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Globalisation of English language programs for young children in Viet Nam

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The specific purpose of education is to *prepare* children so that they are able to maximise their potential and participate in the society or community around them. In order for many Third World nations to access information technology, the provision of language programs, particularly English, has become necessary. However, in the implementation of these programs, the influence of the globalisation of English in a different cultural context becomes a crucial concern particularly in relation to curriculum design. In preparing children from a young age to be in a position to gain access to the information technology, perceived as necessary for the country's development, an awareness of the possible but unintended social and cultural outcomes is important.

Research in second foreign language (referred to in this paper as 'second' language) teaching methodology and curriculum development has been limited in the area of early childhood education. As a result, this paper is an account of an investigation into two second language teaching methodologies (*direct* and *indirect*) applicable for young children in Viet Nam. The development of these programs is discussed from two perspectives. One involved a comparative study into English language programs at the pre-school level, using the target language (*direct*) as a means of instruction and the vernacular (*indirect*) to teach the target language. The other perspective incorporated a brief comparative analysis of native versus non-native target language teachers. This involved four bilingual Vietnamese teachers and four groups of Vietnamese children in two economically diverse early childhood centres, while the second study involved a native English speaker in each of the same centres but with a different group of children.

This research was carried out in the context of a descriptive analysis using a hybrid research methodology involving predominantly participant observation — a research process recommended for studies involving young children. The results that emerged led to the development of a basic structure for age-appropriate programs for use in Vietnamese cultural contexts.

[Key words: early childhood education, globalisation, Vietnamese education]

INTRODUCTION

Research at the early childhood level has tended to concentrate on the intellectual, psychological or physical aspects of development, while research in methodology and curriculum — particularly in second language programs — has been limited in the case of young children (Paulston, 1992). Research in second language acquisition has tended to concentrate on the school age child. This paper explores the research carried out in a pilot program in Viet Nam. The Ministry of Education and Training in Viet Nam was interested in establishing the viability of English language programs for possible introduction at the pre-school level. Consequently, two centres were

selected based on convenience to carry out this research with a comparison made between two different socio-economic areas. The Ministry was concerned that children in low socio-economic areas would not become further disadvantaged because of English language programs being introduced. The ultimate aim was to develop fluency in English language knowledge as early as possible as part of a preparation process in gaining access to information technology.

This research was a comparative study of two language-teaching methodologies (*direct* and *indirect*) at the early childhood level. However, some early childhood studies have researched English language acquisition of young Vietnamese children in Australia (Clarke, 1996). Several studies by Vietnamese researchers had been undertaken but these had involved using a curriculum designed for primary school aged children. This was the first time a foreign researcher was permitted to carry out a study in early childhood education centres in Viet Nam.

The programs were developed from two different perspectives. One involved an English language introduction to pre-school children aged from four to five years incorporating several teaching methods and curricula. Although children attend early childhood centres in Viet Nam until age six, the curriculum introduced after age five begins to incorporate reading and writing skills. The choice of the age group selected was to develop programs involving oral and aural skills leading to a more communicative approach. The second perspective involved developing a Vietnamese language program for the children of the 53 minority groups who do not speak Vietnamese. The basic concepts and approach of the English language program in respect to Vietnamese as a second language and mother tongue maintenance influenced the early childhood programs being established for the 53 other language communities.

Within these perspectives, an overview of the socio-cultural and institutional influences that have impacted on the development of second language programs at the early childhood level are explored in this paper. As a result, the curriculum, language teaching methodology and classroom procedures are developed within the Vietnamese context.

There is limited and variable provision of second language teaching programs in Third World countries due to the lack of financial and community support (Brannelly, 2009; de Grauwe, 2008). Many attempts are based on borrowing or adapting from the so-called ‘Western’ cultures, which require considerable resources and are more suited to affluent communities (Bennett, 1993). These programs are often culturally alien and do not consider the needs and resources of the local community. In the pursuit of electronic knowledge and to compete globally, one or more of the major international languages such as English, is seen as essential for improving the overall economic situation. However, ‘assimilation’, whether within a country or internationally, devalues all other cultural and linguistic forms by establishing the dominant group, locally or globally as ‘superior’. Therefore, all programs need to incorporate ways of acknowledging and building on the local culture when introducing a second language.

Preparing children from a young age to be in a position to gain from information technology, requires an awareness of the social and cultural outcomes. This awareness becomes, not only important in the language teaching process, but in the imposition of education practices and structures more relevant for affluent nations and situations. Bennett (1993, p.109) emphasised the necessity for “early childhood agents from Western or international agencies, practising in developing countries … to be aware of cultural implications of their values and objectives”. Bennett not only questions the attitudes of “engaging in early childhood intervention within different cultures and social milieus”, but the need to have a knowledge of local ‘child-rearing practices’ and cultural values. Bennett (1993, p.109) further suggests that “instead of importing expensive, professional pre-school models”, supporting local parents would be more effective in the provision of early childhood education.

BACKGROUND RESEARCH

In this situation Phillipson (1991, p.40) claims that the theories on which second language acquisition is based, "falsify social reality and serve to maintain and perpetuate the hegemony, linguistic and social, of the dominant group", whether at a local or global level. At the core of this hegemonic practice is the internalisation of the legitimacy of the devaluing of other cultures, languages and classes within both the dominant and dominated groups. Consequently, Phillipson (1988, p.351) concludes, "linguistic imperialism has to do with more than language".

The western system of knowledge and the process of obtaining it has not only been imposed, but has been accepted as the most viable direction in which to pursue social development, regardless of the values or limited contextual suitability. This process devalues the achievements, particularly educationally, of non-western peoples. In regard to Viet Nam, an education system has been in operation for well over a thousand years with the first schools being established in the 11th Century and the first university as early as 1011.

Aikman (1996, p.159) emphasises that "globalisation represents cultural homogenisation" and through education this is being affected as a means of 're-colonisation'. This is further seen as a conquest frequently achieved through the 'dominant' languages taking on a global perspective with the resultant dependence economically and scientifically. Cummins (1993) and Muhlhausler (1994) see English language teaching programs regionally and globally as being aligned with 'modernisation'. In turn, this alignment is seen as an economic commodity designed to impose 'western' models of education and language teaching methods. Mother tongue or bilingual language learning in these situations is still regarded as part of a transition process to the dominant language, in this case English. Communication technology, overwhelmingly in English, is accelerating the globalisation process linguistically.

Viet Nam is concerned about the influence of western culture on Vietnamese traditions and language through the English language curriculum. The Research Centre for Early Childhood Education (RCECE) in Viet Nam expressed this concern before the study began. However, by developing an understanding of the cultural and educational traditions, as well as by working in collaboration with local colleagues, programs in English can be designed within a Vietnamese cultural context. The Vietnamese, similarly to many other Third World peoples, are particularly anxious to acquire international languages, especially English (RCECE). Many teachers and researchers in Viet Nam feel that gaining proficiency in the introduced language, with minimum linguistic difficulties, may be achieved by introducing it at a young age. Tabors and Snow (1994, p.105) verify, "the process of acquiring two languages from a very early age is now seen to have cognitive as well as social benefits". Ellis (1994, p.490) summarised studies carried out over a long term as revealing that younger children "achieve higher levels of proficiency than those who begin in later life" and this is significant with pronunciation. Schachter (1997, p.12) points out that "the developmental paths of L1 and L2" are similar with young children.

Cajkler and Addelman (1992, p.23) feel that the influencing factors on language learning, are related to "size and ability of the class, the aim of the lesson, size and shape of the room, mood of the class", in addition to the time of day the lessons are arranged. Many Third World countries may not be in a position to consider all these factors in providing second language teaching programs.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN VIET NAM

Prior to 1945, there was no pre-school education in Viet Nam, even under the French Occupation. However, immediately after the August Revolution in 1945 the Ministry for Social Maintenance

brought in the Act of Child Protection, Orphanages and Kindergartens. It was decreed that "kindergartens will admit children under seven years old and will be organised according to conditions stipulated by the Ministry of Education" (Pham Minh Hac 1991, p.39). Despite many difficulties from this point on, pre-school education was officially developed. The influencing factors contributing to this official recognition by the new government was a commitment to the care, "protection and education of children from the beginning; the legal affirmation of the equality of men and women … the encouragement of women's participation in social activities and production" (Pham Minh Hac 1991, p.39). Since 1987, all early childhood education came under the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) including the establishment of crèches, kindergartens and childcare along with the development of curriculum guidelines.

Over the past decade there has emerged a variety of early childhood centres, ranging from full day for 10 hours a day, six days a week with meals provided, to others based on shifts or seasonally. Children are placed with the same age group and the children's ages are given in months as the Vietnamese consider a child is already one-year-old at birth. There are non-formal programs, such as family day care and abridged kindergarten programs, in areas where full attendance is not possible. Early childhood education facilities are generally financed and operated by the local communities and the state, while in the mountain areas there is a lack of facilities due to remoteness and seasonal weather difficulties. With 80 per cent of children living in rural and remote areas, the problems of providing early childhood services are overwhelming major challenges. In addition there are 54 Nations in Viet Nam, with the largest, the Viet Kinh, constituting 86 per cent of the population and speaking Vietnamese. The 53 other Nations have their own distinct languages and cultures with 50 per cent of these having no written form, only an oral language tradition. About 95 per cent of the peoples of Viet Nam are Indigenous, including the Viet Kinh. Consequently, developing education programs in these other languages is also a major challenge. However, the government is committed to protecting the basic rights of these peoples and gives up to an 80 per cent subsidy to some villages to protect the cultural and spiritual traditions. Although 80 per cent of the population in Viet Nam is Buddhist, there are some groups still practising traditional beliefs. Viet Nam was the second country in the world to ratify the Convention for the Rights of the Child (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child). This commitment to education extends to the Ministry of Education and Training having a research department for all levels within the department (this is over and above University education research). A strong underlying influence based on the philosophy of Confucianism and tradition is that "a happy and virtuous family must make the child surpass the father in education and talent" (Le 1995, p.8). Therefore, the Viet Nam culture places emphasis on the importance of early childhood education, seeing this as providing a strong foundation for gaining primary education for all.

Kindergartens (*Mau Giao*) in urban Viet Nam can range from 500 to well over 1000 children and the children attend from age three to six usually for the whole day. Childcare centres (*Mam Non*) cater for children from six months to six years, but are otherwise the same as kindergartens in program content and numbers attending. Children three months to three years are in Nursery Schools (*Nhe Tre*) and are grouped in classes for 3 to 12 months, 13 to 24 months and 25 to 36 months. In the rural areas childcare and kindergarten centres can be 20 to several hundred, but varying considerably in standard of facilities and resources. Nevertheless, the program followed is the same throughout the country. Class sizes with three to six year olds can average 60 to 70 children with two trained teachers and two untrained assistants, and for children under three it is usually one trained teacher to six children with an assistant. The class is generally divided in half to rotate classes on a very tight timetable. Even though class sizes are considered large from a western perspective, the children generally remain attentive as the discipline is based on community respect for teachers and education coupled with family honour.

Therefore, in developing a program that is contextually based and applicable to young children, these factors discussed above are important considerations. The facilities, the size of the classes involved, and the resources available, will influence the practical implementation of an English language component of the curriculum at this level. Another consideration was that parents usually pay for early childhood education and extra for music, dance, drama, art and craft, and second language lessons including English. The involvement of the children in this research meant that the groups had to be consistent and be able to pay the $1 a month extra to attend the lessons.

THE RESEARCH PROJECT

In carrying out this research, a mixed paradigm ethnographic approach was incorporated in which participant observation was predominantly used. Participant observation is considered most applicable to studies involving young children (Berk, 1991; Bredekamp and Rosegrant, 1992; Blenkin and Kelly, 1992). Throughout the study, two Vietnamese researchers from the RCECE assisted with the project. The methods of data collection involved recording all lessons on audio tape, and by video of at least two lessons per week of each group, and keeping diaries and logs. In addition, questionnaires were distributed to all parents of the children involved at the start and on completion of the study. Another questionnaire was distributed to all the qualified teaching staff in each centre who were involved with the children participating in this study. This was followed by interviews with the parents and staff. Assessment of young children needs to incorporate "the learning process as a whole rather than the end product" (Blenkin and Kelly 1992, p.126). Consequently, multiple assessment procedures were used rather than just tests alone (Shohamy, 1997). The tests, four in all, were taken over a period of six months, and involved each individual child to identify objects from resources used in the lessons and to follow simple tasks in English. This form of testing was based on recommendations by Foster (1990) in assessing young children, and the researcher's 35 years of experience working in the early childhood field.

The English language program involved in this study was researched and piloted in two urban centres, and developed a curriculum drawn up and based on the Vietnamese language program. The development of the pre-school English language curriculum involved action research over several months before implementing the research study. The thematic approach was considered the most appropriate, which is based on the "children's development from the familiar (self, home, school) to the outside world" (Reilly and Ward 1997, p.11). Reilly and Ward (1997, p.13) recommended that it is a "good idea to link what you are teaching to what the children are learning in their pre-school classes in their own language" and that English is seen as "a means of communication".

The children in this study came from two mainstream early childhood centres in Hanoi and were four to five years of age with parents willing to pay for the extra curricula activities. The two classes were divided in half. One group in each centre was taught using the 'direct' or target language, English, and the second group was taught English using the 'indirect' or vernacular approach. The children in the other group in each centre, who were taught by a native English language speaker, were from a different class but based on the same criteria. The children in these classes were randomly divided for all extra lessons whether it was drawing, dance, English or any other subject, and the rooms allocated rotated. The children formed groups of 17 participants in each of the four groups using bilingual Vietnamese teachers, while the two classes using a native English language speaker had 15 children in each of the two centres and taught using the 'direct' method of language teaching methodology.

A compromise to traditional classroom practices was incorporated, in that the children sat around in a U-shape, with a more teacher-centred as opposed to a child-centred approach. However, there

was far more interaction between the teacher and children than in the structured Vietnamese classroom and the children moved around in response to words or expressions used. Children continued the custom of beginning and ending lessons by greeting the teacher and crossing their arms, and clapping when questions answered were correct or when they finished a song or rhyme. Even though resources were extremely limited, it was possible to find pictures or objects to facilitate the teaching of the target language in a local context without undue expense. Resources and materials produced in western countries are not only expensive, but are not reflective of life in Viet Nam. Consequently, many English language teachers incorporated material produced in the Philippines or Singapore. Conversely, Vietnamese values, educational practices, and facilities, would not suit western contexts. With play equipment being limited, Vietnamese teaching practices incorporate rote learning and are highly structured. This contrasts dramatically to the western model of 'free play', small groups and extensive play equipment.

Reilly and Ward (1997, p.9) state, "activities most suited to very young learners are those which involve songs, chants, rhymes, stories, total physical response … games" and drama, since it is through play that most of the learning takes place. However, teaching songs and rhymes in a second language posed an added challenge, so that it was necessary to choose activities that were clear in meaning, related to familiar experiences and were preferably accompanied by action to improve comprehension. Many songs and rhymes, particularly nursery rhymes popular in English-speaking countries, are not generally understandable in a different cultural context. Consequently, the songs and rhymes that were more easily understood in the Vietnamese context involved familiar themes and action, such as 'Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star', 'The Wheels of the Bus', 'Open Shut Them', 'If You're Happy and You Know It' and counting rhymes '1, 2, 3, 4, 5, Once I Caught a Fish Alive', 'Five Little Ducks' and 'Three Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed'. As young children learn quickly through songs and actions, it is in this way that second language acquisition is facilitated in an early childhood setting (Reilly and Ward, 1997).

The development of the curriculum and resources became very specific, even with respect to the choice of pictures and words used in the lesson discussions, along with the songs, rhymes and experiences of the Vietnamese children. Consequently, many of the same pictures used in the Vietnamese language class were also used in the English lessons. This procedure was also used in storytelling, using children's stories written in Vietnamese with translations provided in English. Some materials from other Asian countries had to be adapted to a Vietnamese Buddhist context since material, for example, from the Philippines usually reflected Catholic images that were not familiar to most Vietnamese children.

As nutrition and health share equal weighting in curriculum content with educational skills, this needed to be incorporated into English language curriculum parallel to the Vietnamese language themes. These included lessons about fruit and vegetables, hygiene and physical education due to the high incidence of nutritional problems in the country (Pham thi Mai Chi, 1994). In all centres, there is not only the allocation of a nurse, but also a doctor, and parents are given periodic guidance programs that include parenting skills, cooking nutritiously and hygiene improvement. In the curriculum, only content words for fruit or vegetables familiar in Viet Nam would be used in the lesson and for hygiene, pictures depicting a family washing in a basin rather than a European-style bathroom. This extended to decisions made over which English words and expressions were used.

This study extended over a six-month period and followed both the 'direct' and 'indirect' methods, using the language as much as possible through daily routines within each lesson, particularly with regard to greetings and instructions. However, the difference between the two methods appears to relate to the direct method requiring greater intensity in listening skills and

more attention to body language or actions by the teacher. Young children are learning new concepts in their first language, so words associated with numbers, colours, and shapes often recapitulate the conceptual understanding as well as broadening into the new language being learnt. In this study, repetition in various formats became necessary regardless of the teaching method being used in order to cater for learner characteristics, absenteeism and levels of concept development. Nevertheless, the aim was not only to develop proficiency in English oral and aural communication skills, but also to gain some understanding of sound differences and be introduced to another language in an enjoyable way. However, because 'competition' between teachers, classes and the children is entrenched in early childhood centres in Viet Nam, the Vietnamese teachers involved always wanted to know how well their children were learning English in comparison to the other groups.

The lesson format maintained the 'Vietnamese nature' as it led to less confusion. The teachers, researcher and the Research Centre decided on this format for Early Childhood Education (Ministry of Education and Training). The lessons lasted 30 minutes, four times a week (this included Saturday) and usually an activity room was used rather than the 'home' classroom. The format of the lessons commenced with the traditional greetings, but in English, followed by counting with rhymes and activities, colour of the week, and games to reinforce the words learnt — then pictures or objects discussions of the theme with games or activities to reinforce the words or expressions used. This was followed by one or two relevant songs, finishing with one or two action songs such as 'Hokey Pokey' or similar types of whole movement songs.

AN ANALYSIS OF THE RESULT

In this study, the focus was on what the children comprehended as well as what they could say. Although there were commonalities in the way the children learnt and understood the target language, there were also individual differences. As indicated by Berk (1991, p.350) the "majority fit a referential style of language learning" wherein the children learnt the names of familiar objects. This has also been reflected in research carried out by Clarke (1996), "a smaller number of children used an expressive style", learning more the social formulas or expressions used in communicating socially. This study revealed that a small number of children had learnt the social expressions more readily but did not rate as well on the naming of objects. Some children were more interested in 'social language' than the names of objects. This could also reflect more on the cultural values of Vietnamese, as very young Vietnamese children learn, according to Berk (1991, p.351), "an honorific pronoun system first". This was particularly so in the groups learning by the direct target language approach. This is consistent, Berk (1991, p.351) points out, "with an interactionist approach to language development, involving interdependency between children's inherent attributes and their physical and social worlds". This further enhances the child's understanding "that an object could be called by a different name in a new language" (Berk 1991, p.377).

In this study, the children began to develop some communicative abilities in English and enhanced their listening and speaking skills. They demonstrated that they had acquired knowledge about when to use the language they were learning with non-Vietnamese and in which situations. Although the level of language acquired over the course of this study was limited, they did try to use it outside the classroom. When given directions, most of the children understood what was required and responded appropriately by the end of the study. On occasions, they would interact collectively or in a group in English, but more often it was on an individual basis. The children who were taught English by the direct method of language teaching were clearer in pronunciation and the children learning with a native English speaker even more so, but with the accent of the teacher. The accent or pronunciation clearly reflected that of the teacher in all the direct groups.

However, with the indirect groups the English pronunciation was not so clear and was much more heavily influenced by the Vietnamese forms of construction. Although the teachers were all bilingual, except the native English teacher, the children learning by the direct method had teachers who were more confident with their spoken English. Nevertheless, having taught all these teachers on earlier visits, there did not appear to be any significant differences between them in regard to the children's performance.

After the six-month period, the children in all groups did understand that there was a difference between English and Vietnamese. The lessons were designed to involve constant interaction, choral as well as individual responses, the emphasis being on communication. The children were also observed as a group, and the test results indicated a wider diversity of language knowledge than the classroom observations revealed. Children in the direct groups were more confident in interacting with native English speakers and their pronunciation much clearer as a group. Individuals in these four groups experienced difficulties, but overall the direct groups were more communicative and interactive with the target language. Listening skills with these groups were more intent as the children needed to observe and listen to the teachers more than in the indirect groups. By the end of the study, the English comprehension of most of the children in the direct groups were more apparent, when observing how they listened intently to stories in English using pictures and could dramatise some of them. Children in the indirect groups still required the stories to be explained in Vietnamese, even with the same pictures, before they understood and were able to dramatise them.

The indirect groups could initially be instructed more readily to, for example, "move back", "sit down" or "get in a circle" and explanations of abstract concepts understood more effectively. With this method, there was less of a requirement of non-verbal language, physical action or visual resources. The test results, based on the processes mentioned previously, revealed a more even learning pattern with these groups but did not appear to create the opportunities for expansion on language learnt with the brighter children. These children were the ones who the teachers judged as progressing more rapidly in acquiring the target language. However, in the good to excellent category, the indirect groups performed better on the tests than the direct groups in both centres. The test results of the direct group were more diverse, covering a wider spread of ability than the indirect groups. In the latter groups, the overall test results tended to be less variable with more children acquiring English language skills, but not to the extent of the higher achievers in the direct groups nor, conversely, as little as the lower achievers of the direct groups.

This appeared to indicate that in the direct groups the children rating highly were advantaged but, conversely, this teaching method leaves a larger group of children in the limited range. A significant disadvantage with the direct groups would be the initial explanations needed to establish a routine in the lesson procedure and to assist in understanding instructions. With this method, there is a heavy reliance on visual resources and teachers who speak the target language relatively clearly as a model. There were also discipline problems, particularly in the disadvantaged centre with the direct English language groups, where the children were initially more easily distracted. There was certainly less confusion with the children in understanding what the teacher was requesting or what was expected of the children in the indirect teaching method. As the study progressed, other children in all groups would assist a child who was experiencing difficulty. However, in all groups the children would copy exactly any mispronunciation of words or expressions.

The results of the tests were used to categorise children into ranges defined as limited, good, very good and excellent. Interesting results emerged in comparison with the children's Vietnamese language learning whereby one of the children, who achieved the highest results on the tests and

had indicated a clear understanding and pronunciation in English language learning, was considered poor in Vietnamese. This was based on the judgement of the Vietnamese language teacher and the two research assistants. In enquiring into the possible reasons, it was found this particular boy enjoyed the more 'active' form of learning and so excelled. He, along with others with less dramatic results between the two languages, were all from the direct groups. However, in general most demonstrated similar language acquisition skills in both languages. Another interesting outcome was the results between identical twins: one achieved well while the other not so well. In considering the children exposed to some English in the home, all were in the direct groups, but there were three children in the limited range, who were in the disadvantaged centre and only one child in the affluent centre. In comparing the centres involved, the children in the disadvantaged centre appeared to have a broader range of test results, while the results from the affluent centre had a tighter distribution. In comparing the indirect groups, the affluent centre performances appeared better overall but there was a higher percentage in the disadvantaged centre that performed at a limited level. In comparing differences between the two centres, beside the availability of resources and facilities, absenteeism was a factor influencing the children's performance and discipline difficulties were more marked, particularly in the direct methodology groups. Whereas the children in both types of groups in the affluent centre performed better than those in the disadvantaged centre, this was in spite of the number who achieved in the excellent range in the disadvantaged centre.

CONCLUSIONS

In considering the differences between the direct and indirect methods, the results in the indirect method appear better than in the direct method for children rated in the good to excellent range. However, the percentage of students in the limited range is higher within the direct groups but in considering only the children rated in the good to excellent range, then this is reversed and the direct method appears more as the approach to recommend. Nevertheless, neither proved detrimental as there were advantages and disadvantages with either method. Consequently, it depends from which perspective these results are viewed in order to assess the advantages and disadvantages in both methods. With respect to the use of teachers who are native speakers of the target language versus non-native speakers, there was very little difference between the direct groups, if any. As a result of this study, the indirect method was recommended at this level of education to the Ministry of Education and Training, at least initially. Maybe as the children progressed, an increased use of the target language could eventually lead to the direct method being the predominant teaching methodology.

In initial discussions and in the preparation of the curriculum to be taught, advice was provided by the teachers involved and the Vietnamese researchers on what to include and what to exclude sensitive to cultural context. Vietnamese classroom practices, culturally relevant teaching resources in English and the preparation of additional materials were all developed within a Vietnamese context for a young homogenous group of Vietnamese speakers. The curriculum incorporated not only traditional festivals and days of significance such as Teacher's Day, but themes familiar to Vietnamese children in Viet Nam. As a non-Vietnamese researcher, this approach was important in minimising any Anglo-cultural intrusion. This included not imposing the same classroom practices as those used in an English-speaking country, nor requiring the same conditions as many economically advantaged countries consider necessary in class sizes, resources or facilities.

Some of the most significant differences in this regard in Viet Nam were the respect given to the teachers and the reverence for parents and Elders in the family and community. This is quite a contrast to English-speaking countries where the individual is paramount and the nuclear family.

In Viet Nam the high educational expectations of the children by their families (including the extended family) has an effect, as it is a tradition heavily influenced by 'honour of the family' which is not so prevalent in English-speaking countries. Confucian values influence Vietnamese educational practices in that "every descendent must strive to do his or her best, to engage in constant education and training to be worthy of the family tradition" (Le 1995, p.8). In this respect, these values are reflected in the moral lessons which feature significantly in the curriculum and continue to be highly valued.

The resources developed and used in these English language programs with the young children were localised with pictures, posters, books and objects made in Viet Nam and featured Vietnamese people, homes and the community. These resources also contained representations of traditional ceremonies, national days and various customs. English stories that were popular and often dramatised later in the program were the *Little Gingerbread Boy*, *Three Bears*, *Three Little Pigs* and the *Farmer and the Beet*; despite their European origins, these are popular in Viet Nam. Wherever possible, Vietnamese children's stories in English were used to encourage the use of English in a Vietnamese context and provide materials to which the children could relate. This procedure assisted with increasing their English language understanding. Using these types of stories meant that the teachers were familiar with the full range of cultural meanings associated with the story. The songs, although in English language, were sung in a Vietnamese manner, which included swaying, clapping or with gestures typical of an animal, plant or object similar to songs in Vietnamese.

English cultural influence came in the form of greater interaction in the classroom. It became more of a compromise between the teacher-centred approach of Vietnamese classrooms and child-centred approach found in western classrooms. The child-centred approach, as a whole, would be difficult to introduce into the Vietnamese classroom for several reasons: the class sizes in early childhood centres were very large; the facilities used were small; and outdoor areas were either very confined or on the roof of the centre due to lack of space. The teaching style is heavily influenced by Confucian methods. As explained by Feeney (1992, p.16) the generally held belief was that the children's intelligence is enhanced if there is early language training and for "the entire class to learn by rote or recitation in unison". Moral lessons featured significantly in the curriculum. However, while maintaining these values many centres are moving away from the more structured teacher-centred approach and the English language program was developed more in the style of these newer directions while still reflecting the Vietnamese values and traditions.

This research supported the recommendations made by Scarino (1998, p.13) of the principles required in attempting to establish quality language programs as including:

1. An engagement with the system as a complex whole and connection among issues, across the layers of involvement (e.g. national, state, school), and across the key concepts in languages education (e.g. language and culture, language and learning, language and literacy), and among participants, (e.g. teachers, and researchers or policy makers);
2. The incorporation of a research-oriented approach;
3. The involvement of teachers as key participants;
4. A recognition of the value of national collaboration … and the improvement which comes from analysing and sharing different experiences; and
5. The understanding that in both languages education and policy formulation we are engaging with a dynamic process that must be continually improved based on research and our own experimental wisdom.

In attempting to provide 'Education for All', Viet Nam places science and technology at the top of the agenda for State policy according to Pham Minh Hac (1991, p.179). He further explains the need for "programs to be researched within a Vietnamese context" and the need to minimise cultural intrusion in the process of second language acquisition.

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