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CROSS-CULTURAL EDUCATION AND CULTURAL
BACKGROUND

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Abstract

Cross-cultural training is proposed as one way to improve care in the classroom for students. The overall aim of this study was to be a comprehensive acknowledgment and awesome. If globalization in education means good communication and much valorization, cultural background could play a significant role. We claim it is important to study the philosophical backgrounds of teachers and students. For this purpose, we have studied it using observation and surveys applied to some groups and after that, we make some interpretations regarding attitudes and behaviors. We have been focused mainly on the Chinese commonsense philosophy for students and how Romanian teachers are aware of differences if there are any. The findings reveal that teachers and students sometimes think and perceive differently some aspects of the universe and aspects of their lives. There are some limits of communication that we must over cross by improving knowledge. The first step could be to learn more about the cultural background of students.

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1. Introduction

Even if we are talking about multicultural or intercultural education in the globalization era, it seems we are not pointing out the right things that we must take into consideration: the levels of the mind. There are teachers who know this issue, working in schools and universities that claim they need more educational strategies in order to make an inclusive school for all students. Intercultural interactions between students and teachers have been described by many teachers as challenging.

Many studies take into consideration the surface level of interaction because the presumption is that the mind and rational are the same everywhere. We will look at the deeper cultural level of education in a constructivist manner and we will talk about the unconscious mind based on implicit, formal, and non-formal education. Second, we will try to identify the philosophical and cultural differences as a case study. The third part will be about education consideration building as the psychological profile for Chinese students.

2. Problem Statement

In the literature of the field, there are some concepts used by authors regarding the deep level of the mind as follows:

The concept of collective unconsciousness as archetypes is used by Jung (1958), the notion of paradigm as tacit knowledge is used by Kuhn, (1976), and the mental program or software of the mind is known in the works of Hofstede (1996).

All these concepts have in common the power which can enable behavior and attitude. For education, it might be a more useful “mental program” instead of another concept to reflect the cultural background of individuals or groups of students. There is also a dynamic perspective of the mental program as a myth (Boia, 2000; Eliade, 1959).

People use metaphors to describe the mental constant and also capture variation from both individual and social perspectives. Education can use the mental program as an entire concept to describe and create an accurate image of the subject we should study. In this approach, we will exemplify a case study on the Chinese philosophical background of the students that are studying in Romania and how they are perceived by Romanian teachers.

3. Research Questions

Are anthropological studies relevant to us? We presume that it could be used in order to reveal the cultural background by studying students’ and teachers’ knowledge and beliefs. Should we learn about different countries and cultures? Might it improve our perception and orient teachers to find and use later good educational strategies? Identification of beliefs will be used in this approach as a good explanation of the roots of behavior. How can we determine the cultural deep level of? We will try to discover philosophical ideas, idioms, historical ideas, and monuments that were previously encoded in their beliefs as tacit knowledge. The results must improve teacher training and the first step is to learn to identify such beliefs as a mental program and later find the proper behavior or style of teaching and learning.

In the USA there are studies regarding social integration, for example, “Applied Cross-Cultural Psychology” (Brislin, 1990/2013). This approach leads to the socio-psychological background being researched and helps academics. His studies are based on Hofstede’s theory regarding cultural dimensions.

Swedish author McDonald et al. (2021), made research from a technical and statistical perspective, but also stresses the values assumption of emigrants, for social assistants to identify mental illness.

Sensitivity to culture was considered to be very important regarding clinical assessment, reasoning, decision-making, and treatment outcomes. Informants particularly discussed different cultural idioms of expressions of mental ill-health and symptoms and how the training resulted in a greater attentiveness and a sense of being better prepared to approach cultural issues in assessment and encounter. He concluded: “Cross-cultural training of mental health professionals may assist the progress of the improved quality of care and reduce barriers to mental health care for asylum seekers, undocumented refugees, and refugee groups” (McDonald et al., 2021, p. 12).

There are also many other works published in Australia about Asian students or in India (Wang & Guiheux, 2018; Raju, 2022).

Following Bowne (2017) and Loya (2021), we will try to emphasize that philosophical background is a key point to understanding others. They claim that it is possible because it “reflects an individual’s beliefs and values about teaching and learning, often including concrete examples of the ways in which that individual enacts those beliefs” (Bowne, 2017, p. 59). Teachers and students must harmonize their beliefs, and values and carefully develop them in order to create more inclusive classrooms because “the process of reflecting on these values will likely increase our awareness of the ways in which we already are supporting our students’ learning and engagement, and work on improving areas that we might have neglected” (Loya, 2021, p. 5).

4. Purpose of the Study

The main aim of this approach is to find if teachers are familiarized with Chinese mythologic-philosophical aspects. There are objective requirements to accommodate and make comfortable study and research of emigrants, students with scholarships, or simple people living in another country. The hypothesis was that there is a gap between students’ philosophical backgrounds and foreign teachers’ assumptions. Therefore, if teachers or students learn more about the new philosophical or mythical background it could be beneficial. The awareness of teachers makes them open-minded, and responsible and brings professional satisfaction. For sure it needs more research and discussions about the cultural background of emigrants, students, and teachers especially. There are necessary more research, observation, and dialog make more visible the deeper level of cultural programming that might be philosophical and psychological as well.

5. Research Methods

Our attempt was based on literature in the educational domain, psychology, philosophy of education, and cultural studies (Brislin, 1990/2013; Granet, 2006; Lan, 2015; McDonald et al., 2021) as

also personal observation, surveys, and questionnaire applied to 14 Chinese undergraduate students in Romanian universities and 24 Romanian teachers. An embedded mixed-method design was applied. We used questionnaires and conducted focus group discussions with students in preservice training for a master's degree in Educational and Counselor Management from TUCEB [The Technical University of Civil Engineering of Bucharest]. Quantitative data were analyzed using thematic content regarding the meaning of some idioms, the significance of sight spots, and behaviors. The questions were the same for students and teachers. Questionnaires have included some variables, assumptions, and symbols related to both cultures, asking people honest answers if they are resizable or if they fit with their own culture. After that, we organized also a focus group for free discussions and add new members related professionally to education. Theoretical documentation reveals the necessity of recognition for different professions that are working with foreign students. The mixed methods qualitative and quantitative corroborate each others in order to get some relevant conclusions.

6. Findings

We've found some Chinese mental programs, how they work, and if they are familiar or not to Romanian teachers. One visible finding from this research was that teachers were learning new aspects about students' backgrounds and described it as challenging. This cross-cultural training might improve knowledge and professional development and attitude can be changed. Additional outcomes of the training were that participants not only gained knowledge about students' backgrounds but also restructured their existing knowledge.

We have identified which are mental programs and how they have risen in the Chinese mind (Lan, 2015) because that might reveal a person's position on any topic and how is anchored in their ontology or view of the world (Loya, 2021). We try here to stress some of them and see the connection with contemporary actions, events, and facts many related to education, achievements, and the meaning of power. We've selected and briefly presented some of them as they are mentioned in historical sources and popular philosophy, as common-sense and personal observations of everyday life.

The mental schemas as mental programs that we've decided to investigate are:

- The circle as an ontological and epistemological assumption;
- The image of the security space- Great Wall;
- The meaning of power – the totemic figure of the dragon.

All these are basically from commonsense philosophy. Our purpose was to identify in the responses the beliefs that show how mental programs are working and observe the behavior and idioms/word they use. Meanwhile, we ask Romanian teachers what they know, and think, and how possibly interpret these cultural aspects.

6.1. The assumption regarding space-time-truth as a circle

During our visit to a Chinese university, we collected some philosophical ideas embedded in their attitude. They think everything is changing according to the game of Yin and Yang as a vector of transformation, change, evolution, and reorientation. Those are ontological and epistemic beliefs (Lan,

2015). The perception of time and space as a circle design is also the meaning of the truth and how could be achieved. There is no final point for achievements. Any final point is a new start.

Romanian teachers express their opinions on this topic following western philosophical ideas where time, space, and processes are developing in a linear perspective and there is a final point and the truth is attended is complete.

We can see how notebooks in western culture for primary schools are designed with continuous parallel lines where children should write letters (phonemes). Chinese notebooks are designed with small rectangular lines where children must write the Chinese character obeying the rule of symmetry and the rules of top-down, left-right direction. Traditional thinking is that the earth, as land must be a square that can be transformed into a circle. Time is viewed also as a round line rising to the top point and downing after a while and starting again. The truth for the Chinese mind is always partial, approaching different points on the circle, but it is never complete. Chinese students explain this syntagma only as a possibility but not a certitude. According to ancient Chinese philosophy yin and yang are two parts working in harmony as male and female, sky and earth, one country to regimes, and so on. Students in our study couldn't choose between Yes or No to some questions saying they agree with both possible answers. Romanian teachers have almost different points of view, two parts being in contradiction and truth must be one part or another, Yes or No.

What kind of educational consequences could be raised? Of course, we are talking about labeling with the assumption of continuity and the possibility of evolution or dichotomy as a bad person, wrong person, smart, or less smart. Some teachers claim that students are lazy or not interested in the lesson.

Other educational and cognitive implications that rise in our focus group are as flowing: Teaching history is very challenging because students need always more details and are looking for the middle path. Some storytelling or Romanian history is for them astonishing but they never ask for details. Chinese learning is focused in get more and more information but for Romanian teachers is viewed as memorization. In the daily conversation, in our focus groups, the Chinese students always expressed modesty saying they have not yet had enough knowledge to become able to do their tasks.

Romanian teachers confess they are confused by the meaning of "non-action" (do not force anything), or by less initiative during games, tasks, or in the classroom. In counterpart, they are stressing: "Be yourself!", express yourself in order to have achievements. So, some Asian students could be disqualified during evaluation. And again, we found much confusion and frustration. To be reserved, "non-action" behavior is interpreted and assessed by teachers as noninvolvement or stupid (M.V.) and by Chinese students as a "waiting person", somebody else (teacher) should ask before. (T.S.)

The deep-level, philosophical background reveals a different perception regarding the fundamental question of how the image of the world looks (liner-circular) and how we can we behave. The world could have a linear order or ascendant, have a final point, or be circular, weaving continuous, or partial. So, there is a strong connection between assumptions and behavior.

6.2. The assumption regarding secure space

The Great Wall is a great achievement for these people. This archetype is related to security as a psychological need and closeness. For Romanian teachers, this is only a historical archeologic spot site.

There are many other social implications we found from our Chinese friends. In this study after we applied questionnaires, we found responses like this:

“I prefer to play with my Chinese friends” (M. G); “I prefer to live in Chinatown.” (Zh. V); “I like to spend time with my family.” (Y. Zh); “If I have troubles, I never ask a stranger, or police to help me” and “I feel well/comfortable only in my family and when I hear the Chinese language” (L.Y).

They are eager to learn English or Romanian in their style, asking and memorizing words, but have difficulties making sentences. It seems they need a friendly environment.

When they are doing homework, students are doing it first in Chinese and after that is translated. That situation in the classroom consumes more time and some teachers have no patience for it and students feel excluded. The mental program of closeness and protection is always related to the Chinese environment. Regarding the Great Wall, they are very proud and have a dream of visiting and climbing it one day.

6.3. The assumptions regarding power

It is well known as the totem of the dragon, but they interpret it nowadays as a symbol that animates force and vigor for everything. We are focused here on the relevance of vital value more than politics or religion. Thinking in image more than in concepts they accept limits, personal limits in a Buddhist style of modesty. If somebody expresses themselves it is considered arrogance. Sometimes they found connections between religions sometimes they reject them as useless. The image of power in some responses we had collected is like the following:

“I am – Confucianist/Buddhist (that means I accept the middle way) as powerful; The Chinese student said:” I feel humble as a person, our force came from unity –The great power is an inner power, invisible or like water, (W. F.); The force is coming from unity, protection of margins, morals is self-control”; “China is one!” (Q. Sh.).

They also appreciate heroes in western culture but confess they do not understand Christianity as a religion even though they respect it.

Even students who are studying English are eager to learn about other cultures but they always turn to their one. It is a stable and protective place in world networks. This is about the conservative mind in a globalization era. “We are eager to learn English, but we should never forget our Chinese home!” said a Chinese student (Q.W.) who was transferred to Romanian University.

Authority is also related to power, so they respect every authority, such as a father or teacher. Sometimes they are qualified by Romanian teachers as obedient. So far, the traditional mental program of a grandiose and moral dragon is working also as an ethical meta-program.

After questionnaires and presentations in classrooms and discussions in a focus group with teachers in-service training for master’s degrees, we made some conclusive remarks. To summarize, we made a psychological brief profile of Chinese students with different commonsense philosophical backgrounds and teachers that must improve their knowledge about that. The Center, the dragon, and the wall work together as an integrative cultural aspect and shaped the personality of Chinese people. Chinese Students express less but they act diligently, respect teachers, and accept and tolerate others, but feel secure only in

the Chinese social environment, and need more encouragement in the classroom. Learning new subjects like logic and argumentation, history, and arts can be easier integrated with western culture.

7. Conclusions

Nowadays, China is still closed, even though they claim in the official discourse that they are living in an open world and must have connections. Chinese mental programs work every day and make the Chinese efficient in competitions. Explicit curriculum (sports in the evaluation of physical education) and tacit knowledge curriculum (demographic increase number by a photo of big brother and small brother together designed in the textbooks, history though as being a great nation) are present in their curriculum. The situation could be different in foreign countries and make them confused. So, we can bring some ideas as expectations of Chinese students revealed after questionnaires’:

- They said it is better to work as part of a community, to work on projects as a group better than as an individual person in the classroom (97%).

- They learn by internalizing knowledge and using less verbal expression. So, teachers should pay more attention to writing tests (85%). Chinese students are not express verbally their beliefs, but only in writing questionnaires’ do their responses and demonstrate when they have a different point of view in concrete situations accordingly, they said, to their culture. Sometimes they feel frustrated and consider a teacher is an arrogant person that imposes new culture.

- Chinese student is always modest and does not show themselves (82%). Teachers must appreciate modesty among foreign students and explain what is modesty, how could improve verbalization, and how could be expressed in actions.

Teachers meanwhile have some remarks:

- They said that they learned new amazing things and some are trying to change their perspective on managing the classroom. A few consider that the background of students is not relevant or they should learn more and assume our beliefs (20%).

- Teachers think they must improve their capabilities, and competencies through teacher training courses regarding communication in multicultural classes (87%).

- Teachers accept they must learn more about philosophy and mind and also something about the native language of students. And all these might be available for any other representative of different cultures, Arabian, African, etc. (73%).

- Other questions that teachers put themselves are the following: how could design new strategies? Should we also teach students new perspectives assuming different views? Can we organize extra-curriculum activities better in order to learn more customs and to make behave as friends?

As we had presumed, we found different cultural backgrounds (philosophical and psychological issues), a gap between cultures, and as well as implicit consequences in behavior. In final discussions with teachers following courses for the educational master’s degree we have concluded there are needed more classes focus on cross-cultural psychology philosophy and educational anthropology. It could be realized more studies with students from other cultures like Arabian, or Ukrainian as a refugee, using the same mixed methods or others.

We claim it could be more inclusive and successful schools if we try to study more foreign cultures for pursuing globalization goals, integrative education, and harmonization.

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