

Developing Teacher Cognition on Culture and Teaching Culture in a Chinese Class

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Abstract

This study examined how Chinese language teachers, through profound reflective practice in a national professional workshop, developed their teacher cognition of *culture* and *teaching culture* in a Chinese language class. Results showed that despite the teacher participants' varied teaching experiences and prior knowledge in this area, in-depth reflective practice compelled their perceptions of culture to be more dimensional, fluid and relative. They also planned to shift their pedagogy from imposing culture knowledge as an addition, to instilling culture in language classrooms through a collective inquiry. For less commonly taught languages such as Chinese, such research is scarce yet desirable as it not only explores connections between teachers' personal experience with teaching practice, but also offers implications to future teacher training programs.

Keywords: Teacher cognition; Reflection; Chinese language and culture; Teacher education

Introduction

In the last two decades, the capacity of foreign language teaching has expanded from a sole focus on training students how to speak a language to a more diversified goal to help students achieve culturally appropriate communicative skills. Learners are expected to develop “the ability to interact effectively and appropriately with people from other language and cultural backgrounds,” through “intentional goal-setting and self-reflection around language and culture and involves attitudinal changes toward one’s own and other cultures” (ACTFL, 2017).

Tolosa et al. (2018) noted, “(t)his complex interplay between language learning and learners’ development of cultural competencies to navigate an increasingly multilingual and interconnected world, i.e., developing intercultural communicative competence, has become the main focus of school language curricula and language pedagogy initiatives around the world” (p. 228). The mission to develop students’ intercultural communicative competence focuses much attention to reforming curricula, implementing innovative pedagogies, and offering robust professional training to prepare teachers for this aspiring mission. Are our teachers ready for this challenge to integrate culture in a language classroom? What can professional development do to foster teachers’ understanding of culture and integrating culture in language education? These questions supplied the motivation for this study.

The present research aimed to examine in what way(s) teachers develop their cognition of *culture* and *how to teach culture* in a foreign language classroom, through reflective practice in a professional development program. In particular, the growth of Chinese as a less commonly taught language calls for more research and understanding in this area. This study asks the following questions:

1. In what way(s) did reflective activities in this workshop help Chinese language teachers develop their teacher cognition of *culture* in language education?
2. How did their teacher cognition of *culture* inform their conceptualization of *teaching culture* in a Chinese language classroom?

Literature Review

This section briefly reviews studies regarding (1) teacher cognition (2) reflective practice and teacher cognition, and (3) teaching culture in a language classroom, in an attempt to provide a theoretical context and to identify research still needed in the field.

Teacher Cognition

Teacher cognition generally refers to what teachers know and believe in relation to what they practice in teaching. In Borg's (2003) seminal work, he summarized 17 terms concerning teacher cognition. These terms reflected an array of emphases, including image, pedagogical approach, personal experience and theories. In his recent work, Borg (2015) further defined language teacher cognition as “an inclusive term referring to the complex, practically-oriented, personalized, and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts and beliefs that language teachers draw on in their work” (p. 321). General education research recognizes the impact that teacher cognition has on practice and their professional lives, and existing research centers around three broad aspects: the connection between cognition and prior language learning experience (i.e. Beach 1994; Holt Reynolds, 1992; Wang & Du; 2014), cognition and teacher education (Karimi & Norouzi, 2017; Richards, 2008), and cognition and classroom practice (Couper, 2017; Zhu & Shu, 2017).

Although teacher cognition is a significant topic in teacher education, existing studies reveal a severe discrepancy in the languages represented. Borg (2003) studied 64 papers published on

teacher cognition between 1976 to 2002, among which 46 were conducted in ESL/EFL/TESOL context, 12 were in modern languages such as French, Spanish, Dutch, German, and six involved MA, MEd and graduate programs. None of the studies examined Asian languages such as Chinese. Additionally, Borg noticed two major topics examined among the 64 papers: grammar and literacy instruction. Integrating culture in language was not a focus. In recent years, a growing body of research has started to shed light on teacher cognition in other language contexts (i.e. Couper, 2017; Karimi & Norouzi, 2017; Richards, 2008).

Given the unprecedented momentum in learning Chinese in the global context and the call for integrating culture into foreign language teaching, more research is called for to examine this field. As a result, an increasing number of Chinese scholars conducted studies on Chinese teachers' cognition and practice in various contexts. Wang and Du (2014) interviewed 12 Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL) teachers on how they viewed their roles in the Danish context, whose conclusion affirmed the influence of prior knowledge and contextual factors on teacher cognition. Moloney and Xu (2015) examined nine CFL teachers in Australia to discover a transition in their beliefs and pedagogical approach informed by a change in experience and identity. Gong et al. (2018) investigated Chinese teacher cognition on teaching intercultural communication competence in the UK. The current study was inspired by the aforementioned scholarship and hoped to contribute a fount of knowledge towards teacher cognition among Chinese language teachers in terms of culture and teaching culture.

Reflective Pedagogy and Teacher Cognition

Reflection embodies varied connotations in different disciplines, but there has been a consensus that reflection as a cognitive behavior can be taught (e.g., Dewey, 1933; Lane et al., 2014), and that an attitude

of being open-minded and whole-hearted is important for reflection to happen. Reflection is discussed widely in teaching and teacher education; in the same line of research, reflection resonates with the tenets of teacher cognition in three aspects.

Firstly, reflective teaching helps teachers question presumptions, re-examine the teaching they inherited as a learner, also known as “the apprenticeship of observation” (Lortie, 2002), to design more informed practice and develop “new ways of knowing and articulating” (Crandall, 2000, p. 40). The purpose of reflective practice aligns with the teacher cognition in that teachers’ prior identity as a learner planted a seed on how language should be learned. As Richards (2008) aptly stated, “Constructs such as teacher’s practical knowledge, pedagogic content knowledge, and personal theories of teaching noted above are now established components of our understanding of teacher cognition” (p. 8). Reflection is an opportunity for teachers to revisit their own learning experience through a critical lens.

Secondly, when teachers engage in reflective practice through journals, diaries, or discussion with others, it is a dialogue with self, which can be debating on best practice, interpreting an incident, negotiating the meaning of an issue, and/or seeking solutions to a problem. There may not be an immediate solution to an issue, but the internal process itself helps teachers to deepen their self-awareness. Scholars believe that such *intrapersonal* knowledge contributes to “the self-actualization of the individual, helping him/her to live a rich, full life” (Akbrari, 2007, p. 194-195). Similarly, teacher cognition is an inclusive term that also emphasizes both the problem-solving and practical-oriented dimensions.

Thirdly, reflection helps a teacher become better on a professional level and a personal level. Thus, reflection is widely applied in teacher education, often referred to as reflective practice, meaning “the engagement in ongoing and focused reflection in which

questions are constantly framed and reframed in response to classroom observations and experiences as they arise” (Lane et al., 2014, p. 482). Research showed that teacher cognition development may be generated as a result of reflection on their experiences as learners and culture beings, and manifested in various forms such as journals and metaphors (Johnson, 1994; Meijer et al., 1999; Moloney & Xu, 2014). For instance, a small case study of a bilingual summer camp unfolded the potential of reflective teaching to support novice teachers’ professional growth (Kong & Shang, 2019). A larger study that traced 120 student teachers’ professional identity transformation during practicums in China and the US found that reflection through metaphor fostered positive change in various areas (Zhu & Zhu, 2018). In this aspect, reflection and teacher cognition both propel teachers’ development in teaching and in self-recognition.

Teaching Culture in a Language Class

Even though many teachers understand the importance of culture in a foreign language class, they reported a variety of challenges, including time constraints, a lack of funding, students’ attitudes towards cultures, teachers’ insufficient knowledge in culture and pedagogy, and insufficient teacher preparations (Chen & Yang, 2016; Dahl et al., 2007; Gu, 2010; López-Gómez & Albright, 2009). A more profound hindrance is a combined lack of understanding in culture, pedagogical knowledge, confidence in self, and effective teacher preparations.

Culture is emphasized in current world language education. The concept of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) was created and has been extensively adopted in the domain of language education (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006; Moeller & Nugent, 2014). Scholars spent decades to explore frameworks and enrich the definition of ICC. A widely used definition is “the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations

based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (Deardorff, 2006, pp. 247–248). When discussing the implications of ICC on teachers and teacher training, Byram (2015) underpinned three insightful messages: firstly, Byram reminded that teachers' ICC and their ability to teach ICC were two different issues; secondly, it would be necessary to have some guidelines such as can-do statements to specify the meanings of teachers' pedagogical competencies of ICC; and lastly, he suggested that "teachers should be involved in the analysis of their intercultural sensitivity as part of their training" (p. 45). For example, three scholars surveyed 43 Chinese language teachers to examine their teacher cognition in teaching intercultural communicative competence. Their results uncovered that participants' pedagogical knowledge of teaching ICC varied, influenced by contextual factors, including overall university surroundings (OUS), computer accessibility (CA), academic atmosphere (AA), and colleagues and superiors (C&S) (Gong et al., 2018).

In sum, teacher cognition, reflection, and ICC are enlightening concepts in investigating teaching and teacher education; however, many studies are seen in language classes such as Spanish, French, German and English, with scant research in less commonly taught languages such as Chinese. This present study intends to bridge the gap by sharing results from a national development workshop and to offer its pedagogical implications.

Research Design

STARTALK¹ is a national program in the United States to provide summer training to students and teachers of critical foreign languages such as Chinese and Arabic since 2007. Funded by the National Security Agency and administered by the National Foreign Language

¹ STARTALK program website <https://startalk.umd.edu/public/>

Center, STARTALK workshops offer “creative and engaging summer experiences that strive to exemplify best practices in language education and in language teacher development.” Data in this study were collected in one of the teacher programs at a midwestern university in 2016; the focus of the workshop was to stimulate teachers’ complex understanding of culture and to develop their skills in teaching language and culture. The author was a co-instructor in this workshop. She co-taught the STARTALK program at this institute for five years, and 2016 was her fourth-year teaching in this program. Although she was not the lead instructor,² she actively participated in the curriculum design prior to the workshop.

It was a residential program where participants came from various parts of the United States and stayed on the host campus. The workshop was two-week long and the instructional days were 10 days. In addition to the interactive activities embedded in daily instruction, other regular activities and projects included: daily reflection essays (including a pre-program reflection and a post-program reflection), microteaching (team teaching for one afternoon), Culture Growth Roadmap presentation, final lesson plan and learning portfolio (a collection of materials from the institute).

It was the two instructors’ intention to construct a reflective learning environment. They invested a considerable amount of time to craft a holistic reflective pedagogy as well as planned to model this pedagogy. As you can see from the list of activities above, they represented the importance of teacher reflection, and the relatability of theory and practice, which will be discussed more with data in the next section.

After the workshop, the two instructors reflected on their practice and created a *Five-Dimension Pedagogical Model* (see Figure 1)

² The lead instructor for the 2016 STARTALK program at this institute was Dr. Fang Andie Wang and the curriculum design mentor was Dr. Martha Bigelow. We three applied for the IRB approval to collect data together. The data used in this present study were from a larger research project.

which illustrated what they had done and how they had supported reflective practice throughout the workshop (Wang & Kong, 2017).

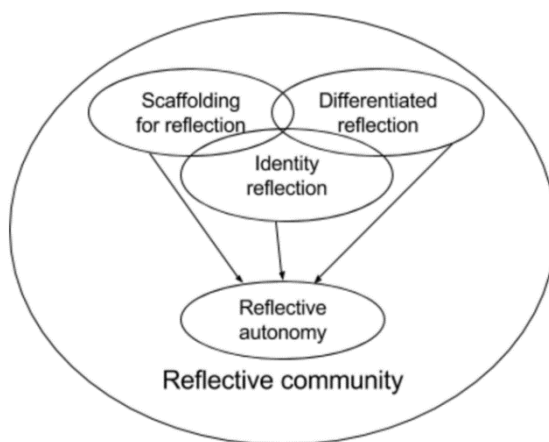


Figure 1. The Five-Dimension Reflective Pedagogy Model

The reflective community underscores the importance of building a supportive and reflective environment to encourage and facilitate teacher participants' reflection. Scaffolding for reflection recognizes the importance of mutual support between learners, and between learners and instructors. Differentiated reflection stresses the significance of giving participants choices on how to deliver their reflection. Reflective autonomy helps teacher participants establish a reflective mindset and apply it in practice on a regular basis. Identity reflection supports teacher participants to make connections between their dual roles-- a learner and a teacher.

Participants

There were 20 participants (18 females and 2 males) in this workshop. Among them, 17 identified Chinese as their first language (L1), and three identified Chinese as their second language (L2). Data used for the current study came from a larger project examining the effectiveness of reflective pedagogy in teacher education. Four participants, Angela, Heng, Jing and Qiao, were selected as focal subjects for this paper for two reasons. First, they represented varied years of teaching experiences in the US and different educational backgrounds; second, they all demonstrated profound reflection and deepened teacher cognition on culture in Chinese language education, evidenced across data sets, including thorough reflective reports and enthusiastic video presentation of their final project. The four focal participants were all L1 speakers of Chinese and all female teachers.

Pseudonym	Background
Angela	An immigrant from Taiwan to the US since a teenager; taught Chinese for 10+ years
Heng	An immigrant from China to the US for over 20 years; taught Chinese for 10+ years
Jing	In a Master's program in language education; taught Chinese for less than one year
Qiao	Recent graduate with a Master's Degree in education; taught Chinese for one year

Data Collection and Analysis

This particular study examined four sets of data: (1) pre-program and post-program reflection papers, (2) daily reflection papers, (3) videotaped presentations on a poster, and (4) a final lesson plan. Using multiple data sets allowed the author to triangulate findings so as to reach a more complete and more accurate amount (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

There were four steps in analyzing data: (1) comparing participants' pre-and-post-program reflections to identify and categorize changes regarding their teacher cognition in understanding culture and teaching culture (Gaines et al., 2019, p.57); (2) analyzing video recordings of their reflection poster presentation, to identify teacher cognition development through visualization on the poster; (3) synthesizing repeated categories and generating themes in response to the research questions; (4) triangulating preliminary findings with participants' daily reflection writing and lesson plans which often provided incremental nuances into participants' underlying teaching cognition.

The data analysis was a back-and-forth, cyclical process (Dillon, 2012) to ensure accurate interpretation of data and enhance scholar rigor.

Findings

This section will present four themes discovered from the data analysis. Each theme will address one specific activity in the workshop and its stimulation of reflection within these four focal participants. It is worth noting that the participants' reflection and cognition development were a result of the collective effectiveness of multiple activities; some may be more salient than others, but none was independent of each other. This section will highlight some unique activities and elaborate on the driving force of such activities with the participants' in-depth reflection.

Theme One: Reflective discussion in class fostered knowledge and belief expansion in teacher cognition.

Reflective discussion permeates throughout the workshop, including daily reflection and other reflective discussion topics throughout the workshop. The instructors were intentional to address the importance of reflecting on the intersectionality of teaching, personal experience, prior knowledge and cultural background.

One memorable reflective discussion during a lecture was on *authenticity*. Jing drew a picture of a Chinese ancient poet Li Bai in a western suit, in an attempt to challenge what tradition should look like and how tradition and modern cultures could be integrated. Her picture triggered a vigorous discussion on *What is authenticity?* When an ancient Chinese poet wears a western outfit, is this figure an authentic Chinese figure to teach? Similarly, many teachers from mainland China raised a question that had been perplexing them for a long time: are fortune cookies authentic Chinese culture? Fortune cookies may not be considered authentic Chinese culture by people currently living in China, but they have been embraced as an

authentic Chinese culture by many Chinese diasporas especially in the U.S. context.

Some believed that authenticity had to be something utilized by native speakers of the target language; some opposed the exclusivity of such a definition; some proposed to regard authenticity as a contextual concept. Although the discussion did not yield a definite answer to whether fortune cookies could represent authentic Chinese culture, or if ancient poets should wear a suit, the participants did reach a consensus that various elements such as time, location, and people should be taken into consideration when deciding what would be authentic and what would not be authentic.

Qiao echoed that culture, although shared by a group of people, has its exclusivity. Defined through various benchmarks, a similar group of people may share a similar culture but at the same time, culture allows for variations. Although members in her discussion groups were all L1 speakers of Chinese and they were all from mainland China, she was not surprised that people disagreed with each other on the question *What is authentic Chinese culture?* She reflected, “Culture is about the similarities that people share in the group, and also about the differences people identify compared to other groups. In this case, culture is exclusive. However, the formation and evolution of culture is always a mixed process of addition, omission or modification, because of the interaction and communication with other cultures” (Qiao’s reflection paper #3). This discussion and the insightful reflective comments from the participants revealed their deeper knowledge to see culture as contentious and relative.

Theme Two: Modeling and engaging the participants through ICC activities helped to propel the participants to recognize personal limitations and to expand their frame of reference in cultural understanding.

As a Chinese saying goes “授之以鱼，不如授之以渔”[Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.] The instructors were deliberate to not only fill the participants’ toolbox with tips and activity ideas, but also model the activities by engaging the participants to experience as students, so as for them to develop multiple dimensions of understanding. For instance, when discussing ways to integrate language and culture learning, rather than showcasing various models, the author, also a co-instructor, invited the participants to put on their student hat to participate in a variety of activities following incredible guidance in Moeller and Nugent’s work (2014). These cultural activities included: artifact exploration (Byram et al., 2002), attitude exploration with the OSEE tool (Deardorff, 2011), and documenting transformation collectively (Byram et al, 2002).

The attitude exploration with the OSEE tool was particularly popular and intrigued exceptional reflection filled with funny stories and cross-cultural comparison. OSEE stands for four stages: Observe, State, Explore, Evaluate. The instructor used some photos and a short video clip from an Irish Wake to guide the participants through these four stages. Almost all participants were not aware of this Irish culture and were surprised to find out it was a funeral filled with celebratory drinking, singing and dancing. After some laughter and surprise “Aha,” the teacher participants had an insightful discussion on similarities and differences between Chinese and Irish funerals. The instructor was also mindful to caution the participants against forming a generalized view of the funeral rituals in Ireland.

This activity was enormously impactful on Heng and it reminded her of her first attendance at a Chinese funeral many years ago as a

little girl, where she saw and heard wailing throughout the funeral. Since then, she had formed a fixed view of what funerals should be like. She also shared her recent attendance at a funeral in the United States, where she pushed herself to wail while others were sharing jokes of the diseased person. Heng's cross-cultural experience and animated story telling caused a lot of laughter, but also stimulated her profound thinking. Her reaction to the Irish wake was like a roller coaster ride: she felt confused about drinking and singing, then felt uncomfortable with the exhibited happiness of death, and at last made sense of different ways to celebrate life. Compared to the Chinese funerals predominated by crying and sadness, she observed beyond the superficial behavior to understand how varied cultures viewed life, as stated in her reflection "这些都让我看到同样是葬礼，不同文化的人可以用不同的方式去举办这个葬礼，可是在这个行为后面都体现了他们对葬礼的认识，对生命的认识 [These differences helped me realize, people from different cultures host funerals differently, but such varied practices all reflect their views of death and life]" (Heng's reflection paper #3). Heng's view of cultural ritual became more dynamic and fluid. Her teacher cognition, knowledge, and belief were more enhanced because it was a personal experience for her. Teacher cognition is personalized and contextualized.

After hearing Heng's reflection, Qiao continued to ponder this topic, and in a later reflection paper, she took the chance to circle back to an earlier discussion on authenticity, to address her updated view on the fluidity and dynamic of cultures across nations and within nations. In her reflection paper, she wrote:

On one hand, Chinese philosophy, literature, custom and legend from ancient times are still part of Chinese people's lives and affects the ideas, decisions and thoughts of people. On the other hand, Chinese popular culture has a big

influence from Korea, Japan and the western world, especially clothing, fashion, and communication... Thus, culture is not only what happened in the past, but also what is happening now and what is going to happen in a dynamic world (Qiao's reflection paper #5).

She was inspired by Heng's view change and stressed that culture flows across time, across generations, and across people's perception of life. Fluidity was a theme across many participants' reflection papers. This fluidity referred to the flow between cultures and a disposition to see change within one particular culture.

Theme Three: The Culture Growth Roadmap was a holistic reflection of teachers' growth that integrated participants' identity and visioning teaching practice.

A unique activity in the workshop was a final presentation called Culture Growth Roadmap. The purpose of the activity was threefold: first, for the participants to document their growth in theoretical knowledge; second, for the participants to bridge their theoretical knowledge, teaching context and personal background through visual aids; and third, for the participants to vision future teaching practice. All participants were given a paper sheet from a flip chart on the first day of the workshop, and they were given some time each day to work on the paper. They could request more sheets if needed. They had a great amount of flexibility and options to visualize their learning, including writing poems, drawing photos, jotting down key words, cut and paste photos from other resources. The expectation was for them to reflect their takeaway from this content-heavy workshop on a daily basis and document teaching ideas before they forgot. The roadmap was a keeper for them to recall the transformative journey and encouraged to display in the classroom. Because it was personal, reflective, narrative, descriptive and

illustrative, the participants were extraordinarily motivated to be creative. On the last day of the workshop, participants presented their Culture Growth Roadmap to the cohort and received feedback. Feedback was filled with compassion, empathy, relatability and encouragement. It was also a beautiful moment of shared understanding and community building.

This activity stimulated profound reflection among the participants, especially Angela, who candidly shared her reconciliation with her complex identities. Angela's reflection had a salient piece on identity and authenticity. Coming from Taiwan and moving to the US at a young age, she doubted herself and was concerned about how others would see her professionally. She was concerned that others would not view her as a qualified Chinese teacher, although she was equally confused by what constituted a "qualified teacher."

She used to "play it safe" by introducing something stereotypical such as Chinese calligraphy and making dumplings, rather than address complex topics evolving deeper questioning and critical thinking. She thought that such stereotypical activities could qualify her to be an authentic Chinese teacher. When the students asked her questions involving controversial topics or reflecting a negative attitude toward the Chinese people, she felt offended and defensive. She experienced an ambiguous identity: although she was born in Taiwan, she immigrated to the US as a teenager. Fundamentally she identified herself as a Taiwanese-American, but the students and their families associated her solely with a general Chinese identity. She felt that the complexity of her identity was invisible in teaching and she failed to navigate an effective approach towards sensitive or challenging questions from the students.

Through the culmination of reflection in this workshop, she was comfortable with her own complex cultural identity and embraced ambiguity in teaching culture. She was animated,

enthusiastic, and even a bit emotional when presenting her roadmap poster. As shown in Figure 2, she had a picture of herself looking into the mirror to figure out who she truly was, and she connected it with a scene in the Disney animation movie *Mulan* (Bancroft & Cook, 1998) along with some lyrics from the song “Reflection” (Salonga, 1998) in the movie. Her self-seeking question emerged in a more salient way when the cohort was in that contentious discussion on authenticity, as analyzed above. She felt like sinking in a swirl. Was she an authentic Chinese? What should count as authentic Chinese?

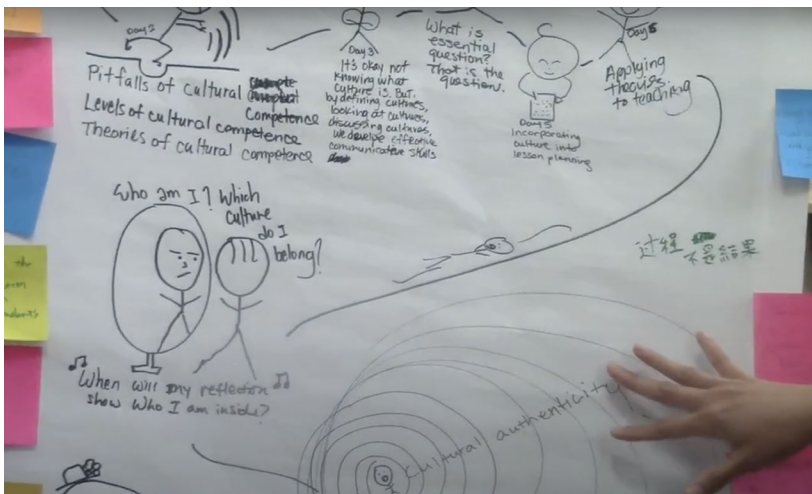


Figure 2. A Part of Angela's Culture Growth Roadmap

In the second half of her video presentation, she felt a sense of relief, not because she clearly found the answer to who she was, but because she recognized and celebrated the complexity of identities. Figure 3 shows her excitement to return to her classroom with a new sense of self.

Angela's reflection paper helped to triangulate other data and lend support to the transformation through reflection, as she stated:

From this discussion, I reflected how poorly I have been handling sensitive cultural issues in the class. I learned that there are helpful ways to deal with these issues in a discussion. In the future, I am hoping to create an environment where sensitive issues when brought up can be openly discussed and students would learn through this discussion to see through multi-cultural lenses (Angela's reflection paper #4).

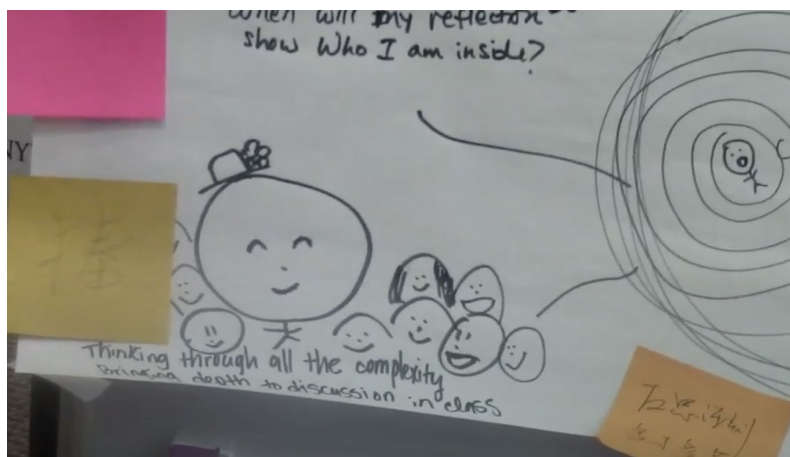


Figure 3. A Part of Angela's Culture Growth Roadmap

If you remember the intense discussion on authenticity mentioned multiple times in the above sections, this reflective discussion was also reflected in Jing's final Culture Growth Road Map. Jing drew the picture of this ancient poet in her final poster again and reiterated her intentionality in challenging the knowledge boundary (see Figure 4). Jing was passionate with what she did and sounded confident in her presentation, asking—asserting rather, “Why can't I integrate ancient culture with modern culture?!” (Jing's presentation, June 2016).

Her poster and her reflection papers intended to assert her identity as a complicated, dynamic and multifaceted cultural being. She made it clear that putting on a western suit on an ancient Chinese poet was a deliberate move to challenge stereotypes even among Chinese people.

我给李白穿了西装，为什么不能把现代文化加在传统文化，所有都学春节，吃饺子，我能带给我的学生什么呢？pop culture，但并不想摒弃中国文化。[I put on a suit for Li Bai. Why can't I add some modern elements to the traditional culture? Everyone learns about the Chinese New Year and dumplings, but then what can I bring to my students? Pop culture, but it does not mean that I abandon Chinese culture]. (Jing's presentation, June 2016)

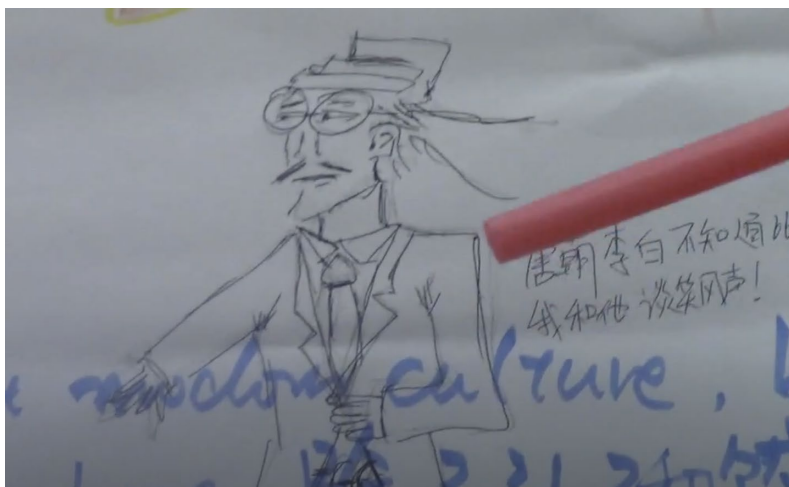


Figure 4. A Part of Jing's Culture Growth Roadmap

In her reflection and lesson plans, she intentionally added pop culture into traditional culture, which she believed could more accurately reflect the complexity of Chinese culture. When she saw that her fellow Chinese had a fixed view of ancient figures, she

wanted to push the boundary and expand their view of cultural diversity within a group. Her teacher cognition of culture went beyond similarities shared by her Chinese fellows and revealed more depth and breadth.

Moreover, visioning teaching practice was also reflected in all the participants' Culture Growth Roadmap. The two instructors constantly reminded the participants to connect their personal experience, theory and teaching practice during reflection. It was prominent that the participants were devoted to deeper thinking when pondering what to teach and how to teach. For instance, Qiao's poster had a part of her reflection after the microteaching experience. As Figure #5 shows, she found that her microteaching experience unveiled diverse cultural understandings within the team. She recalled some disagreement among her team members, but it prompted her to explore a culturally inclusive approach to co-teach with other teachers. She concluded that an expanded and inclusive understanding of culture through the workshop was facilitative in her future endeavor.

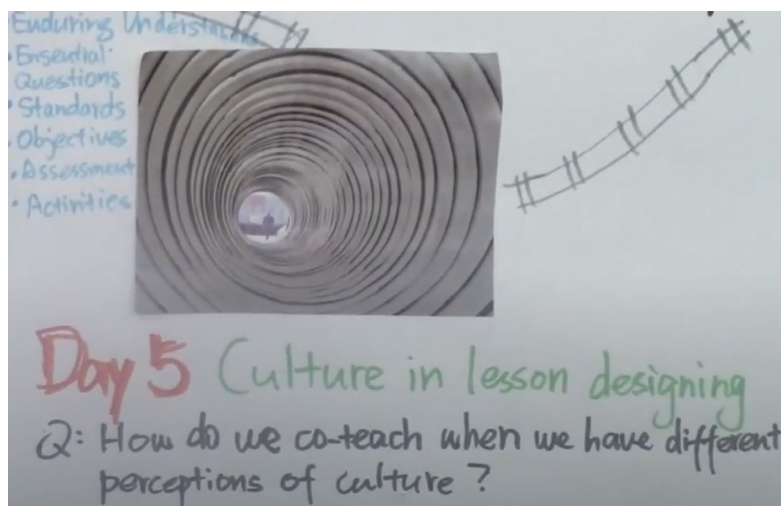


Figure 5. A Part of Qiao's Culture Growth Roadmap

Theme Four: Teacher cognition of culture deepened the participants' teacher cognition on how to teach culture.

As the participants complicated their knowledge and understanding of culture, they also deepened teacher cognition on *how to teach culture* in a language class. The analysis of multiple data sets revealed a shared theme among these four focal participants, all of whom visioned to adopt an inquiry-based pedagogy in guiding their future students to explore culture.

Firstly, Angela considered ICC as a bridge to establishing an understanding of other cultural beliefs, and she conceptualized her teaching by asking questions and engaging students in discussion. She said, "If a question is good enough, it should be able to invite more students into the dialogue" (Angela's reflection paper #4). Because Angela reflected a lot on her own identity and her students' identity, many of whom were second-generation immigrants, she intended to engage identity in inquiry-based learning for her students. She wrote:

I want to see my students having internal dialogues of self-identity related to culture. As Asian Americans, can my students see the very clear line between American and Chinese cultures, and at the same time the very blurry line? Would they come to appreciate their bicultural or multicultural identity? Can they better accept people of different cultures? As I said for my cultural road map, I hope to bring my own internal dialogues back to my classroom. (Angela's reflection paper #10)

Secondly, Heng insisted that cultural teaching should go beyond sharing simple cultural facts, a point resulting from the compelling comparative cultural discussion on funerals. She planned to intentionally guide her students to reflect "on those facts, comparisons and contrasts across cultures, and ultimately coming to

a position whereby cultural differences can be navigated successfully and comfortably in encounters” with individuals from other cultures (Tolosa et al., 2018, p. 228). She planned to gather more examples like the Irish wakes to make connections with Chinese culture to “direct students to interpret other people’s intention in a positive way, not be offended easily and look at things from different perspectives, agree to disagree, celebrate the similarity and embrace the differences” (Heng’s reflection paper #3).

Thirdly, Jing planned to use stereotypes judiciously. Through the workshop, she developed more knowledge of why and how stereotypes would occur. She believed that stereotypes came from people’s limited interaction with people of the target culture and thus formed their judgment from partial facts. Therefore, instead of simply telling students to avoid stereotypes, she wanted to expand students’ horizons and push them to break stereotypes by themselves. She would also discuss the hurtful feelings that stereotypes could create. She conceptualized her method as “以文化共性入手，再帶學生跳出去 [Start with cultural commonality and then take students to jump out of the box]” (Jing’s presentation, June 2016).

Lastly, Qiao particularly appreciated the OSEE cultural model activity, and pondered that teaching intercultural communication could follow this model to guide her students to explore meaning rather than spoon-feeding to students. She would encourage different interpretations from her students “so that the discussion could be in-depth. Discussing the best interpretation and maybe realizing some of the assumptions being wrong would be a really valuable experience to understand that culture is constructed by different perspectives” (Qiao’s reflection paper #3). All four participants were able to see teaching culture as an orchestrated effort with students. Taking students on a journey of inquiry would be more effective and would create a more lasting impact than a spoon-

feeding approach.

Discussion

Teacher cognition of embedding culture in a language class entails two parts: teacher cognition of *what culture is* and teacher cognition on *how to teach culture* in a Chinese language class. Findings showed both aspects; one might be more noticeable than the other, but both aspects informed each other. When the participants understood the connotations of culture more profoundly, they could see their prior limitations more clearly and thus started to develop instructional strategies for intercultural language teaching and learning (Kholer, 2015; Tolosa et al., 2018). For example, Heng realized her prior limitations on what a funeral should look like through the Irish Wake activity. After discussion and reflection, she was inspired to discover more cross-cultural examples to underpin the importance of exploring various perspectives beneath observable cultural practices. When the participants thoughtfully shifted their teaching objectives from “providing cultural knowledge and facts” to “improving students’ intercultural attitudes and skills” (Gong, Hu & Lai, 2018, p. 225), it manifested a development in their “perceptions, knowledge, objectives or attitudes relevant to teaching intercultural communicative competence” (Gong, Hu & Lai, 2018, p. 225).

Findings also revealed the participants’ candidness to confront their limitations so as to be open towards new ideas. Teacher cognition is closely related to prior experience. Prior to the workshop, all four participants, to various degrees, considered teaching culture as making dumplings, making traditional Chinese paper cuttings and showing photos of Chinese artifacts. During the workshop, the participants actively engaged in reflection on what they had thought being intercultural meant to them and why they had such beliefs, as well as reflecting on their intercultural situations in their classrooms (Farrell & Ives, 2015). This process helped them

reconstruct experiences and develop a transformed approach to teaching.

Additionally, findings also showed that participants' teacher cognition in *how to teach culture* in a language class grew through a deeper understanding of self. Developing intercultural understanding is both a cognitive and affective process that affects teachers' theories of teaching and their professional identities (Byram, 2015). Four participants, in their reflection papers and reflection poster, reported varied emotions in teaching culture, including frustration, satisfaction, confusion, and self-doubt. Although this workshop did not, and was not designed to, eliminate their feelings, it offered an opportunity for them to confront and approach their cognition of self in a more constructive way. When conceptualizing their future teaching practice, all participants demonstrated a desire to connect with students' backgrounds, weave in everyday culture, and embrace cultural identities. Findings echoed Sercu's (2006) stance that it is necessary for teachers to have the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes required to accomplish the task of teaching intercultural communicative competence.

In the same light, the four participants adjusted their professional identity, from merely a cultural deliverer to a bridge builder to establish connections. Jing planned to utilize her profound knowledge in youth culture to connect students with contemporary Chinese culture; Angela planned to connect her personal experiences to activate students' own ability to break stereotypes; Qiao planned to connect similarities across Chinese cultures with regional variations in her future approach; Heng planned to connect students in the US with those in China via social media. Their teacher cognition of teaching culture is richer and more dimensional. When teachers transform the teaching of culture from superficial cultural facts to diving into invisible cultural connections, they will "not only enhance learners' intercultural knowledge, but also improve their

intercultural attitudes and skills” (Gong, Hu & Lai, 2018, p. 226). Participants unfolded a more complex view of culture and what intercultural communicative competence meant to them in teaching.

Admittedly, this present study is subject to several limitations. Firstly, although participants shared their future plans to embed culture in the language class, there was no data on if and how they applied their knowledge in practice. Secondly, this study collected rich qualitative data including, self-reports, writings and interviews, but it would be desired to adopt a reliable assessment tool such as the Intercultural Development Inventory³ to gather data on participants’ actual level of intercultural competence.

Conclusion

As an attempt to improve Chinese teachers’ understanding and knowledge of teaching culture in a foreign language class, this summer professional workshop adopted an array of reflective activities. This study examined in what aspects the four participants deepened their teacher cognition of *culture* and *teaching culture* in a Chinese language class, in relation to the reflective activities in the workshop. Results demonstrated participants’ profound reflection across data sets. They viewed culture in a more dimensional, fluid, contentious, relative and dynamic way; they became more mindful that cultural understanding should be contextualized and personalized.

The analysis displayed the impact of reflective activities in the workshop and unveiled the intentionality behind the design. Findings lent support to the notion that creating a professional learning

³ IDI (Intercultural Development Inventory) is a premier cross-cultural assessment that is widely adopted in the world. <https://idiinventory.com/>

community where teacher practitioners can learn, inquire and reflect collaboratively will be beneficial for teaching effectiveness; it aligns with the principles of how people learn (Bransford, Darling-Hammond & LePage, 2007). It is worth noting that the activities highlighted in the results continued to be well received in the STARTALK workshop in the following years.

This study has two implications for future professional development: (1) Establishing a focused and thoughtful pedagogy plays an important role in the success of teacher training. (2) It is essential for teacher educators to participate as mentors, cohorts and colleagues, through which roles they can model practices focused on a growth-mindset, facilitate discussion, and provide empathetic support.

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