

A Brief Discussion on Ye Shengtao's Views on Chinese Language Education Reform

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Abstract

Ye Shengtao's views on Chinese language education are profound and groundbreaking. This article focuses on Ye's representative works on Chinese language education and teaching, briefly examining the essence of his educational philosophy, including his views on the subject, teaching materials, the role of teacher, and teaching methods. The article concludes that Ye Shengtao's views on Chinese language education are ultimately about educational reform and points out their guiding significance today.

Keywords

Ye Shengtao, Chinese language education reform, teaching in order to stop teaching, guiding significance.

1. Introduction

Ye Shengtao's practice in Chinese language curriculum reform was not only groundbreaking at the time, but also continues to have important implications for Chinese language education and teaching today. Drawing on Ye's works and specific practices, this article briefly discusses his views on Chinese language education reform and their current significance and influence.

2. A Brief Discussion on Ye Shengtao's Views on Chinese Language Education

Ye's views on Chinese language education are profound and cross-cutting, encompassing every aspect of Chinese language education. The author can only briefly summarize the key points below:

2.1. Discipline Perspective: What Chinese Language Education Teaches

Chinese language education teaches reading and writing. In his article "The Purpose of the Chinese Language Curriculum," Professor Ye expounded on the core objectives of the Chinese language curriculum[1], expressing his disagreement with the traditional view that emphasizes classical Chinese over vernacular writing. He believed that the primary purpose of the Chinese language curriculum lies in "the overall cultivation of the reading and writing of the native language." "In other words, it is to 'cultivate reading ability' and 'cultivate writing ability.'" Professor Ye pointed out that to cultivate reading ability, students need to read extensively outside of class, as textbooks merely provide examples for guidance and explanation. The cultivation of writing skills should be based on personal real-life experiences and emotions, encouraging students to express their own ideas and emotions in writing, rather than simply pursuing "flowery rhetoric and the ability to write a few articles." In Professor Ye's educational philosophy, Chinese language is not just a learning subject; it also has instrumental and humanistic significance. It is an indispensable tool for people to express their thoughts and communicate with others, and it carries a humanistic concern. He emphasized that Chinese language education should be relevant to real life, focusing on practicality and relevance, connecting it to students' world of experience and enabling them to apply the language

knowledge and skills they acquire in real life. Chinese language education teaches listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In his article "What Kind of Subject is Chinese Language?" [2], Professor Ye introduced the origins of the name of the Chinese language subject, explored the question of "what kind of subject is Chinese Language?", and identified the key reasons for students' inadequate language proficiency. He pointed out that the core of Chinese language learning lies in mastering and using language skills, both oral and written. This course requires students not only to receive information—that is, to understand others' words and writings through listening and reading—but also to be able to express themselves effectively—that is, to convey their thoughts and feelings to others through speaking and writing. From Professor Ye's perspective, the name "Chinese Language" derives from its integration of both "language" (oral language) and "writing" (written language). Professor Ye believes that listening, speaking, reading, and writing are the four fundamental skills of Chinese language learning, interconnected and mutually reinforcing. Although listening and reading are relatively under-assessed in traditional education and examination systems, they are just as important as speaking and writing, and together they constitute comprehensive language proficiency. "Listening, speaking, reading, and writing are equally important and should be comprehensively assessed." Discussing the reasons for "students' insufficient language proficiency," Professor Ye believes that "the lack of a comprehensive system for multifaceted Chinese language teaching is probably a particularly important factor." He concludes his article by suggesting that the newly established Primary School Chinese Language Teaching Research Association invest effort in establishing a comprehensive system for primary school Chinese language instruction. Of course, this has already been achieved.

2.2. Textbook Perspective: What Does Chinese Language Education Rely On?

"One Hundred and Eight Lessons in Chinese" is a significant Chinese language textbook co-authored by Xia Yizun and Ye Shengtao. This textbook reflects their exploration and practice of modern Chinese language education concepts. Its editorial outline aims to establish a systematic and scientific Chinese language teaching system and reform existing problems in traditional Chinese language instruction. Based on Ye Shengtao's article "Editorial Outline of 'One Hundred and Eight Lessons in Chinese'" and the actual content of this textbook [3], its characteristics can be summarized as follows:

Unitized Curriculum: The textbook consists of six volumes, each with eighteen lessons. Each lesson constitutes an independent teaching unit with clear teaching objectives. This design breaks the previous pattern of vague objectives and scattered content, making teaching activities more focused and efficient. **Integrated Content and Structure:** Each unit consists of four interconnected sections: "Literary Talk," "Selected Works," "Grammar or Rhetoric," and "Questions and Answers." "Wenhua" serves as a framework, guiding learning; "Wenxuan" complements "Wenhua" with practical examples; "Grammar or Rhetoric" knowledge is directly drawn from the content of the anthology, closely integrating theory with practice; and "Xiaoxue" tests learning outcomes and promotes knowledge application.

Goal-Oriented: Each lesson focuses on a specific knowledge point or skill training point, ensuring that students make clear progress each week. By the end of the three-year learning cycle, students will have developed comprehensive reading and writing skills.

Systematic Knowledge Construction: Particularly in teaching writing, "One Hundred and Eight Lessons in Chinese" attempts to construct a hierarchical, systematic writing instructional sequence through 108 "Wenhua" passages, laying the foundation for the "discipline" of writing knowledge.

No Annotations: Mr. Ye Shengtao believed that "this leeway should be left to the instructor."

Pedagogical Innovation: In its selection of texts, the book prioritizes the inclusion of practical writing. Overall, Ye Shengtao and Xia Yizun were quite dissatisfied with the state of Chinese

language education at the time, believing its objectives to be unclear and its methods to be outdated. Through "One Hundred and Eight Lessons in Chinese Language," they hoped to introduce a more specific and scientific teaching approach, changing the traditional practice of relying solely on the reading of selected texts without setting specific teaching objectives.

2.3. Views on Being a Teacher: How Should a Chinese Language Teacher Be?

In "Two Basic Concepts of Chinese Language Teaching," Mr. Ye expounded on his core views on Chinese language teaching[4], which can be summarized into two basic concepts: First, Chinese is a language subject, and Chinese language teaching must not only provide technical training but also contain educational significance; second, the meaning of Chinese language is different from that of literature, and its scope is broader than that of literature. Regarding the first concept, Mr. Ye Shengtao pointed out that while Chinese language instruction should focus on teaching language and characters, it should also cultivate students' moral character and thinking. Chinese language instruction should not only focus on content, but also on teaching methods. This means that when teaching Chinese, it's important not only to convey literary content and cultural knowledge, but also to employ effective teaching strategies and methods to enhance students' language proficiency, including reading comprehension and written expression. Regarding the second concept, Mr. Ye emphasized that the scope of Chinese language is broader than literature. Teaching Chinese language encompasses more than just literature; it encompasses a wider range of language skills and knowledge. He advocated that the mission of Chinese language instruction is to provide basic training in reading and writing, skills that are essential for lifelong learning and social life. He stated that "other disciplines are irresponsible for this kind of technical training; it rests entirely on the shoulders of Chinese language instruction." Mr. Ye's ideas are reflected not only in this article but also in textbooks such as "One Hundred and Eight Lessons in Chinese Language," co-edited by him and Mr. Xia Yizun, as mentioned above.

2.4. Teaching Methodology: How to Teach (and Learn) Chinese Language Education

How should students be taught to read? In his article "Guidance on Skimming Reading—Preface to Examples of Skimming Reading Guidance,"[5] Mr. Ye Shengtao pointed out that teachers should provide guidance to students, whether they are intensive reading or skimming. "Single short articles are not substantial, so they require meticulous and careful study." This is intensive reading. Regarding skimming, Mr. Ye believed that while "skimming no longer requires detailed guidance from teachers," this "does not mean that guidance is unnecessary." "However, guidance for skimming differs from guidance for intensive reading. Intensive reading guidance requires meticulous attention to detail and full expression of the text; skimming guidance, on the other hand, requires a concise overview, allowing students to enjoy the text naturally." Mr. Ye proposed that before students begin reading, teachers should provide guidance on the version, bibliography, reference books, reading methods, and questions. After reading a section, teachers and students should "report and discuss their practical experience reading that section in class." After the entire book is read, teachers and students should "give a comprehensive report and discussion on the entire book." Finally, teachers should assess students, "assessing for the students' benefit and, based on the assessment, planning to further their interests." At the end of the article, Mr. Ye also set requirements for reading speed. How to teach students to write[6]? In his article "Reading is the Foundation of Writing," Mr. Ye Shengtao emphasized "focusing on training." "What is training? It means making what students learn their own." He devoted considerable space to explaining that "writing is actually based on reading" and concluding that "reading is the foundation of writing." Mr. Ye even raised the issue of "literature and morality." Explaining a text requires understanding the words and phrases and understanding the content, in order to embody the unity of literature and morality. Mr. Ye

pointed out that "the fundamental point is a thorough understanding of the text." First, teachers must prepare lessons carefully. Second, they must guide students to consciously think while listening. Then, students will gradually learn to read without being taught. This is "training," cultivating writing skills through inspiration from reading. Of course, Mr. Ye also openly pointed out some problems in writing training, such as the problem of composition questions. He explained the solution thoroughly and easily: "Set questions that delve into the student's mind." Furthermore, in his article "How to Write," [7] Mr. Ye criticized the shortcomings of "composition method books," stating that "the most important thing is to cultivate language habits," even elevating language habits to the level of "a crucial life skill." Mr. Ye said that lectures and debates, the refinement of experience, perseverance, and listening to others' advice are crucial. Learning language, reading others' writing...are all ways to cultivate language habits. It's particularly noteworthy that at the end of his article, Mr. Ye used two phrases, "Writing articles shouldn't be like this," to point out the difference between writing articles and language, and to highlight the key technical points of writing articles: staying on topic, not being verbose, using appropriate detail and omission, and using vocabulary and intonation commonly used in various regions. How should we teach students Chinese? "Studying Chinese Seriously" [8] can be considered a methodological summary of Mr. Ye's thoughts on language education, as well as a summary and refinement of the aforementioned articles. First, the importance of learning Chinese: teaching people to absorb and express themselves, to be able to read and write fluently. Second, the correct understanding of learning Chinese: language is a tool for thought. Thought must be combined with practice, and learning must be applied to achieve the purpose of learning Chinese. Third, learning Chinese shouldn't be achieved quickly; it should be accumulated through practice, forming habits, and diligently practicing. Fourth, learning Chinese requires practicing basic skills: recognizing and writing characters, using words, analyzing sentences, and structuring articles. Mr. Ye uses vivid examples and practical language to illustrate these fundamental skills. The explanation is clear and concise. Finally, seriousness is key; we must cultivate a serious attitude and diligently study independently.

3. Brief Opinion: Ye Shengtao's Views on Chinese Language Education are ultimately about educational reform.

Ye Shengtao's writings span a long period of time and cover a wide range of topics, encompassing a vast array of aspects of Chinese language education. Even more commendable is his accessible and thoughtful writing, drawing on the strengths of others, and using vivid examples to illustrate the key points and techniques of Chinese language education. Through this study, I believe that Ye Shengtao's concepts on Chinese language education are aimed at reforming traditional Chinese language education, reforming teachers' teaching methods, and transforming students' learning habits, ultimately achieving the goal of "teaching in order not to teach" and "teaching in order not to teach," thereby achieving "learning in order to learn." Ye Shengtao's educational perspectives not only focus on imparting knowledge but also emphasize the cultivation of students' abilities and the development of independent learning habits, which aligns highly with the philosophies of modern education. In summary, my observations are as follows:

3.1. Instrumentality and Habit Cultivation

Mr. Ye believed that language is instrumental, serving as a vital tool for people to communicate their thoughts and express their feelings. Therefore, the primary task of language education is to cultivate students' language application skills, enabling them to use the language proficiently and accurately. Mr. Ye also emphasized the importance of developing habits, believing that good language learning habits are crucial for improving students' language literacy and independent learning abilities.

3.2. Student-centered and Teacher-led

Mr. Ye Shengtao adhered to a student-centered educational philosophy, believing that students are the main body of education and that education should be tailored to their needs and characteristics. He also emphasized the leading role of teachers in the educational process, believing that teachers should play a guiding, inspiring, and supportive role, helping students discover and solve problems and cultivating their independent learning abilities and innovative spirit.

3.3. Equal Emphasis on Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing

Mr. Ye advocated a balanced approach to teaching: listening, speaking, reading, and writing, believing that these four language skills are interrelated and mutually reinforcing. Therefore, in language education, emphasis should be placed on cultivating and training these four skills, enabling students to flexibly use language in various situations and contexts.

3.4. Role of Chinese Language Teachers

Mr. Ye Shengtao repeatedly emphasized that Chinese language teachers are not only transmitters of knowledge, but also guides and facilitators of students' Chinese language learning. Chinese language teachers should possess profound language literacy and educational philosophies, and be able to flexibly utilize various teaching methods and approaches based on students' specific circumstances and needs, thereby stimulating their interest and enthusiasm in learning.

3.5. Overall Reform of Chinese Language Education

Mr. Ye believed that Chinese language education is a systematic project requiring holistic reform. He advocated for the construction of a scientific and rational Chinese language curriculum system, emphasizing the hierarchy and coherence of the curriculum. He also emphasized strengthening the development and reform of Chinese language textbooks, selecting outstanding works that are contemporary, ideological, and artistic.

Furthermore, he advocated strengthening the evaluation and feedback mechanisms of Chinese language education to timely understand students' learning progress and teachers' teaching effectiveness, so as to implement targeted improvements and optimization of Chinese language education.

4. Inspiration - The Guiding Significance of Ye Shengtao's Views on Chinese Language Education in the Present

Mr. Ye Shengtao's views on Chinese language education reform have profound implications and broad guiding significance. In today's society, Given this context, we should deeply study and grasp the essence of his educational philosophy, integrating it into our Chinese language education practices to promote the continuous development and progress of Chinese language education. First, Professor Ye emphasized a student-centered approach, focusing on students' interests and needs[9]. In today's Chinese language education, we must also respect students' individual differences and pay attention to their learning interests and intrinsic motivations to stimulate their interest and enthusiasm. Second, Professor Ye advocated a text-centered approach, cultivating students' language sense, cultivation, and thinking skills through textual study. In today's Chinese language education, we still need to prioritize the selection and interpretation of texts, guiding students to deeply understand and appreciate excellent literary works, and improving their language literacy and aesthetic abilities. Furthermore, Professor Ye suggestedHe advocated a teaching philosophy that prioritized listening, speaking, reading, and writing, believing that writing is an integral part of life. This philosophy inspires us to focus on

cultivating students' comprehensive language skills in Chinese language education, enabling them to flexibly apply what they learn in real life[10].

Finally, Mr. Ye's philosophy of "teaching in order not to teach" emphasizes the long-term goals and ultimate concern of education. In contemporary Chinese language education, we must focus on students' long-term development, cultivating their independent learning abilities and lifelong learning habits, enabling them to continuously improve and excel in their future lives and work. We strive, supported by the tradition of modern Chinese language education pioneered by our predecessors, including Mr. Ye Shengtao, to uphold integrity, inherit and innovate, and allow the charm and poetic spirit of our mother tongue to flourish in Chinese language education[11].

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