

Constructing Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in Chinese Heritage Language Classrooms: A Multiple-Case Study

Hsu-Pai Wu

National Taipei University of Nursing and Health Science, Taipei, Taiwan

Culturally relevant pedagogy uses cultural references to develop students' knowledge and identities thereby empowering them academically, socially and politically. This article examined how four Chinese heritage language teachers constructed culturally relevant pedagogy in their language instructions. Qualitative cross-case analysis indicated that the teachers used motivational and skill-building strategies to promote academic success. The teachers used individual, plural and progressive methods to transmit and reconceptualize Chinese values. Rather than playing a role as knowledge transmitters, the teachers shared power with students by involving peer discussions and group activities in their classrooms. Their practices lay a foundation to be discussed not only in the Chinese community, but also in the broader field of the US education system.

Keywords: culturally relevant pedagogy, heritage language education, heritage language teachers, Chinese

Introduction

The population of Chinese heritage language speakers has been growing rapidly in the US, totaling as many as 2.5 million in 2000, making it the largest Asian and the second-largest immigrant population after Mexican Americans (US Bureau of the Census, 2004). As China becomes an international power and a more important market, more public or private schools are offering Chinese language classes to both heritage language speakers and students of Chinese as a foreign language (He & Xiao, 2008). Chinese immigrants have endeavored to preserve their languages and cultures for almost two centuries by establishing Chinese language schools. Today, according to a 2005 Asia Society report (Asia Society, 2005), approximately 150,000 students were taking Chinese in community-based language schools across the US as Chinese language schools have become an integral part of the Chinese community.

Culture has often been considered “invisible” in everyday interaction, such as the norms of speaking, the values of a community and the socio-cultural expectations of an individual's roles (Hymes, 1996). Students experience culture when they enter the class. In the Chinese heritage language setting, for example, culture is implicitly embedded in Mandarin learning, from communication patterns to Confucianism, Chinese characters to filial piety. Likewise, non-verbal actions, such as bowing also imply cultural information about Chinese social relation and kinship systems. Thus, in language learning, culture represents a “hidden curriculum” and is implicitly taught in various ways (Byram & Feng, 2004).

In heritage language classes, students learn not only through textbooks, but also through the literacy

activities teachers create. Heritage languages teachers' perspectives towards students and teaching are important, since what teachers think, perceive and say might empower or disempower minority students (Nel, 1992). A substantial number of researchers have advocated that one must employ appropriate instructional practices to ensure that minority students receive equitable education and empowerment (Au & Kawakami, 1994; Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Specifically, the notion of culturally relevant pedagogy proposed by Ladson-Billings (1994) aims to develop minority students' academic achievements and enable them to construct a cultural identity that includes their languages and cultures.

The implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy has been widely investigated for African American students (Hastie, Martin, & Buchanan, 2006) and Mexican American students (Gustein, Lipman, Hernandez, & de los Reyes, 1997) in mainstream schools. However, little attention has been given to Chinese American students in heritage language settings. This study, therefore, conducts an in-depth investigation of four Chinese heritage language teachers, focusing on their perspectives and classroom pedagogy to connect language and culture. It aims to understand how their practices relate to culturally relevant pedagogy.

Literature Review

Language and Culture

Literature on the relationship between language and culture primarily supports the belief that language and culture are inseparable (Kramsch, 1993; Trueba, 1993). That is, people use language to share in the experiences of a culture and depend on language to transmit culture. Culture refers to a variety of conceptions with different definitions (Erickson, 2004). Earlier models (Nostrand, 1974) viewed culture as a static entity made up of accumulated, teachable and learnable "facts". This notion emphasizes surface-level behavior, but neglects underlying value orientations, the variability of behavior within the target cultural community, the participative role of the individual in the creation of culture and the interaction of language and culture in the making of meaning (Moore, 1996).

For socio-linguistic scholars, culture is defined as a system of symbols, meanings and norms passed from one generation to the next. This system has its own "speech communities", governed by cultural values and beliefs (Savignion & Syosoyev, 2002). Socio-linguistic scholars also conceive of culture as constructed through language: It shapes our minds and we construct not only our worlds but the concepts of ourselves and the others (Erickson, 2004). As Bandura (1986) pointed out, culture influences individuals either directly, through the socialization of individuals within a culture, or indirectly, through the learning of a language. In these respects, language is viewed as a complex system that reflects the meanings attached to behaviors and how these meanings are expressed (Hinkel, 1999). Thus, culture associated with language learning cannot be merely limited to a few lessons about celebration, customs or folk songs. Instead, through the process of socialization, culture encompasses shared patterns of behaviors and interactions, cognitive constructs and affective understanding (Paige, Jorstad, Siaya, Klein, & Colby, 2003).

As the number of students coming from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds increases in schools, scholars have suggested that instruction should incorporate students' languages and cultures to stress this diversity (Garcia, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Nieto, 2000). Focusing on literacy teaching, Yau and Jiménez (2003) reported that teachers developed Asian American students' English and Mandarin literacy by choosing culturally relevant literature and engaging them in a family-history project and bilingual book discussion. Likewise, Moll, Sáez, and Dworin (2001) found that teachers utilized both English and Spanish

cultural resources (e.g., books, posters and parents) to develop bilingual students' literacy competence. The studies demonstrate that effective instruction should connect to heritage language students' real-lived experiences to enhance their bilingual literacy abilities. More importantly, using literature close to students' cultures fosters them to develop positive cultural identities.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

As Ladson-Billings (1994) suggested, there are three central tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy: high academic expectation, cultural competence and critical consciousness. Instead of viewing minority students as "others", culturally relevant pedagogy encourages teachers to challenge the nature of the student-teacher relationship, the curriculum, schooling and society.

High academic expectation. Culturally relevant teaching requires that teachers attend to students' academic needs; that is, they should not merely make pupils "feel good", but also teach students to "choose academic excellence" (Coffey, 2008). Teachers who focus on high academic achievement are knowledgeable and have clear goals for student learning and achievement. These teachers do not rely solely on standardized tests to assess students, but also strive to understand each student's progress and take individual differences into account (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Most importantly, teachers provide scaffolding and redistribute authority to encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning (Lee, 2005).

Cultural competence. Cultural competence aims to help students value their own cultures and languages instead of simply acquiring the norms of the dominant culture (Ladson-Billings, 1994). The development of cultural competence connects instructional practices to students' backgrounds. For example, teachers might provide literature that is consistent with students' lives and school-related experiences (Hefflin, 2002), use culturally compatible communication patterns (Howard, 2001) and allow a collaborative work style (Benson, 2003). Howard (2001) further advocated teachers to develop cultural competence through critical reflection. Critical reflection is a process in which teachers examine how their cultural and racial position influences students. This reflective action enables teachers to become aware of, and thus, to avoid stereotyping their students.

Critical consciousness. Teachers not only encourage academic success and cultural competence, but also help students recognize, understand and critique current social inequities (Ladson-Billings, 1994). In literacy class, teachers seek to help students develop critical consciousness by implementing critical literacy strategies (Luke, 2000), which invite students to question and examine the power relations between writers and readers. During this process, teachers are no longer transferring knowledge to students. Instead, they value knowledge as continuously constructed with students through group discussion, inquiry-based assignments and cooperative activities (Hefflin, 2002; Howard, 2001). This problem-posing strategy leads students to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation (Freire, 2003). Furthermore, teachers and students collaboratively share power and learning opportunities.

Focusing on the link between culturally relevant pedagogy and heritage language education, Yu (2009) examined how teachers helped Chinese Americans constructed their cultural identities through literacy learning. The findings revealed that teachers not only provided culturally related literature, but also integrated students' lived experiences, Chinese history and community resources. However, heritage language teachers might confront the challenge of connecting students' backgrounds. For example, Yoneda (2009) described the difficulty of defining culturally relevant pedagogy, because she did not share a similar background with her

Japanese Americans students. She concluded that literacy practices should be based on the educational background, cultural awareness and academic needs of students. These studies illustrate the importance of understanding students' heritage cultures in order to create a meaningful learning context.

Chinese Heritage Language Community

For almost two centuries, Chinese immigrants have established Chinese language schools to maintain heritage language and culture and Chinese heritage language schools are typically run by immigrants from Taiwan or Mainland China. Although each school shares similar cultural heritages, they use different phonetic systems and characters to teach Chinese. The zhuyin system and traditional characters are mainly used in schools run by Taiwanese instructors. Zhuyin utilizes 37 symbols to denote the pronunciation of Chinese characters. The pinyin system and simplified character is primarily used in schools operated by community members from China. Unlike zhuyin, pinyin employs alphabetic letters to represent sounds.

Despite of the rapid growth of Chinese heritage language learners, research on Chinese heritage language schools is under theorized. The majority of studies have investigated students' and parents' attitudes (Li, 2005; Lu & Li, 2008) and few studies addressed issues particular to teachers. The one study that investigated teachers only focused on their beliefs (Liu, 2006). Thus, this study relies on the concept of culturally relevant pedagogy to explore Chinese heritage language teachers' perspectives on their instruction and ways to integrate Chinese culture into the language curriculum. Two research questions guided this study:

- (1) How are teachers' perspectives on Chinese language and culture reflected in their teaching?
- (2) What is the nature of culturally relevant pedagogy in the Chinese heritage language class?

Method

This study was conducted as a qualitative case study: a holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon or social unit. To explore the particular case rather than understand other cases (Merriam, 1998), this study selected only one school operated by Taiwanese, since this school is the oldest one in the city and provides a complete local curriculum from pre-kindergarten to high school.

Research Site

This research was undertaken at the Dragon Chinese School (a pseudonym) in South Texas, with 153 students from pre-school through 12th grade. Founded in 1974, this school is a non-profit organization operated by parents, most of who are from Taiwan. Since this school is community-based, students, teachers and parents meet only two hours every Sunday. Students are taught to speak Mandarin and read and write traditional scripts. In recent years, there are increasingly more students who are not Chinese immigrants. Thus, non-heritage classes are provided from preschool through third grade.

Participants

To construct purposeful sampling, we selected "information-rich" cases and took teachers' backgrounds into consideration: their teaching experience, cultural and educational background and personal commitment to the program. The teachers chosen had taught in the Chinese school for at least one year, were raised and educated in Taiwan and had a strong motivation to teach in the Chinese school. Four teachers, Mrs. K, Mrs. S, Mrs. L and Miss W (pseudonyms) participated in this study. Mrs. K, a 46-year-old woman with ten years' teaching experience, had ten students in her pre-school class. She had immigrated to the US over 20 years ago and had a full-time weekday job. Mrs. S, a 42-year-old woman with one year's teaching experience, had nine

students in her fourth grade class. She had been a professor in social work but decided to become a housewife to take care of her three children. Mrs. L, a 33-year-old woman with one year's teaching experience, had seven students in her eighth grade class. She was a housewife who accompanied her husband to the US to pursue his Ph.D. degree. Miss W, a 28-year-old woman with one year's experience, had nine students in her first grade class. She was a master's student in music education at a public university.

Data Source and Collection

Data were collected in the fall 2009. Numerous data sources were triangulated to build the trustworthiness of the study, including semi-structured interviews, classroom observations and teachers' artifacts. The author conducted approximately 120 minutes interviews with each participant at the beginning of the semester. The interviews focused on structured questions related to the research questions. For example, how do you perceive the relationship between language and culture? How do you integrate Chinese culture into language class? All interviews were undertaken in Mandarin as a convenience to the teachers.

After the interviews, the author closely observed each teacher in their classrooms over 26 hours during the semester. The participant-observer role helped the author establish an insider's identity without participating in class activities (Merriam, 1998). Since the author focused on how these teachers integrated Chinese culture into literacy instruction and constructed the nature of culturally relevant pedagogy, the author looked for teachers' behaviors, interactions and actions with students and literacy materials that might inform how culturally relevant pedagogy could be implemented in the classroom. After observing each teacher, the author took field notes to record how they interacted with students and how they utilized literacy materials with students in the classroom. Finally, teachers' artifacts, such as lesson plans and literacy materials, were included.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was an ongoing process using the constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). After collecting all the data, the author manually coded the interviews in three phases. In the first phase, all the interviews were translated into English and transcribed by the author. In the second phase, the author categorized the comments and noted the categories in the margins. In the third phase, the author highlighted main concepts in each category and matched these characteristics with culturally relevant pedagogy. Field notes were coded through a "contact summary sheet" (Miles & Huberman, 1994), focusing on the participants' verbal and non-verbal actions, literacy activities, related research questions and the author's personal reflections. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), by comparing cases, the researcher can establish the generality of a finding. Thus, the author used a cross-case analysis to identify similarities among the teachers. The patterns, themes and comparisons across the interviews, observations and teachers' artifacts led the author to the findings in this paper.

Themes

Three major themes emerged from the data analysis are: (1) motivational and skill-building strategies to promote academic success; (2) individual, plural and progressive ways to integrate Chinese culture; and (3) rebalancing authority to share power with students.

Themes One: Motivational and Skill-Building Strategies to Promote Academic Success

These teachers used motivation as a critical factor to influence their students' language development. That is, engaging students became the top priority before implementing instructional strategies. Mrs. S said, "To

gain students' motivation and love of learning Chinese is the first step that teachers need to do" (Interview, August 24, 2009). In contrast to a traditional Chinese class that focuses on lecture, Mrs. S used group activities to engage fourth grade students. For example, she encouraged them to make a story or recognize Chinese characters collaboratively. The group who provided their answers first received a point. Mrs. S further noted, "Students show more willingness to speak Mandarin with their peers in such group activities" (Interview, August 24, 2009). That is, the students appeared to be more involved in classroom learning through group competition.

The group competition strategy was also observed in Mrs. L's eighth grade class with the implementation of e-learning. The observational data illustrated that students engaged in answering questions from PowerPoint slides or online language games. Mrs. L indicated her responsibility to motivate students,

Most of the students are forced by their parents to come to the Chinese school. I hope they can develop more interests in learning Chinese through my instruction. I want to help them build confidence and think that learning Chinese is not a difficult work. Because my major is instructional technology, I believe students can engage more through multimedia learning experiences. (Interview, August 24, 2009)

Both Mrs. S and Mrs. L viewed group competition as an effective way to prompt students to use Mandarin in developing their language and literacy abilities. Their statements also showed that heritage language teachers serve as an important role to create a joyful learning environment to maintain students' willingness to come to the Chinese school.

In order to gain pre-kindergarten and first grade students' attention, Mrs. K and Miss W frequently used play-based strategies to motivate students. For example, Mrs. K helped her pre-kindergarten students recognize the zhuyin system by playing a lottery game. Concrete objects, such as balls and cookies, were also provided for the students to play and learn how to count numbers in Mandarin. Mrs. K stated the importance of motivating students in her class,

I have to motivate students to learn Chinese with me. You know, kids are so sensitive and they expect you to make Chinese learning fun. So whenever we play a game or sing a song, I act like a clown to show my enthusiasm when playing with them. Besides, I do not see myself as a teacher because teachers in Chinese culture are always symbols of authority. However, I want students to feel that I welcome them and take care of them. (Interview, August 25, 2009)

Mrs. K perceived that teachers themselves had to be the one to love learning Chinese. She further indicated her strong preference in employing this strategy by stating, "I can see students' enjoyment and concentration in learning Chinese by playing games" (Interview, August 25, 2009). Mrs. K's statement explicitly connects the idea of "learning by playing".

Miss W also incorporated games in her class but borrowed games from Taiwanese culture. For example, she used the game, "One two three, trees", to strengthen students' understanding of animals' names in Mandarin. The other game, "heart attack", was utilized to foster students' abilities to count. In this game, each student in the group needed to count from one to 13 and took turn to put a poker card on the table. As a student's card matched the number they called, they had to hit the table. The last student to hit the table would be the loser. Miss W viewed literacy games as an essential strategy to motivate her first grade students. She explained, "Because my students are still very young, playing games helps them concentrate in class. My goal is not only to let them have fun, but also encourage them to speak Mandarin by playing games" (Interview, August 23, 2009).

To motivate younger students, Mrs. K and Miss W seemed to create fun learning environment in their class. Such strategy aimed to bring younger students into focus and develop their language and literacy abilities.

A second key factor to facilitate students' academic achievement is skill-building strategy. This strategy was primarily implemented through scaffolding and systematic lesson plans. Rather than following traditional strategies based on memorization and direct instruction, Mrs. K taught zhuyin symbols in creative and dynamic ways. She encouraged her pre-kindergarten students to use body gestures to represent each symbol. For instance, the students stretched their hands when learning the symbol “一” and crossed their hands when learning the symbol “X”. Mrs. K also emphasized the importance of “review” in her instruction,

In the first hour of class, I usually spend 30 minutes to help students review what we learned from last week. It is essential to make sure that every student has constructed their prior learning so that they have abilities to connect future learning. (Interview, August 25, 2009)

Mrs. K believed that successful scaffolding begins with students' prior knowledge construction. The classroom observations also showed that Mrs. K continued to activate students' background knowledge through questioning.

Miss W also emphasized scaffolding but focused on peer collaboration. She always prepared two to three discourse practices and asked her students to communicate with their peers every week. Classroom materials were also designed as dialogue so that the students could use in their daily lives. In this sense, Miss W viewed peer dialogue as meaningful scaffolding for students to achieve academic success. Miss W further stated that communication ability was essential for first grade students, because “They need to know how to use words appropriately when expressing their perspectives with other Chinese people” (Interview, August 23, 2009). Clearly, Mrs. L created a context that helped the students understood social “dos” and “don'ts” in the Chinese speech community.

In Mrs. S's and Mrs. L's higher grade class, skill-building strategies referred to an organized learning process and holistic understanding of lessons. Their instruction usually followed a pattern: Chinese character introduction, word explanation, paragraph discussion and sentence practice. From their perspectives, utilizing this strategy helped them fully develop students' literacy skills. They also elicited more questions to students and encouraged them to solve problems independently. Despite similarities were found between these teachers, the observations did find that they focused on different literacy development. Mrs. S emphasized writing ability by encouraging students to write a composition about their lived experiences. Although students' errors were expected, Mrs. S prompted them to take responsibility to complete the task without her assistance. Mrs. L focused on speech ability with the requirement of assigning students to tell a joke or story every week. She noted that teachers have to create different opportunities for students to practice their speaking skills.

The observations showed that each teacher put much effort in motivating students and creating joyful learning environment. Although academic success had distinct meanings at different grade levels, the teachers used structured instruction and provided scaffolding for students to develop their language and literacy abilities.

Theme Two: Individual, Plural and Progressive Ways to Integrate Chinese Culture

All teachers indicated the importance of integrating Chinese culture into language teaching. However, each teacher had their unique views on culture. Mrs. K explained,

Culture contains ethics and philosophy retained from previous generations, such as Confucianism and Taoism.

History is an essential part of a culture. Try to imagine the abundance of Chinese culture with three thousand years of history. A culture also encompasses the evolution of words, arts and architectures. Each dynasty has its own specific characteristics, which enrich a culture. (Interview, August 25, 2009)

Mrs. K perceived that culture contains the integrated knowledge of arts, history, words and architectures of a group of people.

Miss W focused on people's attitudes and actions. She remarked,

Well, I think culture means how a group of people perform and represent their characteristics. For example, Chinese people emphasize hard working and we show these characteristics through our behaviors. People then understand what the Chinese culture is. A culture also incorporates what a group of people eat and dress. (Interview, August 24, 2009)

From Miss W's perspective, culture is considered to be a group-specific behavior that is related to social influences.

Viewing culture as a transmission of beliefs across generations, Mrs. S argued, "Culture could be implied as a style of how a group of people do things. For example, the ways I educate my kids is influenced by my parents" (Interview, August 23, 2009). Mrs. L emphasized the comparison of two cultures. She noted,

Culture influences how you view things. For example, I think Asians are more likely to take care of themselves whereas Americans dedicate themselves to others. I am surprised to find that Americans enthusiastically devote themselves to the volunteerism, even for younger kids. In Taiwan, parents always tell children to study hard rather than spend time helping others. (Interview, August 24, 2009)

From Mrs. L's perspective, culture influences individual's perspectives and further guides their actions.

The teachers' different views on culture reflected on their plural ways of involving culture in class. For example, Mrs. K predominantly used songs, fairy tales and holiday objects to help per-kindergarten students experience the Chinese culture. She stated, "For younger kids, you do not need to tell them the details of the Chinese culture. The most important thing is to let them have fun and 'feel' the culture" (Interview, August 25, 2009). Mrs. K also emphasized the concept of respecting seniority by asking students to bow to her. She explained,

I use every opportunity to educate students. For example, I teach them how to bow in class. Because I think it is the most traditional and fundamental action to show our respect in the Chinese culture, we cannot neglect it. I always tell my students that, the lower you bow, the more respect you show to others. Besides, every student must say thank you to their peers, parents, or me. I think it is important to help students develop and show a sense of appreciation through action. (Interview, August 25, 2009)

Mrs. K fostered students to experience the virtue of respecting through kinaesthetic action.

Miss W also emphasized respecting but connected it to the kinship system. She explained,

I teach students how to say family members' titles. I draw a family tree and tell them that they have to respect the family members senior to them. I let them know that Chinese people stress familial hierarchy so the titles are more complicated than American culture. I want to help them accept that it is part of their culture. (Interview, August 24, 2009)

Miss W helped her first grade students recognize the interrelationship among Chinese family members by learning their titles. Similar to Mrs. K, teaching students to use action to show respect was also observed in Miss W's class. For example, she asked students to give her things with two hands. She said, "When you use two hands, it means that you show your respect to someone. I tell my students that Chinese people consider using one hand to be impolite" (Interview, August 25, 2009). Clearly, both Mrs. K and Miss W perceived that

constructing proper cultural attitudes should start at younger stages.

Mrs. S preferred to use Chinese literature to involve Chinese culture in her fourth grade class. For example, she read one of the most well-known Chinese fables to her students. She said,

I spend some time reading the Chinese fable (Xi Yo Ji, 西遊記) to my students every week. When I finish reading, the students who answer my questions correctly can receive a point. This activity not only fosters the students to enhance listening competence but also helps them gain cultural knowledge. (Interview, August 23, 2009)

Mrs. S perceived that Chinese fable telling enabled her students to experience literary work preserved in the Chinese culture. She further stated, “Because I tell only one chapter each week, the students show their engagement in listening to me since they are eager to know the result” (Interview, August 24, 2009). Mrs. S also incorporated Chinese virtue in language learning,

I have taught the character “xiao” (filial piety) in class. Although I did not mention the theory of Confucianism, my students all learn the idea of respecting parents, which is a crucial value in the Chinese culture. I tell my students that you have to show your respect to parents and take care of them when they become old. (Interview, August 24, 2009)

Mrs. S’s statement clearly showed the inextricable relationship between language and culture. She further encouraged students to show this virtue in their real lives.

Unlike the other teachers who mentioned only “Chinese” culture, Mrs. L was more likely to introduce “Taiwanese” cultures in her eighth grade class. In addition, the classroom observations demonstrated that she continued raising questions and inspired students to compare Taiwanese and American cultures in various topics, such as education systems, life styles and language uses. To help her students better understand the profile of Taiwan, she also shared her lived experience that she obtained in Taiwan with students. Mrs. L further focused on developing her students’ cultural identity,

When I teach the lesson about Taiwan, I encourage them to express their ideas about Taiwan. As the students show their love and preference in eating Taiwanese food or having fun with their cousins in Taiwan, I give them positive feedback and inspire them to talk more. (Interview, August 24, 2009)

Mrs. L not only helped students compare two cultures, but also fostered them to value Taiwanese culture. She also viewed herself as “a model” to represent the Taiwanese culture and “a mediator” to provide information on Taiwanese culture for the students.

While plurality focuses on the multifaceted ways of involving culture, progressivity indicates the change of cultural knowledge and cultural identity. As culture can be constructed through language (Erickson, 2004), the teachers not merely taught “dead” history. Instead, Mrs. L and Mrs. S in particular challenged students to transform the stereotype of Chinese culture through literacy activities. For example, Mrs. L encouraged her students to debate the idea of “Chinese people are always shy” by reevaluating Chinese idioms. Students in this literature discussion activity discussed the feeling of being Chinese in the US and sought to create a new image of Chinese people. Mrs. L also believed that it is important to introduce lexis, phonetics and writing systems that vary in Taiwan, Mainland China and Hong Kong. “In this global village”, she noted, “We have to prepare students not only to inherit their heritage but also to transform the heritage language” (Interview, August 24, 2009). Thus, she provided language use both in Taiwan and China for her students. Mrs. S focused on the change of cultural knowledge through creative writing. She encouraged her fourth grade students to rewrite the ancient stories to become more relevant to their real lives. She said, “Some of the stories are really out-of-date.

I want my students to transform them and use their own ways to represent them” (Interview, August 23, 2009). Their final literacy work also connected to theater action, which was demonstrated at the end of the semester.

Culture was viewed as the core value in language teaching. The teachers had their own perspectives on culture definition, cultural pedagogy and cultural transformation. Their multiple instructional strategies and continuous discussion with students enriched the curriculum and allowed students to experience and reconceptualize culture in numerous ways.

Theme Three: Rebalancing Authority to Share Power With Students

Although all of the teachers were raised in Taiwan, they did not appear to repeat the traditional notion of the teacher as the authority in Chinese culture. Instead, they emphasized mutual understanding and interaction with students. The goal was to facilitate students to be independent learners.

Mrs. K, who was the teacher with the most teaching experience, noted the change in her instruction during these years,

I try to interact with my students more in recent years. I think the traditional instruction, such as “teachers talk and students listen” should be changed. The students need to be active learners and construct learning with teachers. I also learn a lot from my students and enjoy this fluid teacher-student relationship. (Interview, August 25, 2009)

Rather than posing knowledge to her students, Mrs. K invited students to act the role as a teacher to lead the class. She also asked questions relevant to students’ lived experiences to encourage them to talk more.

Miss W also supported the idea of enabling students to become active learners. She explained,

I do not teach Chinese characters every time but assign the characters to my students. They have to go home and search for the correct format to write the character. When they come to the class next week, each student has to be a teacher and take responsibility to teach others. This method fosters them to actively find resources and demonstrate their understanding in class. (Interview, August 24, 2009)

Miss W further indicated the notion of “from teacher-led to student-centered” instruction. She perceived that teachers needed to be the models before implementing the student-centered approach. Thus, she usually provided assistance for students in the first semester, but gave students opportunities to explore themselves in the second semester.

Both Mrs. S and Mrs. L saw themselves as facilitators in the teaching process. Mrs. S indicated that the goal of being a facilitator was to help students “learn independently”,

I do not think that we learn everything from teachers’ instruction. The knowledge we received from teachers is like a database installed in our minds. It is only through interaction with others and personal experience that knowledge can be internalized to our own learning. (Interview, August 24, 2009)

Serving as a facilitator, Mrs. S aimed to help students develop the awareness of constructing knowledge on their own. In addition to using textbooks, she incorporated group activities and encouraged students to solve the problems. For example, the students were asked to make a story from the pictures she provided. Thus, it was the students’ responsibilities to determine who would talk and what information to report. More importantly, they learned how to connect prior knowledge to demonstrate their understanding.

In Mrs. L’s eighth grade class, she provided a free space for her students to negotiate with each other’s ideas. She usually raised interesting topics related to her students’ experiences and encouraged them to argue with each other. From her perspective, eighth grade students had already developed sufficient language abilities.

However, they needed to learn how to use oral language as a vehicle for discovering and negotiating each other's perspectives. The topics she chose also aimed to stimulate students' cultural awareness. For example, she asked, "What ethnicity do you belong to when you fill out the application form?"; "Do you prefer the education system of Taiwan or the US?"; and "What activities do you like to do in Taiwan?". Each student was prompted to state their opinions and respond to peers' comments. Mrs. L hoped that students ultimately could become independent learners,

I hope my students feel that learning Mandarin is truly an interesting thing. I also hope to help them build confidence. I think the Chinese school class is only temporary for them, and the important thing is to develop their willingness to continue learning voluntarily. (Interview, August 24, 2009)

Mrs. L gradually removed her support in order to help students develop autonomous learning.

The classroom observations showed that the teachers shared power with students by following students' leads, implementing joint activities and encouraging independent learning. Such strategies facilitated generative and developmental speech and writing experiences. However, the teachers appeared to follow an IRE (initiation-response-evaluation) pattern to elicit discussion. That is, the majority of questions were closed-ended with short answers. The student's answer was also immediately evaluated by the teachers, who made a brief reply, such as "Good" or "No. Try it again". Thus, students received limited time to engage critically and constructively with each other's ideas.

While teachers in traditional Chinese culture tend to dominate the class and have a hierarchical relationship with students, the teachers in current study shifted their authority and increased students' roles in decision-making and self-expression. However, limited time was allotted to evoke in-depth discussion and exploration. The teachers also had not developed sufficient knowledge in implementing the student-centered approach.

Discussion

This study begins to look at how Chinese heritage language teachers' instructions link to culturally relevant pedagogy. Furthermore, teachers' perspectives on cultural integration in language teaching serve as the main focus. Cross-case analysis indicated that the teachers considered developing students' motivations to be a higher priority than facilitating their language development. To engage students, the teachers created a comfortable and joyful atmosphere with the involvement of dynamic interactions and activities. More than making pupils "feel good", teachers enabled students to "choose academic excellence" by encouraging them to play the role of a teacher to show their language competence (Coffey, 2008). Despite of their different perspectives on language development, it was clear from multiple observations that the teachers designed systematic lessons with references to students' prior knowledge, lived experiences and language progress. Clearly, the teachers believed that it was essential to help students view themselves as competent learners so that they had the potential to achieve academic success.

Each teacher's different backgrounds significantly influence their ways to integrate Chinese culture (Erickson, 2004). The teachers' different lenses in viewing "culture" reflected on their teaching styles. For example, Miss W emphasized everyday behaviors of the culture with the focus on facilitating students' daily communication competence. Mrs. L focused on cultural comparisons. As a result, she elicited discussion about cultural differences. Their instructions explicitly showed that an individual's language development must be

understood in and cannot be separated from its social and cultural-historical context (Rogoff, 2003).

Ladson-Billings (1994) argued that pedagogical excellence not only refers to academic excellence, but also includes the maintenance of cultural integrity. Supporting the inextricable relationship between language and culture (Kramsch, 1993; Trueba, 1993), the teachers incorporated multiple methods and topics to cultivate cultural understanding. Their pedagogy not only contained materials (e.g., Chinese literature, films, holidays, arts, songs and games), but also involved Chinese virtues. Particularly, “respecting seniority” and “filial piety” were the core values that the teachers aimed to transmit. One of the teachers specifically emphasized daily conversation routines, which evidences that the members in a discourse community use particular language signs to meet their social needs. The narrow and broad range of cultural knowledge embedded in heritage language teaching supports the idea that culture contains both “big C” and “small c” elements (Paige et al., 2003).

In addition to developing students’ cultural understanding, Mrs. S and Mrs. L further promoted cultural reconceptualization through multimodal literacy. They challenged students to re-examine cultural stereotypes and traditions that have existed in Chinese community for centuries. This approach allows students to view culture as continuity and reconstruction.

Although critical consciousness in culturally relevant pedagogy stresses students’ awareness of social inequities (Ladson-Billings, 1994), the teachers in this study rarely addressed this point. From their perspectives, elementary school students were still too young to talk about this topic. Mrs. L, the only teacher teaching middle school students, was uncertain, if she should discuss this issue, because she felt that most of her students have already identified themselves as “Americans”. She perceived that students would adapt and solve the feelings of inequity in later years. The other reason might derive from the virtue of Chinese culture, which emphasizes maintaining harmony relationship with others.

The evidence from interviews and classroom observations showed that the teachers shared authority with students, valued students’ perspectives and had a desire to involve students’ voices. Such instruction not only recognizes students as active learners but also establishes the understanding and implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy. The transfer of authority lessens teacher-led instruction and welcomes more cooperative and inquiry-based discussion (Hefflin, 2002; Howard, 2001). However, students did not seem to truly construct knowledge through open-ended “why” and “how” questions, since most of the teachers still pose closed-ended “what” questions. The possible reasons might be related to the short period of time and the teachers’ lack of professionalism. With only a two-hour class per week, the teachers focus on finishing lessons on time. Thus, students received inadequate time to examine their understanding thoroughly. Because most of the teachers were not education majors, their professional knowledge to make “efficient discourse” has not been developed yet.

As the Chinese school is an important context for students to speak their heritage language and experience Chinese culture, heritage language teachers play important roles to provide various resources to enrich learning. Although the teachers in this study did not identify their instructions as culturally relevant pedagogy, their strategies to promote academic success, integrate Chinese culture and redistribute power clearly connect the concept of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Conclusions

This study builds on the existing theory and sheds new light on the critical role culture plays in the Chinese heritage language school. The pedagogical practices identified from these teachers indicate their goals

to revitalize Chinese language and culture and further empower Chinese Americans in the US. While culturally relevant pedagogy has been widely investigated to value African American and Mexican American students' heritages, this study brings insight into how this practice applies to Chinese heritage language teaching context. Particularly, the teachers not only facilitate students' language abilities, but also cultivate their maintenance of cultural virtues. The teachers' commitment to maintaining Chinese language and culture deconstructs the power of mainstream society and challenges the English-only environment in the educational system.

The teachers' practices highlighted from this study also inform us that effective heritage language teaching is not exclusive to Chinese American students. As the number of heritage language schools is growing in local communities in the US, more research needs to be done to explore how heritage language teachers from diverse ethnic backgrounds maintain their languages and cultures. In addition, how different heritage language school settings (e.g., church and temple) influence teachers' instructions is also worth to be investigated. Since immigrants from Taiwan and Mainland China both utilize "Chinese" to describe their heritage language schools, it is interesting to compare the discrepancy between "Taiwanese" and "Chinese" styles of teaching practices and cultural preservations. Heritage language teachers may also become partners to design curricula with mainstream teachers to facilitate cross-cultural communication and multicultural education. Together, Chinese schools can truly help heritage language students value their heritage languages and cultures and further understand "who they are".

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