

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AMERICAN AND CHINESE CLASSES

Approved by Regina Pauly on May 2, 2012

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AMERICAN AND CHINESE CLASSES

A Seminar Paper

Presented to

The Graduate Faculty

University of Wisconsin-Platteville

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirement for the Degree

Masters of Science

in

Education

by

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2012

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my advisor professor Regina Pauly. It is with great pleasure that I acknowledge she has contributed to my completion of this essay. Through out my writing process, professor Regina endeavored to provide me with a lot of valuable advice. I really appreciate about it. Also, I should give my deep gratitude to my dear friends who gave me much assistance.

Thank you to the staff of Karmann Library in UW-Platteville who helped me finds the materials and gave me suggestions.

In the course of my writing, I used many materials for my references. The authors of the materials are appreciated very much.

Abstract

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Under the Supervision of Regina Pauly

For a long time, the differences between American and Chinese classes have been a subject that has received much attention. Many experts have their distinctive opinion about this subject. This paper shows a general understanding about the differences between American and Chinese classes, especially in the behavior of students and qualities of teachers. To understand the characteristics of the education modes, it is good to understand the backgrounds of culture.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

APPROVAL PAGE.....	i
TITLE PAGE.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT PAGE.....	iii
ABSTRACT.....	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vi
CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION.....	1
Introduction	
Statement of the Problem	
Definitions of Terms	
Delimitations	
Method of Approach	
CHAPTER II REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	3
The different teaching method	
The relationship with students	
Theory and practice	
Student's behavior	
Learning methods	
Learning content	
Personal values	
Each culture learns from the other	
CHAPTER III CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	12

REFERENCES.....14

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The topic is the differences between American and Chinese classrooms. This paper focuses on the behaviors of American students and Chinese students in the classroom. American students and Chinese students hold different attitudes about their teachers. The relationship between teachers and students are different. American teachers and Chinese teachers adopt different teaching methods. As we know, America is one of the most typical representatives of the West and influences other countries. China represents an East country and there is a different classroom atmosphere in China. However, this is due to the vast differences between Chinese and American cultures. This paper will put forward reasons for this phenomenon. American students and Chinese students have different learning methods, content, and personal values.

Statement of the Problem

The statement of the problem may be expressed in three questions:

Question One: What are the key differences between Chinese and American classrooms?

Question Two: What can each culture learn from the other?

Question Three: How do Chinese students experience an American education?

Definition of Terms

American: a citizen of the United States

Chinese: a person born or living in China, not including Macanese, Taiwanese and residents of Hong Kong.

<C:\Documents and Settings\pau1yr\Local Settings\install files\Dict\resultui\queryresult.html>**Classroom:** a room where classes are taught in a school, college, or university

Delimitations of Research

This paper studies Chinese students who are freshmen majoring in education at Huazhong Normal University. There are 500 undergraduates, 300 graduate students and 100 PhD students. They received a traditional Chinese education and faced many problems when introduced to traditional American education. Huazhong Normal University was founded in 1903 and is directly under the control of the Chinese Ministry of Education. It known as Central China Normal University (CCNU), located in Wuhan, China. There are about 30,000 students and 380 teachers total at the university. Wuhan is the capital of Hubei provinces in the middle of China.

Method of Approach

For this research, the difference between American and Chinese classes was conducted through of Karmann Library in UW-Platteville. The key words for search are “American classes”, “Chinese classes”, “the behavior of the American teachers and students”, “the behavior of the Chinese teachers and students”, “the difference between American and Chinese classes”. The author used some books and electrical data, EBSCOhost databases and Google. This will be the support for the research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

China is the typical representation of Eastern culture, and America is the typical representative of Western cultures. The two different cultures have different approaches to education. One is required to understand the two different education methods of a comprehensive and objective understanding to appreciate the differences. The differences come down to personal values, curricular arrangement, student's behaviors and teacher qualities. In this report, student's behavior and teacher qualities are centered as critical qualities. The purpose of understanding the different education system is to improve the effectiveness of the education. Education is a fundamental way to enhance the quality of national predispositions. In short, Americans and Chinese grow by mutually understanding of each other.

The differences and similarities between the cultures may be noted in the simplest of things. For example, one author, A. Nielsen, has noted the similarities and differences between Chinese and American Cultures in the movie "Gua Sha". Nielsen has noted similarities between contemporary children in both cultures. The authors provide the following list.

- Both children enjoy playing video games
- Families share similar family morals
- Both read to children at bed time
- Bed time stories have a lesson to be learned in them
- Both care for their children with their "all"
- Father & mother's love their children
- Parents only want the best for their children and that all of their dreams come true
- Parents work together for the well being of their children
- Parents will risk their life for their children

- Parents will lie to their children to protect them

Nielsen also noted some differences in the two cultures. The list includes the following:

- Different forms of child discipline
- Chinese smoke while eating their meal
- People from the Chinese culture eat their meals with chopsticks
- People from the Chinese culture place their food in the middle of the table and they all share from the same dish and put it in their own dish.
- Chinese culture has different forms of medication and treatments for illnesses
- People from the Chinese culture are extremely protective of their families
- The people from the Chinese culture believe in "honor" and incorporate it into everything they do
- People from the Chinese culture express their emotions much differently (they hide and control their emotions)
- Everything in the Chinese culture involves respect (of people, objects, language, and beliefs)
- Chinese people feel they will be treated unfairly in America because of the cultural differences. (Nielsen, 2002)

The different teaching methods

Chinese teachers use traditional teacher-centered teaching methods. Chinese teachers like to make different kinds of rules for students to instruct them what to learn, when to learn, how to learn. For instance, if a student is unable to solve a math problem, the first thing the teacher will do is to ask the student to learn an additional rule and to tell him/her that he/she will make few mistakes. Chinese teachers do so to help the students deal with problems, based on rules. They emphasize too much what the students should do.

American teachers are able to teach flexibly, according to the students' real life situations. In Chinese classes, teachers lack communication with students and have lessons from one another. American teachers focus on a lot on teamwork. For example, if an American student meets some difficult problems, his/her teachers will also help him/her solve this problem, but it occurs only after the student searches for a few more ways to deal with the problem. If the student can not solve it by him/herself, the teacher will encourage him/her to join in the

discussion with other students. If he/she is still unable to handle the problem, the teacher will take part in the discussion until the student himself/herself finds the answer. American teachers stress cooperation when the individual cannot solve the problem.

The differences in teaching methods are illustrated in the teaching of mathematics. Chang (1996) discusses mathematics in Chinese and American classrooms. According to Chang, the traditional lecture-demonstration method is still the most common mathematics teaching method in both countries. In the United States, teaching techniques such as self-paced learning, audio-visual instruction, computer-assisted learning, and small-group setting discussion methods are increasingly being used. In China, due to the entrance examination's severe competitiveness, most of the mathematics teachers have no choice but to use speedy lecture-demonstration to show students the problem most likely to appear on the test. The only method they might like to use the method which will benefit their students' chances to get the highest scores on the test.

The relationship with students

Teachers in China are given more respect than teachers in the U.S. For example, teachers do not pay taxes on their salary, and they receive their own national holiday, Teachers Day, on September 29th (Haymes, R.M. & Chalker, D.M). The relationship between Chinese students and teachers is quite formal. A Chinese saying goes "Respect your teacher as you father." This is the type of relationship between Chinese students and teachers. The teachers and students only have teacher-student relationship, and they cannot become good friends. It is not often the case that students call their teachers first names, for it shows disrespect for teachers. Teachers are commonly addressed by Prof., Mr. or Madam (Mrs., Miss). One blogger put it in this way: "In the Chinese classes, lectures are often rigid, and some teachers read information from the book directly, and there are no questions, and no answers in the classroom. So the classroom's

atmosphere is not active. For example, in calculus class, an old teacher just read the book all the time, which boring us so much, and the teacher bored too. ” (The different between Chinese classes and American classes, 2008)

It is usually heard that American classes are quite casual and open. American teachers need not be formally dressed up in class and are often called their first names by their students.

“American students can speak out in class, and even do not need to raise hands. And sometimes American students argue with our foreign teachers in class, give teachers suggestions on things that need to change, or even criticize ideas. For another thing, the foreign teachers often use multimedia to build an interesting class. For instance, in the Musical Appreciation classes, the teacher plays a bit of music, and when the music ends, we can talk about our experience and ask some questions. That is a very nice feeling!” (The different between Chinese classes and American classes, 2008)

Theory and practice

According to research, the ideals of education in China and US finds that there are marked differences in concepts on education and family beliefs about education and states had established different aims according to cultural needs.

Generally speaking, Chinese teachers focus on theories, the American teachers pay attention to practice. Chinese teachers pay attention to strengthening theory and lack sufficient practical experience. Rules and laws are always employed to deal with matters by Chinese students. If the rules and laws don't work, they will turn to the teacher for help and find a simple way to sort out the different problems but never put it into practice. The courses of Chinese students are not rich or colorful enough because all the courses are taught directly in fixed classrooms. There is almost no other place but the classrooms for the student to study and

explore.

Americans pay attention to the cultivation of practical ability and creativity. American teachers like to make students find what they want to learn by themselves. They are focused on the process of learning and gaining experiences. All round development of morality, intelligence and physique is emphasized. Americans think developing the children's creative nature is better than basic knowledge. American teachers pay much attention to the practical and operation. American teachers tell student that is why practice is the criterion of truth and why "the standpoint of life of practice, should be first and fundamental in the theory of knowledge" (Lenin, 2002).

Students' behavior

In many Chinese classes, the main task of the course is to make students grasp the basic knowledge and listen to the teacher and take notes. Students seldom challenge their authority. Students have been told to sit up-straight, obey the rules and disciplines, and listen attentively in class since kindergarten. In many cases, students are all only seated and taught passively. Some students may be good at taking notes of lessons, but by and large, they learn initiatively. The frequently quoted phenomenon of many Chinese students being generally quiet, slow to respond and reluctant to communicate does not imply that they are born communication-inhibited or that they do not have internal desire or motivation to interact with others (Wu, 2009). If students have any questions about the class, they raise their hands and then with the approval of their teachers they stand and give their answers. Generally speaking, Chinese students' opinions are always in accord with their teachers program as learning progresses (Li, 2000).

In many American schools, students can also take drinks like coffee, tea or juice to class. Students can speak aloud even without raising their hands. They sometimes argue with teachers,

offer suggestions on things that they think should be improved or changed, or, even criticize the teachers' viewpoints.

Flowerdew and Miller (1995) point out in their research: "American students start to answer a question before they know what they are going to say. Chinese students wait until they are sure of what they are going to say before they speak. In answering a question, students run the risk of being wrong or of revealing their weak English."

The students in China, they like to learn by themselves. When they run into difficulty learning, they are used to solving it by themselves. However, it is different with the American students. American students like to cooperate with the others. They often discuss with their partners and work together.

Learning content

To receive high scores on national tests is the purpose of Chinese students learning. Students in China can only confine their learning to book knowledge. Chinese students often get high scores but have low ability which is why many famous companies do not like to employ Chinese students (DON, 2008). Chinese students prefer basic theory to problem-solving abilities. The ability of being good at taking exams has been paid much more attention to than the application of practical knowledge. While American students have lots of courses to choose from to obtain knowledge, and are not being limited to book knowledge only.

The students in America can choose the courses based on their interest, and they have the freedom of choice. Americans think developing children's creative nature is better than basic knowledge. Grade Point Average is adopted in America, so both quizzes and school assignments are important, and both greatly contribute to the final score. This is the most significant to develop the students' abilities.

In the area of science and mathematics the challenges are there for both countries. A continuing challenge is illustrated in a 1994 article. The author pointed out the differences between American students and Chinese students on learning science and math. In China, hands-on practices serve the purpose of proving the theories and results written in the textbooks. The students are required to conduct the same experiments, use the same methods and equipment, and are expected to come up with the same results. In the US, however, the purpose of hands-on activities is to discover the theories, and results in knowledge beyond the textbooks. The students, therefore, are encouraged to conduct different experiments, use different methods and equipments, and come up with different solutions and conclusions. Chinese students tend to be more prepared in mathematics and science basics for higher learning than the American students, a fact noted by American college and university professors (Sun, Sun, & Goldstein, 1994).

Personal values

In America, peoples' self-awareness and independent consciousness are very strong. American culture is characterized by worship of the individual and exalting personal dignity. The United States has many cultures, and people highly value individualism. In American one view, everyone as a separate entity, each person has their own life and one can not interfere with someone else's life, nor can one ask others to be responsible for your life. In addition to attending various communities, many American students also spend about fifteen hours to take part-time jobs every week. It is not only the training but also try to looking for jobs in order to prepare for the future. Students in America are outgoing and have the initiative to study very much.

However, in China, people have striking interdependent features, especially

psychologically and socially; personal feeling is closely interconnected with country. There is a profound social root. The concept of individuality does not exist in China as it does in the West. China is very much a group oriented society. Social consciousness and knowing one's place in a group has been at work in this country for thousands of years is also very evident in contemporary China. From the concept of the 'dan wei' or work unit, to the 'ideal worker' as exemplified by the quiet contributions of the quasi-mythical hero of the Cultural Revolution, Lei Feng, the exemplary citizen is not one who stands out, makes waves, or disturbs the status quo, but achieves quietly and for the greater good (The Chinese classrooms, 2008).

Some Chinese students would say they are coerced into everything by parents and relatives since childhood. Chinese students often participate in remedial classes in their spare time. They do not have enough time for other things apart from studying.

Each culture learns from the other

China is the typical representative of Eastern culture, and America is the typical representative of Western culture. They reflect the different cultures between them.

China is an ancient civilized nation with a history of 5000 years and has its own tradition and is quite different from those in the western countries. During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, China was already a united multi-national country. China's Confucian cultures are the essence of traditional Chinese culture and civilization and the fruits of China's national wisdom for thousands of years.

The United States is a nation only a little more than two hundred years old, and is largely based on immigrants. Over time (since 1621) the Colonies and then the United States, gradually moved towards the American culture. Everyone from over the world moved to America, bringing their own cultures and customs, and had an impact on each other. The United States is a

country that has a high level of respect for freedom.

These characteristics determine the two kinds of different development trends in different domains. It leads to two different kinds of educating and teaching concepts.

China's current educational system is still exam-oriented education, students are very clever, but their ability to research is poor. However, the US is a country that has an open education system; students can learn and practice in all areas according to their interests. Each education system has some advantages or disadvantages they can learn from each other.

China's Ministry Education department has set a standard learning content in the country which uses textbooks through out and unites all teaching material. The students can not decide the content of their learning. Ukrainian Nina, a famous educator said, "No interest, and was compelled to carry out the study, would stifle the will of their mastery of knowledge" (Hidi, 2006). American students have some freedom to choose what they learn and they can be motivated and actively respond to teachers' teaching arrangement to their own initiative. China's education may learn from the American' method of arranging the content of learning and train the students interested in learning, thus improving the ability of practices and innovation.

American classes have a relaxed atmosphere and a relatively high degree of freedom of students. But this style has given rise to a series of problems. Recently, it has reported some problems of violence in schools. American government should learn from Chinese school discipline in order to stabilize and provide teaching order.

CHAPTER 3

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is hard to tell which one is the better education system, because each has their own strong and weak points.

According to the research, there is a difference between American and Chinese classes. Many things account for these differences. It is worth thinking about and summing up our experiences and lessons. No matter what kind of teaching strategies are adopted, the aim should be to improve the teaching effectiveness of student learning. Educational methods can be changed, and decide the destiny of one individual future, education can also be changed to decide the development of the future of a country.

For Chinese teachers, some recommendations should be adopted by these teachers. Firstly, they should create active but relaxed learning environment. Secondly, the teachers should sometimes let students control the class. They can adopt the student-centered teaching method. The students should be encouraged to partaking in the activities in the class, for example, presentations, discussions and role-play. Thirdly, educators should pay more attention to develop the students' characters. The students in China particularly should have a more confident and dynamic personality.

These teaching reforms can help to enhance the activity of students in their study, to inspire their passion to learn, and to cultivate their creativity and consciousness of scientific research.

For America teachers, they should improve some problems in the education. First of all, the educators can make some regulation rules to restrain students' behavior in the class. Some students fall asleep in the class and some students are absent from the class. Secondly, American students like to do group work, but some of them actually do not participate in the work. The teachers should adopt some individual measures. Thirdly, educators should teach students' correct overviews on the world, life and values.

Nowadays, classroom teaching is still the basic form of education; under the present condition, education systems should pay more attention to improving teaching. It is a key step to improving classroom instructional quality.

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