



Exploration of teacher life stories: Taiwanese history teachers' curricular gatekeeping of controversial public issues

Yu-Han Hung

University of Houston-Downtown, Department of Urban Education, One main Street, Suite C430C, Houston, TX 77002-1001, USA



HIGHLIGHTS

- Personal practical knowledge is the intersection of self, family, and society.
- Teachers attribute their views about CPI to their personal life experiences.
- Teachers create the possibility of imaginative engagement with CPI.

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 18 October 2016

Received in revised form

17 September 2017

Accepted 3 November 2017

Keywords:

Controversial public issues
Curricular-instructional gatekeeper
Teacher personal practical knowledge
Teacher as stranger
History curriculum
Taiwanese teachers' teaching

ABSTRACT

This study explores teachers' personal practical knowledge and curricular-instructional gatekeeping as they relate to the teaching of contemporary controversial public issues in Taiwan (e.g., national identity, sovereignty, and ethnic issues). Using a case study design, this study documents how six social studies teachers make curricular decisions about teaching controversial public issues by making use of their personal practical knowledge. Findings illuminate that personal practical knowledge plays a role in teacher's curricular-instructional gate keeping in socially divisive contexts. In sum, this study, refracted through the national context of Taiwan, helps us understand the relationship between a teacher's own imaginative worldview, their sense of personal and professional identity, and their classroom teaching practices.

© 2017 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Taiwan also known as the Republic of China (ROC), has been ambiguously recognized as a sovereign nation in the world since 1949. When we Taiwanese think about ourselves as Taiwanese, we think about Taiwan as an independent country, one that has been challenged by a dynamic relationship with the People's Republic of China (PRC). Outside of Taiwan, there is controversy with the way the nation is viewed within the context of historical development, international relations, and national identity. Further, inside of Taiwan, concepts of sovereignty, the sensitive relationship between the PRC and Taiwan, and the isolated sense of our international relations have been the dynamic factors impacting Taiwan in terms of education, culture, history, society, and people. In particular, education, teachers, and students have been influenced seriously by the controversies inside and outside of Taiwan.

No matter the changes in the ever-shifting landscape of party and ideology, in Taiwan, teachers have been recognized as those who guide students to acquire knowledge, develop moral values, and cultivate self-identity. Thus, teachers play important roles in Taiwanese society by helping students face controversial issues inside and outside of Taiwanese schools, where sovereignty, territory, and national identity have been changing. However, teachers in Taiwan are not completely unique in the situation they find themselves in. There are similarities, for example, to teachers in the U.S., where research has shown that teachers feel hesitant to teach polemical issues and have serious concerns about teaching such subjects. Diana Hess (2009), for example, points out that teachers are hesitant to teach controversial public issues (such as abortion or same-sex marriage) because they worry about causing conflict in the classroom. Yet research claims there is a necessity for having public discussion about such issues in the classrooms in order to develop students' democratic values (Hess, 2009).

In line with much of the research on this topic, Evan, Avery, and

E-mail address: hungy@uhd.edu.

Pedersen (1999), for example, have shown that American teachers often avoid topics that are too controversial because they worry about students' comprehension, the administration's response, and parents' attitudes. Whatever the country, choosing not to talk about controversial public issues in schools means teachers are making choices about what to let into their classrooms; they choose "safe knowledge" to present to their students. In addition, Thornton (1991) points out that, no matter the national contexts, teachers are important actors in schools, given that teachers have their own reactions and responses to controversial public issues. When they are facing controversy, they are not merely deliverers of the curriculum; instead, they bring their own ideas and interpretations to their teaching; they are gatekeepers (Thornton, 1991). Teachers play a particularly pivotal role in the gatekeeping of controversial curriculum content in social studies, since they design and steer conversations that can never be fully scripted (Hess, 2009).

Therefore, it becomes imperative for researchers to understand teachers' personal practical knowledge—their implicitly held values and beliefs about teaching and learning, for teaching controversial public issues. In this way, the constructs of "personal practical knowledge" and "gatekeeping" are key foundational concepts for this study. My study aims to investigate Taiwanese secondary school teachers' personal practical knowledge of their gatekeeping practices as it relates to teaching of controversial public issues.

2. Taiwanese context

Taiwan, as an island in southeastern Asia, has been not recognized as an independent country because of its sensitive and complex relationship with the People's Republic of China (PRC)—a relationship that has dramatically influenced Taiwanese history, culture, and path of development. The year 1949 is pivotal for understanding the relationship between the PRC and Taiwan. Before 1949, the Chinese state was called the Republic of China (ROC); it was an era of Chinese history that began in 1912. It was preceded by the Qing Dynasty and followed by the People's Republic of China.

At the end of Chinese Civil War, 1949, the communists gained control of the mainland, while the Kuomintang (Nationalists) fled to Taiwan. Meanwhile, in Taiwan, between 1895 and 1945, Taiwan was a dependency of Empire of Japan. The expansion into Taiwan was a part of Imperial Japan's general policy of southward expansion during the late nineteenth century. During the era of Japanese colonial domination, Taiwan went through a period of modernization that included, for example, representative democracy, election systems,¹ medical developments, and compulsory education.

After 1949, Kuomintang (Nationalists) leaders and supporters fled to Taiwan, took over leadership of the island, and claimed to represent the Republic of China (ROC). That is, they claimed the right to be the "true" Chinese government. On the other hand, in mainland China, the Communist Party of China (CPC), under the leadership of Mao Zedong, after emerging victorious during the Chinese Civil War (1927–1950), proclaimed that the CPC represented the "true" Chinese government. From Tiananmen Square, Mao declared the founding of the People's Republic of China on October 1, 1949. While the international community did not immediately recognize the PRC as the "true" Chinese government,

the PRC has been synonymous with China for the past several decades.

The government of Taiwan/the Republic of China has overseen several critical developments, for example: democratic reform, the 228 movement,² the White Terror,³ massive economic growth, and the development of an "international" policy that included developing "cross-strait relations" with mainland China. In sum, Taiwan has developed, to a certain degree, a unique culture, politic, education in the post-1949 period—one that has created essential differences with mainland China and the PRC state.

3. Teaching controversial public issues in Asian contexts

Regarding the research related to teaching controversial public issues in the U.S context, most teachers agree that democratic societies are built by citizens who are able to engage in reasoned discussion (Hess, 2008, 2009; Lockwood & Harris, 1985; Parker, 2003). This research suggests that talking about controversial public issues helps to develop democratic values and political tolerance within and for a democratic society. However, most research in the U.S. has indicated that teachers at the elementary level often avoid topics they perceive as too controversial (Evan et al., 1999; McBee, 1996). At the secondary level, teachers lack readiness and worry about conflicts created by discussing controversial public issues, which direct schools away from a place which furthers the creation, maintenance, and transformation of democracy (Hess, 2009). Along the same line, in most U.S classrooms, teachers are less likely to discuss controversial public issues, especially issues about taboo topics, discussions of which are a challenging task for most teachers and requires skills and wisdom (Avery, Levy, & Simmons, 2013). In addition, other Western national contexts, for example, Northern Ireland and England, face similar issues of attempting and failing to teach controversy-free history courses (Barton & McCully, 2007). These are broad trends; no doubt, there are teachers in the U.S. and other Western countries who regularly bring powerful and authentic social studies content to their students through exploration of controversial public issues. However, controversial public issues teaching is further complicated through an Asian lens.

In Asian contexts, different national contexts have influenced various approaches of teaching controversial public issues in social studies classrooms. Ho (2010) contends that K-12 teachers in Singapore consciously avoided addressing controversial issues and intentionally did not contest the central narrative of racial harmony, meritocracy, and progress, because of a climate of censorship and a regime of high stakes tests that restrain democratic discourse within the classroom. In South Korea, classrooms often have a dualistic approach to problems, where controversial issues are treated as factual problems with two clearly delineated sides (Misco, 2016). That means teachers' who teach controversial public issues construct debates and discussion to develop students' critical thinking and cultural tolerance, yet, those discussions and debates end with "the right answer." In addition, similar to other Asian countries, South Korea's entrance exam, textbooks, administrative

² The 228 Incident, referring to February 28, was the prelude to the era of White Terror from 1949 until martial law lifted in 1987, when dissidents and intellectuals were imprisoned or executed to assert KMT rule over the island. Chiang Kai-shek launched a crackdown on February 28, 1947 that lasted for weeks and saw up to 28,000 civilian casualties.

³ The term "White Terror" in its broadest meaning refers to the entire period from 1949 to 1987. Around 140,000 Taiwanese were imprisoned during this period, most of them were perceived opposition to KMT. Most of those prosecuted were labeled by the Kuomintang as "bandit spies," meaning spies for Chinese communists, and punished as such.

¹ Democratization processes in Taiwan proceeded incrementally over a prolonged period punctuated by electoral milestones. Activists had to mobilize, usually peacefully, in order to pressure the KMT into adopting reforms. In 1986, the first organized opposition party, the Democratic Progressive Party was formed. According to Martial Law, organizing such a party was illegal, but Martial Law was rescinded a year later.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6850144>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6850144>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)