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Concentrated Language Encounter Teaching Program: ELT in the New Millennium

Saowalak Rattanaovich

Department of Curriculum & Instruction, Faculty of Education, Srinakharinwirot University
Bangkok, Thailand

Trends of Educational Needs in the New Millennium

Whenever we approach the turn of a new century, we eagerly await the innovations that offer new challenges, both positive and negative. Certainly, there will be a higher level of communication as a result of the advances in technology that will emerge in the new century. On the negative side, there will be the worry of higher competition (which will result in a widening gap in living standards between the rich and the poor) increasing violence, population growth, unequal food distribution, globalization v.s. regionalism and fragmentation, environmental deterioration, and loss of cultural values. These are just some of the problems we will face. According to the UNICEF report on the plight of children in the new millennium (Charoon Seree, 1999), the standard of living of more than half of the world's population will be under the poverty level; especially those in Africa and Asia. It is estimated that only one child out of ten will have a better standard of life. Poverty will be a serious global issue and will have a major impact on national educational reform planning. Literacy education is considered to be the only solution to solving the problem on a long term basis. The United Nations (UNESCO,

1990) placed emphasis on "functional literacy", which involves communicating through using critical thought processes, and adapting knowledge to other subject areas. It is the most important level of literacy in terms of how to improve or develop the community as a whole. In a contemporary context, literacy is increasingly being related to community and workplace processes, as well as to educational contexts. Information processing is becoming more sophisticated, both for the purposes of social participation, and for economic performance. Rapidly changing demands mean that children need to acquire and experience proper literacy learning to have a better life.

UNESCO (Delors, 1998) identified four pillars of education for the new millennium. These are:

1. Learning to know – which means acquiring understanding, knowing and discovering. This is coupled with learning how to learn, by developing the ability to concentrate, memorize, and think critically.

2. Learning to do – which involves acquiring occupational skills, along with the ability to deal with changing employment situations, as well as working as part of a team.
3. Learning to live together – which involves co-operative learning situations, so that the learners are working together towards a common goal.
4. Learning to be – which involves the process of learning what lies within the individual. It focuses on knowing oneself and being able to act in harmony with others.

It is therefore important for educational programs to reach those goals; especially for children in different situations. The English language teaching program is a very important program in most countries, because English is the medium for international communication. The difficulty of English language teaching is teaching its different contexts, such as teaching English as a second language or as a foreign language. Essentially, the English teaching program should be planned to reach the functional goal of literacy, and also to cover all the 4 pillars of successful education. The effective English teaching program in the new millennium should then integrate not only language skills for communicative performance, but also enhance the capacity for creative thinking.

The Concentrated Language Encounter Program

According to research studies in the field of literacy, one approach that has proven very successful in literacy education is the Concentrated Language Encounter (CLE). The CLE methodology was developed during the 1980's in the remote regions of Australia

for children of the indigenous Aborigine population. A successful program began in Thailand in 1987 through the 3H grant of the foundation of Rotary International (Rotary International, 1987). This project was situated in the remote Northeastern Regions of Thailand, which have an ethnically diverse range of people. Therefore, children in these areas experienced many language related difficulties at school, and as a result there was a high student failure rate. In the program, key-personnel (in-service teachers, supervisors, and administrators) were trained using the CLE techniques in teaching literacy in the regions. The result, from both teachers' and students' points of view, showed a significant improvement in students' language, both in spoken and written language. It also resulted in a noticeable improvement in respect of students' self-expression, personal development, positive reading and writing attitudes, creative thinking development, team co-operation skills and in reducing drop-out levels. So successful were those initial projects that the Thai government expanded the CLE teaching techniques nationwide. This project has since been successfully replicated in Bangladesh, Laos, the Solomon Islands, and Nepal. It is now expanding in other developing countries, such as India, Philippines, Egypt, Brazil, South Africa, Turkey, etc.

Concentrated Language Encounter Methodology

The CLE methodology encompasses the four pillars of education previously mentioned.

Learning to know: A CLE program uses activities and literature to expand the knowledge and understanding of the child. Most importantly, all reading, writing and discussion is based on a shared experience at the beginning of the program unit. What is

said or written is intermeshed with what is going on in a well-structured activity that is of central practical interest to students. An underlying principle of the program is the concept of "scaffolding". The tasks that students are expected to do are first modeled by the instructor, who then helps students to perform the same task, but provides less and less support as students increasingly become more able to work unaided. This prepares each child for the task and ensures its successful completion.

Learning to do: The CLE program has 2 kinds of learning units: text-based and activity-based. The students can be involved in practical activities; using practical life experiences. The types of activities used in the program are unlimited, they can be vocational skills or knowledge based processes.

Learning to live together: The CLE process of learning is dynamic and group oriented. The conference group and small group activities are always organized for students to experience their reading, writing, learning and speaking around the core practical activities. Each person contributes to the successful completion of the task; such as negotiating the text and the making of the big book. These books can then be used as a resource.

Learning to be: The nature of personal interactions within the class ensures dignity and respect for each child. The CLE program offers children the opportunity to develop their intellect, judgemental ability, creativity, feelings, relationships and imagination.

According to research studies on CLE projects in Thailand, Laos, and Bangladesh (Rattanavich, 1997), it was found that most of the students who were using their native

language, could achieve their functional literacy skills within 3 months; whereas the students who were second language speakers could achieve their functional literacy skills within 6 months. Also, most of the students showed extremely positive attitudes towards learning. They enjoyed reading and writing much more than they ever had before.

CLE methodology has been developed into 3 stages or models of teaching to enhance the learners' capacity in language use, creative thinking and practical life improvement at different levels (according to learners' aptitudes, intelligence, needs and potential). Learners of different intelligence can work together and maintain their own paces of learning naturally. The CLE program stages are as follows:

Stage 1 is used for non-language learners. The objective at this stage is to make the learners enthusiastic readers, able to write simple texts of various kinds. The emphasis is on enjoying reading and writing and becoming successful users of the written language. With that, comes self-improvement because the learners have learned how to learn, and they enjoy the learning process.

Stage 2 is used for the learner who can read and write well enough. It is aimed at widening the range of text-types that the learners can read and write. They cover most of the texts that are used in everyday life-such as letters, advertisements, bus and train schedules, receipts, invoices, brochures, owner manuals and newspapers.

Stage 3 is used for the advanced learners, emphasizing learning through

reading and writing as well as further experiences with literary texts. The overall objective is to provide all the literacy skills that they will need when they leave school, and the learning skills that they will need at a higher level.

In all three stages, the content of the text that they process is chosen, on the basis of what is more likely to improve their prospects and enjoyment of life – it ranges between basic health and hygiene, public health, morals, norms of conduct, arts, crafts, culture, science, business procedures, community decision making, team work and co-operation,

preservation of the environment, agriculture and all other aspects of local and national life. CLE methodology and techniques in teaching literacy can be adapted effectively, not only for elementary school children in formal educational programs, but also for adults, street children and special groups of children, such as the disabled, the deaf and the blind and ethnic groups. All of the programs mentioned have now been successfully conducted in India, Turkey, and Thailand.

Within each stage of the program unit, the teacher and students work through different phases in a fixed sequence as shown below in Figure 1.

Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3
(a. text-based) 1. Sharing reading of a starter text 2. Recalling the text, discussing the text and being involved in a role play 3. Negotiating a group text 4. Making the big book 5. Language activity through games (b. Activity-based) 1. Sharing a structured experience 2. Reconstructing the experience (phases 3, 4 and 5 are similar to those of the text-based unit)	1. Analysing the model text 2. Linking the text to personal experience 3. Negotiating a new text 4. Critically analysing a new text 5. Language activities and elaboration	1. Orientation using contextualization, mapping, text organization survey, genre establishment, and dealing with unfamiliar vocabulary 2. Reflection using the format for simple writing 3. Note taking 4. Synthesis 5. Editing 6. Final copy and elaboration

Figure 1: Phases of Instruction in CLE Stages

The CLE learning process (at each stage) places emphasis on the thinking process, modeled by the presentation of the material developed in the text-based and activity-based units, and is stimulated by the techniques of instruction in each phase. Also through proper language use from the starter text and also textual concepts focussing on the

students' practical development. Through the individual's critical thought process, he or she can begin to transfer their thoughts into both spoken and written language and also through non-verbal communication (e.g. facial expression, etc.), thereby ensuring an improvement in their quality of life as shown below.

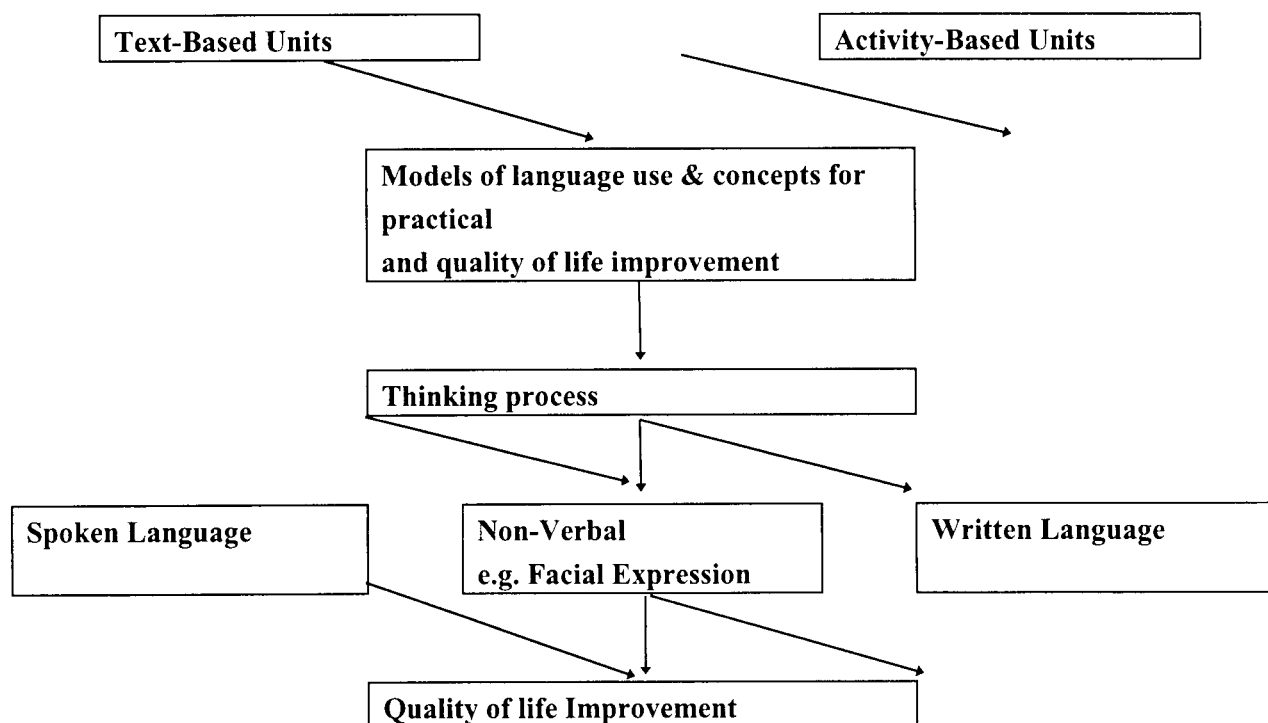


Figure 2: CLE Learning Process

Teacher Training Strategies

The teacher training strategies used in the CLE program are concerned with the following principles:

1. CLE techniques should be taught by demonstration, phase by phase, usually by the trainer. The methodology should be developed with students. The temptation may be strong to use "peer" teaching, but it is not satisfactory when introducing such an innovative technique, in

which the reaction of students is a central issue.

2. If possible, those taught should be beginners from a school from which workshop participation is encouraged. CLE teaching produces such rapid involvement and participation in reading and writing, that there is a tendency to look for explanation in the selection of exceptional students for demonstration.
3. The demonstration should be followed by what is called "return

- teaching” as the workshop participants teach the phase that has been demonstrated.
4. Demonstrating with students from their own school proves that their own students can react just as well, and “return teaching” with other students from the same school confirms that they, and not just some teachers with rare teaching talents, can achieve the same results.

Keeping to the general principles outlined above for training in CLE teaching, the training workshops usually conform to what is now generally accepted as the most effective sequence for preparing teachers to implement a new teaching approach as follows:

- a. Evocation: calling upon what the teachers already have knowledge about
 - current problems in teaching for real life purposes,
 - how students learn the language,
 - other matters related to the current type of project and program,
 - the need for fundamental changes in approach
- b. Demonstrating of the methodology
- c. Analysis of what is happening in the new teaching sequence
- d. Practice Teaching: “return teaching” by the workshop participants
- e. Reflecting on the “return teaching” and how its effectiveness could have been improved
- f. Planning how the teachers will implement the new techniques within their own classrooms

Implementation: The teachers use the new teaching techniques with their own students, as soon as they return to their schools

Follow-up: The teachers report on the implementation of the new techniques in periodic follow-up seminars at their home centers, usually at least twice each year. They report and discuss such things as their own reaction to its use, the response from students, plans for the future, and recommendations for future teaching. They also provide feedback and guidance on the conduct of the project.

Teams of trainers and training workshops are an integral part of developing the pool of experienced, skillful and knowledgeable local educators that will enable a province or even a country to upgrade its language teaching from its own resources. As time passes, and their value to the province or division becomes more obvious, they are truly the key personnel to further progress in literacy teaching; especially in the different contexts of English teaching. Therefore, successful education in the new millennium is an attainable goal.

The Author

Saowalak Rattanaich graduated with a B.A. (English & French) and received an M.A. (TESL) and a Ph.D. (Curriculum & Instruction). She is now serving as Associate Professor both lecturing and advising the TESL program at the Department of Curriculum & Instruction, Faculty of Education, Srinakharinwirot University. She is also Head of Research and Language Teaching Development Center there. Published articles concern research studies on Literacy and Teacher Training. She also serves as the Zone 6 (Asia) coordinator on Literacy & Numeracy Task Force, Rotary International.

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