Exploring the Learning Effectiveness of Dialogue-Based College Chinese Teaching Plans

Yu-Hui Lin¹,² and Te-Sheng Chang²,*

¹ College of Education, Huanggang Normal University, Hubei Province, China
² Department of Education and Human Potentials Development, National Dong Hwa University, Hualien, Taiwan, China

Email: achang@gms.ndhu.edu.tw (T.-S.C.)
*Corresponding author

Abstract—This study aimed to flip college Chinese education, innovate teaching and learning, and improve their learning effectiveness. This study used the action research method, with a national university in Taiwan as the practice field. There were 332 participants in the action research, and sentimental education was carried out through the theme of “Love Story”. Dialogue-based teaching was adopted for the action plan, in which the students and teachers talked about love and passion in the classroom. Through multiple dialogues between students and oneself, the author of the paper, the storyteller, their classmates, and the teacher, a sentimental education of love and respect was established. This study used the Kahoot! and Zuvio real-time feedback systems in the classroom and in a questionnaire survey to collect research data for follow-up analyses and teacher as researcher reflections to cross-check the research results. The research results showed that 79% of the students felt that the dialogue-based teaching program was effective.

Keywords—college Chinese, educational technology, teaching innovation, dialogue-based teaching

I. INTRODUCTION

College Chinese has long been ridiculed as Chinese learning for high school senior students on both sides of the Taiwan Strait, with universities not paying attention to it, teachers not willing to teach it, and students not willing to learn it. Chang argued that college Chinese should be practical and follow current trends [1]. In fact, studies have found that students’ language literacy is declining [2, 3]. Dewey suggested that education is life, and that education should be based on real life situations and school education should also fit normal social life [4]. Temes emphasized the importance of dialogue in education, and stated it helps students to construct knowledge and understand the important connotations of sentimental education [5, 6]. The ancient masters of dialogue included Confucius in the East and Socrates in the West, who engaged in dialogue with his disciple Plato. Piaget argued that motivation is enhanced when people feel what that they are learning is familiar or when they are highly interested in the content [7, 8]. More content and activities that are relevant to students need to be introduced into Chinese language courses in order to increase their learning motivation.

“Love credits” have been recognized as mandatory for college students, and sentimental education is an important component of gender equality education. Reform and innovation in college Chinese education should have a bottom-up orientation to understand students’ learning needs, and teachers should reflect on curriculum and teaching, so that educational reform can be effective.

Therefore, this study used the teacher-as-researcher action research method to explore how dialogue-based teaching strategies could be applied to college Chinese courses and to further evaluate students’ learning effectiveness. Based on academic research ethics, students and a Teaching Assistant (TA) were invited to become research participants in this study by verbally informing them and asking them to sign a written informed consent form. In addition, in order to improve the reliability of the qualitative research analysis, this study adopted Norman Denzin’s first citation in social science research in 1978 as a ‘triangular verification’, in which multiple theories, methods, and data sources are used to explain the same phenomenon in order to ensure the consistency of the study [9]. In this study, the effectiveness of the implementation of sentimental education was analyzed by cross-checking the research data from the questionnaire statistics, student learning feedback, TA observation feedback, and the teachers’ action reflections.

II. COURSE OF ACTION OF THE “LOVE STORY” EMOTIONAL EDUCATION

A. The First Semester

This study chose the short poems Guan Ju and Jian Jia from The Book of Odes as the texts for the independent study before class. In class, the teacher taught Yuan Zhen’s Yingying’s Biography and Feng Menglong’s Madame Du Sinks Her Treasure Chest in Anger, both of which are storytelling texts, to attract the students’ attention. The students were also invited to listen to the music videos of the popular song “The Wedding Blessing” by Eason Chan, which was used to guide them to reflect on the topic of love. Chang Eileen’s Red Rose and White Rose was used as an extended reading text after class. As a
result of the implementation, no students had read it before the class, and only one student read it after the class. A male freshman from the Department of Information Management wrote, “The course ‘Love Story’ is full of negative men. Do you really think there are no stories with happy endings in China?” This comment awakened teachers to reflect on their teaching and to consider the appropriateness of the content and timing of the text. Although the first semester’s implementation of the dialogue-based teaching plan failed, we used the results to create our next action plan.

B. The Second Semester

Hou Wenyong Rejected as well as Feng Menglong’s Madame Du Sinks Her Treasure Chest in Anger and The Oil Vendor and the Courtesan were selected as the texts for the theme “Love Story”. These texts were chosen to avoid the students’ feeling that the authors of the texts were ancient writers. Hou Wenyong is a contemporary writer, while Feng Menglong is an ancient, so that their writings are complementary. Feng Menglong’s Madame Du Sinks Her Treasure Chest in Anger is a sad story, while The Oil Vendor and the Courtesan is a happy story, so that the design of the course of the first semester is modified. After the texts were taught in class, the teacher used the experience of rejection as a dialogue guide; however, the students did not respond very enthusiastically and seemed shy. In addition, the students were given study sheet titled Rewriting the Novel, which allowed them to have a dialogue with the text and the hidden author behind the text through asking questions, such as role play: “What if you were Madame Du?” and “What if you were Li Jia?”. After the writing mode was adopted, the students’ creativity became endless, and they were commendable whether they were rewriting the novel or inserting the inner drama of the novel’s characters.

C. The Third Semester

The teacher again implemented the dialogue-based teaching method, and the texts were refined as Feng Menglong’s Madame Du Sinks Her Treasure Chest in Anger and The Oil Vendor and the Courtesan. The teacher was transformed into a storyteller, and after the storytelling, she directly conducted peer dialogue and sharing activities using about questions about love, and how to solve them. The students were placed into groups of six for the discussions, and they filled in the learning sheets together. The three questions about love were: What are your criteria for choosing a partner? How to solve the problem of a couple in love that is not accepted by their families or society? How to deal rationally with a change in love? The peer discussion was lively, and there were many interactions and a lot of laughter as the groups shared with each other. In their feedback, many students wrote that the discussion time was too short or that the activity was fun. Although there was no questionnaire and it remains unknown whether the dialogue constructed the students’ concept of love or nurtured their sentimental education, the lively and active atmosphere of the classroom was effective in enhancing their learning motivation.

At this point in the implementation of the teacher-as-researcher action plan, the teacher continued to reflect on the plan and find areas that needed revision. After repeated planning, practice, reflection, and revision, the dialogue model from the early stage and the questionnaire were developed and administered in the fourth semester. Therefore, the researcher considered the first two semesters as the precursors and focused on the last two semesters.

III. ACTION PLAN OF THE “LOVE STORY” DIALOGUE-BASED TEACHING

A. Objectives and Activities of the “Love Story” Dialogue-Based Teaching

The cognitive, affective, and skill teaching objectives of Bloom, an American educational psychologist, were the theoretical basis of this study [10]. Skills are the final manifestation of language acquisition and are based on cognitive and affective aspects, and knowledge is constructed through educational actions. Therefore, affective communication is the most important aspect of the practice [11]. Literary works can reflect the reality of life to some extent, but readers still need to savor and dialogue with them in order to understand the world and the true meaning.

| TABLE I. FLOW DESIGN OF THE “LOVE STORY” DIALOGUE-BASED TEACHING ACTIVITIES |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------|
| Step                          | Item            | Summary of the dialogue guiding activities |
| A                             | Introduction    | Students were invited to have a dialogue with a text from 500 years ago, with the author behind the text, with themselves, with their peers, and with their teacher on the subject of love across the centuries. |
| B                             | Lecture         | Text from the Song Dynasty vs. text from the Ming Dynasty; Feng Menglong’s San Yan vs. Ling Mengchu’s Liang Pai |
| C                             | Storytelling    | Storyteller’s Theater I: The Oil Vendor and the Courtesan |
| D                             | Dialogue        | After listening to the story, students were asked to try three questions about love related to the content of the story: 1) Dialogue with yourself; 2) Dialogue with the author of the text; 3) Dialogue with the storyteller. |
| E                             | Storytelling    | Storyteller’s Theater II: Madame Du Sinks Her Treasure Chest in Anger |
| F                             | Group discussion| Questions about love: 1) What are your criteria for choosing a partner? 2) How to solve the problem of a couple in love that is not accepted by their families or society? 3) How to deal rationally with a change in love? |
| G                             | Dialogue        | Questions about love and how to solve them? |
| H                             | Questioning     | Asking questions during the process of answering the questions |
| I                             | Summary         | Have you taken your love credits? Love yourself, love others, love the one you love, and respect each other. Learn to let go. |

The theme of the action plan was love stories, and two famous short stories, Madame Du Sinks Her Treasure Chest in Anger, and The Oil Vendor and the Courtesan, by Feng Menglong of the Ming dynasty were selected. Feng
Menglong’s view of sentimental education was based on the prostitute’s pursuit of ideal love to reflect the awakening of female self-awareness in the Ming Dynasty [12]. While the courtesan in the story makes a lifelong choice for herself, Madame Du remains highly self-conscious in the pursuit of love and establishes the autonomy of her personality [13]. Through the students’ dialogues with themselves, the author of the texts, the storyteller, their peers, and the teacher, the teachers and students talked about love and passion in the classroom. The flow design of the dialogue-based teaching activities is shown in Table I.

Peer dialogue and group discussions in the classroom facilitated learning, as the students could listen to others’ opinions, share their views, exchange ideas, stimulate different thinking, and construct new ideas. As Sato argued, the revolution in learning should be the reformation that starts in the classroom, where students begin to learn to work with others, to form a learning community among themselves, to read the text, and to read the light and shadow of the lives of their peers at the same time [14].

B. Strategies and Methods of the “Love Story” Dialogue-Based Teaching

Before Storyteller’s Theater I started, the students were reminded to reflect on the content of the story and to connect the story with modern society, their current environment, or their personal life experiences. The process of reflection is the beginning of the dialogue with oneself. After the story of Storyteller’s Theater I, The Oil Vendor and the Courtesan, was told, the students were asked to enter the Zuvio system and answer the questions: Please answer three questions about love on the content of the story: (1) dialogue with themselves; (2) dialogue with the author of the text; and (3) dialogue with the storyteller. Through listening to the story and practicing personal reflection and meditation, they had dialogues with themselves, the author, and the storyteller.

The story used in Storyteller’s Theater II, Madame Du Sinks Her Treasure Chest in Anger, allowed a deeper and more complex reflection on the subject. The students were invited to re-enter Zuvio to answer three questions about love: 1) What are your criteria for choosing a partner? 2) How to solve the problem of a couple in love that is not accepted by their families or society? 3) How to deal rationally with a change in love? After the students answered the questions about love, they discussed their answers in groups and started a peer dialogue. Afterwards, each group member shared the peer dialogue with the teacher and the students, which was a dialogue with the author and his text across 500 years of time.

The researcher used a Kahoot! survey to develop a questionnaire investigating the dialogue effectiveness, dialogue content, and sentimental education. The questionnaire consisted of 10 multiple-choice questions scored on a four-point Likert scale. After the implementation of the action plan was over, the students were asked to use Kahoot! to answer the questionnaire, so that the learning effectiveness of the action plan could be summarized, as shown in Table II.

In the course of sentimental education practice, dialogue-based teaching is not always applicable, because it involves some hidden thoughts of the students that they might not be willing to express openly using spoken language. As suggested by Yu and Hsiao, the exploration of intimate relationships involves aspects of personal privacy—students may choose to remain silent due to being shy or having a poor seat location, while other students may be more willing to write their opinions down on paper [15]. The researcher advocated that educational technology should be used to enhance student motivation and promote learning effectiveness.

IV. FEEDBACK AND REFLECTION ON THE “LOVE STORY” DIALOGUE-BASED TEACHING

A. Questionnaire Survey Statistics

The quantitative analysis of the students’ learning effectiveness is shown in the following pie chart:

Class AB (Fig. 1) has 70 students enrolled, 63 students attended on the same day, and 55 students completed the test; A1 class (Fig. 2) has 49 students enrolled, 43 students attended on the same day, and 34 students completed the test. The following analysis is according to the survey statistics of these two classes of students completing questionnaires. Overall, the statistical results of class AB show that 29% of them are very consistent; 55% of those who meet the criteria; 13% of those who slightly meet the criteria; 3% do not meet the requirements. Statistical
results of class AJ: 42% of them are very consistent; 31% of those who meet the criteria; 15% of those who meet certain criteria; 12% do not meet the requirements. It is obvious that the number of students of conversational teaching classes should not be too large. There are too many students to have the opportunity to express their ideas. The total statistical results of class AB and class AJ (Fig. 3) show that 45% of them are very consistent; 34% of those who meet the criteria; 14% of those who slightly match; 7% do not comply.

B. Student Feedback on Learning

The students’ feedback was divided into feedback on the dialogue-based teaching method, the reflection and dialogue, and the construction of sentimental education. The real names of all students are hidden below, they are only shown as the female classmate A or the male classmate A with pseudonyms in alphabetical order, and unless specially marked, the participants were freshmen students. It is a compulsory course for freshmen but not for juniors and older. All the students from mainland China were junior exchange students. The qualitative content is summarized as follows.

Male classmate A said, “This dialogue-based teaching is quite novel, and I hope the teacher can ask more questions about our answers so that we can reflect on them”. Female classmate A said, “I would like to thank the teacher for taking us through the world of love and emotional issues in such a special way. I think it is very special and I like this way, just as we should love ourselves and others at the end of the day”. Female classmate B said, “In addition to understanding the ancient view of love, I also learned a lot of different ideas through the dialogue; it was really interesting!” Female classmate C mentioned, “I really like the way the teacher teaches! I think the teacher is very interesting in class!”. Female classmate D said, “I think the class is very informative and I like the interactive teaching”. Male classmate B said, “The way the class is taught is good and not boring”. These responses indicated the male and female students had the same ideas.

Male classmate C said, “Today’s topic was very good. An oral way was used to teach the lesson, instead of the old boring standardized way of class”. Male classmate D said, “The storytelling was great and lively”. Male classmate E said, “The teacher told two stories in a row, interacted with the audience, and changed the text to more common phrases for fear that we would not understand”. Male classmate F said, “I think the way the class was conducted was very free and relaxed, with no pressure” Male classmate G said, “I think the teacher’s storytelling was lively and interesting, and the stage style was steady. She told the story in an orderly manner and interacted with the students on stage, so that the audience would not be bored”. However, male classmate H said, “Ancient romance novels, whether they have a happy ending or a tragic ending, are all on the fantastic side, and it is really hard to see this in today’s society, so it was harder for me to have resonance with these two novels”. Female classmate E responded that “Both stories are good but slightly long”. This was a good sign that the students were willing to express their innermost feelings to the teacher as a suggestion and motivation to improve their teaching in the future.

Male classmate I said, “Great! It makes people have different ideas”. Female classmate F said, “Today’s class was very interesting”. The teacher’s lively explanation added style to the original story, and I hope we can have more of this kind of class. Female classmate G said, “It is not the old rigid class of Chinese teaching, and it teaches us to think deeper and incorporate the meaning of the text into real life. The atmosphere of the class is very good, and
the teacher is both lovely and amicable”. Female classmate H said, “I think this kind of topic is very good as it is closer to life, and it is also a good way to assign representatives in groups”. Male classmate J (a junior student from mainland China) said, “It’s great. I really like the teacher’s course”. Male classmate K said, “The teacher’s class is really quite interesting; in fact, I don’t think it’s very compact, and we must report on stage to add more discussion and content. I really think the Chinese learning class is excellent!” Male classmate L wrote, “Throughout history, poets and plays have always depicted love as being poignant, beautiful, or hot and sweet, but few people see it as a life lesson or a problem”. It is possible that the students had never experienced a teacher who brought love stories and questions about love to a university lecture hall for talks about love and passion in public, so they felt interested.

Female classmate I said, “It’s quite meaningful to ask myself questions to make me reflect. After all, sometimes the problems are found by myself”. Female classmate J commented, “I think it’s good to change the previous model of asking students to answer questions and let them reflect on the text they read and ask their own questions. This offers more opportunities for reflection”. This response showed that the students had reflected on the material and talked to themselves. Female classmate K (a junior student from mainland China) stated, “I like listening to the teacher’s stories, not only for the literary content but also for the life philosophy”. Female classmate L (a junior student from mainland China) expressed, “The content of the class is very rich and diversified, so it is also very interesting. If there were more time for each PPT presentation, it would be better”. This response showed that the students’ learning needs were not only for the course to be informative, interesting, and meaningful, but also for it to lead them to reflect and not be rushed, as everyone required a different length of time to settle and needed more time and space to reflect on their life experiences.

Opportunity education was carried out through the action plan dialogue process. During the peer dialogue, the teacher asked, “If one person wants to break up peacefully but the other doesn’t want to break up at all and is stubborn, what can they do?”. This was taken as an opportunity to provide relevant legal knowledge about the Domestic Violence Prevention Act and the Stalking Prevention Act to explain basic legal protection for the students and the people around them.

C. Teaching Assistant Feedback on Lesson Observation

The Teaching Assistant (TA) rated Excellent in the four major observation items course Structure, course content, Teaching Skills, and Class Participation on the Teaching Observation Record Feedback Form. The TA was a Vietnamese graduate student who had obtained a master’s degree in Chinese language teaching from Ho Chi Minh National University and was also a Chinese language teacher at the same university, and who had come to Taiwan to study for a master’s degree in Chinese. Some of the TA’s responses on the feedback form were unclear, so the researcher briefly interviewed the TA on the afternoon of May 21, 2018 to confirm his meaning. From the interview, it was clear that he wanted to have a dialogue with the storyteller, and also with the author of the text. Thus, he had formed his own views and opinions about the literary work and the author of the text.

D. Self-Awareness of Learning

At the end of the semester, the students filled out a semi-structured study self-awareness form that contained the following questions: What impressed you most about this course? What content or activity impressed you? What did you learn from it? (Please cite an example). One student wrote, “Love Story, it is very special to see what we are experiencing in modern times through ancient literature!”. Another student wrote, “Love Story: no one taught us how to love, and it’s a bold and new thing to explore with others”. The use of dialogue-based teaching is a new occurrence in college Chinese courses, and the topic of love in particular could attract the active participation of young students in the dialogue. Dialogue-based teaching is a process of re-learning the knowledge acquired by the students and teachers through a dialogue based on parallel positions, sentimental communication, and mutual inquiry, so that a new body of knowledge is created and constructed jointly.

Through the learning feedback from the students and the feedback from the TA, the teachers further reflected on their teaching, finding that teachers and learners should learn from each other, be open to advice, reflect on their teaching, adjust and improve their teaching via the learners’ feedback, and practice teaching innovation together with their students.

V. Conclusion and Suggestions

A. Conclusion

As seen from the above-mentioned learning feedback, the goal of the dialogue-based teaching activity was basically achieved. In the interactive relationship between teaching and learning, it is necessary to reflect on the effectiveness of the teaching and evaluate the effectiveness of the learning. The assessment of learning effectiveness has shifted from a traditional teacher-centered instructional approach to a learner-centered instructional model, which is an important strategy used to assess learning for its own sake and to feed suggestions back into the overall teaching and learning.

According to the action plan questionnaire survey, 79% of the students chose the options of highly match and match, and nearly 80% of the students agreed that dialogue-based teaching is effective for learning. And, when we cross-referenced with the students’ and TA’s feedback, almost all of them agreed with the teaching effectiveness of using the learner’s own reflection and internal dialogue as well as their dialogue with peers, the text author, storyteller, and teacher. Through the design and planning of the action plan, the traditional teacher-as-subject and student-as-object lecture method was flipped to strengthen the students’ motivation, increase their participation in the classroom and the
connotations of building sentimental education by teachers and students together, and form a learning community.

This action plan had a number of limitations. First, there were too many students enrolled in the course, so the students had fewer chances to express themselves adequately. Also, as each class had students with diverse learning needs, the same set of teaching strategies may not have been suitable for all classes. It is suggested that the implementation of this action plan take into account that: 1) some students might not be comfortable talking about intimate relationships; 2) students must have a foundation of reflection and narrative; and 3) a complex teaching methodology should be adopted for the practice of dialogue-based teaching.

B. Suggestions

This study shares a practical teaching experience and enhances a critical awareness of the curriculum. There are two suggestions for future correlational studies which are, firstly, the course design should include group discussion among students, and secondly, through the process of teaching practice, the theoretical model of “learning and teaching” should be further constructed.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Yu-Hui Lin conducted the research and wrote the paper; Te-Sheng Chang analyzed the data; all authors had approved the final version.

FUNDING

The study was supported by a grant from a major project of philosophy and social sciences research in Hubei Province, China (21ZD130).

REFERENCES


Copyright © 2024 by the authors. This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0), which permits use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided that the article is properly cited, the use is non-commercial and no modifications or adaptations are made.