

Book Review

Reciprocal Learning between Canada and China in Language and Culture Education

Edited by Shijing Xu, Luxin Yang, Yuhan Deng, & Shuai Fu

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In the context of the growing global emphasis on cross-cultural understanding, education must move beyond traditional East-West comparisons to more collaborative and co-constructive approaches. *Reciprocal Learning between Canada and China in Language and Culture Education*, edited by Dr. Shijing Xu, Dr. Luxin Yang, Yuhan Deng, and Dr. Shuai Fu, emerges within this transformative shift. Based on Xu and Connelly's Partnership Grant Project titled *Reciprocal Learning in Teacher Education and School Education Between Canada and China*, funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), this book presents reciprocal learning as a transformative model rooted in mutual respect, joint inquiry, and sustained collaboration. The project has attracted a group of like-minded individuals—including school teachers, principals, students, graduate students, pre-service teachers, and professors—from both Canada and China. It demonstrates how partnerships between universities and schools can foster meaningful cross-cultural communication and promote dialogue across cultures (Hayhoe & Li, 2008). As stated in the preface, "It showcases a journey that transcends the boundaries of conventional language education, and the possibilities that arise when different linguistic and cultural backgrounds come together" (p. xi). The editors, who have extensive experience in cross-cultural teacher education and second language research, have

contributed to the project since 2013, embodying the collaborative spirit of Reciprocal Learning (Xu, 2017). Clara Howitt, Superintendent of the Greater Essex County District School Board (GECDSB), describes reciprocal learning as a humanistic model that connects cultures and fosters educational change (Howitt, 2019).

The book is well-structured and rich in content. It is divided into five sections and twelve chapters. The first section (Chapter 1) introduces the theoretical connotation of reciprocal learning and its innovative significance in comparative education research. This part points out that traditional comparative education is mostly centered on differences, while reciprocal learning emphasizes the possibility of generating understanding and co-constructing knowledge through cultural dialogue. As the authors assert in Chapter 1, “reciprocal learning is not always about learning from the others but more of a reflection on their own teaching practices and gaining new insights through the international and cross-cultural interactions and collaborations” (p.19). This concept not only responds to the problem of power-asymmetrical education but also provides researchers with a new methodological direction.

The second section (Chapters 2 to 5) focuses on the benefits of sister school network at the basic education level between China and Canada. Through the observation and analysis of teaching activities such as bilingual reading, writing, and calligraphy teaching, the authors reveal how teachers reflect on their own teaching concepts in practice and construct new teaching identities in cultural conflict and integration. As Chi et al. highlight the cultural differences in pedagogical interpretation in Chapter 3 and note that “while both countries advocate student-centered education, the teaching practices being used are very different” (p. 49). Additionally, in Chapter 5, Guo and Zhang share that “we positioned ourselves not only as researchers but also as learners and narrative inquirers who sought to learn from our participants and fully respect their personal and practical knowledge” (p. 92).

The third section presents narratives from Chinese and Canadian pre-service teachers engaged in the Reciprocal Learning, capturing the complexities of teacher identity formation amid cultural shock, adaptation, and evolving teaching strategies. Through reflective storytelling, the chapters illustrate how participants gained deeper empathy, re-evaluated their pedagogical beliefs, and navigated cross-cultural challenges—such as language barriers and differing educational norms. Rather than highlighting cultural differences, this section underscores themes of reciprocal learning, self-repositioning, and

the awakening of professional subjectivity, revealing how meaningful intercultural experiences can reshape both teaching philosophy and practice.

The fourth section (Chapters 9 and 10), written by Canadian graduate students, offers first-person narratives of their research, teaching, and living experiences in Chinese schools. In Chapter 9, Potocek reflects on conducting research in China on bilingualism and cross-cultural reciprocal learning. Chapter 10, by Guo and Meloche, explores how Canadian pre-service teachers, particularly Meloche, navigate language barriers and adapt to teaching English in Chinese classrooms. These accounts capture cultural shock, adaptation, and the development of cultural sensitivity, using simple, sincere language that enhances the narrative dimension of academic writing.

The fifth section (Chapters 11 and 12) is a commentary section, written by Dr. Jim Cummins and Dr. Zhichang Xu. These two internationally recognized scholars have contributed to the theoretical development of reciprocal learning through the lenses of language education and cultural philosophy. Dr. Cummins points out that teaching must be a process of dialogue, and both parties contribute to and benefit from the West-East Reciprocal Learning. Dr. Zhichang Xu emphasizes that cross-cultural cooperation should go beyond the old model of transplantation and borrowing and develop an educational philosophy of two-way learning based on equality and mutual learning. This section not only provides readers with theoretical sublimation but also highlights the contribution of this book to international comparative education.

This book brings together university language educators, graduate students, teachers, and their students from Canada and China to carry out a series of meaningful teaching and research activities centered on cross-cultural dialogue. Through these activities, educators from both countries go beyond superficial comparisons and explore the deeper cultural logics underpinning their respective education systems. More importantly, this book illustrates and enacts reciprocal learning as a paradigm distinct from the traditional comparative education model. This framework emphasizes finding common ground in cultural differences and promoting innovation through mutual understanding and appreciation. It offers a compelling vision for promoting educational equity and fostering cross-cultural literacy, as well as practical insights for educators in the East and the West.

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