

Analyzing Floating Children in China Through Community Cultural Capital Lens

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Abstract

Yosso (2005) proposed the theory of community cultural wealth through the critical race theory (CRT) lens to challenge traditional interpretations of Bourdieuean cultural capital theory. Similarly, Mu and Jia (2016) conducted a qualitative research in China to reveal that the rural dispositions of floating children as one of disadvantaged groups could turn into recognized and valued cultural capital.

Keywords

Community Cultural Capital; Critical Race Theory (CRT); Floating Children.

1. Introduction

The theory of community cultural wealth was proposed by Yosso (2005) when utilizing a critical race theory (CRT) lens to challenge traditional interpretations of Bourdieuean cultural capital theory and introduce this alternative concept in USA. CRT changed the perspective of research from deficit thinking of Communities of Color as culturally poor and instead focused on and learned from these communities' cultural assets and wealth. Six forms of capital drawn on the knowledge that Students of Color brought to the classroom from their families and communities. This CRT approach to education included a commitment to developing schools that recognizing the multiple strengths of Communities of Color in order to serve the larger goal of social and racial justice. Similarly, Mu and Jia (2016) conducted a qualitative research in China to reveal that the rural dispositions of floating children who were already viewed as in disadvantage position could turn into recognized and valued cultural capital. In China, equal social and educational rights for disadvantaged groups such as floating children have become a high priority on the Chinese government's agenda. Although there is rarely issue of racism in China, this study, to some extent, responded to the views of Yosso which provided a more in-depth direction for Chinese scholars to study cultural capital in education.

2. The Theory of Community Cultural Wealth

2.1. Critical Race Theory and Critiquing Bourdieu'S Theory of Cultural Capital

Yosso (2005) argued that social researchers could use critical race theory(CRT) as a framework to establish theories to study and challenge the implicit and explicit influence of race and racism on social structure, practice and discourse. In addition, CRT in education reveals the paradox of education, where schools most often oppress and marginalize while maintaining the potential for liberation and empowerment. So, CRT not only verifies and concentrates the experiences of People of Color, but also negates dominant ideology and white privilege in the field of education. Looking through a CRT lens means acknowledging deficit thinking, one of the most prevalent forms of racism in contemporary US schools on account of omission of the voices of People of Color. Deficit thinking holds minority students and families responsible for poor academic

performance, and they need to change to fit into this system which is already effective and equitable. But according to Yosso (2005), from the perspective of CRT, the culture of Students of Color can cultivate and enhance their abilities in light of results of many CRT researchers' work.

After challenging deficit thinking through CRT to better understand the empowering potential the culture of students of color, Yosso (2005) began to criticize Bourdieu's theory (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) of cultural capital. In Bourdieu's theory, cultural capital is the most concerned factor in sociological research which is a way for a group to maintain its dominance or obtain its status (Bourdieu, 1997). Cultural capital contains three forms: objectified cultural capital, which refers to objects which require special cultural abilities to be used and appreciated; embodied cultural capital, which is the disposition to appreciate and understand objectified cultural capital; and institutionalized cultural capital, which refers to educational credentials and the qualification certification system.

Bourdieu believes that cultural capital is the accumulation of cultural knowledge, skills and abilities owned and inherited by privileged groups in society (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). The dominant groups in society are able to maintain power because access is limited to acquiring and learning strategies in order to use these forms of capital to achieve social mobility. Therefore, Bourdieu's work has been used to assert that some groups are culturally rich while others are culturally poor. This interpretation of Bourdieu takes White, middle class culture as the standard, that is to say, cultural capital is not only inherited or possessed by the middle class, but also the accumulation of specific forms of knowledge, skills and abilities valued by socially privileged groups. But CRT shifts the focus from notions of White, middle class culture to the cultures of People of Color.

2.2. Revealing Community Cultural Wealth

Through the CRT lens, Yosso (2005) challenged the traditional interpretation of Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) and introduced another theory called community cultural wealth. She outlined at least six forms of capital that make up community cultural wealth, often without recognition or acknowledgement, such as aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital (Yosso, 2005). In examining some of the underutilized assets that students of color bring into the classroom from their families and communities, Yosso (2005) pointed to the potential of community cultural wealth in transforming the process of education. 'Community cultural wealth is an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression.' (Yosso, 2005, p. 77) Indeed, the theory of community cultural wealth is not just to 'see' the strengths of Communities of Colors, instead involves a commitment to serve the larger goal of social and racial justice.

3. Turning Rural Habitus of Floating Children into Recognized Cultural Capital

3.1. Background of Floating Children and Educational Problems

'Floating children' are a unique term created by China's urbanization and 'hukou' system of household registration. Since the Reform and Opening-up policy in 1978, a large number of rural population into the urban regions to work and live in China's rapid urbanization process. Some migrant parents choose to bring their children into the cities in this rural-to-urban migration, these children are called 'floating children'. Under 'hukou' system, floating children remain full residents of rural hukou. Although they currently live in cities, they are deprived of the full civil rights of many of the social benefits and public services enjoyed by city dwellers.

Against this background of large-scale migration, the educational problems of floating children are increasingly apparent (Mu and Jia, 2016).

In China local governments decide on the distribution of and resource allocation of public schools in their administrative regions according to the distribution of school-age children among permanent or officially registered residents in the regions (Yan, 2005). Without an urban hukou, floating children often face considerable difficulties in registering and are deprived of the right to free compulsory education in urban public schools (Goodburn, 2009). In addition to the school-attendance problems, there are problems such as instability of 'migrant-sponsored schools' and low enrollment rate of floating children (Mu et al., 2016). Floating children also reportedly deplore social exclusion in cities in response to 'unfriendly', 'bullying', 'detesting' and 'isolated' environments, feeling 'very uncomfortable', 'angry', 'insecure' and 'annoyed' (Wang, 2008, P.697).

3.2. Associating with Bourdieu's Theoretical Framework

Due to the hukou system, floating children are denied full civil rights in Chinese cities. In this respect, hukou is a kind of institutionalized cultural capital -- an object form of institutional recognition (household book) (Bourdieu, 1986). Floating children's rural hukou means nothing in urban China. Therefore, floating children often come to Chinese cities with a sense of inferiority brought by second-class status (Irwin 2000). The second-class status of floating children showed up in their unique ways of speaking, doing, and being, acquired through their rural cultural history, are what Bourdieu meant by 'habitus', or 'systems of durable, transposable dispositions' (Bourdieu, 1977, P.72). These special rural dispositions were in stark contrast to their urban peers associated with the embodied cultural capital valued by the urban public school sectors. Floating children may be stigmatized or denied access to certain areas of urban public schools, partly because of the unrecognized rural habitus (Mu et al., 2016).

3.3. Recognizing and Valuing Rural Habitus as Cultural Capital

Mu et al. (2016) conducted an investigation on the rural dispositions of floating children by interviewing leaders, teachers and students from four schools in Beijing, where a large number of floating children are currently living. Drawing on Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, the study revealed that the rural habitus of floating children can distinguish these children from their urban peers. This habitus can be marginalized and stigmatized in certain areas but can be regarded as capital in others.

It was reported that the rural habitus was a set of different dispositions that set floating children apart from their urban peers. Mu et al. (2016) focused on certain dimensions embedded in this habitus, such as the particular accent and routine behaviors of floating children, which were inherited from their ancestral heritage, rooted in their cultural history, instilled through their family education, and shaped by the structures of the rural area. It was evident that this rural dispositions of floating children which placed these children at a disadvantaged position in some urban schools could transform social orders and cultural structures in others through pedagogical practices. Some urban school teachers organized theme activities to reassess the traditionally disrespected accents of floating children, and praised and showcased the usually overlooked behavioral patterns of these children. These strategic pedagogical practices made these dispositional inclinations be valued and recognized in some school fields and therefore translated into capital.

4. Applying Community Cultural Wealth into Research of Floating Children

By analyzing the accents and routine behaviors of floating children in different fields, Mu et al. (2016) challenged the static view that floating children's rural habitus were set as

disadvantaged dispositions anytime and anywhere. Floating children were associated with many valued attributes which were normally disrespected and disregarded by the dominant groups in urban field such as urban parents, teachers, and students who also held the power of discourse in urban educational field.

While reviewing the theory of Yosso (2005), the research conclusions of Mu et al. (2016) had certain similarities with the theory of community cultural wealth asserted by Yosso (2005). Just like challenging the standard and dominant culture possessed by White, middle class as the privileged groups in American's society, the cultures of Students of Color should be valued and recognized as cultural capital in six forms. Indeed, we could make such a metaphor with urban population in Beijing corresponding to White, middle class, and floating children corresponding to Students of Color.

However, Yosso (2005)'s theory was based on the long history of racism in the United States. Through the lens of CRT, she made an in-depth and extensive criticism of Bourdieu's cultural capital theory, and therefore had a more profound application in the field of education. Comparatively speaking, the research in China was at the initial stage, without comprehensive analysis or systematic theory. For example, Mu et al. (2016) interviewed school faculty and students without another important factor, parents. In addition, there is no such influential formed critical theory as CRT to criticize and put forward more detailed Suggestions. Admittedly, this was also related to the late start of cultural capital research in China. But Yosso's theory has given Chinese scholars a broader and more critical vision in the future research.

5. Conclusion

Although China and the United States have different national conditions, cultures and ethnicities, it was a good trend that the culture of the disadvantaged groups is explored and valued in the pursuit of social and educational equity. However the study of Mu et al. (2016) just focused on the pedagogical practices which in the relatively micro vision. The views of Yosso (2005) provided a more in-depth and macro direction for Chinese scholars to study cultural capital in the future, such as school system, educational policy should also be considered to critique and theorize.

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