

## Nurturing World Citizens: Wenzao's Steps Forward

Dr. Bosco Wenruey Lee, Ph.D.

Wenzao Ursuline College of Languages

900 Mintzu 1<sup>st</sup> Road, Kaohsiung R.O.C. 807

email: president@mail.wtuc.edu.tw

### I. Taiwan's Crisis in the Global Competition

What does it mean to be a global citizen? To many of the Taiwanese college students, it simply means being the owner of a coffee shop, according to Kuo Tai-ming, CEO of Hong Hai Precision Industry (Yang, 2005). The idea reflects a trend that the young people long for living a stress-free lifestyle and managing a successful, popular shop like Starbucks but do not strive for distinguished characteristics that sometimes only come with hard work. When coffee is replaced by a new fad, certainly there will be crowds of followers, leaving many behind with broken dreams. Although the younger generation is highly creative and sensitive to market trends, their vision stays at the level of the local business world.

Recently the Common Wealth Magazine conducted a survey on college students in China, Korea, Japan, Singapore, Hong Kong and Taiwan and found that the participants in Taiwan fell behind in their ambitions, scope of knowledge, open-mindedness and especially the world view (Lee, 2005). Growing up in our affluent, open, and more internationalized society, many of today's college students have little financial pressure and are provided with more educational and career opportunities and choices. However, they are also being labeled as the "Strawberry or Peach Generation", which means they may appear well put-together but are indeed vulnerable. Compared with the previous generations, they are more open, creative and daring, but they generally lack a vision, models, and judgment in their value system.

### II. In Contrast to the Neighboring Countries

On the contrary, the survey mentioned above shows that young people from China, Singapore, Korea, Hong Kong and Japan are anxious to develop their particular strengths. For example, students in China seem to have clear goals and are more practical and aggressive - the limited support and freedom in their environment contributed to their superior strength and perseverance. Similarly, students in Korea



reveal to be more determined – they are willing to sweat and slave for the future and dreams of their country. Students from the highly westernized Singapore are eager to get out of their “comfort zone” in hopes to earn a leading place in this highly competitive, rapid-changing world. Even students from Hong Kong have started to take advantage of their multi-language and multi-cultural background as a bridge to success in other fields. The Japanese are known for their willingness to be team players and make self-sacrifice for the greater good, but unfortunately the Taiwanese young people are influenced by their fashion trends and lifestyle instead of those desirable values. In contrast, our education now produces students who are more outgoing and creative, but rather self-centered with weak self-demand and self-control. They have been used to taking what is given or fed to them and rarely give any thoughts to what they should be giving to the world.

### III. The Influence of the Mass Media to Taiwanese Young People

In addition to problems with education, mass media is partly responsible for forming the characteristics of the Taiwanese young people. To be exact, the increasing influences from mass media have made their mind and vision shallow. In Taiwan there are over 100 cable TV channels, including at least five that offer news 24 hours a day, but surprisingly they cover very little international news and commentaries. The exception is probably Public TV, but it is produced by a non-profit organization operated by the government. As far as the international news that is covered, most are either related to disasters or Hollywood entertainment news, the kind that would draw the public's attention. Basically the viewing rates determine the contents of the news reports. The decline in newspapers circulation also suggests social changes and causes concerns for many people. The newspaper with the highest number of circulation in Taiwan now is Apple Daily, which focuses on scandals and entertainment news. Although some students claim that they read news online instead, the fact is that most major newspapers or TV channels do not cover news reports in detail online, so it is difficult for students to get a thorough and complete understanding of the event or issue. If the young generation's primary source of news is so limited, it would not be surprising if the dream of global citizenship is wrapped up in fiction or illusions.

### IV. Wenzao's Educational Goals

Wenzao Ursuline College of Languages located in the south of Taiwan is a college of liberal arts renown for foreign language training. Currently there are approximately 7,500 students, including 5,000 in the Day Division and 2,500 in the Continuing Division.



With strong humanities background, Wenzao graduates are able to gain a unique professional standing in the competition with other university graduates in industry and business fields. In the 2004 and 2005 survey over the most welcome graduates from 159 universities and colleges among 1000 businesses in Taiwan conducted by Cheers Magazine ([http://www.cw.com.tw/pics/SpecialRpt/2005\\_1000/page2.asp](http://www.cw.com.tw/pics/SpecialRpt/2005_1000/page2.asp)), the top three areas of insufficiency among Taiwanese students are stability and stress-resistance, problem-solving, and a world view and foreign language proficiency. However, Wenzao graduates already demonstrated their distinguishing feature in their world view and foreign language proficiency in the 2004 survey (Wang, 2004), ranking ninth among all universities and colleges while being the one and only college from the vocational and technological education system on the top 15 list. In general performance, Wenzao graduates ranked four among technological universities or colleges.

Over the past 40 years or so, students graduating from Wenzao Ursuline College of Languages have won praises from various higher education institutes and numerous corporations in different fields for their impressive performances. Wenzao's success in producing confident graduates who are proficient in language and professional skills are the direct results of its goal to educate a "whole-person", a well-rounded person with a world view. Language for us is no longer a tool for pragmatic purposes but, more importantly, a medium for cultural exchange, as well as a source of power to reshape our value judgment if necessary and the momentum to achieve excellence. To fulfill our educational objectives, we try to provide exposures to different cultures through language learning, intensive practice in real or virtual environment with authentic materials, and strict demands in work ethics and performance throughout their academic career.

## V. Fortifying Communication Skills

In order to build up the students' communicative competence as they face fierce international competition, measures are taken to motivate self-learning and to promote intensive and extensive learning of English, both in and outside of the classroom.

### English as a required minor or double majors:

English is a required minor for every student and especially 36 credits of integrated courses are offered in the four-year college program. In the 5-year junior college program, students take double majors in English and another foreign language.

### Target language as the instruction language:



Ever since its establishment, Wenzao has adopted the policy of using the target language as the instruction language to provide a natural learning environment while English is particularly encouraged in subjects other than English.

#### Collegewide language proficiency tests and benchmark

Furthermore, annual English proficiency tests are conducted to help students track their progress, and students must meet the proficiency benchmark upon graduation. With years of studies in students' performance on the proficiency tests, reasonable standards, one for English majors and one for all other departments are set. Although individual scores on the proficiency test are kept confidential, analyses of overall tests results are made public so that students may compare their own progress with that of their peers or those in other programs.

Wenzao was the first institution in higher education in Taiwan to offer college-wide proficiency test, and its test results are used as the benchmark for test analyses by other institutions. Nowadays all vocational and technological colleges and universities in Taiwan require their students to take the same proficiency test, and we are proud to say that the average competence level of Wenzao students still takes the lead.

### **VI. Highlighting Professionalism Against an International Background**

Besides short-term visits and language studies in higher education institutes overseas, several new programs are now in place to help prepare students for studies in depth. One of our special programs is *the International Elite Training Project*, which is designed to nurture young citizens to have a global vision, an interest and understanding in international issues and a sense of mission to be involved in international affairs. The program includes studies and workshops that range from globalization, current issues and international affairs, international organizations and non-government organizations, conferencing, translation, interpretation to international etiquettes. In the later phase of the program, training and workshop are to be conducted at the *Interpretation Directorate*, European Parliament in Strasbourg during its monthly meeting period. During the three-month rigorous training, students in the elite program also get a chance to participate in formal conferences as receptionists or interpreters and even get a chance to present their own research papers with representative students from countries outside Taiwan.

### **VII. Cultivating Cultural Adaptability**

#### Second foreign language learning and Intercultural Studies Program



For those who are not in the elite program, there are still many opportunities for them to acquire multi-cultural knowledge. For example, they can learn another foreign language, or join a three-year Intercultural Studies Program that is carefully designed to offer progressive learning from the basics such as research methodology, to theories of comparative cultural studies and to special seminars on regional studies on politics, economics, history and cultures.

#### Multi-cultural campus

Wenzao is particularly well-known for European language learning; however, in the past few years, we have also recruited teachers and students from all over the world to add a multi-cultural dimension to the campus. Our Center of Chinese Languages also offers courses to foreign students, which promote close contact among Taiwanese students and foreign students on campus and a better understanding of various cultures.

#### Wenzao Multicultural Festival

Other than the curriculum, some special events such as the Wenzao Festival is also worth mentioning. Wenzao Festival is an international cultural festival that Wenzao has held three times since 2001, and the fourth one is scheduled for this October. During this one-week festival, students can attend and enjoy various activities of their choice. The conferences, lectures, exhibits, dramas in multi-languages, music and dance performances, language contests and games, etc. designed and offered by every department and by the administration units provide a fun environment for the students to learn about and to evaluate their knowledge in various languages and cultures.

### **VIII. Establishing Channels to World Citizenship**

#### Volunteerism in international affairs

Volunteerism provides our students channels to world citizenship. For example, one important event was the 2005 World Digital Audio Broadcast Conference that took place in Kaohsiung back in June this year. Our student representatives were given the chance to serve as interpreters and receptionists to greet speakers as well as participants from countries including UK, Germany, France, Netherlands, Norway, Korea, and the US. Other activities include 2001 Baseball World Cup, 2004 Kaohsiung Lantern Festival, 2005 Kaohsiung Poetry Festival and many more, in which Wenzao students offered impressive multi-lingual service.



### International conference simulation

Moreover, in our first Student Leaders Symposium scheduled in mid October, we have invited students abroad and especially those from our sister universities and colleges to discuss and present papers on global concerns and issues. The simulation of a formal international conference allows our students to have some real contact with and share their views with international students from different parts of the world.

### International community on campus

Our Center of Chinese Language, which started in 2002, now offers courses to approximately 100 foreign students from over 50 countries three terms per year. Those students from different walks of life such as teachers of English, businessmen or technicians, missionaries, help us build a more internationalized community on campus, in which our Taiwanese students have the opportunities of meeting people with different cultural background and getting to know and share their views without traveling abroad. On the other hand, when those foreign students return to their countries, they may provide formal or informal channels for contact or communication with Taiwan.

Based on our experience, we believe that all these school activities can motivate the students to look beyond Taiwan and help them form a global view. They will serve as the driving force for Taiwanese young people to boost their morale and encourage them to pay more attention to other countries in the world.

## **IX. Conclusion**

The efforts we have made in Wenzao are simply our attempts to break through people's mindset that being successful in the global business world is sufficient. Because of Taiwan's status quo in international politics, our young generation is already at a disadvantage when it comes to the number of opportunities to participate in and contribute to the international arena. Consequently, many feel discouraged and the enthusiasm for getting involved in international affairs is low. With a decline in long-term overseas studies and a demand for localization or Taiwan consciousness in Taiwan's education, the steps to move forward seem particularly difficult. Certainly our school curriculum may help the students become aware of our intertwined ties with other nations and the importance of getting involved in international activities, yet we still need to first focus on the inner personal development because if our young citizens are without a clear vision, without the desire and enthusiasm to be a world citizen, and without ambitions and perseverance to conquer obstacles that may come their



way, our dream of nurturing world citizens would still be far beyond our reach. What is more important than facing the global competitions is the ability to face self-demands that come with self-awareness. A world citizen must have a sense of responsibility to help all who are in need by taking the initiatives in international voluntary work and serving the less fortunate ones, and only by doing so would we gain global opportunities and respect that we have longed for. "Coffee shop" may not be a fad, but maybe as educators we can brew a cup from the perfect blend of "culture-ground" that is bitter yet sweet to be shared with other world citizens.

#### Reference

- 2005 survey on Taiwan's top 1000 enterprises' strategies on human resources and favorite university and college graduates. (2005). Common Wealth. Retrieved September 14, 2005 from the World Wide Web: [http://www.cw.com.tw/pics/SpecialRpt/2005\\_1000/page2.asp](http://www.cw.com.tw/pics/SpecialRpt/2005_1000/page2.asp) (Text in Chinese).
- Lee, S. et al. (2005) Young talents: a comparative study. Common Wealth, 323, 108~179. (Text in Chinese).
- Wang, S. (2004) 2004 survey on top 1000 enterprises' favorite university and college graduates. Cheers (March 16) Special Issue, 22~30. (Text in Chinese).
- Yang, M.L. (2005) Young people in Taiwan only want to own a coffee shop? Common Wealth, 323, 16. (Text in Chinese).