

Implementing Cross-Culture Pedagogies

EDUCATION IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION: ISSUES, CONCERNS AND PROSPECTS

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Pham Thi Hong Thanh

Implementing Cross-Culture Pedagogies

Cooperative Learning at Confucian Heritage
Cultures

 Springer

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Series Editors' Introduction

Several countries in Asia, such as China (including Hong Kong), Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam, Japan, Thailand and Korea have a Confucian heritage culture (CHC) which underpins and impacts considerably on many aspects of the society concerned, including its education and schooling system. Sometimes Western cooperative learning and student-centred learning have been imported into CHC countries without adequate thought being given to the cultural and philosophical differences between Western and CHC countries. To be successful, Western developed practices need to be imported into CHC countries only after carefully consideration of their appropriateness within the sociocultural context of the CHC countries concerned.

Cooperative learning is a group-centred and student-centred approach to classroom teaching and learning that actively engages the student in the educational process. Under this approach each group member is not only responsible for their own learning and understanding but they also take responsibility for helping other members in their team so that students maximise their own and each others' learning. This is often in contrast to the approach adopted in countries with a Confucian heritage culture where teaching and learning is organised in ways that stress teacher-centeredness.

As the author of this important and insightful book document, in an attempt to improve the quality and effectiveness of their education systems, CHC countries have often borrowed from Western educational philosophies, teaching and learning practices. This has not always worked well since education systems do not exist in isolation to the particular society in which they are embedded, but develop and evolve to meet the needs of a particular society at a certain time. Education systems reflect the political, cultural, social and economic characteristics of the society in which they are located, and so it often does not work well to simply take ideas from elsewhere which may not be compatible with the characteristics of the importing society.

This book examines and discusses various definitions of cooperative learning and the theoretical perspectives underpinning cooperative learning and examines how cooperative learning can work best in CHC classrooms. Cooperative learning

has become a favoured approach in CHC countries, and the book examines why this is the case. It provides an insightful analysis of the current situation and provides guidance on rethinking the importation of educational reforms to CHC classrooms. It goes on to examine educational reforms toward cooperative learning in Confucian heritage culture countries and how cooperative learning reforms in CHC countries can be most effectively implemented and managed. By examining actual experiences in the countries examined in the book, the author is able to effectively identify culturally appropriate strategies to enable CHC teachers promote cooperative learning. Having identified problems in CHC countries with regard to adopting cooperative learning strategies, the author identifies effective strategies to overcome these problems.

The book is important because it provides a theoretical framework and culturally appropriate and practical guidelines which will assist education researchers, policymakers and practitioners optimise success when importing cooperative learning models to classrooms in countries with a Confucian heritage culture.

The book provides an excellent overview of the theoretical perspectives that underpin cooperative learning, examines the claimed and real benefits of cooperative learning and assesses the pros and cons of cooperative learning strategies.

The book is likely to have a wide audience including teachers, teacher educators, education researchers and policymakers with an interest in understanding how to maximise the effectiveness of education systems. The book will also be of interest to members of the general public who are interested in understanding how school systems function and what needs to be done to increase the effectiveness and quality assurance of education and schooling systems.

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Preface

During the last two decades, countries with a Confucian heritage culture (CHC) (e.g. China, Hong Kong, Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan and Vietnam) have widely promoted teaching and learning reforms to advance their educational systems. To skip the painfully long research stage, CHC educators have often borrowed Western philosophies and practices with the assumption that what has been done successfully in the West will produce similar outcomes in the East. The wide importation of cooperative learning practices to CHC classrooms recently is an example. However, many studies have documented that cooperative learning has not worked effectively in CHC classrooms. The reason is that cooperative learning was often imposed on CHC teachers and students without a careful consideration of its appropriateness in the sociocultural context of CHC countries. This procedure is not effective and professional because learning is not an independent factor that stands alone. Rather, it is shaped and influenced by other factors including teaching methods, learning tasks, assessment demands, workload and the learning culture of students in the local context. For cooperative learning to work effectively in CHC classrooms, reformers need to consider the importation of this approach in line with a careful examination of all supports and constraints that affect those factors associated with learning.

The main purpose of this book is to provide an applied theoretical framework and culturally appropriate and practical instructions that could assist policymakers, reformers and teachers to address various factors at multiple levels. By doing this, they could optimise success in importing cooperative learning to CHC classrooms. Specifically, the book will:

- Provide a general discussion about cooperative learning, an investigation of how and why CHC nations have been trying to replace teacher-centred instruction with student-centred instruction as occurs when cooperative learning is implemented
- Provide a review of studies on cooperative learning in CHC countries, document mismatches between principles of cooperative learning and the sociocultural context of CHC countries

- Propose culturally appropriate strategies to assist CHC teachers to adjust their teaching to promote cooperative learning and to design the types of assessment tasks that can enhance cooperative learning
- Develop strategies to modify principles of cooperative learning in a manner that is culturally appropriate to CHC students' learning culture
- Propose strategies to assist CHC teachers to overcome structuring barriers when implementing cooperative learning

This book will have a broad target audience including preservice and experienced teachers who are interested in implementing student-centred learning practices both in the West and Asia. It will also be valuable as a reference text in undergraduate and postgraduate courses that focus on teacher training in education. The book will especially have wide appeal to universities and colleges in Asia, especially in CHC countries where the governments and educators are strongly encouraging the importation of student-centredness. This book promises to be a valuable asset at CHC schools and colleges because it provides useful strategies to design student-centred learning practices, particularly cooperative learning, that are culturally and institutionally appropriate in the CHC context. There is now a demand for such a volume because globalisation is ensuring that information on Western teaching and learning practices is readily available in Asia, often with no evidence on its suitability in culturally different contexts. Unfortunately, many Asian educators are adopting Western practices without considering their appropriateness for either the different instructional contexts or the impact of these practices on their students' learning. Guidelines for instructing local teachers in applying appropriate practices provided in the book are extremely useful and practical. In addition, strategies developed in the book can also be applied at education institutions in Western countries, especially in English-speaking countries, to help non-Western students study more effectively. This is important because the number of non-Western students at Western education institutions is increasing. Therefore, many Western colleges are trying to internationalise their curricula to make them more culturally inclusive to students coming from all cultural backgrounds. Discussions about differences in teaching and learning between the West and the East and the development of culturally appropriate strategies in the book promise to provide Western educators with a better understanding about how non-Western students learn. This could then enable them to teach non-Western students more effectively. Finally, the book would also be a valuable professional resource for learning support teachers, counsellors and psychologists who are regularly called upon to assist teachers in developing effective learning techniques that provide for the academic needs of all students.

Acknowledgements

I have gone through a long journey to complete this book, but I would not have reached this destination without the love, support and encouragement of many people. Therefore, I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to all those who made this book a possibility.

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Finally, I wish to express my gratefulness to the teachers and students in Vietnam who participated in empirical studies reported in this book. Without their support and kindness, I would not have been able to conduct the experiments. Their participation and help is an essential contribution to the value and relevance of this book.

Contents

1	Introduction and Research Overview	1
	References	8
2	Cooperative Learning in Comparison with the Teacher-Centredness	11
2.1	Introduction	11
2.2	Theoretical Perspectives Underpinning Cooperative Learning	12
2.2.1	Behavioural Learning Theory	12
2.2.2	Developmental Perspective	13
2.2.3	Social Interdependence Theory	14
2.3	Benefits of Cooperative Learning	16
2.3.1	Academic Achievement	16
2.3.2	Psychological Adjustment	17
2.3.3	Quality of Relationships	17
2.4	Cooperative Learning Strategies	18
2.5	Differences Between Cooperative Learning and Teacher-Centredness	20
2.6	Chapter Summary	21
	References	24
3	Cooperative Learning in CHC Countries	29
3.1	Introduction	29
3.2	Educational Reforms Toward Cooperative Learning in CHC Countries	30
3.2.1	Hong Kong	30
3.2.2	Malaysia	31
3.2.3	China	32
3.2.4	Korea	33
3.2.5	Japan	34
3.2.6	Singapore	35
3.2.7	Thailand	36
3.2.8	Vietnam	37

3.3	Cooperative Learning in CHC Classrooms	39
3.4	Chapter Summary	45
	References	46
4	An Applied Theoretical Framework to Implement Cooperative Learning in CHC Countries	51
4.1	Introduction	51
4.2	The Procedures of Implementing Current Cooperative Learning Reforms in CHC Countries	52
4.3	An Applied Theoretical Framework to Better Cooperative Learning Reforms in CHC Countries	54
4.3.1	Lens 1: Basic Unit of Analysis	55
4.3.2	Lens 2: Historicity and Continuity	55
4.3.3	Lens 3: Multivoicedness	56
4.3.4	Lens 4: Contradiction and Transformation	58
4.4	Chapter Summary	61
	References	62
5	Teaching Practices at CHC Education Institutions: A Hidden Challenge and Techniques to Enhance Cooperative Learning	65
5.1	Introduction	65
5.2	Teaching Practices at CHC Education Institutions	66
5.3	A Study to Develop Culturally Appropriate Strategies to Enable CHC Teachers to Promote Cooperative Learning	72
5.3.1	Methodology	72
5.3.2	Participants	74
5.3.3	Training Teachers	74
5.3.4	Context	74
5.3.5	Phase 1	75
5.3.6	Phase 2	89
5.3.7	Chapter Summary	97
	References	98
6	Assessment at CHC Education Institutions: Problems and Strategies to Enhance Cooperative Learning	103
6.1	Introduction	103
6.2	Nature of Assessments at CHC Education Institutions	104
6.3	A Study to Identify Assessment Practices That Could Enhance Cooperation Among CHC Students	106
6.3.1	Participants	106
6.3.2	Course Structure	106
6.3.3	Data Collection	107
6.3.4	Data Analysis	109
6.3.5	Results	110
6.3.6	Discussion	120
6.3.7	Chapter Summary	121
	References	122

- 7 Learning Culture of CHC Students: Its Support and Challenge to Cooperative Learning** 125
 - 7.1 Introduction 125
 - 7.2 Learning Cultural Values of CHC Students That Cooperative Learning Reformers Need to Be Aware of 126
 - 7.2.1 Friendship Attachment 126
 - 7.2.2 Group Leadership Preference 127
 - 7.2.3 Peer Assessment Avoidance 128
 - 7.3 A Study to Investigate Conflicts Between Learning Cultural Values of CHC Students and Cooperative Learning Principles 131
 - 7.3.1 Participants 131
 - 7.3.2 Procedures 131
 - 7.3.3 Data Collection Methods 133
 - 7.3.4 Data Analysis 134
 - 7.3.5 Results 135
 - 7.3.6 Chapter Summary 150
 - References 151
- 8 Structural Constraints at CHC Education Institutions: Barriers Hindering Cooperative Learning and Strategies to Overcome** 155
 - 8.1 Introduction 155
 - 8.2 Institutional Barriers That Hinder Cooperative Learning in CHC Classrooms 156
 - 8.2.1 Class Size 156
 - 8.2.2 Curriculum Coverage 157
 - 8.2.3 Limited Material Resources 159
 - 8.3 A Study to Develop Strategies to Minimise the Impact of Institutional Constraints on Cooperative Learning in CHC Classrooms 161
 - 8.3.1 Participants 161
 - 8.3.2 Procedures 161
 - 8.3.3 Data Collection Methods 163
 - 8.3.4 Questionnaires 163
 - 8.3.5 Data Analysis 164
 - 8.3.6 Results 165
 - 8.3.7 Discussion 169
 - 8.3.8 Chapter Summary 170
 - References 170
- 9 Conclusion: Reflection and Integration** 173
 - 9.1 Rethinking the Importation of Educational Reforms to CHC Classrooms 173

- 9.2 An Applied Theoretical Framework to Implement Educational Reforms in CHC Countries 175
 - 9.2.1 Changing Influential Factors 176
 - 9.2.2 Modify Reforms to Fit Desirable Learning Values of CHC Students 178
 - 9.2.3 Developing Strategies to Assist Teachers to Deal with Local Institutional Constraints 182
- 9.3 Contributions and Limitations 183
- References 189

- Appendix 1 193**
- Appendix 2 195**
- Appendix 3 197**
- Appendix 4 199**
- Appendix 5 201**
- Appendix 6 203**
- Appendix 7 205**
- Appendix 8 207**
- Appendix 9 209**
- Appendix 10 211**
- Appendix 11 213**
- Appendix 12 215**
- Index 217**