

Principles For Cross-cultural Education

presented by [Joseph Lin](#) at Interpretation Canada Conference on October 25, 2002

Immigrants constitute a large percentage of the Canadian population. Our country needs to find ways to reach these new residents and taxpayers. The sooner and better we help them understand and appreciate our cultural and natural heritages, the more likely that they will care about and take pride in our unique heritage and pass on their attitude and concern to the future generations.

[Principles and tips for running programs targeting an ethnic group](#) based on my experience with Taiwanese and Chinese communities in GVRD in the past 15 years:

[Green Club](#) is the only environmental education organization targeting the Taiwanese and Chinese communities in British Columbia. Although Taiwanese and Chinese both use the same written characters, namely Chinese, they speak different dialects, including Taiwanese, Mandarin, and Cantonese. In the recent 50 years, Chinese and Taiwanese have different education, socio-economic development, life styles and culture.

Currently, there are about 20,000 Taiwanese Canadians who speak Taiwanese and Mandarin, 250,000 Cantonese Chinese from Canton Province and Hong Kong, and 100,000 Chinese recently from mainland China who speak Mandarin and other dialects.

Understand the targeted ethnic group

1. Understand their demography, education levels, countries of origin, English/French fluency level, duration of residency in Canada. Some people may travel back and forth between Canada and their home country due to their business overseas.

2. Identify interested community leaders and individuals who have sufficient English or French communication ability and introduce to them your mandate and regular and ongoing programs.

Find out their recreational activities that are related to their interests to culture and nature. Try to understand their main goal to attend educational programs, eg. leisure, adventure, or knowledge.

3. Understand the style of presentation and interaction that they are used to. For example, in the Western society, people are used to being direct and asking questions when unclear. In some cultures, people may not speak out when they do not understand or they may be used to indirect approaches when questioning and responding. Plan additional or extra time for discussion and idea exchange among participants and invited spoke person(s) to ask questions or comment.

4. Survey and investigate the specific issues or interests of the targeted ethnic groups. For example, some groups may be particularly interested in health, spiritual experience, medicinal use or life history of fauna & flora, whereas others may be interested in horticulture, food, ornamental or other economic uses.

Develop programs

1. Plan activities and programs to address their interests.

2. Provide affordable and low-cost programs to attract and accommodate people from different social-economic backgrounds. For example, offer discount or free programs to educational NGO groups.

Invite communities and specific interest groups to participate planning and co-sponsor events. For example, the community groups can help with organizing, promotion, recruiting volunteers, and fundraising.

Bring your (outreach) programs to their existing and ongoing meeting and gathering locations at time of their convenience.

3. Coordinate and plan educational programs, displays, activities or dramas to coincide with their cultural events and festivals, such as the Lunar New Year and Mid-Autumn (Moon) Festival.

Program Promotion

1. Establish network and connections with ethnically based communities and media to publicize your programs and promote public awareness. Hold special press conferences introducing your programs; invite an ethnic spokesman for media interviews.
2. Use posters, newspapers, and internet to advertise your programs with head titles or key words translated into their languages.
3. Use existing ethnic organizations, channels, and networks to publicize your programs. For example, many ethnic groups have their own language schools, places of worship, cultural centres, and ethnic-specific business locations.
4. Organize a free introductory workshop or eco-tour for the community leaders.

Program delivery and services

1. Advise groups to register in advance, especially when translation is required. Organize well planned field trips that feature the magnificence of nature manifested in different seasons, habitats, and ecosystems or historical highlights.
2. Provide translation, especially key words, if necessary. Note that using translation always takes more time. Use examples to explain the abstract ideas. Key words may need to be spelled slowly. Verify to make sure they understand what you are talking about. Provide translation on site, especially for introduction, keywords, summary, questions and answers.
3. Incorporate cultural-specific philosophy and spirits about the relationship between human and nature into your programs. For example, compare different philosophies on the relationship between nature and human beings.
4. Offer information on ethno-botany, traditional ethnic medicines and healing of First Nations; Help them see the relevance of your issues (environmental, cultural) to their lives, encourage them to get involved, enticing them to become concerned, caring and responsible citizens.
5. Use multi-media or various means of presenting information, as different cultures may be accustomed to different sensory input. For example, use oral, visual, graphic, or models to present. Provide information in their language (e.g., abstracts or summaries, lists of wildlife and plants, or historic milestone interpretation).
6. Offer free consultation services for newly arrived immigrants.

Program Follow-up

1. Offer opportunities for socializing after programs to solicit feedback, suggestions, and comments for future improvement.
2. Recognize liaison person, cosponsors, volunteers by thank-you letters, certificates, or gifts.
3. Provide information about your continual and ongoing educational programs through fax, e-mail and homepage to attract and capture people with diverse interests.

Invite liaison persons and their members to your AGM or events. Encourage them to join your membership or become board members.