures is viewed as a threat to the good virtue of Thai culture. These foreign cultures are believed to negatively influence Thai youths to exhibit bad behaviors. My lessons aimed to promote self-awareness in the stereotyping of foreign influences. Therefore, this issue was also brought up in the class discussion. One student reflected that *"we need to adjust ourselves to the new ideas that may be different from ours. We should not judge and deny other cultures too quickly."* This theme emerged from the students' reflective journals and it is directly linked to Byram's model (1997). At first, the students started to be aware of the importance of knowing and learning different cultures. One student stated, *"Cultures are*

different based on individual's way of life. In our own culture, we may think it is normal, but in another culture, the same behavior could be prohibited. Therefore, we need to study about other cultures so we don't look like a fool in such culture." According to Byram (1997), one category in his five 'savoir' model is the cultural attitudes by relating one's own culture to others. Learners need to have curiosity and openness to learn about others. Another student added, *"We can't just stay still, we need to always acquire new things." "As a future teacher, we need to learn different cultures, customs, beliefs so we can learn to live together and adjust ourselves. For example, in one class, we may have both Buddhist and Muslim students, teacher need to be aware of the different cultural backgrounds each student brings in to the classroom."*

Later the students stated that their attitudes have changed. *"I learned to open my mind and my perspectives. What I learned and found to be most interesting was about the differences. Every person, every culture is uniquely different. An outsider may find another culture to be intriguing, exotic, or even scary sometime. But when we understand the differences, we learn to appreciate and respect them and learn to live together in peace.*

In the class discussions about socio-political issues such as freshmen orientation (that they directly experienced), and immigration (particularly Myanmar immigrants working illegally in Thailand), their opinions were often divided. They learned that the first step is to listen and to respect. Everyone is entitled to expressing his/her opinion. *"We need to respect others. Everyone is equal.*

We have no rights to put ourselves above others. Though you think you are richer, more beautiful, you have no rights to look down on others."

The class watched a video about "Matthew Shepard", a movie based on the true story of a boy who was brutally murdered because he was gay. This video led to the class discussion on teasing and bullying. A student wrote a story in her journal reflecting her childhood observation of a classmate. *"Today's lesson reminded me of a friend in my middle school. She was chubby and we often joked about her appearance, calling her an elephant, or a giant. She had been picked on like that for over a year, until one day, it was her last straw. Someone was accused her of having a crush on a classmate. She snapped. She cried hysterically while kicking tables and chairs around. She immediately called her mom to pick her up and from that day on, she quit school and never returned to her study again. I was extremely sad every time I think about the story."*

What they learned in class is not just a basic morality lesson, but they started to recognize hidden forms of bias, prejudice, hate, and social inequality. As the class discussed sexism and languages, racism, classism, stereotypes, they learned to critically question their positioning, and accept diverse experiences, perspectives, and beliefs. Respect, openness and curiosity are what Deardoff (2011) refers to as requisite attitudes.

CONCLUSION

This paper showed an attempt to foster intercultural awareness as the first step towards the intercultural competence for pre-service

teachers in the teacher education program. Intercultural awareness in this study is seen as internal outcome of the development of intercultural competence. Needless to say, these learners are going to be the future teachers who will make a profound impact on children's lives. It is considered crucial to prepare the new generations of teachers for life to be driving forces, bringing about the development of intercultural understanding and peace.

There are certainly many more ways in which we can incorporate intercultural competence in language classrooms. The main purpose of the implementation of these activities is to increase the level of critical cultural awareness, embrace diversity and open up to multiple perspectives, and to realize that cultural teaching should not be comprised only of introducing cultural artifacts, but should also include ways for learners to understand their own cultures in order to understand others. These critical perspectives eventually help them to become aware of the manifold forms of cultural differences and to learn to live together peacefully.

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