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ALICE IN THE MULTICULTURAL-LAND: THE READING/WRITING AND WRITING/ORACY CONNECTION TO ENHANCE CHINESE COMPETENCE IN LITERATURE EDUCATION

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BACKGROUND: Foreign language anxiety (FLA)(Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986) has often been reported by Chinese language teachers among ethnic minority (EM) students. Second language performance seems negatively correlated with higher levels of FLA, and FLA is typically highest for speaking. Not only do EM students need to learn Chinese as a second language to enhance Chinese competence and promote social inclusion, local students with Chinese as their native language would also add dimensions to their Chinese learning by multicultural exposures. Literature was employed to link students with their multicultural and global community (Melendez & Beck, 2013).

PURPOSE: This study explored how an adventurous fairy tale was employed in literary learning in a heterogeneous classroom. It is believed that students empowered by educational experience can develop a higher level of motivation on learning. Research questions include how the reading/writing and writing/oracy connection enhanced Chinese learning ability of EM students.

METHODOLOGY: Fifty-eight Grade 9 EM secondary school students and 30 local Grade 6 primary school students were recruited in the study. The reading/ writing connection (Olson, 2007) was employed to enhance the reading abilities of L1 and L2 learners using adventurous fairy tales of English and Chinese cultures and representations. Students were requested to write in Chinese the well-known story Alice in the Wonderland with their own cultural twists. Four versions of the highest quality, namely Indian, Korean, Nepalese and Turkish, were printed in big picture books. This was followed by using the writing/oracy connection (Reutzel & Cooter, 2012), where 29 EM students participated in service learning and shared the stories in Chinese to 60 children in a kindergarten. Storytelling strategies such as role play were employed to facilitate the illustrations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION: The reading/writing connection resulted in multiple versions of Alice with many different cultural backgrounds and a significant increase of idea units in writing (Cheung, Tse & Tsang, 2001). Student questionnaire showed that L2 students improved significantly from having confidence in using Chinese to tell the 4 versions of Alice, clearly telling the problem and the solutions of the story. This showed that participants who used Chinese language outside the classroom have overcome FLA than those students who had learnt a language solely through classroom instruction. Chinese literary activities could be an enjoyment to EM students.

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