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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Ann FRKOVICH

Taking It with You: Teacher Education and the Baggage of Cultural Dialogue

Abstract This case study contributes to counterpoints made to world culture theory and underscores that at the micro, classroom-level, rural Chinese teachers in a reform-oriented professional development course, and reform-oriented U.S. teacher trainers, understand educational reform, and the realities of education in these two cultures, very differently. This study examines interviews conducted with U.S. teachers of English who taught the Oral English Training Course (OETC), a professional development course for rural Chinese teachers of English in Jiangxi province from 2007 to 2013. These teachers reveal how their own understandings and assumptions around teaching and learning shape what and how they teach, and how they evaluate the work of others. This study explains that included in the literal baggage of these foreign teachers teaching in China, is their figurative baggage, which includes their own cultural lens. The thrust of this study lies in uncovering the ideologies, assumptions, and educative constructs of foreign teachers, how these may be perceived by the Chinese teachers that they teach, and how all of this is steeped in the realities in education and the individual experiences of local actors. This study ends with recommendations for collaboration between foreign teachers of English in China, and their students, particularly Chinese teachers of English in China.

Keywords teacher education, culture, collaboration, teaching abroad

Introduction

This study examines English teacher education in rural China and makes the case for examining what it is that we are taking with us, in the figurative sense, when we—foreign teachers—travel to teach and learn. The structures of globalization

Ann FRKOVICH (✉)
College of Education, DePaul University, Chicago, IL 60614, USA
E-mail: annfrk@gmail.com

allow a staggering number of us to travel, to teach, and to learn from each other, and in doing so, educators and policy-makers around the world participate in an on-going dialogue around pivotal issues within education (Spindler & Spindler, 1990; Steiner-Khamsi, 2004; Mundy, 2011). This study illuminates that these dialogues are laced with ideologies, value judgments, normative constructions of both local and foreign knowledge, and are sites of tremendous, on-going discourse that can work in both agreement and opposition (Anderson-Levitt, 2003). Building from these ideas, when considering that the "action" of educational reform is not just global, but local (Anderson-Levitt, 2003), what does this local, micro-dialogue sound like in classrooms, as US-based teachers teach and learn in rural China, and how does the baggage brought by teachers affect what is communicated?

By examining the teaching methods, school experiences, and school-based cultures of teachers engaged in an Oral English Training Course (OETC) conducted over the six years at three different teacher training colleges in the southeastern Chinese province of Jiangxi, this study confirms that individuals engaged in teaching and learning have their own appropriations and interpretations of curriculum to meet the demands of their individual schools and classrooms (Spindler & Spindler, 1990; Tobin, Wu, & Davidson, 1991) and that local actors replicate the idea of school that is most consistent with their own local realities (Flinn, 1992; Anderson-Levitt, 2003).

For this case study, I interviewed teachers who taught the OETC between 2007 and 2013. Specifically, this primary data focuses on the pedagogy, perceptions, assumptions, and sense-making of these teachers. This work examines the tensions inherent in a global discourse that juxtaposes standardized, content-centered, government-controlled, high stakes testing with decentralized, active, student-centered, differentiated learning processes, as well as the idea of teacher autonomy. In addition, this study attempts to understand how the Chinese teachers make sense of their participation in the OETC, as well as their own pedagogy, perceptions, assumptions, and sense-making about the foreign teachers that they meet and the OETC that they attend. These understandings are based on course evaluations that were submitted by over 100 teachers before and after the OETC in the summer of 2013. Both the primary interview data and the course evaluations will be used in this paper to help us better understand the sense-making of both the U.S. and Chinese teachers.

This paper is organized in five keys areas. Section one takes on the major theoretical considerations of this work and examines China's more recent moves toward educational reform, including its push for more progressive-oriented pedagogies. Section two offers the methods used in the study, explaining the point of entry for the foreign teachers involved in the OETC. Section three provides a position statement, which I hope better explains both my own point of view and that of my data pool. Section four explains the four areas of inquiry and examination we focus on in examining the "baggage" of cultural dialogue: Curriculum and Instruction; Evaluation and Error Correction; Lesson Preparation and Material Development; and Informal Interactions. This helps to clarify the purpose and sense-making of the experience for both the foreign and Chinese teachers. In conclusion, section five outlines several recommendations for foreign teachers of English in rural China. I include a call for understanding the culture-clad limitations and the boundless possibilities for teaching English in China.

It is the practice in China that foreign teachers are often simultaneously referred to as foreign experts (Ouyang, 2003), and this paper hopes to shed light on what so many foreign teachers are truly experts on, and consequently, teaching, themselves. There is so much to be learned from understanding the assumptions we all make, our point of view, and how the baggage we bring over, and bring to our interactions with each other is not just contained in a suitcase. We carry much more. This study pays attention to the figurative baggage, the stuff that Transportation Security Administration does not screen for, and begins to understand its importance and its weight.

Global Reform Debates

World culture theory poses the question: Are schools around the world converging and becoming more similar over time? Following the work of educational policy borrowing theorist, Gita Steiner-Khamsi (2004), world culture theory is a grand sociological theory associated with John Meyer and Francisco Ramirez about modern nation states converging and becoming increasingly similar (and Western) over time (Anderson-Levitt, 2003; Steiner-Khamsi, 2004). However, it is not to suggest that a lasting and permanent system of schooling was put in place, but rather, that over the 20th century, school systems have

formed and reformed in ways that are increasingly similar (Chabbott & Ramirez, 2000; Meyer & Ramirez, 2000). This might suggest that educational systems in China and the US, inevitably, are becoming more alike. There are a number of overarching considerations that theorists believe to be at the heart of these processes. Some world culture theorists claim that global convergence is due to the fact that policy makers look to and trust ideas that have been vetted elsewhere (Ramirez & Ventresca, 1992). Other world culture theorists critique the neo-colonial nature of educational policy borrowing, claiming that the emergence of an international model is by no means consensual or voluntary for the actors involved (Ginsberg, Cooper, Raghu, & Zegarra, 1990).

Kathryn Anderson-Levitt (2003) suggests that world culture theorists are looking at a general abstraction, data that has been glossed over and that does not allow for nuanced analysis. She suggests that we must determine where the action is in educational reform, and that we must consider if it is with the national and global policy makers, or if it lies with the individual classrooms and the interworking of individual schools. Anderson-Levitt looks at where individual actors resist and subvert, appropriate and transform, and she looks at how power dynamics mistake the coercion of teachers into adopting policy mandates as voluntary. Therefore, the actual lived culture of schooling is incredibly rich and locally divergent (2003).

This study of the OETC looks at a reform-driven professional development course in rural China. While the majority of Chinese live in rural China, rural Chinese teachers are rarely studied, and often treated as an after-thought, left on the margins of educational study and debate (Paine & DeLany, 2000; Che, 2010). Che (2010) in her video-cued ethnography on early childhood education in China, claims that there is little scholarship available on the complex challenges of the rural school experience for students and teachers. Che contests that this leaves many Chinese scholars to oversimplify the issue and assume that the rural school experience is backward, lagging behind in reform efforts, and of poor quality. However, what we may be missing is a more nuanced view that includes insiders' reflections, and reliable, empirical studies on the impact of reform on rural schools (Napier, 2003; Che, 2010).

Studying the OETC allows us a more detailed view of a professional development course in rural China which is reform-driven and which is taught by US-based teachers, who have their own perceptions and understandings of

reform and school culture. More broadly, we are interested in how the US-based teachers are carriers of baggage, promoters of US-based (and some would say global) educational policies that are steeped in assumptive connections between Western pedagogy and student-centered pedagogy. Studying the OETC allows us to look more closely at this baggage, examining a very specific micro-view of educational reform.

Methods

The six foreign teachers interviewed for this study came to teach at teacher colleges in Jiangxi as early as 2007. The project began because one of the foreign teachers had a student, a Chinese national, in her U.S. classroom, who had an uncle in the Ministry of Education in Jiangxi province. Working through the student, who worked through his uncle, two foreign teachers came to teach the OETC in 2007. In the following six years this has included nine teachers and two other teacher training colleges, all of which are in Jiangxi province. Consequently, the foreign teachers were sent by their U.S. school for two overarching reasons. This first was to support the professional development of teachers who worked with high numbers of Chinese students in their U.S. classrooms; and the second reason was in part due to a direct endowment being made available by a Chinese parent for the purpose of sending foreign teachers to teach the teachers and students of English in under-resourced schools in rural China. While many Chinese students and parents are reluctant to donate money for the development of their U.S. schools, it is the experience of the teachers affiliated with the OETC that the Chinese students in their U.S. classrooms are eager to support the development of education in rural China.[1] The support of these students, and their parents, has made the continued work of the OETC possible.

All US-based teachers participating in this study teach at a college-preparatory, independent school in the US, at which I also teach. Our school is concerned with promoting character, citizenship, scholarship and responsibility, including college readiness, critical inquiry, the use of technology and creativity. We teach

[1] Students at the school featured in this study hold monthly "Green tea and donut holes" sales to raise money to send English dictionaries to OETC participants in China, and are often eager to support the travel arrangements of the OETC teachers while they are in China.

anywhere from two to four courses, each with eight to 16 students in a class. Our pay is not tied to test scores, but is tied to our education and experience.[2] We each hold master's degrees and some are pursuing terminal degrees in their field. We each have a tremendous degree of autonomy in what we teach, as we are not held to state or national standards. Some teachers, however, reported bring pressured to get through the content they need to in preparation for Advanced Placement tests by the College Board. Chinese citizens are the single largest number of international students at our school, comprising 11% of the overall student body in 2012. Consequently, there is tremendous interest in professional development around working with Chinese students, and to a commitment to on-going service work with the country's under-resourced schools. We are not paid for our work with the Chinese teachers, outside of all the travel expenses related to traveling to and within China. This work is not considered part of our contractual employment at the school, but is done voluntarily.

A formal invitation to participate in this study was sent to six teachers who have taught the OETC. Five were working at an independent school outside of Chicago, and one had relocated. Participants included those with vast amounts of English as a second language and experience teaching abroad, including the founder of the OETC at teachers' colleges in China in 2007. Participants also included those with little to no experience teaching English, or English as a second language, or little to no teaching experience outside of the US. These six individuals were all involved with the China course, so they were selected for participation based on that experience.

The interviews of all teachers took place in July and August of 2013, at a time convenient to these participants, in the US, and outside of class time. Each participant was asked to participate in an interview which would take no more than 90 minutes of their time. The interview questions focused on the teachers' experiences and sense-making of their participation in teaching the OETC at teachers' colleges in China. One interview—with the relocated teacher—was conducted over Skype, and the rest were conducted face-to-face in my home or classroom in the US.

It was through interviews that I was able to get to the rich, narrative detail that

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[2] This is true of the U.S. school of the foreign teachers involved in the OETC, and can be said of many similar independent schools in the US, but this reality is not shared by all foreign teachers, particularly U.S. public school teachers.

would provide the detail and description needed to situate and better understand the experiences of foreign teachers in China. These interviews help to look at how the foreign teachers made sense of their experiences by analyzing the ways they made meaning of them, and how culture creates a point of view, again, by way of narrative inquiry. This methodology also supports our ability to contest world culture theory with micro-accounts of school, and the ways that individual actors take up threads of a larger global discourse (Alexander, 2009). After the interviews were conducted, they were transcribed and coded.

Course evaluations submitted by Chinese teachers were used as secondary data to supplement the primary interview data. The Chinese teachers of English that attended the OETC in 2013 numbered between 60 and 120 at each of the two sites we worked with that year. At both sites, on the last day of instruction, I wrote a series of questions on the black board, and asked participants to respond to the questions on a piece of paper, and to keep their answers anonymous. At the time, this feedback was submitted anonymously and collected by a participant in the OETC, not by me. To be clear, the course evaluations were done as course evaluations to inform the practice of the foreign teachers, but these evaluations will now be brought in to this study. The questions asked them to express what activities and experiences taught by the OETC were helpful and which were not. Comments taken from these course evaluations will not be cited directly, but will be used to help us talk back to the experiences of the foreign teachers and to help set the stage for how we may further consider the cultural constructions of education.

Attendance varied daily at the OETC. The Chinese teachers were asked to attend by their headmasters. Some participants suggested it was because they were the best English teacher in the school (the teacher with the students with the highest test scores), while others suggested they needed the help, or wanted to make the most of the opportunity to talk with a foreign teacher, while a few others said they were the only teacher of English at their village, or county, school. Some teachers considered attending the class to be an honor, while others said they were tired, and participation in the OETC was a strain after a long school year. They each reported teaching about two classes, with 40 to 70 students in a class. Some teachers were not English majors in college, some were. Some did not attend school themselves beyond senior middle school. Rather, these Chinese teachers completed junior middle school and a four year teacher

training program. The Chinese teachers informed me that their school had to pay 480 Yuan for each of them to attend the course, and they were expected to go back to their home schools and teach the other teachers of English what they learned from the course. Clusters of two or three teachers taught at different primary and junior middle schools throughout Jiangxi province. Some would commute hours each way to take the course. Some boarded locally, and others lived in the area. Course attendance was taken each day by teachers' college administrators, and the Chinese teachers assured me their attendance and diligence in the course mattered greatly to the headmasters at their home schools. Overall, the teachers reported little to no teacher autonomy or curricular control. Instead, time and again, they discussed how the test controlled their curriculum and what they taught. Some, however, were very clear that they could teach the test material however they would like. Overall, they said that test scores ran their school's mission, and school safety[3] was their school's other chief concern.

In some cases, the Chinese teachers would bring their students to the OETC, their friends, their family members, and often their own children. Attendees were also often the sons or daughters of teachers' college officials who were home, or free, and on summer holiday. While the course was not designed for these attendees by the Chinese administrators, or the foreign teachers, these attendees were welcome to participate. It was assumed that these participants wanted to speak with, and meet, foreign teachers, perhaps in the hope of improving their own English.

The Positionality of Local Actors

Globalization and 21st century modernity has fostered in a new era of accessibility to travel and our ability to connect and collaborate. To this end, the literal baggage of an OETC teacher is bursting with teaching supplies fresh from our teaching practice in the US, but figuratively, we carry far more. In considering this, my work, and the work of my colleagues hereafter, will be described as the work of foreign teachers, in order to denote that, simply put, we are the ones with suitcases, we are the ones with passports in our pockets, and we

[3] The teachers suggested this had much to do with both prohibiting students from leaving campus and jeopardizing their safety in numerous ways, for example: drinking, fighting, swimming in dangerous places, etc.

are the ones who carry the etic perspective of the outsider looking in. This is further corroborated by the fact that the experiences of the foreign teachers are my primary data source, and the Chinese teachers, administrators, students, and parents are secondary. While this is far from ideal, it speaks to some of the inherent difficulties in comparative research and research protocols for international work. Furthermore, while those that were interviewed for this study are not all U.S. citizens, none of us speak Mandarin, none of us live in China or are Chinese, and while we have built a relationship with multiple Chinese schools and teachers' colleges, we are foreigners.

We do, however,

> have a "right" to put forth an analysis of those from whom we are different and we need to consider and articulate the meaning of our speech in relation to our own political goals so that the impact of our speaking does not reinscribe dominance simply by our tone and social identity… the danger of reinscribing privilege by taking on an unquestioned authority when speaking. (Weiler, 2001, p. 73)

It is key that I spend time in this paper exploring my positionality. In fact, it is the work of this paper to delve into the positionality of all teachers engaged in the local-level action of educational reform and on-the-ground cultural dialogue. This work continues to build on the criticism that critique of foreign teachers teaching outside their own country is mostly from the reflections of the foreign teachers themselves, not the students (Oatey, 1990; Dzau, 1990; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Ouyang, 2003). However, there is much more to be said about the agency and the lens with which foreign teachers critique themselves and their experiences.

At a primary school in Jiangxi province, I was teaching a class of about 30 Chinese English teachers from various junior middle schools[4] a lesson on multiple intelligences and personal connections to English study vis-à-vis playacting Chinese folk tales, in English. I concluded my lesson by asking the

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[4] In China, the education system is complex, but falls into roughly three categories: pre-school and kindergarten, compulsory education, including junior middle school (six to nine years), and senior high school (one to three years); see W. P. Hu, Q. Han, P. N. Wen, & J. B. Li (2005). 小学新课程实施现状调查报告 [A survey of New Curriculum Reform implementation status in elementary schools]. 课程 教材 教法 [*Curriculum, Teaching Material and Method*], *25*(2), 8–15.

teachers if they thought they could ever use what I was teaching in their classrooms. It was a sort of painful moment, where everyone looks at everyone else and no one knows what to say, or how to say it. The teachers slowly suggested that their students would love these ideas, that their students hate to study English, but that there was nothing they could do about it. They must prepare for the test. It is everything.

It seemed to me that these teachers were terribly caught between what they knew would engage and delight their students, and what the reality and function of school must be in a country with great numbers (to assess, to sort, and to do this as efficiently as possible). I asked the English teachers if they thought things were changing. In the first two classes, there was widespread agreement that change might very well be needed, but it was not possible. In the last class, there was one teacher who jumped to suggest change was possible, and needed, despite the incredulous stares of her colleagues. She shrank into her seat. When pressed, she suggested that if a constant and persistent message were given to teachers, who became administrators, who then became ministry of education officials, things could change over time. It was suggested this would have to be tireless. Through my lens, this is how the big, global view looks on the ground at the local level, and is as close to recording a transnational, cultural dialogue as I can come as a foreign teacher in China.

Perhaps a more nuanced way of looking at this exchange at the primary school in Jiangxi would be to assert that the teachers knew, or assumed, after taking my class for almost two weeks—perhaps even sooner, before I came in the door, or within the first few minutes—that I was not indebted to high-stakes tests, that I must have tremendous facilities, small class sizes and consequently, that I taught at, or teach at, schools with a certain wealth of resources and the point of view born of that reality. They may have also assumed that this was the way I experienced school as a student, as well. They could have sensed my own progressive and "Western"-style teaching and lessons within the first few minutes of my class. I sat on desks. I kneeled at their side when answering certain questions. I rebuked the platform or lectern. I did not use a microphone[5] or a projector. I sat among them, and I walked behind them and taught from the back of the room. I asked what they wanted to learn and needed to know. I never assumed the position of a one-right-answer, and I openly eschewed the idea of

[5] Teaching with a microphone is common in the large classrooms of China.

myself as an authority figure. Instead, I was a facilitator, a guide, a well-read colleague partnered with them in educative pursuits. Consequently, when I asked if they could use anything that I had taught them, they hesitated before saying no, while they politely assured me this was a great opportunity for them to experience the "Western"-style, and their students would love it, even if they could never use it. While they assured me that some ideas were great for the primary grades, the overall thrust of all we were doing was not going to be of great service within their individual school landscapes and the environment of high seriousness that a junior middle school classroom must attend to. After all, the test dictates all, and what I was teaching, progressive pedagogy and oral English, was not on the test. Furthermore, their headmasters could not afford to be too different. I mean this literally, as merit pay for high test scores abounds in China. These teachers had their own baggage and so did I. While our dialogue was person to person, the issues we took up were much larger than us.

The Baggage

The baggage of global collaboration and cultural dialogue seems to come into great focus along the following four areas: 1. Curriculum and Instruction; 2. Evaluation and Error Correction; 3. Lesson Preparation and Material Development; 4. Informal Interactions. These areas inform our work with each other and best sum up the umbrella categories under which we may share the action of a local-level cultural dialogue.

Curriculum and Instruction

When asked about the OETC curriculum, the foreign teachers reported that other than the time classes should begin and end, room assignments, and the number of sections of the course, "nothing is discussed on site." Tim reported that there was tremendous "polite and fanciful language, but no real conversation" about what teaching was expected and what students need to learn: "it is not clear to me what the Chinese want, like catching fish in a murky pond, just grab it and go by." This may be because the foreigners are considered to be experts in both the "Western"-style and the teaching and speaking of English and are considered beyond reproach or because there is a language barrier impeding these real

conversations. To compensate for this, the foreign teachers made up lessons and experiences which they *thought* would improve their students' English mastery. Tim noted, however, that,

> Never in my life have I had so little ability to link up to a previous discourse to figure out what it would be like. I had no idea what it would be like. The ability to go there and deliver a well-received teaching experience…, I didn't cause anyone trouble. But I learned a lot more than they learned from me.

Another result of this autonomy was that teachers were free to use their own guiding ideologies to create course content and to shape the classroom experience. All foreign teachers wanted their students to have fun and to enjoy themselves. These ideas became almost guiding principles for many. As Sarah explained, it was perceived by the foreign teachers that the Chinese teachers were looking for new ways to engage their students: "I hope they get ideas for how they can be creative, to think all I have to do is put two and two together and I can make things fun, or I ask them 'what fun things do you use to make lessons fun for your students?' " Tim noted, "I was able to make onerous material light and fun. I get up there and get all sweaty and use my voices. Making surgery less painful." Still Sarah offered this: "I asked my daughter what her Spanish teacher does. What's fun? I like to think about what would be fun, and then find a way to make it work for the classroom." Candace suggested, "I did things that were loud and fun, with a lot of music." It seemed widely perceived that a necessary component for the instruction of oral English was the ability to have fun. The foreign teachers believed that fun was missing from the classrooms of their Chinese students, and that it was necessary for teaching and learning. In fact, for many of the foreign teachers, their OETC curriculum was built on engaging students actively and in making learning fun. This type of curriculum and instruction was perceived by the foreign and Chinese teachers as being "Western," and OETC teachers joined their students in affirming that what they were teaching was, indeed, the "Western" teaching method.

Some foreign teachers stressed the importance of making personal connections. Sarah explains: "Making it important to kids, and turning something into a chance for kids to find the solutions." Some foreign teachers were quick to teach Chinese stories, Chinese culture and Chinese concepts in English. The foreign

teachers reported not knowing how this was received by their students or the Chinese administrators, but they suggested that this approach helped to bolster English skills by encouraging students to tell stories and share ideas they already knew, only in a new language. This was reported as a site for tremendous cultural exchange between the foreign teachers and their Chinese students.

Many foreign teachers reported incorporating personal stories and personal pictures into their lessons. Others relayed discussing their personal passions for subjects and ideas other than English to their students. These other ideas most often included sports, film and television, science, technology, and visual art. This may run counterintuitive to Chinese social psychology, which seems to support the formality of the classroom (Bond, 1991; Gow, Balla, Kember, & Hau, 1996). Chinese students often do not find merit in personal anecdotes, stories and interests (Ouyang, 2003). The foreign teachers, however, reported feeling very good about these interactions, and as a result, about getting to know their students in the classroom while their students got to know their teachers.

Some of the foreign teachers were riddled with doubt as to the purpose and success of their teaching. Tim said, "I am in no way confident that what I taught them in July is going to make its way into a tight, difficult-to-negotiate Chinese system." There was real doubt about the effectiveness of their teaching on many levels. Part of this was because of the language barrier, part of this was because of communication around what to teach and why, and part of this was because, as Tim suggested,

> We have nothing to talk about past a certain point, they have a shit-load of kids in their class. Fifty is so different than 25. I don't know how I would teach 50 kids. I would have to completely change how I teach.

The foreign teachers' U.S. reality was so different from that of their students that many of the teachers feared their lessons were useless. Furthermore, it is not clear if the Chinese want to have fun (Ouyang, 2003) or simply "make surgery less painful." To many of the foreign teachers, it seemed that some students wanted more notes, more recitation, and a test which demonstrated their ability to both take notes and memorize material. This is entirely understandable, given many of the expectations placed on Chinese teachers around what forms of curriculum and instruction are of most use.

Because of the degree of autonomy each foreign teacher was given, and because of their individual interests and experience, the types of classroom activities varied greatly from one foreign teacher and their classroom practices, to the other, these classes were taken together to make up the OETC. Typical activities included games for vocabulary acquisition and fluency, the dramatization and performance of original plays, as well as Chinese folk tales and U.S. short stories and poems. Activities also included work with translating idioms from Chinese to English and English to Chinese, drawing and performing idioms, and literature in translation. Classes within the course often incorporated lots of singing and lessons on using body language. There were also lessons on the International Phonetic Alphabet and countless lessons on the correct pronunciation of English words and sounds. Some foreign teachers asked students to write and perform public service announcements, original travel videos, and autobiographical short stories and poems. In addition, the course included lessons on multiple intelligences and differentiated instruction by employing active learning strategies, and tips on classroom management. It also included multiple Q&A sessions on U.S. culture and education system, and some foreign teachers even arranged lessons around the exploration of British and U.S. heroes and holidays.

Huhua Ouyang's (2003) study of course evaluations from pre-service teachers at a progressive Chinese university devoted to teaching a communicative language method suggested that "having fun whilst learning is an idea alien to most Chinese teachers and students, who believe that learning should be hard and that achievement is proportional to the hardship endured" and that praise is given to students who are not intelligent, but hardworking (p. 129). Fun is considered fodder for the primary grades, but not an option for later grades, which also coincide with testing regimes[6] which determine teacher, school and student success. This corroborates the work of the OETC, which has increasingly seen fewer and fewer senior high school English teachers in attendance, with an increase in primary school teachers. At some teachers' colleges, all classes have

[6] Chinese teachers and administrators suggest that Chinese students are tested before entry to junior middle school, after junior middle school, and after senior middle school for entrance to the university; and that students start school, and take these tests, at varying ages; See M. Luo (2012). *Reforming curriculum in a centralized system: An examination of the relationships between teacher implementation of student-centered pedagogy and high stakes teacher evaluation policies in China* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Columbia University, New York, NY.

been comprised of primary school English teachers, and in some cases, the Chinese teachers of English are also asked to teach multiple other subjects at their school. Given Chinese psychology (Gow et al., 1996) and the work of Ouyang (2003), asking Chinese teachers to do child-like activities is not learning, but humiliation. It was not uncommon in the OETC to observe certain teachers refusing to take part in activities. It was notable that this became less the case the more the students of the OETC began to teach primary school teachers, who are more likely to allow themselves to have fun, and who are more likely to find room in their own classrooms for these types of activities. The course evaluations completed by the OETC students at one site in the summer of 2013, used here as secondary data, were all primary school teachers. Their course evaluations were used in this study to provide context, as they have no real significance on the baggage of foreign teachers. However, the course evaluations do seem to suggest that some Chinese primary schools teachers enjoyed the "useful games" and "active strategies" for the classroom. However, many felt that some of the games and activities they learned in the OETC they could never use with their students. The OETC students felt they were restricted due to their large class sizes or the little amount of time they had for anything other than the required, test-prep curriculum. Some OETC students also suggested that these games and activities would not be encouraged by their school administrators.

The baggage of our dialogue around curriculum and instruction may lie in our assumptions around what learning looks like, what should be taught, what should be learned, and how all of this should look.

Evaluation and Error Correction

Laura: Did you see the kid with the name Dennnis?
Helen: Yeah, three n's. Nice!
Laura: I crossed out one of the n's! Dennis does not have three n's!

Invariably, the Chinese students in the OETC made mistakes in their use of oral English. The OETC is given over the course of seven to 14 days. The majority of assessment and evaluation could happen immediately in the correction of errors in a student's oral English. Some teachers latched onto this, and they had their classes speaking together, and asking for students to speak as

individuals. Chinese teachers were then corrected immediately, either as a class, or as individuals, and asked to try again. The OETC was seen by some foreign teachers as a pivotal chance to give a Chinese teacher of English the opportunity to listen to and learn from a native speaker. Other foreign teachers were more hesitant to correct their students, afraid of embarrassing their students and making them lose face in front of their colleagues. Some foreign teachers did not subscribe to the need to see their students' mispronunciation as anything but a new pronunciation, or consequential error, as long as what their students were saying was somehow understood. These teachers favored basic communication over accuracy. Tim suggested a futility in error correction all together:

> Some are low-level, some are great, but what are they really going to take away from this? What does this actually improve? I felt like I was in there and it was too little, too quickly, too superficial. I can run through all the vowel pronunciations you want, and while I don't doubt that works, you don't know what sticks and what doesn't.

Throughout the OETC, foreign teachers ran the gamut in the frequency with which they corrected errors and their reasons for this. For many, the need to stress communicative competence over accuracy was an essential reason for withholding error correction, for others, not correcting errors in oral English was to maintain the integrity of their relationships with their students. Other teachers abstained from correcting oral English so that their courses were perceived as fun. Sarah noted other psychological concerns around error correction, "I hope they feel more confident speaking English without being cowed. The visible anxiety this caused some of them… I hope they feel more comfortable." Ultimately, many foreign teachers questioned when their students would be using oral English. Chinese teachers suggested it is not part of primary and junior middle school tests and therefore receives little curricular consideration. Made aware of this, some foreign teachers felt their assessment and evaluation of their students' accuracy in oral English was futile, and instead, they focused their attention on providing experiences for their students to practice their English without interference. Nonetheless, some OETC teachers used their classes as springboards for opportunities in error correction and teacher redirection. While the foreign teachers seemed to make some very conscious choices around error correction, the choice to not correct errors may be perceived by Chinese teachers

as lazy, or a clear indication that a foreign teacher is not well-trained or experienced. It is often perceived that a teacher is the ultimate authority on the standard of correctness, and as such, must wield her power (Ouyang, 2003; Li & Chan, 1999). This seems to resonant with the course evaluations submitted by the OETC students who had tremendous praise for teachers that constantly corrected them and worked exclusively for oral language mastery. However, the OETC students also suggested that instruction in pronunciation was not sustainable, that it was too easy to forget certain pronunciations over time. Other OETC students said it was hard for them to understand some of their foreign teachers, that they talked too fast, or used vocabulary that made understanding them difficult. While the majority of the OETC students seemed to enjoy pronunciation practice with the foreign teachers, and developing individually as speakers of English, they wondered about the effectiveness of pronunciation practice when they returned to their classrooms in the fall.

Chinese teachers' college administrations have often asked for the OETC to give a test to evaluate their students' mastery of oral English. At one site, it was demanded we give a paper test. Some foreign teachers balked at assessing oral English in a written form. At all sites, ultimately, the foreign teachers were allowed to design their evaluation of their students. At the site with which the OETC gave a paper test, we also submitted a roster of student names with test scores. Some foreign teachers tried to subvert this process in various ways: having conversations about refusing to pass along low scores, collaborating on ways to ensure this could never happen, and finding ways to test orally but provide quantitative data. At two of the three sites, the last day of class became the "test" as students competed for prizes in an "English Olympics" designed to encourage students to work in groups competing against each other in various activities that required oral English. While these students were ranked and publicly acknowledged[7], the foreign teachers were very happy that the students appeared to have had lots of fun. The rankings for the "English Olympics" were Gold, Silver, and Bronze, but foreign teachers also gave individual awards for each activity. In this way, they were very careful to not leave out any group, and they reported taking pains to ensure this, so as to not make any group suffer any unforeseen consequences as a result of their participation in the course. The

[7] The genesis for this idea was, in part, teaching in China right after the Beijing Olympics, and due to a perceived notion that a culminating activity was important and expected.

baggage of our dialogue around evaluation and error correction may lie in our assumptions around what "correct" English sounds and looks like, and the role of the teacher in determining this. It also lies in our understandings of cumulative and formative assessment strategies, and our assumptions as to how students react to success, failure and feedback.

Lesson Preparation and Material Development

Foreign teachers reported that they brought to China lots of dictionaries in hard and digital form, as well as "homemade games, to leave behind, and light weight… big paper, crayons, markers, and sometimes you pick up materials there." Another foreign teacher said, "I brought a ton of flash cards, markers, post-its, scissors, tape, construction paper, a USB drive, pictures, my driver's license, family photos." Foreign teachers often said they brought over a suitcase full of "stuff," and that they never knew what they would actually use until they got there. The foreign teachers claimed this was due to tailoring their instruction to the level and interests of the students they met in each class and at each site. In this way, material development and lesson preparation became linked to reflection and student assessment. Candace noted, "lesson prep is spur of the moment and AHA! Through observation and reflection." Laura reflected,

> I brought over lots of files. When I was on the plane over, I pulled things together. I get a lot of data (poems, quotes and ideas) and began to think about what to do with it. I worked out a basic arc. Every morning I would wake up and think about what to do… I would do this, and this, and this. I would come back at night, and I would write down what I actually did, and what worked and what didn't.

Sarah reported:

> I had like 30 ideas. I sat down with another ESL teacher and she helped me, then I saw [another ESL teacher who has gone to China] with 15 ideas. It looked like a stream of consciousness list of ideas…. I had a grid. I also made an elaborate break-down of how long each thing would take, what activities, but I would get up at 5 am and handwrite what I would be doing. Then prep my materials simultaneously.

Helen explained,

> You forget as a teacher that you adapt to the needs of your students… and I feel like I succeeded in observing and addressing the needs of the students. My successes were the adaptations that I made to help improve the teaching.

While some teachers took great efforts to plan out lessons ahead of traveling to teach in China, others labored each night to develop lessons and materials. Some veteran OETC teachers simply retooled lessons from previous years, or from years of teaching at their U.S. school.

The idea that the foreign teachers were planning lessons without collective input, a standardized textbook, or accepted curriculum is very different from the realities of their Chinese students. This may engender misgivings as to the importance or correctness of the material delivered, as the Chinese students recognize how they are being taught by their foreign teachers (Ouyang, 2003). The course evaluations submitted as secondary data did not assist in better understanding the expectations Chinese teachers had for the lesson preparation of their foreign teachers. However, the baggage of our dialogue around lesson preparation and materials development may lie in our assumptions around how teachers can and should prepare for their lessons, and the level to which they can and should be flexible and open to gauging and planning for the needs of their students. This baggage also includes assumptions around where, how, and from whom teachers get their lessons and materials.

Informal Interactions

Each class in the OETC ran from between 55 to 90 minutes. Often, the foreign teachers would give breaks. During this time, as Laura noted, students "often share information about their school or town, or they take your picture, or they introduce you to their students, or they are practicing their English." Sarah suggested there was

> lots of picture taking. I would stress casual interactions during the break. People would bring in their kids[8]. I would go over to their kids and ask them questions in English. I

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[8] Some foreign teachers used the word "kid or kids" to describe their students' children, or their students' students.

> found it hard to sit by myself and drink water. I did go to the bathroom occasionally.

While some teachers tried to engage with their students, Tim said of his break time:

> I would talk to them here and there, but their conversational English is not great. I am not seeking to avoid that, but I don't want to favor the kids who can converse well. I would often turn it off and decompress and the arduousness of it, in that style, in that heat, talking very slowly. I sat there hearing them say a word for an hour, but you know, I just want to speak with a normal English speaker, at a normal pace. I have a selfish need to be around a native speaker.

Some of the foreign teachers reported the importance of using breaks as a chance for the brain to "have a rest" and for material to be absorbed. Others suggested that the Chinese teachers often needed to go to the bathroom themselves or make a phone call, and therefore, needed to be left alone.

The habit of foreign teachers to leave their students alone during the break, to appear to be stand-offish, or make themselves completely unavailable may be very different from Chinese norms in leadership and authority, where formality is the standard in class, but informality is the guiding principle of outside of class interaction (Bond, 1991; Bond & Hwang, 1986). While Chinese teachers may not feel the need to maintain friendly postures with their students in the classroom, they value their relationships with students outside the classroom (Ouyang, 2003) and use this time for both personal interaction and for asking questions (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996). Foreign teachers eschewing having relationships with their students outside of the classroom may also be complicated by the teachers' U.S. based fears of suspicion or accusations of misconduct (Tobin, Hsueh, & Karasawa, 2002). The course evaluations submitted as secondary data for this study do not suggest this, students were not asked about informal interactions, and they did not make mention of it in their evaluation of the course. Some OETC students did suggest, however, that all they wanted to do was relax, enjoy their time off, and not have to take classes at all. The baggage of our dialogue around our informal interactions may lie in our assumptions around the purpose of these spaces, and how they serve both students and teachers. While much can be learned by what we say and do, much can also be learned by what we do not say

and do in these moments.

Conclusions

The idea that foreign teachers are considered foreign experts is widely accepted, and historically significant (Llasera, 1987; Harvey, 1990; Pepper, 1996; Ouyang, 2003), but vast problems may lie in how this expertise is wielded and how it is perceived (Bastid, 1987; Brown, 1987; Hayhoe, 1987). Foreign teachers are certainly experts on what interests them, they are experts on their own lives, they are experts on what they think is important about teaching and learning in their own contexts, how these ideas have been enacted for them, and how they have enacted these ideas themselves in their home environment. They are also experts on their own culture in which they take part. However, it must be stressed that their expertise lies solely in their own experience, and that they do not speak for all foreign teachers or the entirety of the foreign, or "Western" experience. Foreign teachers are experts on their baggage, and they can only speak for what they have brought with them as individuals. However, often these teachers are not conscious of their own cultural baggage, and their need to reference what they teach in the singularity of their experience. Foreign teachers are not speaking for the West, or their country of origin, but from their own experience. This is fundamentally important and should be made clear by both Chinese and foreign teachers.

Foreign teachers carry both literal and figurative baggage to their teaching sites, and they are met with the baggage of their students. We are all reenacting our own teaching and learning experiences, and we are using these experiences to understand the experiences of others. Indeed, culture greatly influences teaching strategies (Shimahara & Sakai, 1995). Teacher knowledge is embedded in teacher background, and undergirded by a larger sociopolitical influence, as well as other context-specific factors. In this way, when you take a class with a teacher, you are in fact taking every class they have taken. The foreign teachers in this study carried very clear ideas around what curriculum and instruction, evaluation and error correction, lesson preparation and materials development, and informal interactions should look like. Their Chinese students had their own ideas around the same concepts. Listening to and examining these accounts supports the need for the thick descriptions and micro-accounts required of

comparative pedagogy (Alexander, 2009). While these ideas are not always the same for the Chinese and foreign teachers, or within either group, it is important to recognize that there is a larger discourse at work behind these contingencies. While a teacher's ideas around pedagogy are lodged in their lived experiences, their experiences are born of U.S. realties. Each county (and its school systems, public and private) takes up a part of the cultural dialogue around education. This dialogue often centers around loose understandings of progressive and didactic pedagogies. These ideologies undercut a teacher's practice, and teachers bring this baggage with them.

It has been suggested that the effectiveness of foreign teachers can be tied to their understanding of Chinese culture and traditions, and the history and social psychology of its education system. Ouyang (2003) calls this "going native," representing "Western" ideas in traditionally Chinese ways of teaching. While many OETC foreign teachers found great success in doing this, others refused to do so, suggesting that using traditional, exam-driven methods for the instruction of oral English was not why they came to China to teach. Perhaps it is in the best interests of all to not do one or the other, but both at the same time. If foreign teachers are to make headway introducing new concepts and cultures in new ways, perhaps they must do so in ways that Chinese students can understand. This requires that teachers take the time to learn about and immerse themselves in an understanding of the culture of which they are taking part. It should not be underestimated that speaking (even some) Mandarin Chinese is perhaps the key to unlocking many of these doors. However, the most significant part of "going native" for the teachers of the OETC was the degree to which each teacher was aware of the realities of the educational system in China (its history of education, its system of examinations, and its efforts around educational reform, including an understanding of the sociopolitical realities that impact that reform) and to design lessons that somehow understand, acknowledge, and respect this. Nonetheless, foreign teachers must take the time to explore and explain new concepts in the teaching of English, particularly active, applied and oral English. These new concepts and ideas may simply challenge traditional Chinese pedagogies, and trouble Chinese students, teachers, administrators, and ministry officials, or they might strike a balance, ensuring that whatever new ideas that the Chinese are interested in are both understood and carefully appropriated.

Another consideration born of the work of the OETC was that the Chinese are

finding new ways and new uses for language, and that there is a certain amount of aggressiveness in the ways they are appropriating the language, and creating instances of "Chinglish" and that this creates more baggage for both the U.S. teachers and the Chinese teachers of English. One adult son of a teachers college administrator, an English major in his final year at a university in Beijing, told me that a common joke among English majors in China is that native English speakers cannot pass Chinese English tests. The irony here is that the English on these tests was a construct of the Chinese educational system. With the Chinese college entrance examination's heavy hand on passive language acquisition, native English speakers struggle on Chinese English examinations. Indeed, at one site, a student asked a colleague and I to answer 15 questions from a practice college entrance exam in English. Of the fifteen questions he posed, I got three wrong, and my colleague got two wrong. Both my colleague and I immediately began to justify our "wrong" answers with explanations that involved subtext, context, interpretation, and a lack of understanding on the part of the test-makers of the fluidity of the English language.

Yet, for the Chinese test taker, language is not fluid and there is a very definite right answer to each test question. Given the realities of foreign and Chinese teachers, perhaps it is best that English teachers and learners consider that language is viewed by some to be very set, very fixed, and by others to be more open, flexible and dynamic. There is tremendous baggage to be examined here on the part of English language learners and teachers around whose English counts, whose English is legitimate, and whose English *is* English.

Implications of this research for those engaged in this type of partnership include the need for site-specific, cross-cultural competency training. Chinese administrators and foreign teachers must be very clear about the need to engage in conversations to co-construct a sense of purpose for this type of collaborative work, and it is important that we all remain open to what is taken up. But it is truly key that Chinese educators move away from considering and referring to foreign teacher as experts, this feeds into East/West dichotomies that undermine the equality of our partnerships. Furthermore, all parties involved should be perpetually engaged in a critically reflective collaboration.

In many ways, by analyzing the sites in which Chinese students, including teachers in programs like the OETC, and foreign teachers subvert and disrupt, converge and agree, in their interactions with each other, we can begin to listen to

the ebb and flow of a cultural dialogue at the local level. These moments are incredibly fertile for continued analysis and understanding. These moments reveal where there is movement both globally and locally, and point to our "enduring struggles" (Holland & Lave, 2001, p. 22; Bartlett, 2003; Rosen, 2003), or the baggage we bring to our work with each other. Possibilities for global collaboration are on the rise, and the sheer volume of what we bring with us to do this work is rich and emergently understood. As English becomes the thrust of much of this conversation, now more than ever, foreign and Chinese teachers of English need to critically examine what we pack as we travel toward each other. Studying the work of the OETC has led us to examine and explain our own baggage, in the hopes that we may pack better, smarter, and lighter in the future, and to encourage others to do the same.

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