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ABSTRACT

New methods of English second language instruction are being introduced in China through cooperative efforts between Chinese and overseas universities. One of these programs is the Canada-China Language Centre, a joint effort of St. Mary's University (Nova Scotia, Canada) and China's Beijing Normal University (BNU). It provides testing, English and French language training, and cross-cultural preparation for Chinese professionals who will receive technical training and academic study in Canada, and works to improve the quality of English language teaching at BNU. To facilitate introduction of communicative teaching methodology, Canadian and Chinese teachers are paired for planning, mutual observation, team teaching, and discussion of teaching strategies. The program began in 1983, and early surveys revealed skepticism about the acceptance and usefulness of the communicative methodology in Chinese classrooms. As a result, a new, comprehensive curriculum was developed to accommodate Chinese teaching methods. Problem-based communicative activities are followed by language-focused consolidation activities. The technique of creative automatization incorporates traditional language teaching techniques into an interactive, communicative classroom. The curriculum themes are based on Canadian culture. Pair and group work, semantic mapping, and classroom discussion, techniques unfamiliar to most Chinese teachers, are used. A 33-item bibliography is included. (MSE)

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CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION IN CHINA

GREGORY STRONG

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

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The implementation of a communicative curriculum within a Chinese university must take into account the current level of English instruction in China, the characteristics of the curriculum and its reception in China, and finally, the inservice training needs of the personnel involved in the implementation.

Any discussion of education in China should begin with an acknowledgement that China's educational attainments have far surpassed those in developing countries of the same income level (World Bank, 1985). To consider one aspect of education in China, annually, 3 million Chinese high school graduates write entrance exams for over 1,100 universities (Li, 1991). In 1990, there was an enrollment of 2.06 million university students, some 600,000 of these graduated, among them, 80,000 with masters' degrees, and 10,000 with doctorates (Yang, 1991).

Achievements since 1949 include substantial increases in literacy, in school enrollments in both primary and secondary schools, increases in the supply of teaching personnel, and curricular materials, and the introduction of innovative adult education programs utilizing both community resources, and distance learning programs broadcast over radio and television (World Bank, 1985; Huang, 1988; Chen, 1991). With China's current focus on economic development, English language education has been seen as a method to attract foreign investment, acquire administrative and managerial skills, and to facilitate technological transfer (Wang, 1986; Huang, 1987).

I. EFL Instruction in China

In general, language classrooms in China are teacher-centered and the language learner has a passive role in classroom activities (Li, 1984; Dzau, Ibid). Lou (1991) describes how Chinese EFL teachers emphasize grammatical knowledge rather than the ability to communicate in English. Hoa (1990) reports that group work is seldom used in Chinese classrooms and students are "mechanical note-takers" (p. 45).

Chinese students begin English language training when they enter middle school. They study English six hours a week for six years and in a typical class learn new words and read them aloud; read drill patterns; read and translate English texts; and do printed exercises on grammar and words' usage (Dazu, 1990; Li, 1991). Students rarely speak to one another in English and their only opportunity to listen to English is in listening to their teachers and their classmates reading textbook passages aloud.

English language instruction at the university level in China is usually taught through such skill areas as intensive and extensive reading, and through instruction in oral English, writing, grammar, and listening comprehension (Dzau, 1990; Yu, 1990). An emphasis on grammar and translation has resulted in the

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situation found by Wang (1982) where many Chinese scholars and students who went to study in America could not understand their teachers and were unable to participate in classroom discussions.

However, when instruction in listening is taught in Chinese universities, it occurs in a language laboratory and consists of listening to recordings, completing printed exercises, and correcting answers with the teacher. The problem with this approach is that students never listen for a purpose nor do they learn any listening strategies. Que (1991) notes that because Chinese teachers of English usually focus the students' attention on individual words, the students are not able to become effective listeners. They are less able to make deductions about unknown words or to discard information that is irrelevant for their listening purposes.

There are several reasons for these weaknesses in EFL instruction. The first is that a language teaching methodology using repetition and drill is similar to the approach used to teach Chinese. Chen and Fang (1991) indicate that this pedagogy is a very familiar one in Chinese education. All school children learn Chinese characters through memorization. By the fourth year of primary education, for example, children are expected to have memorized some 2,500 characters (Chen, Fang, Ibid).

Another reason for the current pedagogy in EFL instruction is the traditional emphasis on literary and textual analysis in China (Yen, 1987). A third reason is the impact on language teaching of the Soviet intensive and extensive reading programs of the 1950s' (Price, 1987).

Another reason for the weaknesses in EFL instruction is inadequate teacher training in China. A World Bank assessment of education in China (1985) described a shortage of qualified teachers but a surplus of underqualified teachers at all levels of the educational system. Yu (1990) reports that in the 1988-1989 school year, in a poor province like Jianxi, of the 13,754 middle school teachers working in over 80 counties, only 691 had completed a four-year college degree, 4,549, a three-year college certificate of graduation, and 8,514 were classified as being underqualified (p. 60). The student-to-teacher ratio was supposed to be 1:180 or one teacher for three 60-student classes, but was more often 1:340, indicating either overburdened teachers, or more likely, that the course was not offered (Hu, Ibid.).

This situation is not uncommon in China. According to Wang (1986), in Shaanxi province, 60% of the English teachers were not fully qualified because they had not completed the minimum three-year college diploma (p. 157). Dazu (1990) claims that many middle school graduates have never heard recordings of native English speakers during their entire secondary school education.

II. Communicative Instruction at the CCLC

New methods of EFL instruction that emphasize a communicative pedagogy are being introduced into China through numerous cooperative efforts between Chinese universities and universities overseas. The Canada-China Language Centre (CCLC) is one such project. It is a joint effort by a Canadian university, St. Mary's University, Nova Scotia, and Beijing Normal University (BNU), a key teacher-training facility in China.

The CCLC provides testing, English and French language training, and cross-cultural preparation for Chinese professionals who will receive technical training and academic study in Canada. Those eligible for study take a 17-weeks of listening, speaking, reading, and writing courses, followed by language proficiency examinations in each skill area.

The CCLC also aims to improve the quality of English language instruction at BNU. Teachers from the Foreign Languages Department are usually assigned to the CCLC for a three-semester period and follow a communicative teaching methodology. The Department has selected several of these teachers for further study in Canada at St. Mary's University.

Ultimately, the Foreign Languages Department will staff the Centre entirely and administer its language teaching and testing operations. However, at present, the Centre is operated and staffed by both Canadians and Chinese. Six Canadian teachers and eight Chinese teachers at the Centre teach English to some 100 students each term.

To facilitate the introduction of the communicative teaching methodology, each Canadian teacher is paired with at least one Chinese teacher. Each pair engages in joint planning, observations of one another's classes, and in most cases, the team teaching of some or all the lessons given to a class. In addition, the CCLC teachers meet weekly in listening, speaking, reading, and writing skill teams that discuss teaching strategies.

Class sizes range from 12 to 17 students and are grouped according to language ability. A comprehensive extra-curricular program is offered as well with teacher-students conferencing, fieldtrips, guest speakers, and video nights. Students can study in their classrooms, and they have access to two language laboratories and a library, each of which is equipped with self-study materials. Students are not graded at the CCLC but are tested at the end of each semester and either receive high enough proficiency scores in English to be eligible for study abroad or must remain at the Centre for an additional term.

III. Initial Assessments of the CCLC

The Canada-China Language Centre began operation in 1983 after agreement was reached between the Canadian International Development Agency and China's Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations and Trade. Initially, the program was located at the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing. In 1987, the centre moved to its current location at Beijing Normal University.

A survey was completed in 1987 of 14 Chinese teachers who were either working at the Centre or had worked at the Centre and were studying in Canada, and 10 university teachers of English at other Chinese institutions (Burnaby, Sun, 1989). In general, the Chinese teachers' views were that the methodology being used would be useful to Chinese students who were going abroad but not for Chinese students learning the analytical skills to read and translate English technical articles and documents in China.

The Chinese teachers also found it difficult to work with a curriculum in which lessons and exercises were not provided. They were also concerned that they might be unable to answer questions about the English language or about Canadian culture and that these questions might arise spontaneously in a class taught with a communicative methodology.

In addition, the Chinese did not think that they would use the communicative methodology in teaching their classes when they left the Centre. The teachers stated that they had to use prescribed materials and had to teach to the national examinations. Finally, the teachers commented that they sometimes had to teach large classes of 50 to 70 students with as few as three contact hours weekly, and that they had little access to audiovisual equipment, photocopiers, or even authentic materials such as newspapers and books (Ibid, p.229).

Burnaby and Sun (Ibid) concluded that the strongest measures to make English teaching more communicative would be either to provide Chinese teachers with more training and experience in English or to provide more native speakers. Burnaby and Sun (Ibid) suggested that another possibility might be to replace native or experienced English speakers with a curricula and materials that reflected a cognitively-based analysis of the sociolinguistic and strategic structures of English.

Grabe and Mahon (1981) came to similar conclusions about the efforts of a Fullbright team of language teachers training Chinese university teachers at the Shanghai Foreign Languages University. Among the trainees' complaints were that they wouldn't be able to use the new approaches, and that students and senior faculty wouldn't like it. The teachers wanted more vocabulary, literary definitions, and complex parsing (p. 55). Grabe and Mahon concluded that curriculum implementation for this

program and others like it should emphasize specific skills in teacher training rather than theoretical issues.

Similar recommendations have been made by Maley (1986). Maley (Ibid) claims that Chinese institutions equate content and language improvement with teacher training and suggests that the pedagogy could be improved with materials jointly developed by Chinese and foreign teachers. Yen (1987) called for foreign language training which emphasized "real, meaningful communication in the target language" in its social contexts (p.59).

IV. The Development of a Curriculum

A new comprehensive curriculum describing the Centre, its aims, operation, philosophy, and teaching resources was developed as a result of recommendations such as these (Burnaby & Cumming, 1986; Burnaby, Cumming & Belifore, 1986; Dionne, J., Cray, E., Huot, D., 1988). Earlier curriculums used by teachers at the CCLC were simply statements of goals, teaching objectives, and references. Curriculum development had actually begun with the informal efforts of the first teachers at the Centre. It continued under the supervision of committees created in 1984 to develop syllabi for a multi-skills EFL course combining listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In the years that followed, release time was given to teachers for further curriculum development.

These initial efforts were superseded by a curriculum development project under Dr. Elizabeth Gatbonten who developed a comprehensive communicative curriculum (Gatbonten, 1991). One of the most innovative features of the new curriculum was its adjustment of a communicative methodology to a Chinese teaching context. Its second innovation was in its promotion of language fluency through the identification and repetition of key or target phrases as they occurred in communicative activities.

To accommodate Chinese teaching methodologies in this curriculum, the communicative activities are followed by consolidation activities. The communicative phase of each class occurs when the students are engaged in problem-solving activities in which they share information. This is followed by a consolidation phase when the teacher intervenes and focuses the students' attention on the language they have been using. The teacher may also provide supplementary exercises and explanations. In this sense, the approach is "context-adjusted" (Ibid, p.22).

Language fluency is developed through what Gatbonten and Segalowitz (1988) term "creative automatization" (p. 473). In brief, this approach incorporates some principles of language instruction based on form and on repetition into an interactive, communicative classroom. In this way, the language learner acquires the ability to produce utterances "automatically" or

without too much hesitation and also learns to select the appropriate language for a situation.

Both Canadian and Chinese teachers contributed to the new curriculum. Previous curricular objectives and tasks were incorporated into it and the concerns of Chinese teachers were addressed. At their request, the new curriculum switched from a multi-skills approach to the teaching of listening, speaking, reading, and writing as separate skills. Also at the request of the Chinese teachers, the curriculum emphasized practical tasks such as presenting an oral report or reading a magazine article.

The new curriculum was designed as a series of modules based on Canadian themes, science, the rules and procedures of the Canadian workplace, and the appropriate cognitive, and discourse skills to operate effectively in Canada. The modular approach enables teachers to choose those modules most suitable to the language ability and interests of their classes. The themes include such subjects as Health, the Environment, Justice, Education, Seniors, and Medicare. The themes in the four courses are the same to enable students to transfer knowledge from one skill area to another.

In the Listening course, students learn different listening and note-taking strategies suitable for listening to a variety of authentic materials, including weather reports, news broadcasts, interviews, and academic lectures. The listening course provides the candidates with examples of the types of media broadcasts and academic lectures that they may encounter while they are living and studying in Canada.

In the Speaking course, students role play different situations they will encounter in Canada. These include describing their field of specialization, and dealing with interpersonal problems in the office or university.

Students in the Reading course study authentic materials such as newspapers, magazines, and journals, and complete activities designed to make them aware of the structure of certain types of articles. Students learn such skills as predicting the content of articles through reading headlines, finding the main ideas, and classifying information. The students may work in pairs or in small groups that each have a different series of articles. Information is pooled afterwards in order to complete the activities in a module.

Students in the Writing course prepare a curriculum vitae, letters of request, and a program report. Students also learn the skills of writing paragraphs and short essays. The writing process of draft, revision, and peer tutorial is emphasized in this course.

V. The Inservice Challenge

There are obviously many differences between the teaching styles of Canadians and Chinese (Yen, 1987; Burnaby, Sun, 1989; Smith, 1991). An important difference between the two groups is in their relative familiarity with teaching language learning strategies. The skill teams of teachers at the CCLC have found that few of the Chinese teachers at the Centre were very experienced in doing pair and group work with their classes, in using semantic mapping, and in leading classroom discussions. This is not surprising given the teacher-centered classes and the emphasis on content knowledge rather than teaching methodologies in EFL instruction in China (Maley, 1986; Cumming, 1987; Yen, 1987; Smith, 1991).

There are many uses of pair and group work in the curriculum. Students use pairs and groups to practice their skills. English is used as the medium of communication between students working together. Pair and group work provides an opportunity for peer tutorial and modelling of language behaviours. Working in this way is also a motivational device in the classroom and can be particularly effective in language teaching. Cumming (1985) and Ling (1986) note the usefulness of pair and group work when students are learning to write in a second language.

The technique of semantic mapping or brainstorming enhances students' reading in a second language according to Carrell, Pharis, and Liberto (1989). This technique is central to each of the skill areas. In a brainstorming session, students verbalize their associations on a topic or concept which the teacher has written on an overhead transparency or the blackboard. As the students express their ideas, the teacher records them, focusing on the relevant ones. This process may also be used at the end of an activity as well. In both Listening and Reading, it may be used to identify synonyms and related words or to train students in making predictions about the content of a listening passage or of a reading text. Brainstorming may also be used in Speaking to elicit target phrases from students. It may be used to generate ideas and vocabulary for writing activities.

Discussing the relationship between students' experiences and a text emphasizes reading for meaning and improves students' reading (Carrell, et. al, Ibid). It uses their background knowledge to aid them in comprehension (Barnitz, 1985). It usually consists of these steps: a teacher-led discussion of students' experiences that are related to the text (activating their background knowledge and motivating them for reading), then students' reading of short parts of the text, followed by the teacher's questioning afterwards to establish a relationship between the text and the students' experience. The teacher's role is to guide the students through the cognitive processes related to understanding a text so that they can use the strategy independently (Carrell, et al., Ibid).

However, discussing the relationship between students' experiences and a text can prove to be very difficult if neither the teachers nor the students have had the experiences described in a text. Chinese teachers are possibly at an even greater disadvantage here than they are in using new teaching techniques.

For one thing, the curriculum is about Canada and few of the teachers have ever been to Canada or even learned much about it prior to working at the CCLC. The Reading course has many cultural bound references, on everything from Canadian culture to social and political aspects of life in Canada. One part of the reading module "On Being a Canadian" focuses on the role of the governor general in Canada. In this case, there is little that can be done about this problem given that the curriculum is to prepare Chinese students for study in Canada through learning as much about it as possible.

Secondly, some aspects of the curriculum include references to experiences that are unfamiliar to Chinese teachers. These include the extensive use of telephones, and telephone directories, things common enough in developed countries such as Canada but far less typical in China. The fourth module in the Speaking course is "Using a Telephone" and it outlines a series of dialogues and target utterances related to telephone talk and even includes strategies for leaving messages on telephone answering machines.

Other activities such as arriving at an airport, or making customs declarations, as described in module three "Arriving in Canada" and in module nine "Dealing with Office Equipment Problems" are outside the experience of most Chinese teachers. Not only is domestic air travel prohibitively expensive for most Chinese travellers, but it is a type of travel which requires special permission. Few offices in China are operated as they would be in Canada and they are not similarly equipped. When leading discussions related to these experiences, Chinese teachers must either rely on their limited knowledge or discuss these experiences with Canadian teachers prior to class.

These kinds of experiences are in every aspect of the curriculum. In the Listening course, module 16 "Food and Football" is about a pre-game discussion with the men who are organizing breakfast for two different football teams that are going to meet for a "Grey Cup" championship. Because the listening passage is about Western food, it is of high interest to the students, but the teacher using the material must explain the different types of food such as "french toast," "Caesar salad," and "cereal" to the students and give them a further explanation of the "Grey Cup." In the first module of the Writing course, students write a curriculum vitae, and though this document is very useful to the Centre in finding them study assignments in Canada, the purpose of curriculum vitae in promoting an individual's skills in the

marketplace is almost unknown in China where work placements and study arrangements are determined through examinations or recommendations.

To implement the new curriculum effectively, teacher training must emphasize language learning strategies such as these and provide Chinese teachers with the cultural and experiential background that they need. Explanatory notes have been included in the curriculum but the most effective method to transfer skills and knowledge from the Canadians to the Chinese teachers has been through team teaching (Smith, 1991).

Team teaching also made both Chinese and Canadian teachers aware of their respective cultural and methodological differences, and sensitized Canadian teachers to the expectations of their Chinese students. Considerable cultural sensitivity is needed on the part of both the Canadians and the Chinese for successful team teaching. Miner, Vulpe, and Lou (1990) found that there were many fundamental differences between the values of the Canadian and the Chinese teachers at the CCLC. Values such as individualism, efficiency, public criticism, and accuracy at the expense of group harmony were potential sources of friction between them.

Successful team teaching also relies on the personalities of different Canadian and Chinese teachers, each with varying amounts of teaching experience. The challenge is to develop effective partnerships between Canadian and Chinese teachers.

Currently, the CCLC is operating very effectively under joint staffing and administration. It remains to be seen whether the Chinese teachers and administrators at the Centre can operate it using a communicative curriculum. Similar arrangements have been elsewhere in China linking Chinese institutions with British, French, German, Italian, U.S., and Australian universities (Cumming, 1987), to date, none of these language training centres were able to operate after joint administration had ended. Ultimately, maintaining the CCLC as a language training, and testing centre will depend on whether the pedagogical skills and the cultural and experiential knowledge described in its new curriculum are transferred to the Chinese teachers who will be operating the Centre.

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