Introduction

"How delightful it is to have friends visiting us from afar!"

—Confucius

Teaching English to Chinese students is an extremely rewarding, yet demanding experience. Thousands of native English speakers go to China to teach every year. Many of them don’t speak Chinese and don’t know very much about Chinese culture. If this sounds like you, read on! I wrote this guidebook with people like you in mind. The guidebook is designed for teachers that will be teaching adult learners (high school students and older). It is divided into three sections: Teaching and Learning styles, Linguistic Differences, and Chinese Culture in the Classroom. After reading this guidebook you will be able to:

1) Recognize differences that exist between how you prefer to teach and how your Chinese students generally prefer to learn.
2) Adapt your teaching to better fit your students’ learning preferences, and encourage your students to experiment with different learning styles.
3) Identify key areas of the Chinese language that interfere with your students’ ability to learn English.
4) Find answers to questions that you might have about Chinese culture and the Chinese educational system.

Certainly this guidebook will not answer every question you have about the Chinese language and culture. It is not designed to be a “fix all” bicycle tire patch. Rather, its purpose is to introduce you to some of the most basic and important aspects of the Chinese educational system, language, and culture that relate to English teaching in China. China is a large country with many complex cultures and dialects. Remember that not all Chinese students are the same. Each student’s English proficiency, no matter if the student is in high school or in college, can range from beginning to advanced. If you get to know each of your students and teach to their needs you will do great!

I hope that this guidebook is useful for you, and I wish you the best of luck in your teaching endeavors in China.

Austin Pack
June 2015
Teaching and Learning Styles

"Many times, ineffectiveness in the English language classroom is not the result of bad students or bad teachers, but rather the result of different approaches to learning and the lack of awareness of each other's cultural differences."

-Xiuqin Zhang

In the English classroom in China you may find yourself standing on one side of a cultural canyon while your Chinese students stand on the other. The differences in your educational and cultural backgrounds can lead to frustration and confusion for both you and your students. Your teaching style may be very different from the learning styles of your students. To be a more effective teacher, you will need to work together with your students to bridge the cultural gap that exists between you.

At first you will need to be an example as you begin to build a bridge towards their side of the cultural canyon. As you adapt your teaching to the preferences of your students, and as you encourage your students to "style stretch", you can meet your students on middle ground. When you work together with your students to overcome differences in educational and cultural backgrounds, both you and your students will be more effective.

In this section you will learn about some general differences in educational philosophies as well as teaching and learning styles in China and in the West. You will learn how you can know what your students' preferred learning styles may be. You will also learn ways to work together with your students to build a bridge over the cultural crevice that exists between you.

Introduction

Chinese students often prefer to learn English in a way that is very different from the way that Western teachers tend to teach. If your teaching styles do not match the learning styles of your students, many problems may occur:

- Students may consider classroom activities to be a waste of time and so become bored.
- Students may perform poorly on end of year tests, resulting in students, parents, and school administrators feeling frustrated and disappointed.
- As a teacher you may feel frustrated with your students' low participation and low test grades.
- You may become too critical of your students or even yourself.

One of the most important things you can do as a teacher is to gain a better understanding about how your preferred teaching and learning styles compare to the preferred teaching and learning styles of your Chinese students. In order to build a bridge to reach your students, you must first know where they are coming from. Remember, each student is different!

There are many benefits when teachers and students work together to bridge the gap of teaching and learning styles in your classroom. You will have a more enjoyable experience because:

- Your students will be more likely to be excited and actively participate in class.
- Your students will perform better on their assignments and tests.
- You will have a sense of accomplishment because of your students' success.
- You will become a more able, well rounded teacher.
- You will have a stronger and more meaningful bond with your students.

Because understanding our students is so important, let's first begin with understanding the educational background that Chinese students come from.

Understanding Differences in Educational Philosophies

Here are a couple of side by side comparisons that will help you to understand how the approach to obtaining knowledge, the roles of teachers and students, and the purpose of language learning generally differs between China and the West. These explanations are to be understood and applied in general terms only. Do not assume that all Chinese are like this and all Westerners are like that!

The Chinese approach to obtaining knowledge:

- Knowledge is not something discovered, rather it is something transferred.
- Teachers and books are the source of knowledge.
- Knowledge is best transferred from teacher to student or from the book to the student.
- Knowledge is concrete and clear; there is no room for ambiguity. Each question has a clear, specific, unambiguous answer.

The Western approach to obtaining knowledge:

- Knowledge is discovered by students.
- Teachers and books are resources that help students discover knowledge.
- Students learn best by discovering concepts and answers rather than having a teacher defining a concept or giving the answer.
- Each question may have more than one correct answer, ambiguous answer, or no answer at all.

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These differences in approaches to obtaining knowledge influence what roles we expect teachers, students, and books to fill in language learning. Let's look at the different roles teachers and students play in China and the West.

**Role of the teachers and students in China**
- Teachers are the authority on the subject, they should not be questioned.
- Teachers teach, students listen and take notes.
- Students answer only if called upon; asking questions on their own would interrupt the teacher and be impolite.
- Teachers evaluate students on how well they have understood and are able to explain the teacher's point of view.

Think of the difference in educational philosophies in this way. In China, each student represents an empty bucket that is waiting to be filled with water. The bucket represents an open mind and the water represents the knowledge that each student can receive. The teacher fills each student’s bucket with water to the brim. Students focus on memorizing what the teacher has given them and try their best not to lose any of the water. At a later point the teacher tests the students and examines how much knowledge they were able to comprehend and retain. This educational philosophy focuses on language knowledge, grammar and rote memorization.

The mindset of Western education is more like the making of a fire. The student is a fire that will grow on its own with the help of the teacher. The teacher must make a suitable environment for the fire to grow. The teacher adds some kindling to the fire and allows for some wind to help the fire grow. The fire grows on its own as long as the teacher is there to supply it with its needs. Teachers at the end of the semester look for which students burn the brightest and hottest. This educational philosophy focuses on language use, and performance. One thing that many Chinese students expect out of their teachers is plenty of direct feedback. Many Chinese students become frustrated when Western teachers give feedback that is watered down. You’re students may find feedback such as “good job!”, “don’t worry about it, you’re doing fine” disappointing. Chinese students are used to their teachers being very direct and pointing out specific errors that they make.

Remember that each teacher and student is different! Never assume that Western teachers and students are better than their Chinese counterparts. Some Westerners may prefer traditional teacher-centered styles of teaching and learning. On the other hand, some Chinese may prefer student-centered styles of teaching and learning rather than traditional teacher-centered teaching and learning.

**Summary of differences in educational philosophies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>China</th>
<th>The West</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher-centered</td>
<td>Student-centered learning begins when students begin to make connections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book-centered</td>
<td>Interactive, students actively involved</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grammar-centered</td>
<td>Focus on language knowledge</td>
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<td>Focus on language knowledge</td>
<td>Focus on rote memorization</td>
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<tr>
<td>Focus on rote memorization</td>
<td>Focus on language use</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Understanding Chinese Students’ Learning Styles**

Now that you’ve got a basic understanding of what educational background your Chinese students are coming from, let’s look at some typical learning styles of Chinese students. Below is a summary of typical learning styles that your Chinese students may or may not have. Don’t assume that all Chinese students’ preferred learning styles will be the same! Some of your Chinese students may have several of the following learning styles; whereas other students may just have a few.
Inward focused learning style
- Students tend to be reserved, quiet, and shy.
- They enjoy working alone or with a partner they know well.
- They dislike working in large groups.
- They don’t like expressing their opinions or emotions.

Teacher dependent learning style
- Students dislike ambiguity and uncertainty.
- These students are generally more willing to follow rules and deadlines.
- They prefer to have constant correction from their teacher.

Detail focused learning style
- Students prefer to analyze details of passages rather than look at the overall picture of the passage.
- They enjoy looking for contrasts and finding cause-effect relationships.

Visual learning style
- Students prefer to absorb material visually.
- These students find it much easier to understand lessons, lectures, conversations and reading passages if they are accompanied by some kind of visual display.
- They enjoy it when the teacher keeps a clean and well organized blackboard that will help them take notes on what the teacher is saying.
- When practicing listening skills, they prefer to have written text in front of them so that they can follow along easier.

Reflective learning style
- Students prefer to think and reflect on what they have learned before they offer an answer.
- They are often uncomfortable making guesses.
- They want adequate time to think of an answer and think of a way to express this answer in a well thought out way.

Sequential learning style
- Students prefer lessons, assignments, and learning materials to be sequential.
- They like teachers to be highly structured.
- They focus on rote memorization.
- They may not be willing to move on to a new topic if they don’t fully understand the topic at hand.
- They may find detailed outlines and lists that can be memorized to be helpful.
- They also enjoy and benefit a lot from structured reviews.
Identifying Your Students' Learning Styles

"Bridging the gap between teaching and learning styles can only be achieved when teachers are, first of all, aware of their learners' needs, capacities, potentials, and learning style preferences in meeting these needs."

-Zhanhui Rao

Understanding the common learning styles that Chinese students prefer is helpful, but we need to take it one step further and identify what specific learning styles your students prefer. Remember, not all students are the same. Let's talk about how to identify your students' learning styles.

The Classroom Collaboration Survey, created by Dr. Kate Kinella of San Francisco State University, is a useful survey that can help you and your students learn about their learning styles. The survey contains 25 questions that aim to help students and teachers understand whether the students prefer to work individually, in pairs, or in groups. An English and Chinese version of the survey is located in the appendix of this guidebook.

Dr. Kinella suggests that before giving the survey to the students you should explain the following:

1. What learning styles are
2. How understanding learning styles will help both students and teachers
3. What general terms found in the survey mean (survey, questionnaire, tally)
4. How to tally the results of the survey

The survey will only help you to identify which students prefer individual, pair, or group work. The survey does not tell you if your students are visual learners, teacher dependent, etc. For this reason, after administering the survey to your students consider holding a class discussion on learning styles. The purpose of the class discussion is to eliminate potential conflicts that may exist between your teaching style and the students' learning styles. In addition to this, having such a discussion will help students to become more self-aware of their learning styles and allow them to see ways that they could style stretch. Consider taking the following steps in leading a discussion with your students about learning styles:

1. Write the major learning styles on the board (these are on pages 4-6 of this guidebook).
2. Explain what each of the major learning styles is. (You could list under the name of the learning style a few of the most important characteristics of that learning style)
3. Ask students to write their names under the learning style that suit them best.

4. Ask the students what challenges they think you might have as a teacher in teaching students with different learning styles.
5. Ask the students what challenges they might face trying to learn English in a classroom full of students with different learning styles.
6. Ask the students what ideas they might have on how to bridge the gap between your teaching style and the students' learning styles.
7. Explain to the students that both you and they should try their best to be flexible and be willing to style-stretch.

How to Bridge Teaching Styles and Learning Styles

After you have an understanding of the different learning styles your students prefer, you can begin to plan how to bridge the gap that may exist between your teaching style and your students' learning styles. You will need to adapt your own teaching style by providing a variety of activities that meet the needs of your students. Here are several things you can do:

- Encourage students to "style-stretch" by experimenting and trying new learning styles
- Conduct a variety of activities with different levels of participation (individual work, pair work, group work, class discussions)
- Organize activities from low risk to high risk
- Plan for different learning styles in your lesson plans

Let's discuss a few of these in greater detail.

Conduct activities with different levels of participation

As discussed earlier, some students may prefer to work by themselves or in pairs, while other students may prefer to work in groups. The activities planned each day for your class should reflect this balance. If your lesson plan has only activities done in groups, then those students who tend to learn individually or in pairs will be at a disadvantage. These students might not be as willing to participate and not learn as much as they would have if the activities had been more balanced. While planning lessons, try to incorporate activities where students can work individually, in pairs, and in groups.

Organize activities from low risk to high risk

Chinese students are very concerned with what their teachers and fellow classmates think about them. For this reason, many Chinese are hesitant to participate in activities where they could make mistakes in front of the class. For example, Chinese students, without the proper preparation, may feel very uncomfortable giving a presentation in class. If students are likely to make mistakes during the activity, or if students are required to perform in front of the class, we could say these activities are high risk activities.
Just because Chinese students may not be comfortable completing high risk activities does not mean that high risk activities should never be done in class. Activities such as presentations, speeches, and debates are very effective in learning English. Students need to do these high risk activities. You as a teacher can help them prepare so that they are more comfortable and more willing to do these kinds of activities. At the end of this learning style section there is an example lesson plan that will help you understand how you can help your students to overcome their anxieties.

One thing that you can do as a teacher to help is to arrange activities in a low to high risk order. Students should begin with low risk activities and slowly build towards high risk activities. By the time students are confronted with the high risk activity, they will have already built up some self-confidence from their success in the easier, lower risk activities.

**Activities Ordered from Low Risk to High Risk**

![Graph showing activities ordered from low to high risk](image)

Plan for different learning styles

When planning lessons, you should take into consideration the learning styles of all your students. Look at the following lesson plan and look for ways that the teacher has taken in consideration the different needs of students.

**Lesson Plan – Does Technology Bring Us Closer Together?**

**Objective:**
1) Students will gain confidence in public speaking by preparing for and participating in a debate.
2) Students will appropriately use transition words (first, second, in conclusion) in a well thought argument.
3) Students will demonstrate mastery of this week's vocabulary by using at least five vocabulary items in their argument. (Technology, Internet, Skype, text, SMS, communicate, globalization, connection, Facebook, blog (verb & noun), social media)

**Materials:** Blackboard, Amish Picture, Technology Picture Handout, Debate Rules handout.

**Overview:** Explain your desire for your students to speak English well and with confidence. Explain that the class will be holding a debate at the end of this week. Help the students to see how holding a debate on technology will help them to learn vocabulary, structure an argument, and build confidence in public speaking. Reassure the students that although it looks like a daunting task, they will have time to prepare and you will be there to help.

**Activity 1 – Class Discussion (Visual learning style - Pictures)**

- Show students the picture of Amish men and boys working
  [link](http://telegraph.co.uk/multimedia/archive/01155/amish_1119781.c.jpg)
- Ask students the following questions
  - What's happening in this picture?
  - Where do you think this picture was taken? What country?
  - How long ago was this picture taken?
  - Do you see any use of technology in the picture?
- Explain that the picture was taken in America and that it was taken within the past ten years.
- Explain that the people in the picture are Amish people and that they consciously decide to not use certain forms of technology like cell phones and cars.
- Ask why students think a community of people would ever agree to not use cell phones and cars.
- Explain the debate will be centered around this question: "Does technology bring us closer together or make us further apart?" Write it on the board.

**Activity 2 – Individual Work (inward focused learning style)**

- Give students the Technology Picture Handout (This is a hand out that has several pictures of different ways we communicate using technology. For example this can include a picture of a cell phone, a computer, a car, the Skype logo, Facebook,
Activity 3 – Pair work (information exchange)

- Have students discuss in pairs the following questions:
  - What types of technology do you use to stay in touch with your family and friends?
  - Do you think technology brings us closer together or do you think technology makes us further apart?
  - In what ways does technology bring us closer together? (try to think of at least 3)
  - In what ways does technology make us further apart? (try to think of at least 3)
  - Would you want to live in a community like the Amish? Why or why not?

Activity 4 – Class Discussion (visual learning style – black board)

- Write on the board two columns “Ways technology brings us closer together” and “Ways technology makes us further apart”.
- Invite each pair of students to write one of their examples under one of the columns (ensure students to keep it balanced).
- Lead a class discussion on some of the pros and cons of using technology as a way of continuing our relationships. Try to make sure both sides of the issue are discussed.

Activity 5 – Teacher instruction (teacher dependent learning style - explaining rules of debate)

- Explain the rules of the debate. How you want to run the debate is up to you. I suggest debate groups to include no more than 4 people. Each person assumes a role, introduction, main arguments, and conclusion.
- Be sure to make clear rules on turn taking and how much time is allowed.
- Make sure you clarify how they will be graded. I like requiring students to use at least three vocabulary and three transition words throughout their argument.
- Remind the students the debate will be held at the end of the week. They will have some time in class today to prepare, but they will also need to prepare outside of class.

Activity 6 – Group work (Preparing for the debate)

- Divide the class into groups. Take into consideration the skill level of students, conflicts that may exist, and what side students prefer to argue.
- Have students make a 2x2 table where they list the pros and cons of both sides.
- Give them ample time to discuss and structure their argument.
- Circle from group to group, encouraging all members to participate, reminding students of vocabulary and transition words they could use, and asking thought-provoking questions to help them analyze the situation. Reassure struggling students.
Linguistic Differences

"The more Native-English-Speaking teachers learn about the host language, the more effectively they will be able to teach."
-Zhenhui Rao

Introduction

Many Chinese students and program administrators feel that Western teachers are insensitive to their linguistic needs. Some feel that Western teachers have a difficult time helping them overcome linguistic challenges. They feel this way because many Western teachers are unaware of important differences between English and Chinese.

Although becoming fluent in Chinese during your stay in China may not be practical or realistic, showing your students that you are putting forth effort to understand their linguistic background will impress your students. Learning some basic Chinese is an effective way to help you improve your relationship with your students.

In this section you will learn some basics differences between the Chinese language and English. The main focus will be on common pronouns and grammar errors that Chinese students make when speaking English. This section will help you to understand the source of their errors that they make in English. Teaching suggestions will also help you to understand how to help your students overcome these errors. Speaking errors, not writing errors, are the focus of this guidebook. If you want to learn about errors beyond those listed in this section, Michael Swan’s Learner English and Peter Avery’s Teaching American English Pronunciation are two helpful books.

Quiz on Linguistic Differences

How much do you know about Chinese? Take this short quiz to find out.

1) Why do Chinese struggle with ‘a’ and ‘the’?
   a. In Chinese ‘a’ and ‘the’ are the same word.
   b. The words ‘a’ and ‘the’ don’t exist in Chinese.
   c. The words ‘a’ and ‘the’ sound like Chinese words that have the same meaning.
   d. In Chinese ‘a’ and ‘the’ aren’t used as often as in English.

2) Which dialect of Chinese does Standard Chinese come from?
   a. Cantonese
   b. Hakka
   c. Wu
   d. Mandarin

3) What is the standard word order for a Chinese sentence?
   a. Subject → Time → Verb → Object → Place
   b. Time → Place → Subject → Verb → Object
   c. Object → Subject → Verb → Place → Time
   d. Place → Object → Verb → Subject → Time

4) Why do Chinese struggle with verb conjugations?
   a. In Chinese verbs don’t change.
   b. Verbs in English are much longer than verbs in Chinese.
   c. In Chinese you change the prefix of verbs, not the suffix.
   d. Chinese verbs all have the same ending.

5) Why do Chinese students find changing their intonation (pitch) throughout a sentence difficult?
   a. In Chinese only male speakers are supposed to change their intonation.
   b. It is rude to change your intonation in Chinese.
   c. In Chinese, intonation is used to distinguish words, not sentence meaning.
   d. Only individuals of high status are supposed to change their intonation in China.

Answers: 1) b 2) d 3) a 4) a 5) c

What is Chinese?

What Westerners call the Chinese language can actually be broken down into numerous different spoken dialects. These dialects are different enough that people who speak them can’t understand each other. Although these dialects are very different when spoken, they do share ties to the same written language. The written language has two forms: traditional and simplified. Traditional characters are used in Hong Kong and Taiwan; while simplified characters (developed in the 1950’s to increase literacy) are used in Mainland China.

The dialects of Chinese can be categorized into eight different groups. The two most commonly used dialects in China are Mandarin and Cantonese. Mandarin has become the official language of China. Most northern Chinese are accustomed to speaking Mandarin. Cantonese is used in Hong Kong and its surrounding areas. Other dialects include: Wu, Hsien, Kan, Hakka, Northern Min, and Southern Min.
Because Mandarin is the official language of China, it is used for school instruction and news broadcasts throughout the country. Because of this, students throughout China grow up learning Mandarin in school. When they return home or hang out with friends they prefer to use their regional dialect. For this reason, although most young Chinese understand Mandarin, they are more comfortable and confident in using their regional dialect.

All Chinese dialects share important basic features. These basic features are very different from English. In the remainder of this section you will learn about some of the key features of Chinese that make it difficult for Chinese students to learn English.

Map of Dialects in China

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General differences between English and Chinese

You should understand some of the general differences between English and Chinese before we jump to the specific mistakes that many Chinese students make when speaking English.

The most obvious difference between English and Chinese is the writing system. Unlike English, Chinese does not use an alphabet. Each Chinese character is written with a set stroke order. Characters can be written left to right, right to left, or top to bottom.

Chinese does not allow for much inflection. Inflection is when we change the meaning of a word by changing the beginning (prefix) or end (suffix) of a word. In English we change the form of verbs to convey different tenses. For example, we add -ed on to many verbs to make them past tense. I walk becomes I walked. Chinese doesn't do this. For this reason many Chinese may incorrectly say that Chinese has no grammar. Every language has grammar, including Chinese. Some aspects of Chinese grammar are similar to English grammar, while others are very different.

Take for example Chinese sentence structure (syntax). Chinese sentence structure is very similar to English sentence structure. The standard sentence structure for Chinese is Subject Verb Object Place. English also shares this Subject Verb Object order in sentences.

Some aspects of Chinese grammar that are very different from English grammar are inflection and parts of speech. In English we change the form of a word in order to change its word class. In other words we can change the prefix or suffix of a word to change it from a noun, to a verb, adjective, or other part of speech. In Chinese, on the other hand, parts of speech are not as distinguished as in English. A Chinese word can be a noun, verb, or another part of speech. This means that many Chinese struggle with related words in English like difficult and difficulty.

Another important distinction between English and Chinese that deserves attention is the role that pitch plays. In English we change our pitch over the duration of a sentence. We do this convey how we feel or think about what we are saying. In Chinese, pitch is used not at the sentence level, but at the word level. Many words in Chinese are pronounced exactly the same way, except for the pitch. We call these pitch changes 'tones'.

Although these aren't all the differences between English and Chinese, they are the most important ones. Many of your students will struggle with these differences. Now let's take a closer look at some pronunciation and grammar errors you might hear your Chinese students make when they use English. Both sections on pronunciation and grammar errors are organized by the errors that Chinese students make, the sources of those errors, and a teaching suggestion or two.

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Pronunciation Errors

Sounds that Chinese students struggle with

Chinese struggle with many sounds of English. Sometimes it's because the English sounds aren't used at all in Chinese. Other times it's because the sounds are very similar, but still different, from sounds in Chinese. This section on pronunciation errors contains many, but not all, of the sounds that Chinese students struggle with. For more information on other errors and suggestions on how to fix these pronunciation errors, see Peter Avery and Susan Ehrlich's Teaching American English Pronunciation, Judy Gilbert's Clear Speech, and Lynn Henrichsen's Pronunciation Matters.

My students have a hard time distinguishing between vowel sounds like beat and bit.

English vowels can be categorized as tense vowels or lax vowels. Say beat slowly a few times. Now say bit slowly a few times. Notice how when saying beat the muscles in and around your mouth are more tense than when you say bit. The words beat, bait, boat, boat, and bought are all pronounced with tense vowels. Bit, bet, bat, bat, and book are all pronounced with lax vowels. Chinese does not have as many vowel sounds as English does. Chinese especially struggle with the contrast between beat and bit, as well as pod and pull.

My students struggle with the TH sounds in words like think and that.

The only difference between the TH sounds in think and that is what we do with our vocal chords. Sounds that require our vocal chords to shake are called voiced sounds. Sounds that are made without our vocal chords vibrating are called voiceless sounds. Put your hand over your throat and make the TH sound in that. Feel it the vibrations? Now make the TH sound in think. Your vocal chords don't shake. Neither of these TH sounds exists in Chinese. As a result, students struggle to distinguish between these sounds. Your students might replace the voiceless TH sound with an S, T, or F. Think might be pronounced sink, tink, or fink. The voiced TH sound may be replaced by D or Z. Your students might say dis or its instead of this. Because these sounds don't exist in Chinese you will need to help your students understand what to do with their tongue and mouth in order to make this sound. The TH sound is made by placing your tongue between your teeth. Then you pull back your tongue while exhaling. You will then need to help your students understand how to make voiced and voiceless sounds.

Why do my students mistakenly use W or F sounds instead of the appropriate V sound?

The V sound doesn't exist in many dialects of Chinese. Sometimes Chinese will make a W or F sound instead of a V sound. For example, live might be pronounced lif. Help them to understand how W, F and V are pronounced differently. V is pronounced by putting your bottom lip to your upper teeth. Then you let air vibrate between your bottom lip and your upper teeth.

You also let your vocal chords vibrate. The F sound is made exactly the same way except it is voiceless, that is to say your vocal chords do not vibrate. W is made by bringing your two lips close together until they form a small circle. It is also a voiceless sound.

Why is it hard for my students to say the Z sound? They often say things like nice instead of rise.

Most of the Chinese dialects do not have the Z sound. As a result many Chinese will replace a Z sound with an S sound. The Z and S sounds are both made at the gums just behind your front teeth. Your tongue allows only a small amount of air to pass over it. Z is voiced and S is voiceless.

Some of my students struggle with their L and R sounds, how can I help them?

Especially in southern China, Chinese have a difficult time distinguishing between the L sound and the R sound. Students especially struggle to pronounce L correctly when it comes at the end of a word. Sometimes students will drop the L sound or replace it with an R sound. Mill becomes mahl or mier. The L sound is made by curling your tongue back and touching the top of your mouth. Air passes around the sides of your tongue to make the L sound. The R sound is also made by curling the tongue back. The tip of your tongue doesn't touch the top of your mouth however. The air passes between the top of your mouth and the tip of your tongue.

My students struggle with a lot of words that end in consonants like knife.

Typically, Chinese syllables consist of a vowel or a consonant followed by a vowel. Few words in Chinese end with consonants. For this reason, many students often add an extra vowel to the end of words that end in consonants. Knife may become kniez. Students may also just drop the consonant sound.

My Chinese students have a hard time stressing words with multiple syllables correctly. Instead of pronouncing one syllable louder and longer than others, many students stress each syllable of each word. Why?

Many Chinese dialects (especially Cantonese) require the speaker to stress each syllable equally. Because they are used to this Chinese stress pattern, students do the same thing in English. Students struggle to lengthen the stressed syllable and reduce the length of the unstressed syllables. For example, instead of saying distribute normally, your students might say distribute with each syllable stressed equally.

To overcome this problem, give students a list related words with stress marked. Have them practice stressing the words correctly. They can tap the table or clap their hands when stressing a syllable more than others. You can also distribute rubber bands to the students.
students can place the rubber band around their thumbs. When students come to the stressed syllable of the word they pull on the rubber band.

fossil fossilization
photograph photography photographic
distribute distribution

Make sure when you teach new vocabulary that you demonstrate to your students how to properly stress the vocabulary items.

My students can't seem to grasp the "flow" of English. They can pronounce words with the correct stress when words are isolated, but they struggle to say a whole sentence with a natural flow. Instead they sound choppy. Why is this?

In English we make the most important words in the sentence longer and louder than less important words. In other words, nouns, verbs, and adjectives are pronounced longer than determiners (a and the) and prepositions. Mandarin Chinese works in a similar way to English, but to a much lesser extent. Other dialects of Chinese (like Cantonese) do not do this at all. When Chinese speak English, they often pronounce each syllable with the same stress. In addition to this, each word is pronounced with roughly the same length. This results in a choppy staccato rhythm. Many Chinese tend to separate English words rather than linking the words together and creating a "flow of speech."

To remedy this problem consider using rhythmic expressions of spoken English. Nursery rhymes, for example, are a fun and effective way to help your students acquire the rhythm of English. Nursery rhymes are also easily accessible online. There are many YouTube playlists have both music and words. Poetry can also be used. Jazz Chants® can also be used. Jazz Chants® are short sentences that flow together in a jazzy, rhythmic fashion. The creator of these chants, Carolyn Graham, has a website with useful examples and instructions on how to make your own jazz chants. See jazzchants.net for more information.

My students do not change their intonation throughout a sentence. This makes it seem that there is no emotion behind what they are saying.

In English we change the pitch of our voice to express how we feel about what we are saying. Take for example the sentence *You left the car keys in the refrigerator?* We can change the intonation of our voice to let the listener know that we are angry, amused, or surprised about what we are saying. In addition to this we use intonation to convey whether we are making a statement or making a question. The sentence *The homework was difficult, wasn't it?* could be a question or a statement, depending on the intonation used.

Of course Chinese do speak with emotion, but they do not use intonation to do this. Instead they use particles (extra sounds placed carefully in the sentence to express emotion). In Chinese intonation plays a completely different role. Many words in Chinese, whose meanings are very different, use the exact same consonants and vowels. Chinese can tell the words apart because they use different tones, or pitch changes. In Mandarin the word *Ma* has five different meanings. It can mean *horse, mother, hemp, to scold. Ma* can also turn a statement into a question. Chinese use intonation, or pitch changes, to distinguish between the words. Chinese could say *Ma* five times with different pitch changes to say *Did mom scold the hemp horse? All that our Western ears might hear is Ma Ma Ma Ma Ma*. The important thing to remember is that because Chinese change the pitch of their voice at a word level and not at a sentence level, their speech may sound flat, emotionless, or choppy to Westerners.

Give students a couple of sentences that could be read different ways. For example *"You left the car keys in the refrigerator?"* could be said by someone that was angry, amused, confused, or even bored. Demonstrate how to change your intonation by reading the sentence using different emotions. Ask the students what you are doing so that it sounds angry, amused, etc. In pairs have the students read the sentences. One partner reads the sentence, choosing a particular emotion. The partner guesses which emotion the first student was trying to express through their intonation. You can also practice with sentences with tag questions like *The homework was difficult, wasn't it?* to help our students understand how to use intonation to convey the meaning behind the sentence (is it a question or a statement).

**Grammar Errors**

My Chinese students often struggle to use the correct parts of speech. They might use an adjectival form of a word when they should use the noun form. For example, they might say *It is very difficult to speak English: Why?*

Parts of speech in Chinese are not as distinguished by word endings as in English. A word doesn't necessarily have to change its form to be used in as a different part of speech. In other words, Chinese can use a noun as a verb or an adjective without changing the form of the word. For this reason it may be difficult for your Chinese students to distinguish between related words like difficult and difficulty.

Help students learn what the ending, or suffix, of a word will often tell you what part of speech the word belongs to. For example words that end in *'s* and *'s' (like socialist and socialism) are usually nouns. Words that end in *'ing' and *'ly* (like harmonize and harmonize) are usually verbs. For a list of more suffixes in English go to [http://www.michigan-proficiency-exams.com/parts-of-speech.html](http://www.michigan-proficiency-exams.com/parts-of-speech.html)
Why do my students use present tense verbs when they should use past tense verbs (or vice versa)? For example, one student said *He sleep too much yesterday.*

In English we change the form of verbs so that the listener knows if something is happening in the present, past and future. For example, *walk* becomes *walked* in the past and *will* walk in the future.

Chinese do not change the form of verbs to show if something happened in the present, past, or future. Instead, Chinese use time markers (words like *today*, *tomorrow*, and *last week*) to express when something occurs. Chinese use the same character for a verb whether it is used in the present, past, or future.

Why is it that my students use verb forms that don’t agree with their subjects. They say things like *She walk to school every day.*

Unlike in English, Chinese verbs don’t change form. For this reason there is no subject-verb agreement in Chinese. Your Chinese students aren’t used to having to think if the form of the verb they are using matches the subject of the sentence.

One activity you could do to give your students practice with subject-verb agreement is to create a short story. Underline all the verbs in the story. Change most of the verbs so that they do not agree with the subject. Have the students look at each verb and decide if it agrees with the subject. Have them fix the verbs they feel are incorrect.

Some of my Chinese students struggle to use articles consistently and correctly. Often they don’t use the articles, use articles when they shouldn’t, or confuse definite (the) and indefinite (a/an) articles. My students say things like *Let’s play game* or *They played piano in the harmony.*

In the Chinese language there are no articles. The closest thing that resembles article is Chinese are classifier words like *piece* (piece of cake) or *sheet* (sheet of paper). Because Chinese students have never used articles before, they struggle with understanding why they are necessary and how to use them.

Be upfront and honest with your students. Let them know that this will be a grammar principle that they will struggle with and continue to make mistakes. Tell them they shouldn’t get discouraged. Be patient as a teacher when they keep making mistakes. Although articles in English seems simple (its only three words and one of them is one letter ‘s’!), the usage of articles in English is very complicated and difficult to master.

My students struggle when using passive structures in English. They say things like *A new book is writing this year instead of A new book is being written this year.*

Passives, in Chinese are rarely used, and inflection (the changing of verbs) doesn’t exist in Chinese. Despite this, your Chinese students are still able to use Chinese to express the same idea as passive voice in English, but they do not use a passive structure like we do in English. For example, to say “This book was written in 2005” Chinese actually say “This book is 2005 year write.” It really is different!

Because Chinese are not accustomed to changing verbs, you should provide lots and lots of examples when teaching passives. In addition to helping students change verbs from active to passive voice, also have them change verbs from passive to active voice. It’s not enough for the students to learn the rules or forms of passive verbs. Make sure that they can always associate the form of the verb with its correct meaning.

My Chinese students confuse pronouns like he, she, and it. Why do they make mistakes like *My girlfriend, he doesn’t like it or That’s my sister, do you know him?*

The Chinese words for he (他), she (她), and it (它) are pronounced exactly the same way (Tā). The words are written in three distinct ways, but are pronounced with the same sound and tones.

Chinese students will continue to make this mistake, even at advanced levels of English. When students say ‘she’ when they mean ‘he,’ simply correct them. Students need to be corrected over and over until they get into the habit of thinking about which pronoun to use before they speak.

My students often don’t add s onto nouns. They say things like *I have many movie at my house.*

In Chinese, nouns can be both singular and plural without having to change them.

*车* (che) can mean both *car* or *cars.* You know if it is singular or plural by the context around the noun (words like *many* or *some*). Because your Chinese students don’t have to change their Chinese nouns to make them plural, when speaking in English they may often forget to add the plural ending *s*.

When students fail to add *s* onto nouns, use “echo correction.” Echo correction is when you politely restate what a student said, but in the correct form. If a student forgets to add an *s* to the word they want to make plural, then simply say the word with an *s*. Students need to be corrected over and over until they get into the habit of thinking about how to change a noun into its plural form.
My students often drop pronouns in the middle of a sentence. For example, one student said *I went to the store after finished my homework.* The student forgot to add *I* before *finished.*

In Chinese, when talking about a particular subject, you only need to state the subject once. Having established who or what you are talking about, you are free to drop any pronouns that refer back to the subject. It is OK in Chinese to say *I went to the store after finished my homework.*

Explain to students that in English we repeat pronouns more often in Chinese. Gentle echo correction will remind students to not drop pronouns.

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**Chinese Culture in the Classroom**

"The apparent passivity of the students in the classroom is not a lack of involvement in the lesson, but respect for the teacher's greater knowledge and wisdom... This passivity of students can be a major obstacle to improving speaking skills in the language classroom."

-Xiaojin Zhang

**Introduction**

Your ability to understand your Chinese students requires more than an understanding of their educational and linguistic background. Many of the misunderstandings you will have with your students are the result of deeply embedded cultural differences. In this section you will read answers to questions that previous English teachers in China have had regarding Chinese culture in the classroom. The more you can understand how your Chinese students think and feel, the more able you will be to help them.

**What is the Chinese idea of “saving face”?**

To save face means to preserve one's image and honor. Chinese are less individualistic than Westerners. When Chinese think of themselves, they think of themselves as a part of a larger whole in the context of their other relationships. What one does or says will be seen and heard by others. Face (image, reputation, or honor) depends on how a person acts in front of their community. If they do or say something inappropriate then their reputation is harmed. Because the Chinese self is tied to other relationships, when a person does something shameful and loses face, those tied to that person also lose face. For this reason, Chinese are always thinking about how their actions and words will reflect on themselves and those associated with them (friends, family, work associates, bosses, etc.). The end result is that Chinese are much more conscious and careful of what they do and say than their Western counterparts.

"Chinese often are concerned with what others will say, and this concern has a controlling effect on Chinese behavior."

- Ge Gao and Stella Ting-Toomey

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Linguistic Differences Page 77

Chinese Culture in the Classroom Page 78
Why are Chinese students so quiet in my classroom? How come it's so hard to get them to ask questions or offer answers?

Chinese students in the classroom may be quiet and hesitant to ask questions or offer answers partly because they are afraid of losing face. Your Chinese students' self-esteem is most often formed by the opinions and remarks of others. If a student offers an incorrect answer, then that student will feel ashamed. He or she has lost face in front of others. The fear of making a mistake a losing face discourages students from asking questions or offering answers.

"Chinese regard one's ideas as entangled with one's identity or sense of personal worth; an attack on one's ideas is therefore an attack on one's self, or, more specifically, one's face."

- Linda Young

In addition to being afraid of making mistakes, Chinese students are quiet because they want to show respect to the teacher. Chinese students are used to listening to the teacher, taking notes, reflecting on what has been taught, and obeying the teacher. Asking questions or volunteering answers without being called upon would be interrupting the teacher. In other words, your Chinese students might seem passive or uninterested, but they are actually showing you respect as they sit quietly and take notes.

Why are Chinese students so focused on tests? They seem to care more about getting good grades on tests than being able to speak good English. Why?

Testing has been crucial to the Chinese educational system for thousands of years. In 603 AD the Imperial Examination (kǎiliè) was established. Chinese that passed this test were given prestigious and well paying positions in the Chinese government. Although the Imperial Examination ended in 1905, the importance of tests in China remains very strong. Today the tests are different, but they still determine the future opportunities that are available for students that pass or fail them.

If high school students do not pass the National Matriculation English Test (NMET) then they are not permitted to study at a college or university in China. Likewise, if university students fail to pass the Chinese English Test – Band 4 (CET-4) then they will be unable to get a bachelor's degree. Similar tests exist for graduate students and English Major students. Many of these tests do not assess the students' ability to speak. Instead they focus on reading and listening comprehension, writing, and translation.

These tests are considered high-stakes tests. That is to say, a lot of opportunities (to study at a university or to get a nice job) depend on passing these tests. Some jobs even require the applicants to pass these tests. Because there is so much at stake, students want to make sure they are prepared for these tests. Because many of these tests do not test your students' ability to speak English, you may have some students that don't care about their ability to speak. Rather, they focus on those things that will be on the test they are preparing for.

"The high-stakes nature of these tests makes most educational activities in China very exam-oriented... Teachers focus on helping their students to pass these tests, and the students focus on passing them."

- Chaping Sun

What English tests are my students required to take at the high school, undergraduate, and graduate levels?

The tests that you should know about can be divided into two categories: entrance exams and certificate exams. Entrance exams are those tests that students must pass in order to gain entrance into a university or graduate school. Certificate exams are tests that students must pass in order to earn a degree and graduate from university or graduate school. The following tests are the major ones that your students may face.

Entrance Exams:

The National Matriculation English Test (NMET)

The NMET (gōsködjongyö in Chinese) is actually just one part of the University Entrance Exam to Higher Education (gōsködkö). The NMET is the most important test for high school students because it determines what universities (if any) those students can attend. It is a norm-referenced standardized test. This means that it works in a similar way to the SAT or ACT in America. The purpose of the test is to predict how well students will perform in English in university level classes. The NMET is administered annually in June throughout China. Students are tested on listening, grammar and structure, reading comprehension, and writing.

The Graduate School Entrance Exam (GSEE)

The GSEE is taken by undergraduate university students that want to continue their studies in graduate schools in China. It is the English portion of the Graduate School Entrance Exam (GSEE). The GSEE is administered annually in January and February. The test assesses grammar and structure, reading comprehension, and writing.
Certification

The Chinese English Test (CET)

The CET is for all undergraduate who are non-English majors. English majors, in contrast, take the Test for English Majors (TEM). The CET is a national standardized test administered biannually in June and December/January. The CET can actually be broken down into different tests that are taken after each semester of English. Chinese university students take it after each semester. The most important CET to pass is administered at the end of their sophomore year. It is called the CET-Band 4 (CET-4). Students who fail to pass this test will not be given a degree. The test assesses listening, reading comprehension, error correction, translation, and writing.

The CET is a very important and influential test in China. Because the CET determines whether or not college students can graduate, it has become the standard for other tests (and hence English programs) throughout China. What is assessed in the CET is what students want to learn. Because of this, the CET influences what is taught in English classrooms throughout China.

The Test for English Majors (TEM)

The TEM is designed for students who are pursuing an English major. English majors take the TEM-4 at the end of their sophomore year and the TEM-8 at the end of their senior year. These tests are more difficult than their CET counterparts. The TEM-4 is administered every May, while the TEM-8 is administered every March. Both tests assess listening, reading comprehension, grammar and structure, and writing. In addition to these areas, the TEM-8 also assesses students' ability to proofread.

It is important to distinguish between English major students and non-English major students. There are sharp differences in these students' language proficiency. English major students are held to higher expectations and are expected to perform at higher levels. Expectations for non-English major students may be much lower and they may be required to perform much simpler tasks. Getting to know what expectations administrators have for students at the institution you teach at will help you to tailor your teaching to the needs of your students.

Summary of tests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test name</th>
<th>Test takers</th>
<th>Purpose of test</th>
<th>Content of test</th>
<th>Time of the test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NMET</td>
<td>High School graduates</td>
<td>College entrance</td>
<td>Listening, grammar, reading comprehension, writing</td>
<td>Annual – June</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GSEE</td>
<td>College graduates</td>
<td>Graduate school entrance</td>
<td>Grammar, reading comprehension, writing</td>
<td>Annual – January/February</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CET-4</td>
<td>Sophomore non-English majors</td>
<td>College certificate</td>
<td>Listening, reading comprehension, error correction, translation, writing</td>
<td>Biannual – January/June</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEM-4</td>
<td>Sophomore English majors</td>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>Listening, grammar, reading comprehension, writing</td>
<td>Annual - May</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEM-8</td>
<td>Senior English majors</td>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>Listening, reading comprehension, proofreading, grammar, writing</td>
<td>Annual - March</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For more information on standardized tests in China, see Caiping Sun's MA thesis located at http://etl.lib.buu.edu/.
Why do my students often plagiarize? Even when I tell them they will be punished, they still plagiarize. Why?

What westerners call plagiarism is much more common in China than it is in America and other Western countries. Even when told they will be seriously punished for this form of "cheating," many Chinese students are willing to take the risk and plagiarize. Why?

Plagiarizing is copying. Unfortunately, the habit of copying is instilled in Chinese students throughout their education. Let me share a story to illustrate this point. An American friend of mine (let's call him Aaron) studied in Nanjing, China for a year. Aaron enrolled in a normal Chinese university and sat in classes with normal Chinese university students. Class instruction and homework were done in Chinese. On his history class's final exam was the essay prompt "Please explain your view of the One Child policy". Aaron wrote an essay detailing his view of the advantages and disadvantages of the One Child policy. When he received his exam back from the professor, he was quite upset with his low grade. He asked his professor why he received such a low score. The professor explained that the reason why he received such a low score was because none of the things that Aaron argued in his essay reflected the professor's view of the one Child policy. Confused and a bit angry, Aaron argued that the essay question asked specifically for his own point of view. The professor refused to change the grade. You can see how the expectation that students regurgitate information that their professors have passed on to them can lead to students' willingness to plagiarize.

Another reason why many Chinese students plagiarize is because of plagiarism isn't clearly defined in the academy in China. Many students don't understand what plagiarism is. They may not think that it's wrong. In addition to this, incidents of plagiarism aren't necessarily punished. Part of the problem lies in the fact that the students aren't the only ones plagiarizing. It's not just that Chinese professors are also caught plagiarizing.

The competition to get into good universities as students or professors is brutal. When graduate students and professors are evaluated on how many articles they publish, many graduate students and professors turn to plagiarism to meet the demands of their evaluators.

In addition to this, Chinese students plagiarize often because they want to make sure they are correct. Students who fear their English isn't good enough to complete an assignment may turn to plagiarism as a way to ensure their homework looks good. If they are required to give a news report in English class then they may go directly to an English news source online and copy it word for word. Some may fail to realize that in the pursuit of getting the right answer, they have missed an opportunity to truly learn the material.

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Appendix

References

The red quotations throughout the guidebook come from useful sources. Here they are listed below:


Acknowledgments

Special thanks to Lynn Henrichsen for the many hours he spent with me reviewing and improving this guidebook. Dr. Henrichsen has made some great resources for novice English teachers. His special project at www.tesol.com is definitely worth looking at.

I would like to acknowledge my talented brother Jordan Pack for helping me with the cover art. Check out his artwork at http://www.jordangpack.blogspot.com

Thanks to www.freedigitalphotos.net for permitting me to use the following images in the guidebook:

Lastly, thanks to Kate Kinsella for permitting me to use her Classroom Collaboration Survey. You can find the survey on the next page. I have provided a Chinese translation for your convenience. I suggest using the English version, using the Chinese version only if your students' reading comprehension is poor.
**Classroom Collaboration Survey**

**Directions:** This survey has been designed to help you and your teacher better understand the way you prefer to work on assignments in class. Please read each statement, then taking into consideration your past and present educational experiences, decide whether you mostly agree or mostly disagree with each statement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>AGREE</th>
<th>DISAGREE</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. When I work on assignments by myself, I often feel frustrated or bored.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. When I work by myself on assignments (instead of with a partner or a small group), I usually do a better job.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. I enjoy having opportunities to share opinions and experiences, compare answers, and solve problems with a group of classmates.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. When I work by myself on assignments, I usually concentrate better and learn more.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. I prefer working on assignments in class with a single partner rather than with a group of classmates.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Most of the time, I prefer to work by myself in class rather than with a partner or a small group.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. I enjoy having opportunities to share opinions and experiences, compare answers, and solve problems with a single partner more than with a group.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. When I work with a partner or a small group in class instead of by myself, I often feel frustrated or like I am wasting time.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. When I work with a small group in class, I usually learn more and do a better job on the assignment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Most of the time, I would prefer to work in class with a single partner rather than by myself.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Most of the time, I would prefer to work with a group rather than with a single partner or by myself.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. When I work with a partner in class, I usually learn more and do a better job on the assignment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. I am more comfortable working with classmates when I can select the partner or group with whom I will be working.</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. Usually, I prefer that the instructor select the partner or the group of classmates with whom I will be working.</td>
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<tr>
<td>15. Usually, I find working with a partner to be more interesting and productive than working alone in class.</td>
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<td>16. I prefer working in groups when there is a mixture of students from different backgrounds.</td>
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<td>17. I hope we will have regular opportunities in this class to work in groups.</td>
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<tr>
<td>18. I generally get more accomplished when I work with a partner on a task in class.</td>
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<tr>
<td>19. I hope we will not do too much group work in this class.</td>
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<tr>
<td>20. I prefer working with classmates from my same background.</td>
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<tr>
<td>21. I hope we will have regular opportunities in this class to work with a partner.</td>
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<tr>
<td>22. I mainly want my teacher to give us classroom assignments that we can work on by ourselves.</td>
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<tr>
<td>23. Usually, I find working in a group to be more interesting and productive than working alone in class.</td>
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<tr>
<td>24. Usually, I find working in a group to be a waste of time.</td>
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<tr>
<td>25. I generally get more accomplished when I work with a group on a task in class.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Directions:** Give yourself 1 point if you AGREE with the following survey items and 0 points if you DISAGREE. Next, add the points under each heading. The greatest total indicates the way you usually prefer to work in class.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>WITH A PARTNER</th>
<th>WITH A GROUP</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
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<td>4.</td>
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<td>8.</td>
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<td>12.</td>
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<td>14.</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<th>TOTAL</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
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13-2-14:17
### 课堂偏好调查

**导言**：这项调查用于帮助您和您的老师更好地了解您选择课堂作业的倾向。请阅读每一项，参照您过去和现在的经历，勾选您（对/错）同意或（对/错）不同意选项。

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>同意</th>
<th>不同意</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1.</strong> 当我独自做作业的时候，我感到很困难或无聊。</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2.</strong> 当我独自做作业时（而不是和学习伙伴或小组时），我做的更好。</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>3.</strong> 比起跟小组一起回答问题或是解决问题，我更喜欢分享我的见解或经验。</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>4.</strong> 我独自工作时，学的更专心也更快更好。</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>5.</strong> 比起多人团队，我比较喜欢和一个学习伙伴合作。</td>
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<td><strong>6.</strong> 大多数时候我喜欢独自学习而不是和一个伙伴或一群人学习。</td>
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<td><strong>7.</strong> 比起跟小组一起回答问题或是解决问题，我更喜欢分享我的见解或经验。</td>
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<td><strong>8.</strong> 当我和一个伙伴或一群人工作时而不是自己完成，我时常觉得很难或是在浪费时间。</td>
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<td><strong>9.</strong> 当我和一个小组合作时，我学到更多也能把作业做得更好。</td>
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<td><strong>10.</strong> 大多数时候我愿意和一个伙伴学习而非独自一人。</td>
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<td><strong>11.</strong> 大多数时候我更愿意和小团队学习而非和一个合作伙伴或是独自一人。</td>
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<td><strong>12.</strong> 当我和一个伙伴学习时，我学的更多也能把作业做得更好。</td>
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<td><strong>13.</strong> 若在选择合作伙伴的前提下，我更倾向于选择同班同学。</td>
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<td><strong>15.</strong> 通常，我认为与一个伙伴在课堂学习比独自一人更有趣也有效。</td>
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<td><strong>16.</strong> 我喜欢与有不同文化背景的团队合作。</td>
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<td><strong>17.</strong> 我希望我们每个人在课堂都有均等的机会进行团队合作。</td>
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<td><strong>18.</strong> 我认为与一个伙伴在课堂完成学习任务更加有效。</td>
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<td><strong>19.</strong> 我希望不要在课堂上有太多的团队合作。</td>
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<td><strong>20.</strong> 我倾向和有相同背景的人合作。</td>
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<td><strong>21.</strong> 我希望在课堂上有均等的机会与一个伙伴合作。</td>
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<td><strong>22.</strong> 基本上我希望老师布置我们可以独自完成的作业。</td>
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<td><strong>23.</strong> 通常，我认为团队合作比独自完成更加高效、有趣。</td>
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<td><strong>24.</strong> 通常，我认为团队合作是浪费时间。</td>
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<td><strong>25.</strong> 当我和团队合作完成课堂任务时，我感到任务完成的更多更快。</td>
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Bridging the Gap Between Teaching and Learning Styles in East Asian Contexts

Zhenhui Rao

Liu Hong, a 3rd-year English major at Jiangxi Normal University, in China, was in David's office again. After failing David's oral English course the previous year, Liu Hong had reenrolled, hoping to pass it this year. Unfortunately, things were not looking promising so far, and she was frustrated. When David asked why she was so unhappy in his class, she explained:

I feel quite nervous in your oral class. I know that many of the activities you ask us to perform are excellent in improving our oral English, but I find it difficult to adjust myself to those performances. I don't like to act, play games, mime, and move around the classroom in the formal lecture. Besides, I feel helpless if you don't write down lecture points on the blackboard.

Jenny, a teacher from the United States who was teaching in Vietnam, sat in the Dean's office again, feeling perplexed by the students' negative responses to her teaching style. She had been trying to avoid a teacher-centered approach by assigning group and pair work, communicative role-plays, and student presentations. Despite Jenny's persistent efforts to convince the students of the advantages of her teaching styles, she was told by her Vietnamese colleagues that her attempts were in opposition to the prevalent teaching styles in Vietnam. Jenny held a degree in applied linguistics and was experienced in TESOL. However, her TESOL degree and teaching experience had not prepared her for this situation.

The above examples are representative of serious mismatches between the learning styles of students and the teaching styles of the instructors. In a class in which such a mismatch occurs, the students tend to be bored and inattentive, perform poorly on tests, become discouraged about the course, and possibly conclude that they are not good at the subject and give up. Instructors, confronted by low test scores, may become overly critical of their students or begin to question their own competence as teachers, as exemplified by Jenny's case above.

To reduce teacher-student style conflicts, some researchers advocate that teaching and learning styles be matched, especially in foreign language instruction. Kumaravadivelu (1991) states, "the narrower the gap between teacher intention and learner interpretation, the greater are the chances of achieving desired learning outcomes" (p. 98). There are many indications that bridging the gap between teaching and learning styles plays an important role in enabling students to maximize their classroom experience.

This article describes ways to reduce teacher-student style conflicts in real-life classroom teaching in East Asian and comparable contexts. The assumption underlying the approach taken here is that the way we teach should be adapted to the way learners from a particular community learn. Before exploring how to bridge the gap between teaching and learning styles, it is important to examine traditional East Asian students' learning-style preferences in dealing with language learning tasks.

Traditional East Asian Learning Styles

Individual learners have a composite of at least 20 style dimensions (Ehrman & Oxford, 1990), but students in East Asian countries (e.g., China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam) tend to show a distinctive pattern of learning styles that is a much smaller subset (Liu & Littlewood, 1997). Traditionally, the teaching of EFL in Asia has been dominated by a teacher-centered, book-centered, grammar-translation method and an emphasis on rote memory (Littlewood, 1999). These traditional language teaching approaches have resulted in a number of typical learning styles in East Asian countries, which are repeatedly reported in the literature. By synthesizing the work of many people who have examined the styles of East Asian students, I categorize these typical East Asian learning styles and describe their related strategies in Table 1.

It is worth noting that the following generalizations about learning styles of East Asian learners do not apply to every individual in these countries; many individual exceptions exist. Nevertheless, these seemingly stereotypical descriptions do have a basis in classroom studies and observations.

Introverted

In East Asia, most students see knowledge as something to be transmitted by the teacher rather than discovered by the learners. They therefore find it normal to engage in modes of learning that are teacher-centered and in which they
Table 1. Typical Learning Styles of Learners From East Asian Countries

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<tr>
<th>Learning Style</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<td>Introverted</td>
<td>Students tend to be stimulated most by their own ideas and feelings. Related strategies include working alone or in pairs with someone they know well, disliking lots of continuous group work. (Harshbarger, Ross, Tafoya, &amp; Via, 1986; Sato, 1982)</td>
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<td>Closure-oriented</td>
<td>Students tend to plan language study sessions carefully, do lessons on time or early, and avoid ambiguity. Related strategies include regarding the teacher as the authority, expecting constant correction from the teacher, and conforming to rules and deadlines. (Harshbarger et al., 1986; Littlewood, 1999)</td>
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<td>Analytic and field-independent</td>
<td>Students tend to place more emphasis on details than on the overall picture. Related strategies include dissecting and logically analyzing the given material, searching for contrasts, focusing on accuracy, and finding cause-effect relationships. (Oxford &amp; Burry-Stock, 1995)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Visual</td>
<td>Students tend to prefer that information be presented visually rather than in spoken form. Related strategies include reading and looking at objects in the process of learning. (Reid, 1987)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thinking-oriented and reflective</td>
<td>Students tend to prefer systematic, analytic investigation of hypotheses and to be accurate in their performance in all skills. Related strategies include concern for precision and not taking quick risks in conversation. (Anderson, 1993; Nelson, 1995; Oxford, Hollaway, &amp; Murillo, 1992)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Concrete-sequential</td>
<td>Students tend to prefer language learning materials and techniques that can be applied in a concrete, sequential, linear manner. Related strategies include following the teacher's guidelines to the letter, rote memorization, demanding full information, and avoiding compensation strategies. (Harshbarger et al., 1986; Oxford &amp; Burry-Stock, 1995)</td>
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Japanese and Korean students are often quiet, shy, and reticent in language classrooms. They dislike overt displays of opinions or emotions, indicating a reserve that is the hallmark of introverts. Chinese students likewise name “listening to teacher” as their most frequent activity in secondary school English classes (Liu & Littlewood, 1997). In a classroom-based study conducted by Sato (1982), she compared the participation of Asian students in classroom interactions with that of non-Asian students and found that the Asian students took significantly fewer speaking turns than their non-Asian classmates.

### Closure-Oriented

Teacher-centered classroom teaching in East Asia also leads to a closure-oriented style for most East Asian students. Students who favor this orientation dislike ambiguity and uncertainty. This inclines them to sometimes jump to hasty conclusions about grammar rules or reading themes. Many Asian students are less autonomous, more dependent on authority figures, and more obedient and conforming to rules and deadlines. It has been noted that Korean students prefer that the teacher be the authority and are disturbed if this does not happen. Japanese students often want immediate and constant correction from the teacher and do not feel comfortable with or tolerant of multiple correct answers to a question or exercise.

### Analytic and Field-Independent

Perhaps the most prevalent East Asian learning styles are analytic and field-independent, which likely developed from the traditional book-centered and grammar-translation method used in East Asian countries. In most reading classes, for instance, the students read new words aloud, imitating the teacher. The teacher explains the entire text sentence by sentence, analyzing many of the more difficult grammar structures, rhetoric, and styles for the students, who listen, take notes, and answer questions. Chinese students, along with Japanese students, are often detail- and precision-oriented, showing some features of the analytic and field-independent styles. They have little trouble picking out significant detail from a welter of background items and prefer language learning strategies that involve dissecting and logically analyzing the given material, searching for contrasts, and finding cause-effect relationships.

### Visual

Another characteristically East Asian learning style is visual learning. It has been found that Korean, Chinese, and Japanese students are all visual learners, with Korean students ranking the strongest. They like to read and obtain a great deal of visual stimulation from doing so. For them, lectures, conversations, and oral directions without any
visual backup are very confusing and can be anxiety-producing. It is possible that such a visual learning style stems from traditional classroom teaching methods in East Asia, whereby most teachers emphasize learning through reading and tend to place a great deal of information on the blackboard. Students sit in rows facing the blackboard and the teacher. Any production of the target language by students is in choral reading or in closely controlled teacher-student interaction. Thus, the emphasis is strongly visual (text and blackboard), with most auditory input closely tied to the written.

**Thinking-Oriented and Reflective**

Closely related to visual, concrete-sequential, and analytic and field-independent styles are the thinking-oriented and reflective styles. Asian students are in general more overtly thinking-oriented than feeling-oriented. They typically base judgment on logic and analysis rather than on the feelings of others, the emotional climate, and interpersonal values. Compared with U.S. students, Japanese students, like most Asians, show greater reflection, as demonstrated by their concern for precision and for not taking excessive risks in conversation. Japanese students are often uncomfortable making a guess and prefer to have time to formulate a correct answer to a question (Nelson, 1995). Chinese students have also been identified as possessing the same type of thinking orientation.

**Concrete-Sequential**

The final preferred learning style among East Asian students is concrete-sequential. Students with such a learning style are likely to follow the teacher’s guidelines to the letter, focus on the present, and demand full information. They prefer language learning materials and techniques that involve combinations of sound, movement, sight, and touch that can be applied in a concrete, sequential, linear manner. Chinese and Japanese students appear to be concrete-sequential learners, who use a variety of strategies such as memorization, planning, analysis, sequenced repetition, detailed outlines and lists, structured review, and a search for perfection. Many Korean students also like following rules, which might also be a sign of a concrete-sequential style.

**Bridging the Gap Between Teaching and Learning Styles**

Clearly, there exist identifiable learning styles for most East Asian students. Native English speakers engaged in teaching Asian students are likely to confront a teaching-learning style conflict. The two examples I shared at the beginning of the article illustrate some of the characteristics of native-English-speaker teaching styles that may conflict with East Asian students’ learning styles. These characteristics include extroverted, global, kinesthetic, and impulsive teaching styles, which are also confirmed by Reid’s (1987) and Melton’s (1990) work. Such style differences between students and teachers can negatively affect student performance (Oxford et al., 1992). When differences between teaching and learning styles are addressed, students’ motivation, performance, and achievements can be increased and enhanced.

In the following sections, I give examples of how to bridge the gap between teaching and learning styles in East Asian settings. I obtained these ideas from several sources, including descriptions in books and published articles, responses to a recent questionnaire I sent to selected Japanese, Korean, and Chinese students studying in Australia, and my own teaching experience in China. Teacher actions are classified into the following four categories:

1. diagnosing learning styles and developing EFL learners’ self-awareness
2. adapting teaching styles to suit students’ learning styles
3. fostering guided style-stretching and encouraging changes in students’ behaviors
4. providing activities with different groupings

It is important to note that teachers who work in a variety of contexts (e.g., ESL and EFL, as well as K–12 and postsecondary) can take these actions to improve their Asian learners’ classroom experiences.

**Diagnosing Learning Styles and Developing EFL Learners’ Self-Awareness**

Bridging the gap between teaching and learning styles can only be achieved when teachers are, first of all, aware of their learners’ needs, capacities, potentials, and learning style preferences in meeting these needs. One of the most recent and easily accessible assessment instruments is the Classroom Work Style Survey (Kinsella, 1996). This instrument is sensitive to the kinds of style differences that are affected by culture. Although this kind of assessment is not comprehensive, it does indicate students’ preferences and provide constructive feedback about the advantages and disadvantages of various styles.

Before a survey is administered, the teacher should give a presentation, trying to

- establish interest and explain what learning styles are
- define general terms from the survey (e.g., survey, questionnaire, perceptual, talky)
- discuss how learning styles are determined and used by students and teachers
- explain how to tally results of surveys
- persuade students of the benefits of identifying their learning styles (Kinsella, 1996)

Following the presentation, the teacher can ask students to

work in pairs to share notes from the presentation. By
doing this, students can further clarify their understanding of survey-taking and learning styles. While the students work in pairs, the teacher can answer questions that may arise. Then, students should complete the questionnaire individually. If they have questions or need assistance, the teacher can help them individually. Finally, following instructions in the survey, students can summarize their individual style results.

Next, the teacher can organize a whole-class discussion of the style assessment results. The teacher can write the major learning styles on the blackboard and ask the students to write their names under their major styles. Then, students can engage in a full-class discussion, in which everybody becomes aware of their own and their classmates’ specific learning style preferences. This discussion may eliminate the potential for a teacher-student conflict of style if the teacher also shares his or her own style preference during this time. I have found that students are intensely interested in talking about their own learning style preference as well as those of their peers and teachers. When such style discussions are constructive, students’ initial interest is rewarded and their self-awareness is deepened.

Furthermore, based on these style assessment results, the teacher can build classroom community by asking students to find several other students whose major learning style matches their own and to form a group with those students. The groups follow instructions prepared by the teacher (written on the blackboard or presented on an overhead projector), share their summarized results, and analyze the results. This discussion often starts slowly but becomes increasingly animated as students discover similarities and differences. In addition, teachers can use the survey results to identify style patterns among various groups of students in their classes, which can help them design more effective learning tasks.

There are, however, dangers if learning assessments, diagnoses, and prescriptions are misused. At least three shortcomings can be identified in existing self-assessment instruments:

1. the instruments are exclusive (i.e., they focus on certain variables)
2. students may not self-report accurately
3. students have adapted to expected classroom styles for so long that they may report on these adapted preferences

For these reasons, I recommend using diaries as a supplemental tool. By reflecting on the processes that go on inside learners’ minds, diaries open up fields that are normally not accessible to teachers and are thus able to provide an important complement to other means of learning about the actions learners engage in and prefer when learning something. Before students start keeping diaries, they should be given a set of guidelines about what to include in their entries, such as their reactions to the course, their teachers, their classmates, and any other factors they believe affect their learning. Students should describe only those issues that interest them. They should also include problems they have found in their encounters with the foreign language and what they plan to do about it. Although diaries can be kept in the native language, it is better for students to use the target language.

The diaries are collected at regular intervals, photocopied, and then returned immediately to the students. The

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Bridging the gap between teaching and learning styles can only be achieved when teachers are, first of all, aware of their learners’ needs, capacities, potentials, and learning style preferences in meeting those needs.

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students are assured that the material in their diaries will be kept confidential. Teachers should use diaries to determine if there are recurring patterns or significant insights to be gained from entries.

Finally, students’ learning styles should be made clear to them as early as possible in the course or school year. I suggest that teachers follow the identification process mentioned above when they first meet their students in class. Teachers are more likely to encounter a greater range in learning styles among beginning-level EFL students and should therefore be more patient and careful in identifying these learning styles. Teachers could either follow the steps mentioned above or adapt these steps, taking into consideration the age of the students, their cultural backgrounds, the learning contexts, and classroom goals. However, it is not necessary for teachers to diagnose their students’ learning styles every year. For one thing, repeated use of surveys, discussions, and diaries could make assessment of learning styles a tedious process for students. Furthermore, research shows that learning styles remain relatively stable for each learner (Oxford et al., 1992; Reid, 1987), although they are not immune from change. Therefore, once teachers identify students’ learning styles, they should keep this information on file for later reference.

**Adapting Teaching Styles to Suit Students’ Learning Styles**

After identifying students’ learning styles, teachers should try to bridge the gap between teaching styles and learning styles. One response is for teachers to adapt their own teaching styles and strategies, and to provide a variety of activities to meet the needs of students with different learning styles. By doing so, they will help ensure that all students will have at least some activities that appeal to them based on their learning styles and will be more likely to succeed in these activities.

The following is an example of a reading lesson plan 1
use with English majors in a Chinese university. Although the overall aim of this plan is to challenge students to use and extend the language they are learning in a communicative way, I consider the students’ learning styles. I use posters to engage the students in interacting as they complete particular tasks and integrate different language skills. The rationale for this is twofold: First, posters occupy an important place in China, providing the best illustration of a theme, such as becoming rich by hard work or the importance of protecting natural resources. Second, as most Chinese students are visual learners, they are more comfortable with the visual (poster) and have a clearer picture about the message in the reading. There are three stages in this sample poster session, each designed to cater to students’ habitual ways of learning in the EFL classroom.

Stage 1: Information Transfer—Posters

In this stage of the lesson, I select two reading passages. The two passages need to be more or less related to each other but sufficiently different that there is a significant enough information gap for the students to fill. In this example, I chose one reading passage on Christianity and the other on Buddhism.

I begin by dividing the class into five groups of six students each. Then I further divide each group of six into two subgroups of three. I have each subgroup work with a different passage (i.e., one with the passage on Christianity; the other with the Buddhism passage). Next, I have the students read their passages individually, analyze them, and find cause-effect relationships. Then I have the students work in their subgroups, sharing information to create a poster. The purpose of Stage 1—information transfer—is to develop students’ understanding of the passages well enough for them to explain them to the other subgroup with the aid of the poster.

Stage 2: Information Exchange and Writing

Next, I appoint a leader from each subgroup to explain what is represented in its group’s poster; then the groups of six discuss the contents of their posters. Before the discussion, I invite the students to tell the class which sentences or paragraphs from the reading passages they did not understand and help them solve remaining problems concerning the understanding of the language in the text. While the discussion is going on, I circulate among the groups, answering questions, monitoring their activities, and, when necessary, correcting their output.

Following this exchange of information, I have the students who presented a poster on Christianity spend 15 minutes writing on Buddhism and vice versa. I remove the posters from the walls during this period to test students’ learning of the contents. After finishing their writing, students from different topic subgroups are paired and asked to edit their partners’ writing for factual accuracy and organization of content. Afterwards, I collect the writing samples, make comments, and return the samples to the students the following week.

Stage 3: Information Checkup

In this stage, I give each pair a card containing five true and false questions based on their partner’s original text. For example, a student who read the Christianity text is given a card containing five questions about the passage on Buddhism.

Most students are able to answer some of the questions on their cards. Partners read the questions to each other, challenging one another to listen carefully to recall specific details of the passages they read at the beginning of the session. Then the partners work together to decide whether the questions are true or false. When all ten true/false questions have been discussed, the pairs meet again in their groups of six to compare answers. In this final activity, any remaining questions that students have are usually answered. If necessary, students may refer to the original reading texts.

I find this three-stage teaching process works very well for my students. First, using posters not only provides a visual reinforcement for students who have a visual learning style preference but also engages the analytic and reflective learners in a logical analysis as they search for contrasts and find cause-effect relationships. By having students work individually, in pairs, or in subgroups rather than as a whole class, I am able to create a more relaxed learning environment for the more introverted students. Although most of the classroom activities described here are student-centered, I also satisfy students’ expectations that the teacher will guide and correct them. For example, when students’ understanding of the readings is limited by lack of knowledge of grammatical structures, I analyze the structures for the students. In this way, I provide the information and detailed explanations of the texts that are necessary for students with the concrete-sequential and closure-oriented styles of learning.

Fostering Guided Style-Stretching and Encouraging Changes in Students’ Learning Behaviors

Another important action teachers can take to reduce teacher-student style conflicts is to encourage students to change their learning behaviors and to guide them in expanding the ways they are able to learn. Reid (1987) indicates that learning style is a consistent way of functioning that reflects cultural behavior patterns and, like other behaviors influenced by cultural experiences, may be revised as a result of training or changes in learning experiences. Thus, learning styles are described by Reid as “moderately strong habits rather than intractable biological attributes” (p. 100).

Teachers should not only adapt their teaching styles to
suit EFL learners in East Asian countries but also encourage students to diversify their style preferences. Students need to expand their learning styles because it has been found that students with greater learning style flexibility are greater achievers (Scarcella & Oxford, 1992). Similarly, teachers must assess their students’ learning styles and their own teaching styles, and work toward expanding both.

Teachers need to be sensitive and patient when encouraging students to expand their learning styles. For example, many Korean students might need to be disengaged gradually from rote learning and guided slowly into real communication in authentic language situations. An effective instructional style for dealing with Chinese students is to create a structured but somewhat informal classroom atmosphere that relaxes students and introduces topics slowly to avoid embarrassing students and to be consistent.

Providing Activities for Different Groupings

Finally, it is possible to solve style conflicts by providing activities that involve different groupings of students. Although EFL learners in most East Asian countries tend to share learning styles, it does not mean that all students there exhibit the same preferences. A variety of learning styles is present in almost all ESL classrooms in these countries. Therefore, it is helpful to divide the students into groups by learning styles and to give them activities based on their preferred learning styles.

In addition to trying style-like groupings of students, teachers may also wish to introduce style-varied groupings to encourage students to experiment with other learning styles and behaviors. Teachers should avoid always grouping introverts together, although it is often helpful to include extraverted students and closure-oriented students in the same group. The former will make learning more lively and enjoyable, whereas the latter will ensure that the task is organized and completed on time. Before dividing students into groups, teachers should make them aware of the various styles and help them understand what they are doing and why they are doing it.

Finally, no matter how students are grouped, teachers should make a conscious effort to include a variety of learning styles in daily lesson plans. An easy way to organize lesson plans is to code them according to the learning styles that are included. For example, putting an A or V beside activities that denote whether they are primarily appealing to the analytic learner or the visual learner will serve as a reminder that there is a need to mix both kinds of activities. Various parts of the lesson plan can be coded as well (e.g., I for individual work, P for pair work, SG for small-group work, LG for large-group work). Teachers can also code lesson plans with symbols to remind themselves to consider learning styles (e.g., an asterisk [*] to remind them to offer detailed explanation, a question mark (?) to remind them to prompt students to ask questions, a pound sign [#] to remind them to ask for confirmation of understanding). The coding is not meant to create extra work for the teacher or to make classes seem artificial or less spontaneous. If the coding system is used on a regular basis, creating inclusive activities becomes a routine part of the lesson planning process. It also creates the likelihood that every learner will find some portion of the lesson particularly appealing.

Conclusion

In this article I have discussed the significance of bridging the gap between teaching and learning styles in East Asian countries and provided some evidence that East Asian students exhibit distinctive learning style characteristics. To gain an understanding of and respect for students’ diverse learning styles, I suggest that teachers employ instruments to identify these learning styles. Once teachers understand and recognize the different learning styles of their students, they will be better prepared to develop instructional alternatives to accommodate these learning styles and encourage students to experiment with new ones. By doing this, teachers can better assist students in becoming more effective language learners.

Note

1 All names of students and teachers are pseudonyms.

References


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