The Introduction of Learner-centred Pedagogy in Northwest China:

a Critique

By

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
Curriculum Teaching and Learning
OISE
University of Toronto

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Abstract

Learner-centred pedagogy did not originate within a Chinese educational framework. The implementation of this borrowed policy therefore poses difficulties for Chinese educators on cultural, systematic, and practical levels. A review will be undertaken of the scholarly understanding of the practice of policy borrowing and lending, with the goal of better understanding the reasons and significance of the adoption of learner-centred pedagogy in China. I review the development of learner-centred pedagogy, and my understanding of it. With a reliance on my experience as a scholar, teacher, and student of the Chinese education system, the difficulties of integrating learner-centred pedagogy into the China will be examined and analyzed. In conclusion some thoughts are presented on how the principals of learner-centred pedagogy might be expressed in Chinese classrooms, in a manner more sensitive to context, and more harmonious with the existing culture, and needs of Chinese teachers and learners.

Keywords: Learner-centred pedagogy, Policy borrowing and lending, China, Culture
Acknowledgements

I am appreciative of having had the support of several people throughout the development of my thesis, I could not have accomplished it without all of them.

First, I would like to take the chance to give my deepest thanks to my thesis supervisor, Dr. Karyn Cooper. I first contacted Karyn when I was applying the Master program of OISE, I was still in China, and knew nothing about Canada and had little direction for my own future. I sent my proposal to Karyn, and she kindly agreed to be my advisor. It has been 5 years, I still remembered the feeling I had at that moment when I saw her reply, like a person saw a light in a foggy dusk, for me, it was the light of hope. Karyn has always been supportive and her guidance has been invaluable during my studies. Her insight and passion into critical literacy has helped me to create this thesis. I have experienced some unusual obstacles at the last stage of my thesis writing, and I had to take some time off, and the whole process has taken much longer than it supposed to. I am grateful for Karyn’s ongoing guidance and support, and thankful to her faith in me. I am lucky to have a such knowledgeable and supportive supervisor, thank you Karyn.

I would also like to thank my thesis committee member, Dr. Michael Connelly. I have to thank Michael not only for the valuable feedback and support on my thesis, also for involving me in his Canada-China Reciprocal Learning Partnership Project, I enjoyed the time when I was working in the project, and it allowed me to have a chance to actually go to a classroom of a Canadian primary school, and to have a genuine idea of how a learner-centred classroom looks. By working in the project, I also shared insights and activities with a number of Chinese teachers, all from different parts of China than
I, so they helped me to open my mind and allow me to see more possibilities in Chinese education. All these experiences have been invaluable to my education and the creation of my thesis. During the time I worked with Michael, I was inspired by his wisdom and working attitude, and I appreciate his compassion and commitment, he is a true role-model to me.

Another person I must thank is Dr. Safaroz Niyozov. My thesis is built up on a paper I wrote for his class. I thank him for encouraging me to pursue my research, and introduced me to Dr. Connelly.

Last but not least, thank you to my husband, thank you for being beyond supportive, thank you for being incredibly patient and faithful. During the process of my thesis writing, my husband has been my peer, my teacher, my audience, and my proofreader. Without his support and encouragement, this would not be possible, thank you!
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Introduction

Learner-centred pedagogy has been adopted in China as a step towards building a democratic education system by promoting learners' rights. Traditional curricula that are dominated by teachers are expected to be replaced by learner-centred ones, and teachers’ lectures are expected to be replaced by students' discussion. However, the adoption has not been successful. According to Steiner-Khamsi, understanding what happens when policy borrowing takes place requires examining the context of the ‘lenders’ and the ‘borrowers’, as well as looking closely at what happens when the policy moves from one to the other (Steiner-Khamsi, 2012).

As a borrowed educational policy, learner-centred pedagogy was a major part of China’s educational reform, I was fortunately involved in one of the reform projects in Gansu province. In this article, I use a relatively narrow scope mostly based on my own research and experience to analyze the obstacles hindering the adoption of learner-centred pedagogy in Northwest China. I offer my own insights and suggestions on how learner-centred pedagogy could be more appropriately rooted in Chinese educational system, with its unique cultural context and heavy focus on examination. As a literature review, I use an annotated bibliography to introduced Gita Steiner-Khamsi’s work on policy borrowing and lending, which helped me to build the theoretical background of my paper, and Allen Luke’s opinions on critical literacy, which I believed could be a specific kind of learner-centred pedagogy that would potentially be more appropriate for Chinese primary schools.

During my studies, my own understanding of learner-centred pedagogy itself has undergone a dynamic growth process, I demonstrate how my understanding of learner-centred pedagogy changed from an outsider’s point of view – that it undermines the role of teachers, to deeper understanding that
learner-centred pedagogy is an approach to education that has resulted from complex social, philosophical and historical developments. By understanding the pedagogy beginning from its original context, I have a clearer view of the first part of Steiner-Khamsi’s formula – what and where the policy is coming from.

The failure of learner-centred pedagogy in China is not a single case. I employ a comparative method to examine the adoption of learner-centred pedagogy in China and other developing areas within the framework of global education and policy borrowing and lending. Instead of focusing on a specific country and applying an in-depth analysis, I demonstrate the process of policy borrowing and lending at the global scale. Following Steiner-Khamsi’s model again, this analysis helps to illuminate the actual process of policy transfer, how and why it happens, and how the policy itself can be changed in the process.

Inspired by Michele Schweisfurth’s enlightening question: ‘Learner-centred education in international perspective: whose pedagogy for whose development?’ (Schweisfurth, 2012). I reveal the difficulties that learner-centred pedagogy has been facing in China mainly from three perspectives: cultural, systemic, and practical. The practical difficulties include limited educational facilities and a shortage of teacher resources. I focus on Northwest China’s Gansu province, which shares many problems in common with other underdeveloped parts of China. To return again to Steiner-Khamsi’s formula, this is a close look at the context of the policy borrower, the third of the three elements essential to understanding policy transfer.

I defend the traditional Chinese teacher-centred pedagogy; however, I do not end on a purely negative outlook for learner-centred pedagogy. There are cultural elements in learner-centred pedagogy that overlap with Chinese culture. The goal of this endeavour will be exploring the
intersection of the Chinese education system and learner-centred pedagogy in a full and proper context, with an eye both to the benefits that learner-centred pedagogy has the potential to offer, as well as its potential incompatibilities with the needs and realities of Chinese education. By using a Chinese literacy curriculum as example, I believe learner-centred pedagogy can be an efficient and perhaps superior approach during the early stage of school education.
Chapter One:

The Voices in the field: A Critical Annotated Bibliography

In order to analyze the obstacles learner-centred education is facing in China, the voices from the scholars who share the same research interests will be reviewed first. I borrow Gita Steiner-Khamsi’s framework of ‘policy borrowing and lending’ to examine learner-centred pedagogy as a travelling policy; and I am also inspired by Allan Luke’s work on critical literacy, which is a particular type of learner-centred education that deals with issues of power and injustice, privilege and marginalization, democracy and oppression, culture and identity; it focuses on whose interests are presented and whose voice is missing. (Cooper & White, 2012; Janks, 2010; Luke, 2002; Luke & Woods, 2009). Instead of just “reading of the word”, critical literacy encourages students to “read of the world” (Freire & Macedo 1987) with their own eyes, to interpret their real life experiences and express their genuine feelings with their own voices.

In this annotated bibliography, I choose five articles or book chapters from these two authors (and co-authors), and explore their viewpoint of educational policy, learner-centred education, and critical literacy and pedagogy, and introduce the current debates in the field. (The articles are ordered chronologically from the most recent.)

Gita Steiner-Khamsi: Policy Borrowing and Lending

Policy borrowing and lending has become an important theme in the study of education, especially in comparative education, and Steiner-Khamsi is one of the leading scholars in this field. For educational policy borrowing and lending, Steiner-Khamsi mostly focuses on two dimensions:
How does a particular policy travel? Why does a travelling policy fail? In order to answer these two questions, Steiner-Khamsi claims that there are two dimensions of a process of borrowing and lending: political and economic. Economically, policy borrowing is a requirement for external funding. Politically, the author believes that it is a coalition builder and enables opposed advocacy groups to combine resources to support a third, supposedly more neutral, policy option borrowed from elsewhere; usually this option is defined as an “international standard”. This concept leads to Steiner-Khamsi’s critical opinion on “globalization”. To the author, globalization is more an economic concept; in education, there is no such thing as a standardized educational model, the blurry national borders in the global market do not lead to the same pattern of education. Before a policy starts travelling, the local context of borrower and lender has to be fully examined, to do otherwise would guarantee the failure of the policy borrowing.


“Nowadays, the research area of policy borrowing has bifurcated in two directions; one group of researchers actively advocates for policy borrowing, and the other group is interested to understand when, why, and how policy borrowing occurs.”

In this article Steiner-Khamsi explores two key concepts that she had already begun to explore in earlier work. These are the two concepts of ‘reception’ and ‘translation’.

As applied to cross-national policy borrowing, reception refers to a normative approach to policy borrowing. Reception is concerned with identifying best practices, that could and should be
adopted in other contexts; it asks how best practices can most effectively be disseminated. Reception scholars will also investigate how well policies have been adopted into a new context, and will strive to answer questions about what does and does not work in education policy. (p. 155)

Translation scholars study policy borrowing with a different emphasis or point of view. These scholars are less concerned with finding what is ‘best’ and disseminating it to the world, instead they are more concerned with studying how imported policies are modified, adapted, re-framed, or altered by their encounter with the local context after they are imported. (p. 160)

In commenting on issues involved in the reception approach to policy-borrowing Steiner-Khamsi highlights the reasons that policies get imported. She points out that often a borrowed policy is one that doesn’t carry with it domestic political baggage. Because opinion of a borrowed policy is not so polarized it can serve as a consensus builder, a way to mobilize diverse factions into making a change. Steiner-Khamsi points out that global policies, or international standards, not only help to enable policy change, but can also serve as, in essence, empty vessels. The borrowed policy is acceptable because it is free of domestic baggage, but the content of the borrowed policy may be largely determined by the domestic context. (pp. 156-157) From the point of view of the lending country, Steiner-Khamsi emphasizes the economic advantages that come from having a respected and widely imitated educational system. She points out that when a policy is widely borrowed support for it, in the form of expertise, materials, and training are essentially exported from the lending country; as with other exports this support generates jobs and revenue. (p. 158)

When discussing the work of translation scholars Steiner-Khamsi explains that there is some disagreement, not about the fact that borrowed policies are altered and adapted when their context changes, but rather about how much analytical significance this has. One group explains this policy
mutation as ‘loose coupling’; they argue basically that different places are different, and so policies change as they move, but not in a meaningful way. (p. 160) Other scholars argue that local adaptation is meaningful because it demonstrates the importance of perspective, or position. In other words, a global policy isn’t just imperfectly copied, it literally means different things to different people. Finally, a third group of scholars claims that the process and outcome of local adaptation is neither arbitrary nor unique, but has lessons to teach about the policy process itself. Steiner-Khamsi herself is clearly a member of the third school of thought. (p. 160)

Steiner-Khamsi ends her paper by summarizing one final response to policy borrowing, what she calls the ‘yes but’ approach. This approach argues, to some extent at least, against the wisdom of policy borrowing in the first place. It argues that different contexts might be so essentially different that they are not truly comparable, and that any attempt to discern a best practice in education is profoundly context dependent. The criticism offered by this school of thought is that when policy makers attempt to emulate education’s world leaders, they are underestimating the extent to which the difference in circumstances between the borrower and lender will make a policy which may be optimal in one context, operate completely differently in another context, in spite of all good intentions. (pp. 163-164)

Steiner-Khamsi’s paper seems to be an admirable summary both of many current trends in policy borrowing studies, and of her own recent views. That being said it is difficult to gather from this paper, what precisely it was intended to contribute to the scholarship. Most of the ideas that Steiner-Khamsi lays out here are found, explained, and developed in her earlier work. In this paper Steiner-Khamsi is not obviously describing any significant change either in her own views, or in her view of the rest of the policy borrowing research community. In addition, this paper does not introduce new
case studies or research from Steiner-Khamsi herself. Ultimately this paper is a cogent summary, and very readable introduction to the state of the field, but beyond that it seems to lack a clear purpose.


“I invite you to reflect on how the method of comparison has changed over time and to explore why it is increasingly used as a tool for setting policy agendas.” (p. 323)

To begin this paper, the author reviewed the development of the method of comparison. One of the most important themes of the comparative method is contextual comparison – Steiner-Khamsi presents it as the current state of the art in comparative method. (p. 326) This type of comparison emphasizes the importance of context. The author believes that comparison with other contexts can help us to better understand a single context. One limitation of this method, however, is that it does not answer the question of the larger significance of the result or what the study stands for or represents.

Steiner-Khamsi also focuses on policy borrowing and lending in education. Politically, the author believes that it is a coalition builder and enables opposed advocacy groups to combine resources to support a third, supposedly more neutral, policy option borrowed from elsewhere; usually this option is defined as an “international standard.” (p. 337) Economically, policy borrowing can also be a requirement for external funding. Steiner-Khamsi asks two intriguing questions. The first question is: Why are failed policies borrowed, and “worst practices” transferred?

Steiner-Khamsi uses as an example teacher accountability reforms in Singapore and the Kyrgyz Republic. This is an example of how solutions are borrowed from educational systems where the
problems are entirely different. In Singapore teaching is an attractive profession. Teacher selection in Singapore is extremely competitive, and the training is of high quality. The problem Singapore is facing is teachers’ Motivation; skilled teachers need be encouraged to work harder and to excel. (p. 331) A teaching career in the Kyrgyz Republic is not attractive. Teacher selection in the Kyrgyz Republic is not competitive, and most trainees never become teachers. The problem for Kyrgyzstan is the teacher supply; there are not enough teachers, those that do exist are poorly trained, and they are horribly overworked. (p. 329)

One reason that “worst practices” travel is the actions of international donors. They impose specific policies on countries by offering funding with conditions, so the “best” practices are imported and implemented. (p. 331). The borrowers, particularly the aid – recipient countries can also be the reason why the wrong policies travel. These countries are not necessarily resisting the imposed policies even if they aware it might be inappropriate. They adopt what the author calls “policy bilingualism”, which is a kind of doublespeak. They borrow the language of a travelling policy in order to meet the criteria imposed by external funders, but leave the real content out, so the ‘borrowed’ policies are either implemented very selectively, or not at all. (p. 332)

This point also leads us to the second question the author asked, how come everyone talks international standards, but nobody knows what they are? In the author’s opinion, both globalization and so called “international standards” are empty shells that may be filled with whatever the person or group employing them is trying to promote. In other words, ‘international standards’ and even globalization are not external forces that impose change in an irresistible, but more or less impersonal way, but rather internally induced and reflective, usually, of the domestic policy context. (p. 332). I do not fully understand, though, how the author’s answers to the first question do not contradict the
answers to the second. She seems to be saying that external pressure and poor understanding of context leads to inappropriate policy transfer, but that this policy transfer is largely doublespeak concealing a domestic policy solution? It is certainly unclear in this paper how these two explanations coexist with each other.

Another important concept in this paper is looking at travelling policies using an epidemiological model, this model has three stages: First is the slow growth stage, during which the policy is specific, and identifiable rather than generic; it has clear and well defined content, and is strongly associated with its originating location. The second stage is the explosive growth stage. In this stage the actual content of the policy has become vaguer, as has its origin. Adopters will refer to the policy as part of ‘international standards’ or ‘best practices’ rather than the actual originating location. The third stage is the burnout stage. By this stage the policy has lost much of its specific content, it has become largely a rhetorical instrument. Also, the adoption of the policy is likely to be ‘global speak’ concerned with managing international perception, but not necessarily involving substantive change. (p. 334)

Steiner-Khamsi concludes her paper by discussing three theories used in policy studies. The first theory examined is the Policy Cycle stage model, this breaks the process of policy change down into different stages, identify the problem, search for solutions, etcetera. For travelling policies though, she notes that the problem and the search for possible solutions are constructed in ways that match the available solution. (p. 336) The Advocacy Coalition Framework describes policy change as the product of shifting domestic alliances between groups with different beliefs and policy agendas. Under this view it is easier for political opponents to unite around a ‘neutral’ international policy. Because they offer the possibility of compromise among divided advocacy groups involved in protracted
conflict, travelling policies catalyze domestic reform. (p. 337). Finally the Multiple Streams theory describes policy change as resulting from the convergence of largely independent factors. For change to occur for example, data about problems must be matched to an available solution, at a time when it is politically possible for the change to take place. The criticism of this model is that solutions are often formulated according to the “best practice” that already exists. Researchers are hired to go out and generate evidence that a crisis exists. (p. 338). Although Steiner-Khamsi is critical of all three theories she does not go so far as to offer an alternative method for understanding policy change.


“Attention to low-income countries not only reveals new types of transfer (regional transfer, South-South transfer) but also – as this article presents – the limitations of policy borrowing research focusing exclusively on cultural, social and political dimensions of transfer, and neglect the economics of policy borrowing.” (p. 666)

In this paper Steiner-Khamsi uses the example of ‘outcomes based education’ (“OBE”) to investigate what she calls ‘late adopters’ of this policy, and to advocate for increased scholarly awareness and investigation into the part played by economics in policy borrowing and lending.

Steiner-Khamsi has a clear understanding in this paper of the temporal progression of widely borrowed policies. She describes such policies as following an epidemiological life cycle. A policy begins in one location and spreads slowly in the beginning, after a while the policy catches on and the growth becomes explosive, and finally the policy burns out, and adoption slows and ceases. Over the
course of this life-cycle the policy becomes less and less specific, both in terms of its origin and its policy prescriptions. (p. 666)

OBE in particular seems to map well onto this scheme, it began in New Zealand in the early nineties, and spread, slowly at first, and then quickly, around the world. In the beginning borrowing countries clearly identified New Zealand as the source of the new policy, and borrowed OBE more or less wholesale. As time passed OBE became a more ‘global’ policy rather than one tied to a specific originating country, and borrowers increasingly interpreted the policy as they saw fit, adopting some aspects and not others. Eventually OBE reached the stage of its life-cycle that Steiner-Khamsi refers to as burnout, its growth slowed down, and many of the countries that had adopted it, were questioning the value of OBE and perhaps even in the process of moving on to something else. Curiously it is at this stage that OBE was first adopted by three countries in central Asia – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Mongolia; these are the late adopters that this paper looks at. (p. 668-670)

As late adopters the late adopting countries did not adopt OBE as a specifically kiwi policy, although New Zealand was an important model, rather they adopted it as a global, deterritorialised model of education embraced by the global community. OBE was also not adopted wholesale; rather some elements of the ‘policy package’ were embraced by borrowing countries, and some disregarded. In Mongolia for example OBE included only teacher monitoring, and performance-based teacher incentives; it did not include policies promoting standardized testing nor public accountability – policies which were considered part of OBE elsewhere. (p. 670)

By looking at late adopting countries Steiner-Khamsi is able to look more closely at not just why policies are borrowed, but why they are borrowed at a specific time. In other words, what factors combine to create a ‘policy window’ for OBE in these three countries? Because the three countries that
Steiner-Khamsi is looking at in this paper are developing countries she identifies one factor above all others, as determining the timing of policy adoption, she also point out that this factor is among the least studied in the literature. This one, unstudied, factor is the economic factor and specifically the availability of development loans and grants that carry with them the condition of OBE adoption. (p. 671). In both Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan for example the timing of OBE adoption was dictated by the availability funding from the Asian Development Bank, and the World Bank respectively. Both of these funding sources required the systematic adoption of OBE. (p. 672)

Steiner-Khamsi ends by suggesting that comparative educationalists move beyond their ‘first world bias’ and systematically work to understand the process of borrowing and lending in the development context. She suggests that the focus on first world policy transfer has tended to obscure the importance of economics in policy borrowing in the developing world. She also suggests that development scholars move past framing the issue of policy transfer purely in terms of imposition and coercion, and try to understand why decision makers in developing countries choose to borrow policies. (p. 676)


“The cold war triggered the development and area studies turn that U.S. comparative education experienced in the 1960s. The development turn has not only had consequences for the selection of target countries of research, averting attention form high-income countries and directing attention to low-income countries, but also huge methodological repercussions.” (p. 40)
In this paper Steiner-Khamsi describes the trajectory of post war comparative education, and situates it in its historical and political context. Today we take it for granted that the field of comparative education is deeply concerned with understanding and improving education in the developing world. Her focus is particularly on the United States, as a representative of the capitalist side of the cold war, and East Germany; a representative of the communist side.

One important point that Steiner-Khamsi makes that I had not considered before is that research into developing countries, with the stated aim of improving education for the world’s poor is not the natural or inevitable function of comparative education. During the pre-war period, and throughout the nineteen fifties comparative educational scholars paid comparatively little attention to the developing world. They were more interested in studying the places where, it was felt, education was being done right, and for the purpose, generally speaking, of improving their own national education systems. As might be expected the result was that scholars from developed nations tended to study education in other developed nations. (p. 20)

In the nineteen sixties a, in Steiner-Khamsi’s words, ‘development turn’ in comparative education took place. She traces this development turn to two primary factors. One was the foundation of UNESCO. With developed countries acknowledging, through their membership in the United Nations, a responsibility to improve education in the developing world, the academy in the developed world increasingly turned its attention to the development context. (p. 20) The second factor that refocused the attention of the comparative education community was the development of détente in the continuing rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union. The stalemate in the direct confrontation between the two superpowers led to them developing spheres of influence. Both countries began recruiting allies and client states in the developing world; and in return offering
benefits – including assistance with improving education – to developing nations. Again the greater geo-political concern for education in developing countries led to greater focus from the academy. (p. 27)

Steiner-Khamsi also comments though on a trend, particularly in U.S. comparative education that she finds troublesome. As part of the trend towards development studies comparative education research in the U.S. saw and continues to see a very large number of single country studies. Steiner-Khamsi criticizes this phenomenon because it makes the study of comparative education more shallow, she writes “the period of greatest territorial gain in comparative education was also the era of greatest methodological loss.” (p. 40) Fewer people in comparative education are truly engaging with the work of comparison. She also criticizes this development as producing comparative educationalists who are little more than “second rate cultural anthropologists”. (p. 41) Steiner-Khamsi also finds the intended audience of these sorts of studies problematic. They are not really written for an audience in the countries where the research is carried out. Western education researchers, in other words, tend to sally forth into the developing world, and then return to the west where they publish their research for the edification of other western scholars, and for the improvement of the western academic system. This relationship, Steiner-Khamsi suggests, carries the whiff of exploitation with it. (p. 41)

This paper is particularly interesting because it places the focus within comparative education on development within its historical context. This was something that I hadn’t considered before. I do feel that Steiner-Khamsi’s condemnation of single-country studies in comparative education may be a trifle one sided. After all, one of the benefits of a narrow focus ought to be a deeper understanding. Even for scholars whose eventual research goals are to do multi-country comparison, surely they must begin by studying each country first?

“globalization is for real, but the international community of experts agreeing on a common (international) model of education is imagined.”

This paper is a brief introduction to a book-length collection of papers by other scholars. Steiner-Khamsi is taking the opportunity to summarize the impact of globalization on education, and to offer a few insights of her own. Perhaps her most important observation in this paper is “globalization is for real, but the international community of experts agreeing on a common (international) model of education is imagined.” (p. 4)

Steiner-Khamsi begins by pointing out the two types of scholars working in international education. The first are those scholars who adopt an international perspective with an ameliorative purpose, they are actively seeking policies that have worked in one place, in order to bring them to other locations, and hopefully improve educational conditions there. The second kind of international education scholar, the kind of scholar that Steiner-Khamsi herself is, focuses on how and why educational policies travel across borders. (p. 1)

Steiner-Khamsi looks at ‘globalization’ as an idea, and locates it within a long line of what are essentially scholarly fads. She sees it as the kind of idea that takes hold in the academy, becomes something that every scholar must address, and that then loses any coherence or definite meaning. (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004, p. 2). Steiner-Khamsi doesn’t disagree that globalization is a real thing with real consequences, but she does seem to feel that it is also a kind of empty vessel into which scholars and others pour their own ideas and priorities. Globalization is real, but its meaning is plastic. (p. 3)
On the other hand, the fact that globalization is not easily defined does not seem to have robbed it of its power. Steiner-Khamsi points out that globalization has been an incredibly potent tool to bring about policy change. Globalization is a justification whose content may vary but whose power is difficult to resist. Especially for low income countries, the pressure on them to change, brought in the name of globalization may be difficult to resist. (p. 5)

This paper presents some tantalizing ideas, but it is limited because of its scope and purpose, because it is an introduction to a longer work it does not delve deeply into evidence or examples. In addition, because this is an introduction to a work by multiple authors it is often difficult to tease out what Steiner-Khamsi’s views genuinely are.

Allan Luke: Critical Literacy

Critical literacy, a form of school literacy education, is seen as an effective way to raise students' awareness of problems within the current sociopolitical system, power hierarchy, and economic and cultural order of the world. Critical literacy deals with issues of power and injustice, privilege and marginalization, democracy and oppression, culture and identity; it focuses on whose interests are presented and whose voice is missing. (Cooper & White, 2012; Janks, 2010; Luke, 2002; Luke & Woods, 2009). The goal of critical literacy is to make social changes via education. In order to achieve this goal, critical literacy requires a transformational pedagogy. Luke and Woods (2009) note that critical pedagogy and text analytic models are two foundational approaches to practising critical literacy, and these two methods share the characteristic that learners’ knowledge and experiences are taken into account in the classroom (Pinar, 2004; Freire, 2000). In a learner-centred
classroom, teachers are facilitators, students create knowledge and invent curriculum; It is the opposite of what Freire (1973) calls the “banking model”.

There are also challenges to, and critiques of, critical literacy and its learner-centred practical model. Externally, many voices are questioning the coexistence of critical literacy and state-mandated curriculum, and the possibility for learner-centred pedagogy to survive in an assessment system that is dominated by the standardized tests. Furthermore, because of the learner-centred nature of critical literacy, there is also some question whether it is suitable for every political and cultural context.

Allan Luke, an extraordinary scholar of critical literacy and pedagogy studies, has made a profound contribution to the field. As a Chinese descendent who has spent most his life in a 'white dominant' cultural context, his work is rooted in and reflects on his own multicultural identity. He has worked as an English educator, an educational researcher and bureaucrat, his works on critical literacy offer insights from both theoretical and practical perspectives, and from the policy making level as well.


“A respectful understanding of and engagement with the cultural other can only ultimately be done through that archetypal ethnographic strategy of making the familiar strange: … by disrupting and de-normalising the taken-for-granted, everyday practices of literacy, of its institutions, its educational practices – and, indeed, of ‘childhood’ itself.” (p. 2)
In this very recent forward Luke reminds us that, in a very real sense, there is no such thing as normal. Luke recounts how, when he was first aware of the study of ‘whiteness’ he was offended by it, because he took it as a means by which the dominant group was asserting its own specialness against others who were already marginalized. Later however, and upon deeper reflection, Luke realizes that the existence of whiteness studies actually serves to emphasize the fact that all cultural behaviours are, in a sense, artificial. (p. 1)

Particularly, as an example, Luke points to the historical creation, and continued development, of the western idea of childhood. The creation of the idea of childhood is historically quite recent, and we see it now as normal not because this model of childhood is natural, but because the culture that embraces this model is a dominant one (p. 3).

Luke now sees the study of whiteness as a necessary tool to enable members of an ethno-cultural majority to see their own worldviews as constructed as well. It is easy, when looking at other cultures from the point of view of our own to see them as strange and unnatural, it is more difficult, but very necessary, to understand that our own culture is equally unnatural. Luke argues that it is essential to “make the familiar strange” (p. 2) in order to allow members of a particular culture, and especially a dominant one, to approach it critically.

This paper is not explicitly about critical pedagogy, but implicitly Luke’s concern with it is everywhere. In a sense ‘normalness’ or ‘naturalness’ are the enemies of a critical approach. Before we can bring a critical view to bear on anything we must move past the idea that something is ‘just the way it is’. It is probably simple to understand how critical literacy can be useful in a classroom of marginalized or minority students. These students probably already think of themselves as different, they recognize that they are not fully a part of the culture that surrounds them. When reading a text
these students will have the sense of displacement from the mainstream that helps them to recognize when that text is not by or for them.

Critical literacy should not only be an approach for the poor and the downtrodden, especially today, when the rise in cultural diversity means that many classrooms will have a mix of students from both majority and minority backgrounds. In a mixed classroom those majority students will face the challenge of criticizing a culture that they are fully a part of, and analyzing texts that are by and for them. I think that this is one of the problems with doing critical literacy in China, where in most places Han Chinese people are an overwhelming majority, and I hope that Luke may be offering a way to make it work there. For Luke, if we can achieve a widespread understanding that all cultures are unnatural, that none of them are normal, then the benefits of critical literacy will be available to everyone, and classrooms doing this kind of work will be more equitable and less divisive places.

“It suggests that schooling is struggling to come to grips with the new Australia, with its culturally and linguistically diverse population, with its volatile economy ... This is a troubling and complex picture. But I believe that it belies, rather than reinforces, the capacity of the quick fixes offered by the testing, basic skills, and accountability models advocated in the approaches to education policy I have critiqued here.” (p. 354)

The new Australia - which is more culturally and linguistically diverse, but also for more economically volatile - poses new challenges to Australia’s education system. In this chapter Luke highlights a different challenge for three stages of education. In the early years he sees the most serious problem as the effects of poverty. In the middle years it is a dearth of really effective pedagogical approaches, and for senior students the challenge is finding pathways from senior school into further education or employment (pp. 347-348).
One problem that Luke identifies both in young learners and also in middle years students is the limitations of a ‘basic skills’ approach. Particularly for young students from impoverished backgrounds it is normal to begin school with very limited literacy skills, and the emphasis in those early years is on imparting basic skills. In fact, test results indicate that basic skills are being taught effectively, but once they have learned them, students seem to have difficulty moving beyond the basic skills to accomplish more complicated or demanding tasks. Luke identifies this as a deficiency in pedagogical approaches that will help students to transition between acquiring basic skills, and applying them in more complex ways.

For seniors the most serious problem is an outdated system of pathways for students leaving school. There are really two options, extensive testing and matriculation for university entry, or vocational training designed to prepare students for an economy and employment environment that no longer exists. This challenge causes students to lose their connection to the school system, and increases the drop-out rate (p. 353).

Ultimately Luke emphasizes that there is no easy fix to the problems confronting Australian education. He describes the system as it exists today as “a state-of-the-art 1980s system” struggling to deal with 2010 problems (p. 356). Luke encourages a debate over whole-system reform, it is not enough to apply some new methodology or instructional innovation. It may be necessary to rewrite the curriculum form the ground up, and to reimagine the role of schools in the lives of students, and among other public institutions.

Although this chapter does not specifically address either critical literacy or learner-centred pedagogy, what does come across, is the permanence both of change and of challenge for education. If an education system is overly focused on basic functional literacy skills, then where is the space for
critical literacy to grow, and how can the students be trained to think critically? Perhaps more focus on critical literacy might give, particularly, middle level students an avenue to push beyond their grasp of basic skills, towards more complex and rewarding forms of intellectual engagement. Australian schools have been under reform for many years now, and for Luke it seems as though reform needs to be simply a permanent condition; the challenge, he says, is to “rebuild institutions in ways that enable changed material and social relations.” (p. 357)


“In this way, the debate around pedagogies can be shifted from empiricist concerns about the “right,” “effective,” or even “culturally appropriate” pedagogy to focus more on the normative questions of which pedagogies can and should be developed for human beings of which distinctive linguistic and cultural backgrounds and with which intellectual and cognitive discourse and disciplinary effects.” (p. 5)

In this article, Luke highlights three key questions regarding pedagogy: What is pedagogy? Why is pedagogical study worth the effort? How should pedagogy be studied? Rapid social change has led to a paradigm shift in education. Educational research no longer focuses on the assessment/testing system, school management or teacher quality; pedagogy - what actually happens in classrooms during the learning and teaching process – is attracting more and more attention from educators, educational researchers, administrators, and policy makers. At the same time, Luke echoes Alton-Lee's opinion: “There are major gaps in the evidence bases on pedagogy in current educational
policy making” (p. 2). Pedagogy reflects on teachers' and students' sociocultural, cognitive, and intellectual background, and affects the power-knowledge relationship in schools.

Luke challenges the positivist approach to studying pedagogy, he believes it can be dangerous to assume there is a fixed scientific pedagogy which works universally, because this can “translate into a cultural decontextualisation and sociological misrecognition of pedagogic and curriculum practice” (p.3). Therefore, instead of looking for “what works”, pedagogic studies should pay attention to questions such as Why/When/Where/How does it work? On the other hand, Luke disagrees with the assumption in the field that “new pedagogy” is guaranteed to be progressive, productive, transformative, and preferable; it should also not be seen as a binary opposite of so called “old pedagogy”, which is seen as unproductive and irrelevant. Instead, Luke proposes three approaches to study pedagogy: pedagogy as historical and theoretical discourses; as material, cultural practices; as structural actions.

There is no “magic bullet” in education that is guaranteed to work in every context, whether learner-centred pedagogy is more productive and preferable depends on the local context and the goal of education. As with any other pedagogy we should not see learner-centred pedagogy as the newest and the best, and teacher-centred as old, outdated, and defunct; it is more important to evaluate the suitability of a pedagogy to the context where it might be used, and to solving the real problems faced in schools. Luke encourages researchers to see pedagogy as an object for analysis and redesign, and to work on all aspects of pedagogy. It does not matter what methodology we apply, empirical or interpretive, the final goal is making our own education better.

“In such a setting, traditional authority and epistemic knowledge relations of teachers and students shift: Learners become teachers of their understandings and experiences, and teachers become learners of these same contexts.” (p. 7)

As we can see from the title, in this article Luke adopts a macro lens to look at some foundational issues of critical literacy. First, Luke distinguishes critical literacy and traditional literacy by introducing an example of freedom of access to information in the digital era. He points out that critical literacy is no longer just about “reading or functional literacy” (p. 4), it is about how we view the world and answering questions such as *What's the truth? How is it represented? For what purposes? Who has access to it?* In terms of educational practice, critical literacy is about “Whose version of culture, history, and everyday life will count as official knowledge” (p. 5). Critical literacy should be a practical approach, it aims to contribute to building a more equal and equitable society by challenging and transforming dominant ideologies, cultures, and political systems.

This article also tracks the development of critical literacy historically. For Luke, the concept of ‘critical’ is rooted in Greek culture, and the theory and practice of critical literacy is influenced by Marxism, phenomenological philosophies, and Poststructuralism. Many of our critical literacy works are informed by the Freirain model. (p. 5) Luke also points out that there are critiques about this pedagogical approach, such as a lack of specificity in how teachers and students can engage with the complex structures of texts, and that it overlooks the need for students to master functional literacy. Lastly, Luke argued that critical literacy is about working in marginalized people, about representing and reshaping the world, about developing “human capacity to use text to analyze social fields and
their systems of exchange” (p. 9). There is no universal model of critical literacy; it is an ever ongoing process; it is rooted in, and reflects on the relationship of teachers and students on a daily basis.

From the pedagogical perspective, Luke argues that the practice of critical literacy requires a learner-centred classroom, which is the opposite of what Freire (1970) calls the “Banking model” that overlooks the learners' culture and lives. Critical literacy should be “a dialogical approach to literacy based on principles of reciprocal exchange” (p. 5), learners' life experiences are crucial to construct the meaning of a text and solve real problems. Teachers are no longer authorities in the classroom, learners' personal responses that are influenced by their social, cultural, and economic background are emphasized. From this point of view, schools are no longer places that only reproduce mainstream culture and ideology defined by the ruling class, teachers are no longer the controllers of the content of curriculum, students become the source of knowledge, and they are, in Luke's words: “inventors of the curriculum, critics and creators of knowledge” (p. 7).

In order to gather students' interpretation of texts from different cultural and social perspectives, Luke says that what is required is “an explicit engagement with cultural and linguistic diversity” (p. 8). I think that if this is true a context having a large immigrant population, such as Canada, Australia, and the US states, would have a genuine advantage, however, places where an overwhelming majority of the population speaks the same language, shares a single cultural heritage and one strong central ideology, such as China, might find themselves trying to grow critical literacy in barren soil indeed.

“For what we've seen in Australia is not a single project, a dominant approach to critical literacy, but teachers and students blending, shaping, and reshaping theories and practices in complex, clever, local, and innovative ways.” (p.459)

In this paper, Luke, as an educator, a critical literacy scholar, and an educational bureaucrat, talks about how critical literacy practice works in Australian schools and how it accommodates itself to the mainstream state-mandated curriculum policy climate. By tracking the critical education reforms in Australia historically and demonstrating the different resource models that are components of critical literacy teaching in classrooms, Luke shows that critical literacy is welcomed and practical in many Australian school settings. Luke emphasizes that every point he makes in this paper is exclusive to Australia, because educational practices have to be contextualized, and “it dangerous to generalize any educational approach from one national/regional and cultural context to another” (p. 449). In order to support this idea, Luke briefly compares the critical literacy reforms that have been done in Singapore, North America, and Australia, and shows that there are various pathways for critical literacy agendas in different contexts.

Texts are not neutral, and curriculum is the product of the sociopolitical system; curriculum also represents mainstream ideologies and stands for a specific group of people. These understandings are necessary for critical literacy to flourish. Luke argues that “critical literacy education would have to go beyond individual skill acquisition to engage students in the analysis and reconstruction of social fields” (p. 451). Luke connects critical literacy theories with their implementation in classroom practices. He highlights 5 philosophical ideas about how texts work that inform how learners should approach them, thereby “moving students toward active position-takings with texts to critique and reconstruct the social fields in which they live and work” (p. 453). Luke also lists 4 strategies to
approach a text - “the four resources model” (p. 453). This model includes decoding the meaning and accurate usage of words, detecting possible meanings of a text, understanding the purpose of the way that a text is constructed, and deconstructing the social power and ideologies of a text critically. Luke claims this model does not imply a developmental hierarchy, it can overlap at any stage of literacy education, he also offers an example of how the model is implemented in Australian schools.

In terms of pedagogy, the four resources model presents a strong image of learner-centred pedagogy: teachers work as facilitators within classrooms by asking leading questions and encouraging students to interpret a text using their own voices – which come from their real life experiences. There is no single meaning of a text for everybody, students' social, cultural, and economic backgrounds are taken into account; the meaning of a text is constructed individually, and students are autonomous and dominant in their own learning process.

Such a critical and learner-centred classroom atmosphere is desirable and beneficial for both teachers and students; however, Luke also presents some concerns with it. The current empirical assessment system, such as standardised exams, is one of the major obstacles to be overcome, it puts students who come from a critical educational environment at risk of not having their achievement recognized. Furthermore, as Luke says, a more suitable qualitative evaluation, which facilitates critical literacy, is hard to actually implement (p. 457). I share Luke's worries, and I also agree with Luke's view that national curriculum policy should give space for critical literacy to develop itself freely; there is no one version of critical literacy fit for every context, but it is worth the efforts of educators, academics, and policy makers.

Conclusion
The world has to be made safe for democracy, and a society can never be democratic enough. (Cooper & White, 2012). In order to increase the level of democracy and thereby to benefit the whole society, education plays a crucial role. Education can reduce inequality within society by helping to give everyone equal opportunity in life. For Steiner-khamisi and Luke, they believe that there is no pedagogy guaranteed to be more progressive or productive. Whether it is from a more traditional or more contemporary educational paradigm, a good pedagogy can meet the needs of education in a particular context. There is also no specific methodology of pedagogical study assured of producing more accurate results, no matter whether empirical or interpretive, quantitative or qualitative, pedagogical study always serves the goal of improving pedagogical practice. These scholars also remind us that, when we talk about educational issues, the discussion always has to be contextualized, what works for one place can be problematic in another. So solutions or policies should not be borrowed just because they may work in one place. For learner-centred education, such as critical literacy, as well as other educational movements or pedagogies, the most important consideration for researchers and policy makers should be the local context.
Chapter Two:

The Development of My Understanding of Learner-Centred Pedagogy

In this chapter, drawing heavily on Ornstein & Hunkins’ book *Curriculum: Foundations, Principles, and Issues* (2012), I will demonstrate the development of my own understanding of learner-centred pedagogy. Pedagogy is a part of curriculum. In order to gain a better understanding therefore, before I look into a particular pedagogy, I will clarify the development of my understanding of the concept of “curriculum” itself. During my study of Learner-centred pedagogy, my understanding of curriculum has become more historically, philosophically, and socially constructed, and I have developed an understanding of the relationship between philosophy and curriculum choices.

My previous understanding of Curriculum was close to what Egan (1978, p.16) concluded: “Curriculum is the study of any and all educational phenomena”, and it has two basic constituents: what to teach and how to teach it. So curriculum was a really broad and fuzzy concept for me, it was almost equivalent to ‘formal education’, I couldn't pin down any details about it.

I now look at curriculum with a narrower scope, I am more clear about the boundaries of the discipline of curriculum. In my opinion, which is also reflected in Ornstein & Hunkins (2012), curriculum study is an umbrella which covers particular procedures: Curriculum design, Curriculum implementation, and Curriculum evaluation. Besides these, it also includes educational philosophy, which is the theoretical framework of curriculum design, as well, particular pedagogies can also be part of curriculum.
Development of my personal educational philosophy

Because of my own background, I used to lean towards traditional philosophical perspectives, especially towards historical functionalism (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2012). I believed that a curriculum should contain a certain body of content, subject matter should be emphasized; preserving cultural heritage and improving students’ academic performance should also be taken into account by curriculum writers. I also believed that the teachers should be in charge of students' learning process, in order to make sure students learn efficiently. This is why the transmission model still remains the dominant methodology in reality.

The educational philosophies introduced in Ornstein & Hunkins all act as theories to explain curriculum phenomena, some of them put stress on “the substantive dimension” and others focus more on “the process dimension” (Beauchamp, 1982). I could not fit myself into one particular philosophical framework, nor was I completely against any one perspective, but I did have some thoughts about those which are more influenced by post-modernism, such as progressivism and reconstructionism. Relativism is one major characteristic of these educational philosophies; they both declare that there is no certain truth, knowledge is relative and individual, and so there can be no unified curriculum either. In principle, from the perspective of individual or social development this may be reasonable, but in reality, in an education system which is dominated by national high-stakes exams, such as China’s, how would this work? How could theories embracing extreme relativism, like existentialism, really help to improve education? Most problematically for comparitivists, post-modernism, by rejecting the validity of the testable predictive statement, as a mechanism for knowledge generation has created a framework for knowing in which all knowledge is perfectly individual, non-rational, and relative
(Epstein & Carroll, 2005). Postmodernism, I believed, was therefore, in a pragmatic sense, unproductive.

I agreed that a “humanistic curriculum” and “humanistic teacher” are desirable, although as the authors say “most jobs in the real world have a gap between what would be nice and what is possible” (Ornstein & Hunkins, p. 41). As for students, in a traditional system, they focus on the right answer because it determines their future, not because they want to please their teacher. Even though they follow different paths, teachers in both traditional and contemporary systems both attempt to help their students with self-development and to contribute to society.

I still maintain my essential opinions about the content of the curriculum, I still believe there are truths for students to learn, and so teachers still have to have expertise in the subject matter. I oppose the idea that knowledge is completely relative and individual. Though, my beliefs about how knowledge should be taught have changed. I am convinced that a constructivist or transformational method (Miller & Sellers, 1990) is better for preparing students for their future, also it is a better way to engage students and help students to learn. Nowadays, we are going through a paradigm shift in the field of education, and the aim of education has changed along with it (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2012; Dewey, 1916; Dillon, 2009; Millar & Seller, 1990; Smith, 1996,2000; Epstein & Carroll, 2005; Terwel, 1999). I still believe it is important to educate the rational person, at the same time, I also acknowledge that education has to contribute to the promotion of democratic social living and facilitate social reforms. My personal educational philosophy is represented by my current understanding of learner-centred pedagogy, it also reflects my understanding of the relationship between theory and practice.
The Development of Learner – Centred Pedagogy

China is experiencing educational reform, it is changing from a traditional model to a modern constructive one; as a form of progressive learning, learner-centred pedagogy is one of the most important themes of this reform. Therefore, learner – centred pedagogy has always been at the centre of my own research interest. Personally, I was an opponent of it. As I understand it, the whole point of learner-centred pedagogy is to promote democracy in education (Dewey, 1916). Learner-centred pedagogy is completely rooted in, and reflects, constructivism and existentialism, it denies the importance of the particular content of knowledge and marginalizes the role of the teachers; it declares knowledge is subjective to every student. In my opinion, it is not practical at all, there is no way to bridge the gap between theory and practice in such a framework. My understanding of learner – centred pedagogy has become different and more complete. In these next parts, I will illustrate my current understanding of learner – centred pedagogy from different perspectives.

Social background change

As demonstrated by Ornstein & Hunkins (2012), for the current generation, society is changing from inner-directed to other-directed. Inner-directed people are those who form behaviors and goals as children, - though influenced by adult authority - that will guide them later in life; other-directed people are those “who became sensitized to expectations and preferences of others (peer and mass media)” (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2012, p. 130). A higher level of independency from adults is desired by the new generation. This is reflected in the ever-increasing importance of the peer group; an other-directed society allows peers to have more knowledge and information to share with each other, and to learn from each other. An influential peer group can also help students to gain qualities such as compromise.
and tolerance, and students' future will benefit from positive peer relationships. This development has made learner-centred pedagogy more suitable for the needs of students.

The rapid development of internet technologies and mass media means that teachers are no longer the only source of knowledge, it has enabled students to inquire, to explore and to process what they need and want to learn by themselves. Teachers now are more like guides and facilitators, instead of controllers, who teach content students can easily find online. This has also made learner-centred pedagogy more practical and effective.

Our era is changing from an industrial age to a knowledge age (Gilbert, 2007), and the knowledge age has its own requirement for its future workers. School is the place to prepare students for their future career. Problem solving and critical thinking are essential skills that students have to master to be more capable and competitive in the global market. In other words, instead of training a person capable of a high level of academic performance, education now is more focused on producing a human resource who has to be able to use knowledge as a tool to solve the problems that exist in the market. Traditional teacher–centred pedagogy cannot train such skills as efficiently as learner–centred pedagogy.

**Paradigm Change**

Besides social change, in the field of education, we are also experiencing a paradigm change, from realism to constructivism (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2012). Constructivism is perhaps the main dominant paradigm which frames educational reforms worldwide (Applefield, Huber & Moallem, 2000; Terwel, 1999). In terms of epistemology, constructivism emphasizes the importance of learners in terms of knowledge structure; there are no ultimate truths for every learner to receive, and there is no universal
method guaranteed to work for everyone. Students should be, and are able to be, in charge of their own learning process, including what they learn and how they learn it. According to Applefield, Huber and Moallem's paper (2001), there are three means to construct knowledge: based on external realities (exogenous constructivism), focusing on the internal and individual knowledge (endogenous constructivism), and emphasizing the social interactions of people (dialectical constructivism). Endogenous constructivism relies on the Piagetian theory, and dialectical constructivism is represented by Vygotsky, who accounted for the role that society, culture, teachers and peers play in childhood development.

The different Paradigms call for different pedagogy. From the ontological perspective, the existence of ultimate truth is more and more doubtful, and from the perspective of epistemology, the relationship of learner and knowledge is more and more subjective. So, for me, even though I still believe that there are fundamental skills and knowledge, such as literacy and numeracy, for every student to learn; the way they learn can be subjective and constructive. So learner–centred pedagogy is more suitable from this perspective.

**Historical development**

Mirroring the social and paradigm changes, learner-centred pedagogy has experienced many steps to become what it is today. The basic idea of socialization, Plato's academic idea, and Rousseau's developmental idea, are the three ideas that have had a profound influence on selecting curricular design and bringing it into reality through curriculum development (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2012). From the subject-centred curriculum design to the learner-centred one, curriculum development has experienced discipline design, broad-field design, process design. And within the framework of the
learner-centred design, there are child-centred design, experience-centred design, humanistic design. I learned that my previous understanding was rather narrow in scope. I also found that a third type of curriculum design, problem-centred design, could strike a balance between the subject matter and the learners’ experiences.

Through this history, we can see the effects of change on the social and philosophical background of education. More importantly, I believe that this history has also led to the mental picture of education that people today commonly hold. They can compare current themes with historical ones ‘the way schools used to be,’ and so history has an impact on the social expectations of what education and schools should look like. This is very important for educational reform. Without this preparation, it is unrealistic to expect the whole of society to accept sudden change in education. This point helps me to understand why learner-centred pedagogy is facing such doubt, even rejection, in the developing world, it is not because people hate the pedagogy itself, it more due to the unfamiliarity of the soil that learner-centred pedagogy is rooted in.

Roles of the Teachers

One of the reasons that I was against the learner-centred pedagogy was that I had doubts about the role of teachers in such a conceptual framework; The deeper I dig into it, the more knowledge I gain on this point as well.

On the level of implementation, it is an unquestionable fact that teachers have certain content from the curriculum document to cover in each class, how could we let the students decide what they want to learn? And if students are deciding what they will learn and will learn it by themselves, what should teachers do? Now I am aware that the biggest responsibility for teachers in a learner-centred classroom
is setting the appropriate intellectual goals or tasks, and guiding students to reach them by doing research themselves and interacting with peers. This way the teacher decides the content, and prevents the learning from being superficial; the students are in charge of their own learning process to complete the task, and develop skills like problem solving and critical thinking during the process.

Vygotsky introduced the concept of the 'zone of proximal development' (Terwel, 1999). He pointed out that for a learner, at a given point in time, any skill belongs to one of three categories, they are: skills the learner can perform unaided, skills the learner cannot perform, and, importantly, skills the learner can perform if given assistance. This last category is known as the zone of proximal development (Kozulin, 1986).

I find the zone of proximal development interesting because, based on Vygotsky, this is where the teacher should work. When teachers assist students to perform tasks that they would not initially be able to perform unaided, students will develop the ability to perform these tasks without help, and new tasks that they would have been completely incapable of, become possible with assistance. Through the lens of the zone of proximal development, constructivist learning is a top-down system instead of a bottom-up one found in the traditional paradigms. Constructivists set up a task which cannot be completed by a student alone, a difficult one at the upper range of the zone so that students have to seek the help of others instead of working alone. By contrast, the traditional way of learning is teaching the necessary skills first, in order to prepare students for the tasks they may have to overcome in the future.

I believe this concept offers a very important insight into the role of teachers in a constructivist classroom. Rather than teaching particular skills, the real challenge is how can we set a proper task for students and how to facilitate students' achievement of the task via interactions between peers and with teachers, how do we make a classroom a 'community of inquiry' (Terwel, 1999). On the other hand, in
the framework of the knowledge economy and human capital, problem solving is the essential skill students should master in order to prepare themselves for the future market, from this perspective, the concept of the zone of proximal development presents a strong rationale for the learner-centred pedagogy as well.

In order to give a clear guide and to direct students to the right path, I feel it's really helpful to follow the suggestions given by Cleveland-Innes & Emes (2005). Before each class, a teacher should design a detailed syllabus and activities schedule, and also a teacher should act as a facilitator and empower the students to process their own learning. This offers me important ideas on how learner-centred pedagogy should be done on the practical level instead of just describing it.

Evaluation

Lastly, learner-centred pedagogy requires a matching evaluation system, Biggs (2003) paper offers insights on this point. Instead of ordering students by mechanical measurements, such as exams, teachers should pay more attention to students' ability to complete the task and the learning process; as Smith (1996, 2000) would say, we should evaluate the learning as a process or praxis instead of a product.

I believe that understanding the assessment system is crucial to understanding the education system as a whole. No matter how progressive the curriculum becomes, if the way the outcome is evaluated does not also change, then there is no chance for the new curriculum to succeed. One of the primary obstacles that constructivist curriculum faces in China is the highly mechanical and quantitative exams. I agree that this kind of assessment has many negatives for students' learning, and it does not mirror what we intend for them to learn, nor facilitate acquisition of the qualities they should gain to achieve
success in the future. In a traditional system, the final exam mark is the only valid indicator of a student’s performance in school, but it not only lacks the ability to show the students' capacity for problem solving and thinking critically, the worst thing is that if one student is sick or just not in the best situation, it is possible that all their effort over the whole term will be wasted. In order for learner-centred pedagogy to actually flourish in China, a matching evaluation system is more than necessary.

Theory and Practice

To conclude this chapter, I want to talk about my current understanding of the relationship between theory and practice. Theory sets a framework for practice, but it also has to adjust itself based on the reality to make itself practical. And practice is the yardstick used to examine the rationality of a specific theory. Even though I believe I have gained much new knowledge about curriculum design, implementation, and evaluation, and I also now acknowledge the advantages of learner-centred pedagogy - as Schubert (2009) says, it produces knowledge which is more worthwhile - nevertheless I still see gaps between its theoretical level and practical level. For example, how can learner-centred pedagogy adapt itself to an environment with oversized classrooms and standardized exams? How could teachers engage each of 70 students in 40 minutes without any help from a co-facilitator? Would a process based assessment be still meaningful when high stakes exams are the only path to access the next level of education? As a Chinese educator, I believe these are puzzles for all educators to solve.
Chapter Three

The Travelling of Learner-centred Pedagogy: Policy Borrowing and Lending

In this chapter, I employ a comparative method to examine the adoption of learner-centred pedagogy in China and other developing areas within the framework of global education and policy borrowing and lending. Instead of focusing on a specific country and applying an in-depth analysis, I demonstrate the process of policy borrowing and lending at the global scale. Learner-centred pedagogy is used as an example, I reveal the general factors that prevent travelling reforms from being successful. I seek to structure a more complete reflection on policy borrowing and lending itself on a theoretical basis, and to gain a deeper understanding about why the borrowing of learner-centred pedagogy has not been successful in China. Last, and in conclusion, the possibility that learner-centred pedagogy could adapt to the Chinese context will be briefly discussed.

This research belongs within the framework of a constructivist paradigm. I believe that there is no single truth, reality is multiple, and it depends on the researcher’s point of view, so the result of any research is individual and subjective. I am therefore willing to employ methods and approaches to inquiry from multiple theoretical frameworks. I believe that each country is unique, and has its own characteristics, so I challenge the existence of single world culture or curriculum suitable to every nation.

In order to draw a complete picture of the travel and adoption process of learner-centred pedagogy, this chapter has three components which are addressed by posing three questions: Why did learner-centred pedagogy start travelling in the first place? Has the adoption of learner-centred
pedagogy been successful in developing countries? Would it be possible for learner-centred pedagogy to develop in China?

**Why did Learner-centred pedagogy start travelling in the first place?**

This question will be answered from two perspectives: Why learner-centred pedagogy? Why does it travel? Schweisfurth (2013, 20) defined learner-centred pedagogy (learner-centred pedagogy) as:

a pedagogical approach which gives learners, and demands from them, a relatively high level of active control over the content and process of learning. What is learnt, and how, are therefore shaped by learners' needs, capacities and interests.

As a travelling policy, learner-centred pedagogy is seen as an important contributor to the creation of democratic citizens and societies, and widely adopted in developing countries as part of the transition to democracy (Schweisfurth, 2011, 2013; Nykiel-Herbert, 2004).

As demonstrated in the last chapter, we experienced a social change, from an inner-directed society, which emphasis adult authority, to an other-directed society in which a higher level of independency from adults is desired by the new generation (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2012). Instead of learning from teachers, students are influenced by and benefit from positive peer relationships. The knowledge age also changed the expectation of education, it requires that education now is more focused on producing a human resource who has the ability to use knowledge as a tool to solve the problems that exist in the market and help the knowledge economy to flourish (Field, J. 2001; Spring, 2008). As the dominant paradigm which frames educational reforms worldwide (Noah, 1984; Terwel, 1999; Auld & Morris, 2014), constructivism aims to cultivate students who should be, and are able to
be, in charge of their own learning process, including what they learn and how they learn it. All these changes and developments have called for the widespread adoption of learner-centred pedagogy.

As a result of these changes in education, and in the world more generally, the spread of learner-centred pedagogy has become one of the most important themes in education. In order to reveal the reason why it travels, the background of globalization has to be examined.

**Globalization and Education Policy Borrowing & Lending**

As part of the process of globalization, travelling reform in education is happening all over the world. Many researchers are working on this tide of educational policy borrowing and lending from different perspectives: the different methods are distinguished either as policy-orientated and research-orientated (Silova, 2012), or as reception and translation (Steiner-Khamsi, 2014). Despite the varying names, policy-orientated and reception scholars generally agree that the travelling educational reforms are motivated by the existence of “best practices;” researchers work on finding “what works” from one context, and policy makers push the transplantation of this “magic bullet” (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Shimizu, 2001) uncritically to another context and expect it to work just as well. This point is exemplified by the case of learner-centred pedagogy in South Africa, where it’s cultural incompatibility and the lack of resources caused learner-centred pedagogy to fail to live up to its promise (Nykiel-Herbert, 2004). Research-orientated and translation scholars (Schriewer, 2011, 2013; Steiner-Khamsi, 2012) consciously work against normative and de-contextualized policy borrowing and lending, and shift their focus to one that “critically examines a variety of issues related to historical, political and economic dimensions of the educational borrowing process” (Silova, 2012, p.229). In other words, instead of “what works,” it is more important to understand “the politics of educational borrowing and lending (“Why”), the process (“How”), and agent and transfer (“Who”)” (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004, p.2).
As Steiner-Khamsi (2012) pointed out, as a borrowing and lending process, travelling reform includes at least three essential perspectives. First, the perspective of the reform's originating context. Studying the lender can help to provide understanding of the reform's original goals and perhaps help us to understand why particular reforms are attractive to other systems. The second factor is the middlemen: actors and agencies who help the reform to travel. For example, the experts who help the reform to travel have their own perspective on how and why the reform should be done, so they will have an impact on the reform. The third factor is the local policy context of the borrower.

Local context is the most crucial aspect to be considered during the process of education policy borrowing and lending (Steiner-Khamsi, 2012); without defining the problem within the framework of the local cultural heritage, political system, and economic conditions, travelling reforms have little chance to succeed. Globalization creates a more connected world but, as Steiner-Khamsi asks: “whether globalization necessarily leads to a “world culture,” “internationality,” or “internationalism” in education, that is, to an international model of education?” (2004, p. 4). She answers this question by stating “globalization is for real, but the international community of experts agreeing on a common (international) model of education is imagined” (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004, p.4). Even though the international model of education may be imagined, its impact is real; educational policies are still adopted in many developing countries just because they are perceived, at least, as having worked successfully in a western context (Dyer, et al., 2003; Guthrie, 1990; Nguyen, et al., 2006; Niyozov, 2008; Nykiel-Herbert, 2004; Schweisfurth, 2013a, 2013b).

Under the tide of globalization, technology and global trade have made all nations of the world more alike; schooling has become a global phenomenon, and it is supposed to meet the needs of the global economy (Spring, 2008). Human capital and the knowledge economy have become core
concepts in contemporary development; in the field of education, most of the world's governments create similar educational agendas that aim to train better workers for the future global market and thus to promote the economy. Due to the characteristics of learner-centred pedagogy, it is seen as an effective way to modernize local educational systems; learner-centred pedagogy is actively pushed to travel by IGOs and it is widely accepted by national governments worldwide (Niyozov & Dastambuev, 2012; Nykiel-Herbert, 2004; Samoff, 2009; Silova, 2005).

As mentioned before, the wide implementation of neo-liberalism and the emphasis on economic development has made the world more alike. Spring (2008) pointed out that there are a group of scholars who declare the existence of a homogenous world culture, which is reflected by educational systems; all educational systems are slowly integrating into a single global system. Within the framework of the world culture, educational policy borrowing and lending is becoming practical and necessary, and this is one of reason why learner-centred pedagogy travels globally.

Economically, policy borrowing is a requirement for external funding. Politically, it is a coalition builder and enables opposed advocacy groups to combine resources to support a third, supposedly more neutral, policy option borrowed from elsewhere; usually this option is defined as an “international standard” (Steiner-Kharma, 2010). As one of three essential actors (borrower, lender, and middle man) of policy borrowing and lending, the impact of the institutions like the World Bank, OECD, and other intergovernmental organizations, as well as international donors has to be discussed. In the eyes of the scholars who believe in the world culture, those organizations are contributors of this homogenous culture. There is no doubt that they also the strongly push educational policies to travel globally. As the “middle man” (Steiner-Kharma, 2012) of policy borrowing and lending, IGOs and international doners impose specific policies on countries by offering funding with conditions. As a
result the “best practices” are imported and implemented (World Bank, 2003), and this is also an important reason why learner-centred pedagogy has travelled.

**Has the adoption of learner-centred pedagogy been successful in developing countries?**

Globalization can be seen as a process in which many cultures were interrupted and radically reformulated by European imperialism' (Smith, 2005, 20). From this perspective, education policy borrowing and lending is a source of colonization, or a form of Western empire building. It is an effective way to impose western values and ideologies that are considered to be more civilized onto developing nations, and to disconnect the people of those nations from their own language and culture. More importantly, at least form the view of the colonizing west, reshaping an education system in its own image means graduates who are ready and qualified to contribute their labor to the global capitalist project (Spring, 2008). Understanding the cultural background of a given country has a profound impact on picturing the local context as a whole; if people see, or are taught to see their own culture as primitive, barbaric, and backward, they may seek changes by uncritically transplanting policies and pedagogy from the places they consider more developed. This approach, though, would guarantee the failure of an education reform. Cultural heritage is now emphasized more than ever in the discourse on education; respecting the local culture is commonly acknowledged to be the foundation of any form of education reform (Okrah, 2008). Culturally responsive pedagogy is therefore an expanding area of research, and the need for culturally appropriate pedagogy has never been more strongly felt. Without fully considering the local social, economic, and cultural context, solutions might be borrowed from educational systems where the problems are entirely different. In many cases, learner-centred pedagogy is seen in a completely positive light by the borrowers, it is a step towards achieving
democracy and preparing future workers for a growing economy, but the ideology and cultural aspects learner-centred pedagogy is rooted in are usually neglected.

Phuong-Mai Nguyen, Cees Terlouw, and Albert Pilot's paper *Culturally appropriate pedagogy: the case of group learning in a Confucian Heritage Culture context* (2006) examines the educational issues caused by adopting a western educational pedagogy into another context from the perspective of culture. The paper analyzed the reasons why group learning, as one type of learner-centred pedagogy, cannot work successfully in China and other Confucian heritage culture (CHC) countries; these authors claimed that culture played an important role in this failure. The characteristics that learner-centred pedagogy emphasizes are not culturally appreciated in CHC countries, so it not supported by parents or teachers, and it is hard to actually engage students in activities which are designed based on learner-centred pedagogy principles.

China is of course an example of a CHC country, and one moreover that has committed heavily to learner-centred pedagogy. China is a very centralized state, although a huge and diverse country, it has a centralized ministry of education, and curriculum is designed nationally. Recently the central government has embarked upon significant curriculum reform. The goal is to prepare China’s youth for their new economic future. China’s future will be incomparably more prosperous than its recent past, but it will also be characterized by deeper integration into the global economic system. Chinese schools must prepare their students for a future full of competition, innovation, teamwork and independence; in short schools must ensure that China has the human capital it needs to continue its economic miracle. The government has decided that turning Chinese classrooms into learner-centred classrooms is the best way to achieve this (Carney, 2008). As we have seen in the previous section there are good reasons to believe that learner-centred pedagogy might be well suited to achieving this
goal, the trouble is, is learner-centred pedagogy well suited to Chinese classrooms? As a CHC China has no real tradition of learner-centred pedagogy, quite the opposite in fact, culturally teachers have always been seen as deserving respect, and the classroom and the students in it have been seen as within their legitimate authority. China also has many schools whose limited resources will make learner-centred pedagogy difficult to implement, less than ideal teacher education for learner-centred pedagogy, and perhaps worst of all, a very rigid subject driven curriculum, culminating in high stakes national exams. These factors all present enormous obstacles to learner-centred pedagogy, and indeed its success in China has been limited (Ginsburg, 2006).

Nykiel-Herbert (2004) also demonstrates many misunderstandings about outcome-based education (OBE), another form of learner-centred pedagogy, in South Africa. Due to insufficient material supply and under qualified teachers, the educational reform there was unrealistically aggressive, teachers were marginalized and students learned nothing from school. There are also studies that have been done focusing on the central Asian context (Niyozov, 2008; Silova, 2005). Scholars question the necessity of the adoption of learner-centred pedagogy. They see it as an essentially foreign idea, and put efforts instead into looking for alternative options which are more suitable to the local context.

learner-centred pedagogy is a policy – actually an entire reform package – that is shipped out from the global centre to the global periphery. learner-centred pedagogy is not exported as a raw material, which might be shaped into something suitable for local conditions, but, in the classic colonial tradition it is sent as a finished good, to be adopted and used as is. In many developing countries education policy makers are faced with the classic dilemma of the colonized. They can adopt the imported policy, even though it may not be appropriate under the circumstances, because it will attract
resources and support from the colonizer, or they can reject the imported system, knowing that if they do so whatever system they choose instead will be impoverished and inadequate, because it will not have the benefit of those resources and that support. Tragically of course this is a true dilemma; both of the options are bad and there is no obvious path to educational success.

There is much to admire in learner-centred pedagogy, but as long as it is spread according to a colonial model, it will fall prey to this same dilemma. This will prevent learner-centred pedagogy from ever really being effectively implemented, and worse, it works against any improvement in education in developing countries. Escaping this dilemma doesn’t require giving up on learner-centred pedagogy, but it does require giving up on colonialism. The problem is that learner-centred pedagogy is being exported as a finished good, as a whole package; it is always the receiving country that is expected to change. Any program of reform, which asks a whole nation or culture to change, in order to make learner-centred pedagogy more successful, is I suggest, impractical at best. It would be far more productive I think if we could envision a process where the receiving system and the imported policy change together, a process of mutual adaptation. learner-centred pedagogy, if we want it to succeed in a multiplicity of regions and cultures, cannot be imported, it must immigrate. Just as important as allowing this process of adaptation to take place is learning not to see it as a failure. Today donor nations and IGOs expect learner-centred pedagogy to be adopted as a package deal, and they are deeply suspicious of any kind of mutual accommodation. If countries could adopt elements of learner-centred pedagogy, to contextualize it to best suit their needs, without alienating the international organizations, that, in many cases, they depend on, the future of learner-centred pedagogy would be much brighter.

Conclusion
Learner-centred pedagogy has become a global educational phenomenon. It has been adopted and tried in numerous contexts globally. This chapter has explored, comparatively, the factors that have led to learner-centred pedagogy becoming such a widespread policy. I have shown that learner-centred pedagogy has spread as both positive and negative factors encourage it to travel. Learner-centred pedagogy is well suited to producing graduates who have the soft skills that we think are necessary to prosper in the economy of the future, and it seems to be well suited to a new generation of other-directed people. Learner-centred pedagogy has also been pushed to travel as one of the strings that are often attached to international aid.

Although the reasons why learner-centred pedagogy has become a travelling policy are understandable, it is also important to consider how successful the policy is once it arrives. Here the picture appears to be more negative, especially with respect to the developing world. Learner-centred pedagogy faces many obstacles when it is introduced into these contexts, it is often culturally inappropriate, under resourced, implemented by inadequately prepared teachers, and mismatched to the curriculum and evaluation methods. This is particularly damaging because learner-centred pedagogy travels as a comprehensive reform, when it is adopted it is the host system that is expected to adapt, and not the policy. As a result learner-centred pedagogy has not been a notably successful policy when it has been borrowed.

In spite of the difficulties faced by learner-centred pedagogy I do not believe that it is bad pedagogy, and I do not advocate rejecting it. I believe that we need to change our perspective of what learner-centred pedagogy means. The successful adoption of learner-centred pedagogy into diverse contexts requires more flexibility. We should look at learner-centred pedagogy as a more plastic concept, that can be adapted and modified to fit the context where it is introduced. In the case of China
in particular I believe that certain principles of learner-centred pedagogy do resonate with Chinese culture. If we can be selective, and adapt the policy, instead of only adapting to the policy, I believe that some elements, or some version of learner-centred pedagogy could be implemented in Chinese classrooms, to the benefit of both Chinese students and Chinese teachers. This learner-centred pedagogy might look very different that the learner-centred pedagogy practiced in North America or the EU, but if it could create real improvement for education in China, I think that this uniqueness is just fine.
Chapter Four

Misplaced Learner-Centred Pedagogy in Northwest China

Learner-Centred pedagogy is considered as a constructive pedagogy to build a modern classroom system and has become a theme of educational reforms in global south during the last decades. (Schweisfurth, 2011; Dyer et al., 2004; Tabulawa, 1997; David, 2004). Many academic works have been done on the focus of learner-centred pedagogy’s implementation in the developing country context, and I share the research interest of how learner-centred pedagogy is implemented in China.

Michele Schweisfurth is a comparative education scholar and a professor of University of Glasgow, who has done significant research on learner-centred pedagogy, and published a large number of inspiring works on the topic. (Schweisfurth, 2002a, 2002b, 2006, 2008, 2009, 2011, 2015). My paper is born on the foundation built by Schweisfurth. In spite of her own study, Schweisfurth is the formal editor of Comparative Education, and a member of the editorial board for International Journal of Educational Development, those are two major stages for the scholars who share the research interest in Learner-centred pedagogy. As a teacher and researcher, Schweisfurth practiced variations of learner-centred education in many international contexts, and she also participated the educational reform, which was introducing learner-centred pedagogy in post-apartheid South Africa and post-communist Russia (Schweisfurth, 2002a. b, 2011), and she has conducted a number of researches of the international higher education students as pedagogical border-crossers (Schweifurth, 2011; Schweifurth & Gu, 2009). With many years of studying, Schweifurth noted the patterns of the
implementation of learner-centred pedagogy in developing centuries and tried to reveal the reasons beneath the surface for the adoptions’ failure. She asked such enlightening questions as: “Learner-centred education in developing country contexts: From solution to problem? (2011)”; “Learner-Centred Education in International Perspective: Whose Pedagogy for Whose Development? (2013)”.

The Chinese education system is largely teacher-centred. It uses a fixed curriculum and uniform exams. The classrooms are dominated by teachers; students are sometimes considered passive, unresponsive, and even oppressed by the unequal teacher-student relationship. In order to improve the situation, learner-centred pedagogy was imported into China, and it aimed to encourage active and collaborative learning, to cultivate students' critical and creative thinking, to switch teachers’ roles from controllers to facilitators, and thus to achieve a more democratic and equal classroom atmosphere. Despite these good intentions, the implementation of learner-centred pedagogy has suffered problems in China.

By illustrating the background of global policy borrowing and lending, I argue that learner-centred pedagogy's adoption in China was done backwards, as the local cultural and systemic context has not been fully studied, even some of the papers focusing on the issue continue to have an outsider perspective (Nguyen, et al., 2006), and the implementation of learner-centred pedagogy has been done as an action “from solution to problem” (Schweisfurth, 2011) – meaning learner-centred pedagogy is first seen as desirable, and only second is a problem for it to solve identified. learner-centred pedagogy is neither appropriate to the Chinese traditional cultural environment, nor effective in the current Chinese educational evaluation system, and it is mismatched to available educational resources, and the skills and mindset of in-service teachers, especially in rural school settings in China. Through addressing the Chinese cultural tradition and demonstrating cultural concepts from the original
Confucian documents, interviewing in-service teachers in a teacher development program, and describing my own life experience, I build a framework of the Chinese local context, in which, I claim, the traditional teacher-centred education is different than the image presented through the lens of western ideology and is a better approach for the Chinese education system as it works to create positive academic performance and healthy relationships between teachers and students.

In China, teacher-centred pedagogy is more culturally and contextually sensitive, and is a better match for Chinese students’ motivation and expectations of learning, but it still shows the limitations of any teacher-centred education system; replacing it with learner-centred pedagogy, though, is not the only possible solution. Learner-centred and teacher-centred pedagogy do not have to be dichotomous, and learner-centred pedagogy should not be seen as a singular absolute; it can exist on a continuum (Niyozov, 2008; Schweisfurth, 2013a); some of its aspects can be merged into the Chinese educational strategy to fit the Chinese context.

China is experiencing the shift from a traditional education system to a modernized and internationalized one. The Chinese government, schools, and teachers are putting a huge amount of effort into the transition, but have had very modest outcomes. As analyzed in the former chapter, Nguyen's paper (2006) aims to help outsiders to better understand Confucian Heritage Culture, and appreciate it from the outside looking in. Personally, however, I doubt that this kind of “culturally appropriate pedagogy” would lead to promising outcomes. Following Smith's (2005) language, this is a kind of research, amongst outsiders, for outsiders and to outsiders, that is an example of cultural and educational imperialism.

Nguyen's paper analyzed the reasons why group learning, as one type of learner-centred pedagogy, cannot work successfully in China and other Confucian heritage culture (CHC) countries;
these authors claimed that culture played an important role in this failure. I acknowledge that most of the explanations they give are reasonable, but I believe some their key concepts are problematic. First, there is no doubt that China is a CHC country, but when speaking about educational issues specifically, would it still be appropriate to see all CHC countries as being alike, and to assume that what is suited for one is suited for all? Just because they have the same cultural root, does it necessarily mean that there current situations still share something deeply in common?

In order to answer these questions, the definition of culture itself must be examined. Frederick Erickson (2004) defines culture as a symbol system, where core symbols are shared by the group, so the members of the same cultural group have similar cultural patterns and tend to repeat them again and again. This idea supports the concept of a CHC context. Nevertheless, Erickson also points out in the same paper that culture can be seen as an information pool that consists of many small pieces of knowledge. Each member of the cultural group withdraws some pieces from the pool, but nobody can have all of the knowledge and nobody's collection is exactly the same either. This explains why there is diversity even within the same cultural group. More importantly, culture is not still, it is a dynamic system; “differing interest groups becoming progressively more culturally different across time even though the groups may be in continual contact” (Erickson, 2004, p.37). Different historical experiences weave different patterns in the CHC countries’ cultural fabric, and their contemporary political and economic systems call for different cultural reactions, and all these elements contribute to creating these countries’ cultural landscapes and national personalities. Confucian culture in the Chinese context has its own unique characteristics, just as it does in the other countries. Thus, CHC countries cannot be treated as a homogenous construct.
In terms of education, Michele Schweisfurth distinguished the different methods used by teachers in Hong Kong and in China by quoting an art metaphor: “Teachers in Hong Kong use time as watercolour painters paint: lightly marking out parts of the canvas to create an overall effect. Chinese lessons are more like oil paintings, with no blank canvas, and every millimetre covered to achieve the whole” (2013, p. 92). This example illustrates the problem with seeing CHC countries as a unified group. From an outsider's perspective, CHC seems like the best way to package all the East Asian countries together, but to educators who are from a CHC background, the distance between China and Hong Kong can seem as far as between China and, say, North America. As a Chinese person who undertook the entire Chinese education process, I will try to analyze the failure of learner-centred pedagogy from the perspective of an insider.

Learner-Centred Pedagogy in China

In a learner-centred classroom, teachers are still important, they are involved in students' collaborative interactions but no longer control everything, they are not the centre of attention; instead, teachers are facilitators for students' learning practice. Students, on the other hand, have more control of their own study, not just what they learn, but how they learn it. As a travelling policy, learner-centred pedagogy is seen as the foundation for the building of democratic citizens and societies, and widely adopted in developing countries as part of the transition to democracy (Schweisfurth, 2011, 2013a, 2013b; Nykiel-Herbert, 2004). However, “the history of critique of learner-centred pedagogy is nearly as long as the history of its own provenance” (Schweisfurth, 2013b, p.17), and learner-centred pedagogy has experienced an implementation failure in the global south.

China is transplanting learner-centred pedagogy to its national education system as well. Like other countries that have a fixed and prescriptive national curriculum, the transplantation faces a lot of
challenges (especially in the northwest part of China which is less developed), the attempt to adopt learner-centred pedagogy suffered a grievous failure. However, compared to Africa and India, there is little research in the field about the mismatch of learner-centred pedagogy with conditions in China (Schweisfurth, 2011).

I was a teacher trainer and teacher in China; I saw many of my colleagues suffer from switching pedagogies. As a cultural insider, because this study is of deep personal concern for me and because my background is highly relevant to it, I acknowledge that there is the potential for bias, but I also believe that the voice of those most affected by and relevant to this pedagogical shift should be heard.

“It is great, but not for me!”

The local context, as I have mentioned before, has to be considered as the most important factor in policy borrowing and lending. However, to a policy maker, what evidence could be stronger than the in-service teachers' opinions about the local context? It would be easy to believe that the future of a new pedagogy is assured if 100 percent of in-service teachers sampled believe that the pedagogy is a good idea and better than the current one.

Nguyen (2006) claimed in their paper that 100 percent of Korean kindergarten teachers advocated the child-centred pedagogy as the main aim of preschool education, even though as a Confucian Heritage Culture country, child-centred pedagogy is not culturally appreciated in Korea. I was working for a national teacher development program which was located in the northwest of China – Gansu province. For my own research, I interviewed 20 middle school English teachers and 10 middle school Chinese language teachers, all trainees in the program, and none of them said they would implement learner-centred pedagogy in their own classrooms, but all 30 of them stated firmly – even
when asked privately - that learner-centred pedagogy is better than traditional teacher-centred pedagogy. One of the teachers told me directly: “What we learn here (learner-centred pedagogy) is great, but not for me!” These results raise an interesting question: Why is this western pedagogy so desirable to non-western educators, and why is what they implement so completely separated from what they believe is good?

The answer to these questions must begin with an investigation into the cultural framework of Chinese teachers themselves. In China, the concept of learner-centred pedagogy is delivered to teachers through teacher training programs, and teachers are expected to implement it in their classrooms. Teachers are culturally conditioned to respect the distance between authorities and themselves, and intend to obey those in authority, such as trainers (Schweisfurth, 2011). For these teachers who are also trainees, they are not used to questioning and critiquing what they learn from a training program; even if they believe learner-centred pedagogy is mismatched to their teaching practice, they still acknowledge the progressiveness of the pedagogy itself, just because they have been taught to do so.

Another reason that learner-centred pedagogy is attractive is because it has been seen to flourish in Western countries. Even though the progressive nature of western education systems may be more about perception than fact, it is universally believed that western countries are more developed than China, and their education methodology is often given credit for this success. So, to most Chinese teachers, especially those from relatively poor areas, the education system of developed countries must be more advanced, and the pedagogy and teaching philosophy from such advanced education systems must be more progressive as well.
Teachers believe in learner-centred pedagogy in theory, and they are encouraged to use it. Why, then do they still reject implementing this 'better' pedagogy in their classrooms? Is it because Chinese teachers lack the skills to adopt methods they believe to be superior? Is it because it is difficult to reformulate the classroom atmosphere, making teachers unwilling to do it and afraid of failure? Is it because even though teachers know learner-centred pedagogy is good, they just do not care enough to actually implement it? It is not fair to blame the failure to adapt learner-centred pedagogy successfully in China on teachers. It is not fair to see Chinese teachers as unprofessional, conservative, flabby, or even stupid. As previously stated, there are at least three major reasons that have led learner-centred pedagogy into this paradox in China, and one of the three is China’s own cultural heritage.

Cultural Perspective

Teaching is deeply informed by culture, and culture affects teacher-learner interaction and shapes the motivations of both teaching and learning. Therefore a pedagogy that is commonly credited with producing academic success in one culture may be seen as problematic and ineffective in another. In the case of learner-centred pedagogy, it emphasizes the equal relationship between teachers and learners; the whole philosophy of the approach is built on a collaborative foundation and it aims to cultivate learners' critical thinking and creativity, but these principles of learner-centred pedagogy do not echo Chinese traditional culture. In this section I will briefly demonstrate aspects of Chinese traditional culture that have implications for the success of learner-centred pedagogy.

learner-centred pedagogy encourages collaborative learning; it is organized through group activities and class discussions. Some critiques in the field criticize Chinese classrooms for being too quiet, some classrooms even have a sign on which is written 'quiet' posted on the wall at the front of the
room. Many commentators see this kind of discipline as oppressive to the students. Students are not only forbidden to talk, they are not willing to speak in class themselves either; this is often explained as a product of Chinese people’s concern for ‘face’ (Nguyen, et al., 2006). I admit this explanation is sensible on some level, but it too simple to show the whole picture. Chinese traditional culture is profoundly influenced by Confucian culture. As an educator himself, Confucius stipulated some fundamental roles for learning, and students talking has never been appreciated in his system.

Confucius described the silent treasuring up of knowledge (Confucian Analects, Legge, 1971). Learning is a sacred and quiet process; students have a conversation with knowledge itself directly by thinking instead of speaking, and thinking in depth requires a quiet environment. Actually, not only is speech not required for learning, it is not even necessary for teaching. The Analects record a conversation between Confucius and one of his students, when Confucius was asked why he does not talk in class by a student, he answered: “Does Heaven speak? The four seasons pursue their courses, and all things are continually being produced, but does Heaven say anything?” (Legge, 1971, p. 326). We see a similar proposition in Taoist culture too. The core concept of Taoism – Tao (Dao) – which is considered as the ultimate truth of nature, cannot be explained or described in language. “The Dao, if it can be told, will not be the eternal Dao” (Tao Te Ching, Yanan, 2008, p. 1). The knowledge that can be learned or taught is just skill, the real knowledge can only be gained by thinking or through insight.

After two thousand years these philosophies are now fully developed in China. Learning has increasingly become an individual act; sharing with peers has never played a role. The only interaction which has been highlighted is asking and answering, and this is because the learners have to be honest and respectful of the knowledge: “When you know a thing, to hold that you know it; and when you do not know a thing, to allow that you do not know it;-- this is knowledge” (Legge, 1971, p. 151). There
is a Chinese idiom that draws a vivid portrayal of a Chinese learner, its literal translation is “reading hard beside a cold window”, but it actually pictures a student studying beside a candle; his shadow is cast on the window paper, it is cold not because of the temperature, but because the road to knowledge is lonely. This is not a vision of learning that resonates with the principles of learner-centred pedagogy.

Both critical thinking and creativity, are crucial for learner-centred education, but when looking to the roots of Chinese traditional education, they are not considered important. In China, for almost two thousand years, the standardized exams aimed to check a student’s ability to memorize, understand, and illustrate the content from the Confucian classics; these books were seen as the ultimate truth and completely undoubtable, there was no tolerance for different voices or interpretations. The best one can do is to further develop the existing interpretive framework in order to curry favour with the emperor, reinforce the central power, and thereby gain personal advancement. Historically, Confucianism was respected as the ‘national philosophy’ by the emperors, to question Confucianism was the same as questioning imperial authority; so critical thinking could lead to nowhere but prison or even death. Creativity is problematic too. Confucius did not write any original books, he laid the foundation of Confucian culture by editing the existing classic books. Confucius described himself as: “A transmitter and not a maker, believing in and loving the ancients” (Legge, 1971, p. 195). Confucius believed that the knowledge inherited from our ancestors is sacred and rich; that we are less wise than they and therefore unable to surpass their learning. Our job is to relay their thought without adding our own ideas, so that we can pass on their wisdom, undiluted, to our descendants. Whether or not this idea is practicable in reality, almost all the Chinese academics for the next two thousand years claimed that they were the students of Confucius. This has meant that
creativity was considered as a betrayal of our ancestors; it was viewed as the height of ignorance, and arrogance to believe that you could know better than the ancients.

The cultural issues discussed above reveal the authority of Confucius and Confucianism. As mentioned, Confucius was a teacher, so his influence reinforces the authority of teachers in the Chinese traditional cultural system. It is fairly common knowledge, worldwide, that teachers are accorded great respect in the Confucian Heritage Cultural context (Nguyen, et al., 2006; Gu & Schweisfurth, 2006; Schweisfurth, 2013b), but not everyone is aware of the cultural roots underpinning this phenomenon. In China teachers’ authority flows originally from the sanctity of knowledge. “If a man in the morning hear the right way, he may die in the evening without regret” (Legge, 1971, p. 168), this is Confucius telling his students how important knowledge (“the way”) is. Confucius’s belief that ‘knowledge is important’ is worthwhile and correct, but the question is, throughout the long history of China and among the many worthy ideas, why has this one been so universally accepted and widely followed by Chinese people? To answer this question, the motivation of Chinese learners has to be explored.

In Confucian culture, students work hard to gain knowledge because knowledge is the key to achieving their political ambitions, becoming a part of the ruling class and increasing the well-being of society. The seeds of this ambition are sowed in every Chinese student’s mind when they are very young:

Things being investigated knowledge becomes complete. Their knowledge being complete, their thoughts were sincere. Their thoughts being sincere, their hearts were then rectified. Their hearts being rectified, their persons were cultivated. Their persons being cultivated, their families were regulated. Their families being
regulated, their States were rightly governed. Their States being rightly governed
the whole kingdom was made tranquil and happy. (Legge, 1971, pp. 358-359).

So, knowledge is actually the way to gain self-actualization in order to make a more peaceful and prosperous society for all. More importantly, for a regular individual, knowledge is a ladder that can allow them to rise to the upper class where they will enjoy higher social status and more social resources. In this sense, even though one can doubt the authority of knowledge, it’s hard to argue with the importance of power, fame, and wealth; knowledge is the only vehicle which would take one to that desirable position and make one's dream come true. Teachers represent knowledge and they were seen as the only source of knowledge before the widespread use of books. Thus their authority was an extension of the authority of knowledge itself.

Confucianism emphasizes the teacher's authority as well. Students are directed to respect their teacher as their father. There is a famous story about one of Confucius's students: Confucius claimed that a real gentleman should always wear a hat. When this student was in battle, his hat fell off, he stopped fighting to pick up the hat; as result, he was captured, and executed by being chopped into little bits. His last sentence before dying is carved into Chinese cultural history: “A real man would rather die than lose his hat” (Zuo Zhuan). This is an extreme example of respecting a teacher's authority, and it fully addresses the cultural difficulty that learner-centred pedagogy faces when it attempts to create an equal relationship between Chinese teachers and students.

During our current era of globalization, the influence of Chinese traditional culture is fading quickly. During the Cultural Revolution, the Confucian cultural heritage was severely damaged. However, it is still meaningful to understand the traditional culture which grounds Chinese people's cultural identity and shapes the teaching and learning environment. In China the concept of learner-
centred education is widely accepted, and viewed as desirable, but it stands opposite to Chinese
traditional cultural values and the traditional educational philosophy. Of course this opposition is an
obstacle to implementing learner-centred pedagogy in China. Cultural context is important, but it is not
everything. There are other factors that hinder the development of learner-centred education in China,
for example poorly prepared teachers.

**Teacher Development Perspective**

Teachers are the intermediaries between theoretical pedagogy and teaching practice. They are a
key factor that determines the implementation and outcome of a new pedagogy. Even though
education policy in China is moving in the direction of learner-centred education, there are few
effective implementations. This is partially due to the weakness of in-service teacher development
programs, which creates a gap between research and practice.

In 2010 the National Teacher Training Program was launched nationwide, it is sponsored by the
Ministry of Education and Ministry of Finance of the People's Republic of China. The goal of the
program is to improve the expertise of primary and middle school teachers, especially those from rural
schools, and to help to popularize progressive educational theory and pedagogy (MOE, MFPRC, 2010, 4). learner-centred pedagogy “carries the promise of intellectual liberation from 'oppressive' traditional
approaches” (Nykiel-Herbert, 2004, p.249), so it is one of the core elements of the program’s agenda.

Learner-centred pedagogy plays an important role during the training sessions, which usually
last two months. Trainees take one month lessons in a normal university, and spend another month
going to schools arranged by the university, in order to observe. As I mentioned previously, when
interviewed, few trainees said that they would use learner-centred pedagogy as a routine approach in their teaching. One of my interviewees said:

I believe that learner-centred education can cultivate certain qualities of students and they can benefit from those qualities in the future, I took a lot of notes about those qualities too. These notes are important to me because I can show it to my principal and prove I worked hard here after I go back to school, but that's it. I won't even talk about what I learnt here to my students, I don't want to distract them, because there is no way for me to implement it, and you didn't even teach me how to actually implement it. Activities, discussions, what kind? I cannot just let my student play games in school, that's not what their parents paid for.

What this teacher said reveals an important question about these training programs: What do teachers actually learn from them? For trainers and trainees, learner-centred pedagogy is like a phoenix, everybody knows it is beautiful, but nobody has ever seen it for real.

Like other developing countries, the teacher training classes themselves are completely teacher-centred. Trainers give lectures by reading from a textbook, trainees take notes - or check their phones. The trainers lack background knowledge and have no personal experience in learner-centred teaching, therefore they are unable to answer detailed questions or give real-life examples. The training largely focuses on introducing the new concept and explaining the structure of the curriculum framework itself (Dyer, et al., 2004; Nykiel-Herbert, 2004). Because the teacher education itself is rarely learner-centred, it does not provide a suitable model upon which teachers can base their practice (Schweisfurth, 2011). Even if the training program provided a better example of learner-centred pedagogy, a two month program is a very limited amount of time to learn an entirely new mode of
teaching. The teachers’ lack of personal experience leads them to misunderstand learner-centred pedagogy, they interpret active learning as students playing and singing in class, or they believe that learner-centred education means that teachers are no longer necessary and have to be directed by students. With this kind of beginning, even before it is implemented, the odds are already against learner-centred pedagogy achieving success.

The vague image of learner-centred pedagogy is just one of obstacles that stop teachers from taking learner-centred pedagogy seriously. Another trainee said:

Actually I am willing to try this new way (learner-centred pedagogy) to teach, I learnt it from university as well. But I am the only English teacher in the school, I teach 5 grades and 6 classes, each grade has different curriculum and each class has at least 60 students. I don't have time to design the activities, and I don't know what activity can involve every student in the class, there are too many students.

Due to the enormous population in China, classes are usually oversized, and research has proved that teachers with more training and less crowded classrooms more often believe classrooms should be structured as learner-centred and are more likely to implement learner-centred pedagogy successfully (Schweisfurth, 2011).

The shortage of teachers and resources make learner-centred pedagogy impractical in small cities and rural areas in China. As the trainee said, as the only English teacher in the school, the overwhelming workload gives her no time to improve pedagogically. Usually, the schools that lack teachers also have insufficient teaching materials, such as chalk and textbooks. Teachers from those schools were not willing to talk to trainers and did not bother to show up to the class in the training
program; they were angry about taking time to learn something completely useless to them. These teachers were always trying to find an excuse to go back to their schools and to resume their jobs. Schools located in urban areas are usually better by comparison, but many of them face a level of material shortage as well, so learner-centred pedagogy lacks the material preconditions for success in many schools.

Many of the trainee teachers’ subject-matter expertise was poor or shockingly low. My class had 71 trainees who were all rural middle school English teachers. Their ages ranged from 23 to 58; only 15 of these teachers had a university degree, and only 10 of them were English majors who were able to communicate, minimally, in English. In a way it is fortunate that these teachers did not choose to use learner-centred pedagogy to avoid the hard work and awkwardness due to their lack of subject-knowledge. After all they believe learner-centred pedagogy means students are responsible for their own learning and teachers may or may not be needed. One teacher told me:

I have been teaching math for 10 years, and last year my principal asked me to teach English for two classes, because I speak good Mandarin. I never spoke one English word in my life for more than 15 years; all I learnt from school I completely gave it back to my teacher [forgot], I had to pick it up from the Alphabet. It's hard, but I have to do it for those kids who need to learn, I learn together with them. I can't use what you call student-centred teaching, even though my students are the centre of my life, but they have to learn from me, because there is nothing they can learn from games or from each other.

This teacher is admirable, although he misunderstands learner-centred pedagogy, because he works hard to improve his own teaching for the sake of his students. Even so, he was right about one thing:
he cannot manage a learner-centred classroom, not because students can only learn from a teacher, but because he does not have the knowledge or ability to implement real learner-centred pedagogy.

The learner-centred classroom is more, not less, demanding for teachers, because teachers have to make sure each student is “indeed reasonably challenged and makes academic progress at a satisfactory pace” (Nykiel-Herbert, 2004), and this demands more work than does direct instruction. It also requires a large amount of planning, coordination and supervision from the teachers. In order to better prepare the lesson and give effective feedback, teachers’ expertise in their subject is essential. So, for teachers like the one quoted above, learner-centred pedagogy is not practical.

The successful transformation from traditional teacher-centred to learner-centred education requires high quality teacher development programs. Sadly, in China, these programs are inadequate, and this has resulted in great difficulty adopting the new pedagogy. Besides the incompatible cultural tradition and inefficient teacher development programs, the factor that most ensures the failure of learner-centred education in China is the extremely competitive exams.

**Systemic perspective: Exams**

It is meaningless to analyze Chinese education without discussing the examinations. Exams are a product of Chinese culture, and they have shaped the landscape of Chinese culture as well. Teachers' authority is largely derived from the superior authority of knowledge itself. In order to fairly select people who are knowledgeable, the Han Chinese invented the civil service examination system to select the ruling class based on merit (Lockard, 2010). For those from non-privileged families, success in the examinations was the only way for them to change their lives and accomplish their
political ambitions. This tradition continues today: excelling in the College Entrance Exam (known as the Gaokao) is the only chance for Chinese students to obtain the benefits of higher education.

As a national exam, the Gaokao uses a uniform exam paper, and the papers are collected and marked using a standardized answer sheet at the provincial capitals. This practice requires a fixed and uniform curriculum nationwide. In contrast, learner-centred education advocates “open-ended questioning to promote discovery, reflection and higher-level thinking” (Nykiel-Herbert, 2004, p.258). Open-ended questioning - leaving questions unanswered - does not, however, match students' and parents' expectations for schools; they need to know exactly how to answer the exam questions correctly. 9.39 million students attended the Gaokao in 2014 (Roberts, 2014). The number of hopefuls is enormous, but the positions at good universities are much more limited.

In China, exams are a filter which permit some students the opportunities that come with a good education, and deny others. Entry into a good secondary school and university depends entirely on exam scores. How is it possible for learner-centred pedagogy to succeed under these conditions? The adoption of learner-centred pedagogy is a conscious attempt to move away from the exam-oriented education system, and cultivate “quality people and a quality nation, with a new emphasis on the whole person, beyond the previous concentration on preparation for examination success” (Schweisfurth, 2013b, p. 88). It has to be said that this is an admirable attempt at the policy level, but what is actually happening at the practical level?

I was an official Gaokao marker. I graded the exam that Chinese high-school students work 18 hours a day to prepare for and the exam that carries the hopes of millions of Chinese families. Due to the huge workload and very limited time, for the exam subject of Chinese, the average marking time for a half page long essay question was 5 seconds. The ‘full marks’ answer usually contained 4 – 5
key words. As long as the students' answers covered those words, then they earned the mark. Other parts of the students’ answers would not be given a glance by the marker; in other words, if a student only wrote the key words and nothing else, the answer would still be given a full mark; in contrast, without those key words, no matter how creative and valuable the answer is, it earns nothing. The whole marking process is incredibly mechanical with no tolerance for ambiguity, in order to guarantee that every marker uses the same standard and that all the marking can be done by the deadline. In the face of this fact, all of the arguments for learner-centred pedagogy pale. The competition is cruel and bloody. To win it, an individual has to be “better” than others; this “betterness” must be demonstrated through examination, and can only be gained through mastery of the curriculum. It depends on knowledgeable and responsible, even strict, teachers.

The Gaokao is a powerful example of Chinese exams. There are also other typical examples that show why learner-centred pedagogy is rejected by Chinese learners and parents. In primary school Chinese exams, a question that appears rather often is: “Which sentence is the best one in the given paragraph, and why?” It seems to be an open-ended question, but there is a right answer for it. Put another way, it is possible for students to pick the wrong “best sentence” or give the wrong answer why a sentence is the best. In order to deal with these exams, what do students need? The answer is obvious: authoritative teachers.

In contemporary China, teachers not only deliver knowledge itself, they also deliver the experience of achieving on exams. They teach the skills needed to capture those key words on the answer sheet and to spot the “best sentence” and give the right reason. The belief that teachers in Confucian culture are infallible, unquestionable, and all-knowing (Nguyen, et al., 2006) is incorrect. What is actually unquestionable and infallible is not the teacher; it is the exam answer sheet, which
teachers represent. Teachers are not culturally expected to know everything. Confucius said: “When I walk along with two others, they may serve me as my teachers” (Legge, 1971, p. 202). So, even Confucius needs to learn from other people constantly. He never believed there was anybody who was supposed to know everything. The true story is: Chinese teachers are expected to know everything about the exams.

Chinese teachers actually study exam papers, they teach students not only what the answer is, but also how to present the answer most effectively. They also study the answer sheet and try to discover the Chinese version of “When in doubt pick C.” This is why teachers are the absolute centre of Chinese classrooms, because learner-centred education can never provide this authoritative guidance. In China, students’ futures, teachers’ reputations, and schools’ ranking and funding are all decided by exams. As long as the exams work this way, Western-style learner-centred pedagogy has no chance to take hold.

**In Defence of Chinese teacher-centred classrooms**

Teacher-centred education has a long history of being criticized as “banking education” (Freire, 1973), using simple methods like “chalk and talk” (Schweisfurth, 2013b), treating students as “stuffed ducks” (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2006) or an “empty vessel” (Schweisfurth, 2013b). In the Chinese context, the image of the teacher-centred classroom is, as in Warkins and Biggs’ commonly quoted summary: “large classes, expository methods, relentless norm-referenced assessment, and harsh classroom climate” (2010, p.3). On the other hand, learner-centred pedagogy increasingly receives criticisms like “culturally inappropriate, politically unsettling socially and racially biased, and intellectually
superficial” (Niyozov, 2008, p.134). If neither of these pedagogies is perfect, why should researchers waste time on choosing one or the other?

Given the problems with teacher-centred education from the western perspective, the Chinese education system should produce very poor academic outcomes but, in fact, it does the opposite (Watkins & Biggs, 2001; Schweisfurth, 2013). Actual Chinese teaching practice should make us question the learner-centred vs. teacher-centred discourse, and how we understand authority and liberty in a classroom. Scollon and Wong-Scollon declare:

Western concepts of authority are set against the background of the western concept of the free, autonomous individual whereas Asian concepts of authority are set within a context of the part-whole relations of Confucian thought. When a westerner views Confucian or Post-Confucian authority structures, all that is seen is the restriction on the freedom of choice of the individual. An Asian looking at the same phenomenon is more apt to focus on the responsibility of the person in the position of authority to look after the interests of the one or ones over which the person's authority applies. The Asian focuses on the care, nurture and benevolence (or their absence) of the person in authority while the westerner tends to focus on the restriction, limitation and dependence of the person over which the authority is exercised (1994, p. 107).

Niyozov also argues: “Not all authorities and traditions are oppressive. Nor should respect, acceptance, and submission be seen as based on passivity and blind emulation. Traditional culture can promote active learning, questioning, and searching.” (2008, p. 154) From this perspective, should
learner-centred pedagogy still be seen as the only solution if we assume that there is a problem or should it be recognized as a form of imperialism (Tabulawa, 2003)?

Is there an impassable boundary between learner-centred and teacher-centred pedagogy? Non-dichotomous images of classrooms, schooling, and teachers' lives have been presented by scholars (Niyozov, 2008; Schweisfurth, 2013b). In China, even though classrooms are tightly controlled by teachers, we can still see elements of learner-centred education during the teaching process. Role play and Group discussions are little used in Chinese classrooms, but intellectually challenging and stimulating questions are common. Students do not interact in class but are deeply engaged by the profound knowledge and authority of teachers, and therefore tend to be fully engaged in their assigned tasks. Being highly motivated, students co-operate and compete with each other when not in class; students' continue to learn, even outside of the lesson. I do not see how learning would be improved if learner-centred pedagogy was adopted.

Instead of labelling the pedagogies and debating which is superior, what really matters for teaching is the relationship between teachers and students (Niyozov, 2008). There is nothing wrong with students respecting a teacher's authority; it makes students feel more secure and confident in their own learning because, for the students, teachers are seen as trustworthy role models. Teachers do hold power over the students’ learning; they are the centre of the classroom but, in their own lives, like the teacher I quoted previously, they place students and teaching at the centre. Teachers work hard for their students’ benefit; they take the responsibility for their students future without complaint; they enjoy the authority, but do not use it as a privilege or to reject their obligations. Surely this teacher-student relationship shouldn’t be defined as oppression in urgent need of elimination?
Even assuming learner-centred education is more suited to the development of a modern society, would it be wise and worthwhile to seek a sharp break from the teacher-centred education which has lasted for thousands of years and is deeply rooted in Chinese culture and Chinese people's cultural identity? Is it reasonable to hope that such a shift could happen overnight? Hall pointed out almost four decades ago:

> Everything man is and does is modified by learning and is therefore malleable.
> But once learned, these behaviour patterns, these habitual responses, these ways of interacting gradually sink below the surface of the mind and, like the admiral of a submerged submarine fleet, control from the depths. The hidden controls are usually experienced as though they were innate simply because they are not only ubiquitous but habitual as well. What makes it doubly hard to differentiate the innate from the acquired is the fact that, as people grow up, everyone around them shares the same patterns (1976, p. 43).

Therefore, we should not invent a problem for our current education system and expect to solve it by borrowing learner-centred pedagogy from outside just because it works well in other cultural contexts. In the Chinese context, the question that should be asked is not, how can we improve the quality of teaching by reinventing our teaching style, but how can we improve the quality of our traditional teaching style?

**Conclusion**
There is no single pedagogy, not even learner-centred pedagogy, which guarantees a positive academic outcome. The failure of the implementation of learner-centred pedagogy in China shows the importance of local context in the process of policy borrowing and lending. Chinese traditional teacher-centred education surely has its shortcomings, but it has to be examined within the Chinese context and in the framework of the Chinese education system, instead of through the lens of western stereotypes and values. Learner-centred pedagogy is not the only truth in education, and it is not absolutely opposite to teacher-centred pedagogy, some characteristics of the former can be seen in the latter as well.

The goal of education should not be to formulate an international and modern pedagogy, but to enable every member of society to benefit from knowledge, intellectually, culturally, politically, and economically. Learner-centred pedagogy should be considered as part of a continuum (Schweisfurth, 2013a), some of its aspects should be more pronounced than others to fit the Chinese local context. Compared to learner-centred, teacher-centred education is better adapted to Chinese culture and is more capable of satisfying Chinese learners’ expectations and motivations for learning. After all, what we need is just good teaching, as long as it can produce positive outcomes and structure healthy teacher-student relationships (Ladson-Billings, 1995); in the current Chinese context, teacher-centred pedagogy can be good teaching. Learner-centred pedagogy is not a panacea, it is difficult to master, demanding of teachers, resource intensive and, in the Chinese context at least, culturally inappropriate. Worst of all, perhaps the values and abilities that learner-centred pedagogy is designed to instill in students are neither those that Chinese students want to obtain, nor those that they need in order to be successful.
Chapter Five

Conclusion: The future of Learner-centred pedagogy in China

In this chapter, I discuss the potential for learner-centred pedagogy to adapt to the contemporary Chinese cultural and social context. In order for this adaptation to occur, some of aspects of learner-centred pedagogy that echo elements of Chinese traditional philosophy, of Chinese culture, will have to become more pronounced than others. The current nature of the Chinese education system provides little possibility for learner-centred pedagogy to flourish. Learner-centred pedagogy is admirable in many ways though, and offers advantages for a modern education system, these include active learning, problem solving and creative thinking. If the advantages of learner-centred pedagogy are to be brought to Chinese schools, efforts must be made on both the administrative and practical levels to make learner-centred pedagogy fit the Chinese context and the educational needs of Chinese people.

I explore the possibilities and give suggestions for the localization and development of learner-centred pedagogy in China. First, I reveal the aspects of learner-centred pedagogy that reflect Chinese traditional cultural values. Combining these aspects of learner-centred pedagogy with the teacher-centred pedagogy now dominant in China will make the new pedagogy more culturally appropriate, and more easily accepted by Chinese teachers, learners, and parents. In China, and especially in northwest China, not all schools are capable to adopting learner-centred pedagogy, both because of available resources, and because of the nature of the Chinese education system itself. Schools equipped with sufficient teaching materiel and an adequate number of properly trained and motivated teachers are more likely to incorporate the new pedagogy successfully. In addition, through the
analysis of a Chinese Language and literature courses curriculum document\(^1\), I suggest that the primary school level could be the best place to adapt learner-centred pedagogy, largely because it is under less pressure to prepare students to perform on high stake exams, and therefore more amenable to learner-guided instructional methods.

My study belongs to the post-positivist paradigm, I believe there is a truth, for example, whether the implementation of learn-centred pedagogy has been successful or not, however the interpretation of the reasons or results of any phenomenon can be subjective. I use King’s Ethnographic approach (King, E., 1999, 1973), and I believe that the fullest possible understanding of the context which learner-centred pedagogy has been adopted into is crucial. As a cultural and ethnic insider, I hold a value explicit culturalist’s position, I acknowledge my potential bias, but I believe I also offer a deeper illustration of the adoption of learner-centred pedagogy in northwest China.

**Localizing Learner-centred Pedagogy to the Chinese Cultural Context**

As mentioned before, I echo the author’s idea that in order to make the travelling policies work, the three perspectives of lender, middle man, and borrower (Steiner-Khamsi, 2012), have to be carefully examined. An uncritically borrowed policy, such as learner-centred pedagogy cannot survive, and could even produce negative outcomes if it does not fit the local context. For policy makers, policy borrowing should not be a completely upside-down and outside-in process – they should not begin by finding an attractive policy and only secondly trying to make it fit the school context they are applying it to. Before any policy change is formulated all the aspects that can be influential to a specific policy’s implementation have to be fully considered, including local resources, teacher’s capability, and

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\(^1\) The translated document is seen as an appendix. Because there is no official English version of the document, I have translated it myself.
people’s expectations of education. If this is not done, the policy borrowing will become what Philips calls “phony” (Phillips & Ochs, 2004): politicians and policy makers borrow education policies from other countries in order to reap political benefits immediately, not because the policy is best for their own system, and often without concern for long term effects.

From the culturalist point of view, there are different knowledges and multiple ways to discover and deliver knowledge (Hayhoe & Pan, 2001; Hayhoe, 2008; Niyozov, 2008), I also argue that there is no ideal schooling model. So far the prospect of learner-centred pedagogy in developing countries seems very problematic, but I believe that it is possible for some aspects of learner-centred pedagogy to be adapted to the Chinese context.

As demonstrated above, there is nothing wrong with the pedagogy itself. Doubtless, it is a better match for the core development theme of the contemporary world -economic development- than traditional pedagogy in China. After all the promotion of the economy is one of the top tasks for the Chinese government. Thus, as long as learner-centred pedagogy could adjust itself in order to fit within the cultural and social framework in China, I do not see why people would reject it. Nevertheless, the problems that learner-centred pedagogy is facing are global, they include how to find the balance between covering the curriculum and students' learning interests; how to engage every student in a learning activity in an oversized classroom; how teachers can be facilitators and, at the same time, prevent the learning from becoming superficial; and how to make learner-centred pedagogy more effective when there are still high stakes exams. China is not the only place where these problems exist, and so there is potential for learner-centred pedagogy to continue to develop. There are also reasons for optimism when discussing the implementation of learner-centred pedagogy in China.
Learner-centred pedagogy emphasizes the acquisition by students of skills and competencies that enable them to become self-directed, independent learners. This emphasis is in harmony with the movements for lifelong education and education for all, even though these terms have been reconceptualized by OECD (Field, 2001). Lifelong learning requires people to have the ability to acquire knowledge, evaluate it critically, and integrate it into their existing knowledge, and worldview without necessarily doing so through conventional formal education. The ability to do this is one of the things that learner-centred pedagogy has always aspired to cultivate in students. The original meanings of lifelong education and education for all also echo in Chinese traditional culture, so they are familiar to Chinese people. As an educator, Confucius advocated: “In education, there are no differences in kind” (Analects, Book fifteen. Slingerland, 2003), and “never too old to learn” is a well known proverb in China as well.

Moreover, the concept of the knowledge economy and human capital resonates with themes present in contemporary Chinese social development and traditional Chinese political ideology. Therefore, instead of adopting learner-centred pedagogy uncritically, it would be more culturally appropriate, not to say more effective, to work to adapt it to the Chinese context.

How to reconcile the process of modernization with Chinese tradition and culture in terms of education and pedagogy is a matter of great concern for educational scholars studying China. Wu’s thought provoking concept “Confucian pedagogy” (2011,1014) is one attempt to merge aspects rooted in the Confucian heritage with modern western pedagogy, in order to preserve the Confucian cultural legacy, while fitting Chinese education into the global pattern in this globalized era. Many scholars have responded to Wu’s innovation; Deng wrote two papers (2011,2014) to summarize the influential work in this area. Recent scholarship has contributed to Chinese pedagogic development by analyzing
either the factors that have impacted on Chinese education historically (Hayhoe, 2014), or exploring what appropriate pedagogy might be through understanding Chinese learners’ behavior from the cultural perspective (Watkins & Biggs, 2001; Chan & Rao, 2010). Efforts have been made to localize globally popular educational policies to the Chinese context. Not only have Chinese traditional culture, and the educational philosophy that accompanies it, attracted more attention; these attempts acknowledge that Chinese, or perhaps east Asian Confucian education should be respected, and learned from, by the western world, because it can help to produce positive academic outcomes (Hayhoe, 2008). These studies raise awareness of the need for culturally appropriate pedagogy, and will create a better environment for learner-centred pedagogy to adapt to China.

**Focusing Learner-centred Pedagogy on Better Resourced Schools**

Besides cultural conflict, another obstacle to learner-centred pedagogy’s implementation in northwest China is poorly prepared teachers. Learner-centred pedagogy requires teachers to have expertise in both their subject matter and in pedagogic management so that they can smoothly orchestrate a learner-centred classroom and ensure positive outcomes. In China, teacher quality varies, there is a sizeable gap in qualification, training, and skill between teachers in urban schools and those teaching in rural schools. So besides emphasizing the cultural aspects that echo Chinese culture, learner-centred pedagogy also requires quality teacher development programs. In Chinese teaching schools, students are expected to gain expertise in their subject, pedagogical training is marginalized. The training programs for in-service teachers are usually 1 week to 2 months in duration, this is far from adequate to support such a significant curriculum change, and the trainers in these programs deliver the training courses by transmission; this creates a huge gap between theory and praxis.
Many teachers see learner-centred classroom activities as extra work, and worse work that won’t be reflected in exam scores. Therefore, instead of forcing teachers to perform a sharp pedagogic switch, learner-centred pedagogy should be used as an experimental program in schools which are equipped with sufficient resources and capable teachers. After learner-centred pedagogy has achieved some real success in these settings, and once teachers in these schools have become more familiar with the pedagogy and achieved their own successes with it, only then will further pedagogic reform be appropriate, and can learner-centred pedagogy be introduced into more schools. A larger number of teachers with successful experience of learner-centred pedagogy could also change the current the situation of teacher development programs. Presently these programs largely focus on introducing the new concept and explaining the structure of the curriculum framework itself (Dyer, et al., 2004; Nykiel-Herbert, 2004); practical experience would give the trainers the ability to answer detailed questions or give real-life examples, and provide a suitable model upon which teachers could base their practice.

**Targeting Learner-centred Pedagogy at the Primary Level**

Not only do the facilities where learner-centred pedagogy is implemented matter, the participants are important as well; not all grade levels are immediately suitable for learner-centred pedagogy in China. Due to the pressure of high school and university entrance examinations, the nature of learner-centred pedagogy makes it impractical at the middle school and high school levels, the exam score is the single indicator for students’ , teachers’ , and schools’ achievement, and middle and high school classes are intensely focused on exam preparation. Therefore, the primary school is the most suitable level to begin the practice of learner-centred education. Next, I will analyze a curriculum document from the year 2000 describing expectations for the teaching and learning of Chinese, and try
to uncover some of the possibilities and difficulties for the implementation of learner-centred pedagogy.

First, the curriculum document introduces the basic concept of the Chinese Language, and the purposes of teaching this subject. The document gives a few characteristics of Chinese language: it is an important communication tool, and written communication is an essential part of human civilization. In schools of the course, Chinese Language is a foundational subject, and makes an extraordinary contribution to students' academic, cultural, and social development; the Chinese language should be taught within the framework of Marxism, and reflect the national education policy.

In term of teaching purposes, the document shows that primary school language teaching should be based on promoting the development of students, and laying the foundation for their lifelong learning, life, and work. Primary school language instruction teaches students to love the language and culture of the motherland, to guide students to understand and use the language of the motherland, so that they have preliminary reading and writing skills, and develop good language learning habits. In the teaching process, students receive education in patriotism, socialist ideology, moral education and the scientific way of thinking on a basic level.

The document also states that language instruction should foster students' creativity, cultivate the realization of aesthetics, develop a healthy personality and dauntlessness.

Here we can see some aspects of learner-centred pedagogy, such as lifelong learning and an emphasis on creativity and personality development, so learner-centred pedagogy might be an excellent method to achieve those goals. On the other hand, the impact of political ideology on teaching is also strong; it could be problematic in a learner-centred classroom.
In the area of teaching content and requirements, the reading section includes reading methods and habits, and it also emphasizes a certain amount of material to read and recite. The writing section includes what to write, how to write it and writing habits. Student writing should express concrete details, genuine feelings, and clear fluent sentences.

From the document, we can see clearly that Chinese education is experiencing a transition from the traditional transmission model to a more learner-centred and transformative one (Miller & Seller, 1990). The influence of traditional philosophical perspectives, especially historical functionalism (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2012) is still strong. The curriculum contains a particular body of content, subject matter is emphasized; preserving cultural heritage and improving students' academic performance are the main purposes of schooling. Students are expected to recite a large number of classic poems, and poetry recitation material would be sourced from textbooks or classroom teachers instead of from students themselves. Students receive knowledge from teachers, and teachers control the learning process and the usage of learning materials, and play the part of an academic role model for the students.

The document also shows aspects that actually echo the transactional and transformative teaching model (Miller & Seller, 1990), it says: students should be in charge of their own learning process. In the teaching process, teachers should enhance student – dominant language practice activities, and guide students to take the initiative to acquire knowledge in practice, gain ability, and avoid tedious and trivial mechanical analysis exercises. Regarding the teaching evaluation, the document also points out that teacher evaluation should focus on the process of teaching and the teaching effectiveness of teachers, students’ test scores should not be the sole basis for this assessment.
Teachers should pay attention to analysis and feedback to assess the state of their teaching, in order to facilitate the improvement of teaching.

These rules are encouraging collaborative learning and activities, in the writing section, the document actually mentions the importance of students’ own reflections. It's not hard to see the attempts to change the curriculum design by incorporating these learner-centred elements into the traditional teacher-centred and content-oriented transmission model.

Even though we do see the spark of learner-centred education in this document, teachers are still the most important factor in language learning. It says: In order to improve the quality of language teaching, the key factor is the teacher. Teachers should love their jobs and love each and every student, strive to improve their subject expertise, and play an exemplary role in language learning. Teachers have the responsibly to establish a correct concept of education, improve their professional level and teaching ability, and they must be able to conduct teaching activities in a creative manner. In the writing section, it points out: Teachers should stimulate students' love for life, mobilize students to observe, and cultivate students' enthusiasm for thinking and practicing writing. Teachers should encourage students to write familiar people, things, scenery, and objects; to speak the truth, to express true feelings instead of artificial emotions; to write imaginary things, to unfold students' imagination and fantasy in order to cultivate their creativity.

So even though the curriculum emphasizes some qualities of the learners, the classroom is still largely dominated by the teachers. The ambiguous nature of the document itself is one of the things that made the original implementation of learner-centred pedagogy impossible in Chinese schools. So a hybrid version of learner-centred pedagogy is not only possible, but necessary; a version that respect learners’ rights, and also emphasizes teachers’ expertise and authority.
What makes primary school the best level at which to practice learner-centred pedagogy is the way students take exams. There is a municipal exam at the end of primary school. This exam is selective rather than competitive; students are guaranteed a place at the middle school in their residential neighborhood. This means that the pressure to do well on exams is much less in primary school, and it gives teachers and students more space to experiment with new pedagogic ideas. Perhaps unfortunately however, the exam marks can still decide what rank of class they will go to in middle school, so teachers, students, and parents tend to believe the mark on this exam has an impact on the long term academic future of a student. Because the exam is based on the curriculum document, teachers are expected to deliver the curriculum successfully in terms of exam results. This leads teachers to focus on the parts of the curriculum which are testable, and the parts related to student self-development usually get ignored. So even though some of these factors are mentioned in the document, they are hard to actually implement. For example, it mentioned that teachers should pay attention to feedback, but the feedback they receive is usually solely represented by the students' exam marks, and the marks are usually considered the complete representation of the students' learning habits; good habits lead to higher marks. Notwithstanding all of this, primary school is still much better than the situation in middle schools and high schools, students’ interests and personality development are actually taken into account, and that makes the primary grades a good starting point for learner-centred pedagogy.

**Conclusion**

To conclude, the adoption of learner-centred pedagogy in China has not been as successful as was hoped. The benefits offered by learner-centred pedagogy are wanted, and even needed within the Chinese education system, but actually implementing this new pedagogy is difficult. If learner-centred
pedagogy is to be successful it must find a way to fit within the culture, and the context that already exists in China; learner-centred pedagogy must adapt, it must become culturally appropriate. In the case of learner-centred pedagogy in northwest China, cultural appropriateness is not the only barrier to adoption. Resource limitations, poor teacher training, and the importance of high stakes exams in Chinese education are also considerable obstacles. Only when learner-centred pedagogy fits itself into the culture of China, and is supported by sufficient educational resources, both material and teaching force, and also with more freedom from systemic factors, will it have a more positive future in China.

All in all, there is no single pedagogy, not even learner-centred pedagogy, which guarantees a positive academic outcome. The failure of the implementation of learner-centred pedagogy in China shows the importance of local context in the process of policy borrowing and lending. Chinese traditional teacher-centred education surely has its shortcomings, but it has to be examined within the Chinese context and in the framework of the Chinese education system, instead of through the lens of western stereotypes and values.

The goal of education should not be to formulate an international and modern pedagogy, but to enable every member of society to benefit from knowledge, intellectually, culturally, politically, and economically. Learner-centred pedagogy should be considered as part of a continuum (Schweisfurth, 2013a), some of its aspects should be more pronounced than others to fit the Chinese local context, and to help improve the current education model. What we need is good teaching; teaching which incorporates the benefits offered by learner centred-pedagogy, but which is suitable to Chinese culture and is more capable of satisfying Chinese learners’ expectations and motivations for learning.
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APPENDIX

curriculum for primary school Chinese Language and literature courses (2000).

(grade 1-6, 6-12 years old)

What is the Chinese Language and literature?

- Important communication tools, and essential part of human civilization.
- In terms of the course, Chinese Language and literature is a foundational subject, and makes an extraordinary contribution to students' academic, cultural, and social development.
- It should be within the framework of Marxism, and reflect the national education policy.

Teaching purposes

- Primary school language teaching should be based on promoting the development of students, and lay the foundation for their lifelong learning, life, and work.
- Primary school language teaches students to love the language and culture of the motherland, to guide students to understand and use the language of the motherland, so that they have preliminary reading and writing skills, and develop good language learning habits. In the teaching process, students receive education in patriotism, socialist ideology, moral education

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2 This is the original Chinese Language and literature courses curriculum document that I analyzed in chapter five. Because there is no official English version of the document, I have translated it myself.
and then scientific way of thinking on a basic level. Also it should foster students' creativity, cultivate the realization of aesthetics, develop a healthy personality and dauntlessness.

**Teaching contents and requirements**

1. The total requirement of teaching

Basic literacy skills

- Recognize and accurately read and spell Pinyin (consonants, vowels, syllables), to recognize capital letters, memorize "pinyin alphabet".

- Recognize about 3000 commonly used Chinese characters; be able to write, and understand the meaning of about 2500 characters in a specific context.

- Learn how to use the dictionary in two ways (Pinyin etc.). to be a more proficient reader of the dictionary based on need. Independent literacy

- Learn writing with both pen and brush.

Reading

- Train a strong interest in reading, and provide suitable articles. To understand the main content, appreciate the thoughts, learn how to express feelings, pay attention to the accumulation of language materials. Can read the text correctly, fluently, and emotionally with Mandarin. Silent reading with a certain speed, and can think while reading. Memorize no less than 150 representative and famous classic poems (including texts in the textbook). Learn to browse, collect relevant information and material as needed.
Develop good reading habits. Extracurricular reading no less than 100 million words during the five-year primary program, six-year program no less than 1.5 million words.

Writing

Bring their knowledge, experience and imagination to writing. The writing should express concrete details, genuine feelings, clear coherent fluent sentences. The writing also should be tidy, character use should be correct, and use common punctuation marks. Develop good writing habits, such as observing details, considering seriously, and careful revision.

Speaking

Oral Communication should be civil and courteous. can understand the main content when listening to people talk. Adhere to correct spoken Mandarin, and can express oneself clearly.

* Based on the total requirement, 6 grades are generally divided into 3 levels, each level has its own detailed requirements, for example the intermediate level (grade 3-4) should memorize 30 classic poems.

2. Requirements for each grade level

First and second grades are considered to be lower grades, third and fourth grades are middle grades, fifth and sixth grades are upper grades. For schools teaching grades one to five only, grades three to five are be treated as a combination of middle and upper grades.

Lower grades
Pinyin

1. Students can read standard consonants, vowels, tones and syllables and combine them to read whole words. Students can accurately write consonants, vowels and syllables. Students must recognize uppercase letters, and memorize the "pinyin alphabet."

Basic Literacy

2. Students must recognize around 1800 commonly used Chinese characters, of must be able to write around 1200 of them. Students must master the basic strokes of Chinese characters, stroke order rules, character frame structure and common radicals.

3. Students must learn to use a dictionary.

4. Students must be able to use a pencil to write, with correct posture. Words must be written correctly, neatly and clean.

Reading

5. Students will learn to derive the meaning of words from their context, and real-life knowledge.
6. Students will learn to read the text accurately, fluently, and with the correct emotion. Students must be able to read silently, without speaking aloud to themselves, without pointing to their place in the text as they read, and be able to grasp the meaning of the text as they read. Every academic year a student must memorize and recite more than 30 outstanding poems. Students must be able to read simple children's books, and generally understand the contents. Students must understand common punctuation marks. Grade two students should undertake at least 50,000 words of extracurricular reading.

Basic Writing

7. Students should be interested in basic writing, and happy to write down whatever they want to say.

Oral Communication

8. Students should listen carefully to others. After listening to a simple passage or story students must be able to repeat and rephrase the basic content or main ideas.

9. Students must learn to speak Mandarin. Students must express ideas in a complete and coherent manner. Students must be willing to work with others to carry on oral communication and have a generous and polite attitude.

Middle Grades
Pinyin

1. Students can use pinyin recognize new characters and learn Mandarin.

Basic Literacy

2. Students should recognize about 2500 commonly used Chinese characters, and be able to write about 2000 of them. Students should be able to understand the meaning of these characters in a specific language context.

3. Students will be able to use a dictionary in two different ways.

4. Students handwriting with a pen should be correct and clean; students will begin to learn calligraphy with a brush. Students will develop good writing habits.

Reading

5. Students must be able to understand the meaning of a word or sentence from context or by using a dictionary. Students can grasp the main content of the article, understand the narrative sequence used in the article, understand the author's thoughts and feelings, and have some preliminary insight into the author’s mode of expression.
6. Students must be able to read text correctly, fluently, and with appropriate emotion. Students must be able to read silently at a certain speed. Each academic year students should recite approximately 30 outstanding works of poetry.

7. With the aid of a dictionary or other reference material students should be able to independently read material of a suitable level, and understand the main content. Students should gradually develop the habit of previewing material before class, after-school review, and extracurricular reading. Third grade students extracurricular reading should not be less than 150,000 words, no less than 300,000 words in fourth grade.

Writing

8. Students should pay attention to the things around them, and develop a habit of observing, thinking, and putting in writing. Students should be able to express their experience and imagination in free-form writing. Students writing should be detailed, the feeling should be authentic, and the sentences should be fluent. Students should be able to use commas, periods, question marks, exclamation points, colons, and quotation marks. Students should learn to write journals and letters. There should be around 16 in-class writing assignments per year.

9. Students should learn to proof-read and edit their own assignments.

Oral Communication
10. Students should listen carefully when others speak, think while they are listening, and understand the main content. Students should constantly speak Mandarin, and be able to clearly describe an event.

11. Students should be able to make themselves clear when they are participating in a discussion. When they do not understand something students should be willing to ask others for clarification. When a confronted with an opinion different from their own they are able to engage in discussion.

**Upper Grades**

Pinyin

1. Students can use pinyin recognize new characters and learn Mandarin.

Reading and Writing

2. Students should recognize about 3000 commonly used Chinese characters, and be able to write about 2500 of them. Students should be able to understand and use these characters in their reading and writing.

3. A student should be able to proficiently use the dictionary to serve their reading and writing needs.
4. Students must be able to write with a pen at a certain speed. Students must be able to neatly transcribe at least 20 Chinese characters per minute. Students must be able to write with a brush more proficiently.

Reading

5. Students must be able to read articles of an appropriate level, be able to understand the main content, and understand connotative meanings of words and sentences. Students should understand the thoughts and feelings expressed by the author, have their own opinions, and have some understanding of the author’s mode of expression.

6. Students must be able to read text correctly, fluently, and with appropriate emotion. When students read articles outside of the text they should be able to read them correctly and fluently with little preparation. Students should be capable of a silent reading speed of no less than 300 words per minute. Each academic year students should recite approximately 20 outstanding works of poetry.

7. Students will learn how to browse the internet to collect relevant material as needed. Students’ extracurricular reading should be no less than 500,000 words per year. Students should gradually develop the habit of taking notes while reading.

Writing
8. Students should be able to write a simple documentary essay or imagined story, reading notes, letters, etc. The writing should have detailed content, genuine feelings, and should be fluent and logical. Writing should be neat, without typos, and correctly use punctuation. It should take students about 40 minutes to complete assignments of about 400 words. In class writing assignments should be given around 16 times per academic year.

9. Students should begin writing with a mental outline, and should proof-read, revise, and edit what they have written.

Oral Communication

10. Students should carefully and patiently listen to others speak; they should understand the main idea, and be able to paraphrase.

11. Students should be able to clearly describe an event with little preparation. Students should be able to give a two to three-minute speech about a topic in public. When giving a speech, students should be coherent and composed. Students will be able to actively communicate orally with people.

3. Text

- The texts for lower grades have to be close to the lives of children, and connect closely to children’s experience and imagination of the world.
Texts can be divided into intensive reading and skimming or general reading. The total number of high-grade texts should be 35 per semester or so.

4. Practice

- Actively create conditions to guide students to read more books, and to encourage students to exchange reading experiences.
- All kinds of activities should be organized inside and outside of the classroom, such as visiting, dramatic play, and making newspapers.
- According to the students' interests, organized recitation, calligraphy and other outside interest groups.
- Use of radio, television, Internet and other media channels to expand language learning.

Several issues should be noted during teaching

- In the language teaching process, teachers have to take the characteristics of the textbook and the actual situation of students into account, so that students will be subtly influenced to enhance their understanding of knowledge, and cultivate their moral character and sense of beauty.
- The students should be in charge of their own learning process. In the teaching process, teachers should enhance student – dominant language practice activities, and guide students to take the initiative to acquire knowledge in practice, gain ability, and avoid tedious and trivial mechanical analysis exercises.
Pay attention to students' individual differences, meet the different requirements of students who have different levels of learning to develop their learning potential. Also stimulate students' interest in language learning develop a positive attitude towards learning and good study habits, guiding them to master basic language learning methods, and encourage them to adopt their own ways of learning, and gradually improve the ability.

Language teaching should pay attention to the link between knowledge, ability, and emotion; and the connection between listening, speaking, reading and writing. Focusing on basic skills training to improve students' overall language literacy.

To take full advantage of real-life language educational resources, optimize the language learning environment, and build internal and external class communication links, structuring an interdisciplinary integration of the language education system.

In order to improve the quality of language teaching, the key factor is the teacher. Teachers should love their jobs and love each and every student, and strive to improve their subject expertise, and play an exemplary role in language learning. Teachers have the responsibly to establish a correct concept of education, improve their professional level and teaching ability, and have to be able to conduct teaching activities in a creative manner.

* Several specific issues

Reading

Teachers should promote reading among students as the basis of thinking. Through teacher's instructions, focus on key discussions and exchanges, encourage students to express
independent opinions. Allow students to practice reading and gradually learn to think independently.

Teachers should be creative, according to the textbook and students' age characteristics, using flexible teaching methods.

Writing

Teachers should stimulate students' love for life, mobilize students to observe, and cultivate students' enthusiasm for thinking and practicing writing. Teachers should encourage students to write familiar people, things, scenery, and objects; to speak the truth, to express true feelings instead of artificial emotions; to write imaginary things, to unfold students' imagination and fantasy in order to cultivate their creativity.

Speaking and Communication

Students, before starting school, should already have preliminary listening and speaking abilities. The primary school stage should make students’ use of language more formal, improve oral communication ability, and to develop good language use habits.

Training oral communication ability should be done through two-way interactive language practice. Teachers should use all aspects of language teaching to consciously cultivate students listening and speaking ability; should create a variety of communication contexts inside the class, so that each student feels free to communicate; encourage students to actively practice their oral communication abilities in their daily lives.

Teaching Evaluation
Assessment of language teaching, has to respect the characteristics of the subject and follow the laws of the subject.

Teacher evaluation should focus on the process of teaching and the teaching effectiveness of teachers, students' test scores should not be the sole basis for this assessment.

Assessment of students should be conducive to encouraging and promoting the development of students' language proficiency. The tests can be formatted as written or oral, and can be from several aspects, such as attitude, emotional and intellectual capacity.

Also pay attention to the students' learning attitudes and habits, the amount of reading assignments, oral communication ability, learning ability, and participation in a variety of language activities to evaluate. Do not only test interpretation of words.

Pay attention to analysis and feedback to assess the state of teaching, in order to facilitate the improvement of teaching.

**Teaching equipment**

Schools should actively create the conditions and strive to provide equipment for primary language teaching.

Schools for children are to be equipped with adequate readings of ancient and modern literary classics, other readings in the humanities, science and technology books, etc. The school should also supply adequate books and wall charts, necessary teaching materials, and teaching aids, and a number of newspapers and magazines. Schools should, depending on teaching needs, have some audio and video tapes, CDs and other audio-visual materials, with the appropriate number of slide projectors, projectors,
televisions, tape recorders, video recorders, computers and other auxiliary equipment. Qualified schools should actively use internet resources, and also create audio-visual classrooms, language labs, and multimedia classrooms.

Language teachers should strive to master and use modern educational technology, make full use of teaching equipment, and improve teaching quality and efficiency. Schools should strengthen their guidance and training to encourage and support them to develop and produce courseware.

Appendix:

Here the document listed 80 Chinese classic poems which students should recite

Note: The above is recommended for students to recite. Unlike the Classic poems included in the curriculum document, Modern poetry recitation contents would be sourced from textbooks or classroom teachers.

1. 长歌行(节选) 汉乐府
2. 七步诗 曹植
3. 敕勒歌 北朝民歌
4. 咏鹅 骆宾王

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3 This is the appendix in the original document, the 80 classic poems are also originally included in the document content.
5. 回乡偶书(少小离家老大回) 贺知章

6. 咏柳 贺知章

7. 凉州词 王之涣

8. 登鹳雀楼 王之涣

9. 春晓 孟浩然

10. 宿建德江 孟浩然

11. 凉州词 王翰

12. 出塞 王昌龄

13. 从军行(青海长云暗雪山) 王昌龄

14. 芙蓉楼送辛渐 王昌龄

15. 鹿柴 王维

16. 竹里馆 王维

17. 送元二使安西 王维

18. 九月九日忆山东兄弟 王维

19. 别董大 高适

20. 静夜思 李白

21. 古朗月行(节选) 李白

22. 望庐山瀑布 李白

23. 赠汪伦 李白

24. 独坐敬亭山 李白
25. 黄鹤楼送孟浩然之广陵 李白
26. 早发白帝城 李白
27. 秋浦歌(白发三千丈) 李白
28. 望天门山 李白
29. 闻官军收河南河北 杜甫
30. 绝句(两个黄鹂鸣翠柳) 杜甫
31. 赠花卿 杜甫
32. 江南逢李龟年 杜甫
33. 春夜喜雨 杜甫
34. 绝句(迟日江山丽) 杜甫
35. 江畔独步寻花 杜甫
36. 逢雪宿芙蓉山主人 刘长卿
37. 江雪 柳宗元
38. 寻隐者不遇 贾岛
39. 枫桥夜泊 张继
40. 渔歌子 张志和
41. 寒食 韩
42. 滁州西涧 韦应物
43. 塞下曲 卢纶
44. 游子吟 孟郊
45. 竹枝词(杨柳青青江水平) 刘禹锡
46. 乌衣巷 刘禹锡
47. 望洞庭 刘禹锡
48. 浪淘沙(九曲黄河万里沙) 刘禹锡
49. 赋得古原草送别 白居易
50. 忆江南 白居易
51. 悯农(锄禾日当午) 李绅
52. 悯农(春种一粒粟) 李绅
53. 山行 杜牧
54. 清明 杜牧
55. 江南春 杜牧
56. 秋夕 杜牧
57. 乐游原 李商隐
58. 商山早行 温庭筠
59. 元日 王安石
60. 泊船瓜洲 王安石
61. 梅花 王安石
62. 六月二十七日望湖楼醉书 苏轼
63. 饮湖上初晴后雨 苏轼
64. 惠崇《春江晓景》 苏轼
65. 题西林壁 苏轼
66. 夏日绝句 李清照
67. 示儿 陆游
68. 秋夜将晓出篱门迎凉有感 陆游
69. 小池 杨万里
70. 晓出净慈寺送林子方 杨万里
71. 四时田园杂兴(昼出耘田夜绩麻) 范成大
72. 春日 朱熹
73. 菩萨蛮·书江西造口壁 辛弃疾
74. 题临安邸 林升
75. 游园不值 叶绍翁
76. 墨梅 王冕
77. 石灰吟 于谦
78. 朝天子·咏喇叭 王磐
79. 竹石 郑燮
80. 己亥杂诗 龚自珍