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How to View Cultural Conflict in Intercultural Chinese Language Teaching Class from Freire's Critical Theory Perspective

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Abstract: As an international education practitioner, the author is aware of the importance of language teaching in education. However, international teachers often neglect intercultural teaching and learning in language teaching. In this article, the author uses Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital and related theories to analyse the intercultural perspective in Freire's critical theory. At the same time, the author draws on her own experience to give practical advice on teaching methods in different cultures, in relation to Freire's theory of education, which has been applied in her work.

Keywords: Teaching methods; Freire's critical theory; Language teaching

1. Introduction

In recent years, there has been increasing recognition of the importance of culture to education in general and to language teaching in particular. Similarly, Richard(1987, p.27) suggested that on the basis of the micro ethnographic and social psychological data presented, it was reasonable to conclude that Chinese students and educators had distinct learning and teaching styles that were markedly different from the teaching practices of other ethnic communities. As many of the teachers in Chinese schools were from Chinese cultural backgrounds, they had a different cultural background from the students who had grown up in Britain, and consequently, misunderstandings often occurred when there was a significant cultural difference between the teacher and the students. Further research could help to avoid such and other situations involving cultural differences.

Through previous learning experiences, the author had seen Freire's critical theory in relation to this intercultural perspective on conflicts in the classroom, which Guilherme had previously highlighted as Freire's intercultural thinking.

Guilherme (2017) discussed with great creativity the intercultural perspective embedded in Freire's critical theory: although Freire never used the term 'intercultural', he used the terms 'multiculturalism' and cultural 'tolerance'. Understanding Freire's rationalist perspectives on emancipatory and basic majority rules, citizenship, teaching method, discourse and communal support, it was obvious that his moral hypothesis was anchored in an intercultural metaphysics and could provide a solid and strong rationale for the theoretical system of interculturality, as Freire's basic hypothesis was anchored in amicable and social real factors that cared about justice for all and gave voice to individuals who were silenced.

2. Discussion

The basic assumption mentioned by Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972) was that education was the best chance for 'social justice' and progressive change in an oppressive society.

According to Freire's (1972)critical theory, in the classroom, there was a narrative subject (the teacher) and patient, listening objects (the students).

On such occasions, official pedagogy portrayed students as passive characters, so that they internalised the passive roles imposed on them in the classroom. Maria and Macedo (2001) then summarised Freire's educational thinking: Freire believed that "education in the service of liberation" could free students from intellectual stagnation and dogmatic adherence to the status quo because education had the capacity to equip students with the tools they needed to respond meaningfully to the social constraints that support and underpin tyranny.

Many scholars also shared the view that there was a link and an influence between education and power in the classroom. One of these arguments was found in the work of Bourdieu and Passeron (1977, p. 31). They claimed that what was imposed on students in education

'helps to replicate the power relations'. This, in turn, was the foundation for the authority they were enforcing in the first place. Delpit (1988) came to an agreement with delving into the power dynamics that exist between educators and students. If schooling prepares people for work and the nature of work determined their financial status and thus their power, then schooling was closely related to power. Then the power of teachers over students was one of the issues of power in the classroom.

According to Cochran and Riley (1990), student's academic success was influenced by their immediate social environment. In this case, it was the students and the teachers, i.e. the different cultural backgrounds of the natives and the foreigners, but in many cases, the need for intercultural teaching was often forgotten by the teachers because of the homogeneity of nationalities.

Building on this concept, some scholars had examined the relationship between cultural capital and the classroom in particular. In Bourdieu and Passeron's (1977, p. 31) study, they argued that some school efforts were aimed at imposing on students a body of information that was foreign to their cultural habits. Alexander, Entwisle and Olson (2007) held that education was important because it could be seen as distributing cultural capital in the academic marketplace. Those who entered the classroom when they matched the dominant cultural capital of the school had the opportunity to further increase their cultural costs in the classroom. One might think that the inequalities caused by cultural capital could further exacerbate the unequal relationships between teachers and students in the classroom. Moreover, Bourdieu and Passeron (1977, p. 31) had pointed out that one of the challenges for education was to increase the stock of cultural capital that students master. It was worth noting that McLaren and Lankshear (1994, p. 15) also aptly summarised this phenomenon: an educator serves as a legislator, artist, and activist, and should not be viewed as a "rigorous, objective technician."

There was an urgent need for the teacher to understand the issues raised by the students in the classroom from the perspective of different cultural capitals and to recognise her identity as an oppressor in the classroom in order to make changes from the perspective of Freire's critical theory. For example, the students in my class had repeatedly complained about the way they learned new characters by copying them over and over again. In such a case, Chinese students often remained quiet and submissive to ensure quiet learning.

In response to this phenomenon, Freire suggested that students "uncover" the world in the "credible conversation" of genuine exchange, which would lead to a relationship of shared appreciation and cooperation. Dialogue obscured the mottos by which the oppressor decoded and coordinated the data, rather than advancing 'freedom', resulting in 'shared learning' between educators and students, between oppressors and oppressed.

In response to such problems, Freire (1970) proposed not only ideal but also concrete solutions - Freire developed discourse through 'problem-oriented training' that breaks the 'vertical patterns' typical of 'non-dialogical education'. According to Freire (1970), this technique stimulated creativity and promoted awareness in the classroom as students learned critical understanding. The teacher was less controlling and more pedagogically 'engaged' with the students. The Chinese approach to pedagogy was more in line with Freire's (1970) 'idea of bank education', where learning was essentially a 'deposit of money, with the students as cashiers and the teacher as the depositors'. Instead of talking, the teacher sent out announcements and "deposits" which the students dutifully read, memorised and repeated. This concept was particularly prevalent in conservative, traditional and religious education programmes. To minimise 'teacher-student conflict', teachers and learners must avoid taking on the roles of depositors and cashiers in their own relationships.

Ladson-Billings' (2009) study of teaching and learning research conducted by eight teachers, all of whom were motivated to create educational success and positive cultural identification in their classes, could be a concrete answer. They also exhibited what Ladson-Billings called "culturally relevant teaching", a methodology that empowered primary and secondary students "intellectually, socially, emotionally and politically" by using cultural references to teach information, skills and attitudes (p.17). As a result, teachers cultivated dynamic and respectful relationships with their students both inside and outside the classroom.

3. Conclusion and limitation

Based on the problems related to classroom conflict that the author encountered during her internship in a Chinese school in the UK, the author identified it as a teaching problem belonging to a cross-cultural domain. After reviewing the literature, the authors found that while there was a relatively small body of literature that innovatively interpreted Freire's critical theory from a cross-cultural perspective, there was still an academic gap in how to understand and use his theory to make specific classroom recommendations.

As for the weakness of this article, which was mainly due to the professional status of the author, was that I did not analyse the conflicts in the intercultural classroom from multiple perspectives, but only thought about the solutions from the teacher's perspective. The author suggested that future research could be conducted in the form of empirical studies, for example, to examine the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed in each case from the perspective of the teacher and the student, or even from the triple perspective of the teacher, student and parent.

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