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MP3 AND CULTURALLY FREE

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Education

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Michelle Zuckerman-Parker

Graduation May 2007

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Michelle Zuckerman-Parker

2007

**DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION**

Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Education (Ed.D.)

EddIT Doctoral Program

Presented by:

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M.S., Duquesne University, 2002
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March 1, 2007

**MP3 AND CULTURALLY FREE: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC INQUIRY
INVESTIGATING SHYNESS AND TECHNOLOGY WITHIN THE CHINESE
HIGHER EDUCATION**

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ABSTRACT

MP3 AND CULTURALLY FREE

By

Michelle Zuckerman-Parker

May 2007

Dissertation Supervised by Dr. Gary Shank

This ethnographic inquiry investigated the interaction of shyness, a cultural trait and technology within the Chinese higher education system. It was from this adventure a new approach to help Chinese students improve their oral English was developed while stumbling upon a global phenomenon. Technology does more than provide logistical assistance; it creates opportunities. One such opportunity is a culture free learning environment.

The purpose of this study was to explore whether different combinations of technologies help to overcome cultural barriers when teaching Chinese students to speak English in the People's Republic of China. There were three different forms of technology used in this study: cell phones, MP3 players, and computers. These ideas were born out of necessity as an educator. Under traditional classroom settings, it was difficult to urge Chinese students to speak. Within the Chinese culture, students were

terrified of making mistakes. For the Chinese students a certain amount of perfection in their work was required, and the cultural strain of “saving face” was evident. The ideas behind the subsequent research with Chinese university students were formulated by the success observed when working with adult students at a private English school.

By seeking to identify the catalyst for a possible phenomenon when English Language Learner (ELL) university students in the People's Republic of China learn English, the primary goal of this project was to facilitate learners of ELL with becoming less shy in the learning process and gain confidence through the learning experience. Technology played a major role in the educational delivery, communications, and learning. Based on a familiarity and ease of access, the university students were directed to incorporate the use of cell phones and MP3 players to facilitate their learning. The devices took away self-consciousness, hesitation, and removed the cultural boundaries that made them unwilling to speak. This, combined with affirmation of their skills, allowed students to speak about adult ideas in a more grammatically correct and more complex way. A website was also developed, but it was less successful. Students were more comfortable with cell phones, and continued to use them when commenting about the website. According to my students, computers were regarded as technological devices to increase productivity. Although ownership of personal computers was increasing, they were rare with limited access while this research was conducted.

DEDICATION

This paper is dedicated to my family, teachers, friends and the strangers whom became friends along the way. To my mother and father who believed in the value of education, I thank you. I am grateful for instilling in me the value education and providing me with many opportunities to learn. As a parent and educator today, I realize how critical these learning experiences are. To my sisters, Danielle and Lisa, thank you for your patience. To my brother Michael thanks for understanding when extremely belated birthday cards and gifts were finally sent from far off lands. I realize there has been countless family events missed. Although I chose not to attend because of deadlines related to this project, these sacrifices were part of the process. Fortunately, something tells me you will forgive me. To my nieces and nephews, Steven, Jonathan, Jacob, Gabrielle, Savannah, Benjamin and Seth, I promise, we will make up for the missed family time starting now! To Dave and Sandy, you have been the most understanding, patient and supportive in-laws any woman could dream of. To my grandfather, Walter Zuckerman, I still have the Haim Ginot clipping you sent me from the New York Times over twenty years ago. We should all be blessed with such a grandfather. Thank you for everything you have done.

Although my extended family has endured, a preoccupied daughter or aunt, my own family has logged countless accumulated hours of hearing a mantra, “not now, mom is writing.” Yet, without the genuine love and support from my husband Steve, son Joshua and daughter Sarah, I doubt this work would have come to fruition. After all, how many husbands allow their wives to pack up on a six-week mommy sabbatical to the

People's Republic of China, which then turns into a two-year research project? Better yet, how many children agree to go off and live in a foreign land with their mother where they can't speak the language? Oh wait; we did that when we moved to Germany! Josh and Sarah, you are the true heroes of this journey.

In addition to the phenomenal support of my husband and children, academic guidance was necessary. Amazingly, as I discovered throughout this adventure, what I truly needed was provided for. Fortunately, Dr. Shank, Dr. Mautino and Dr. Barone, were available to provide the quality of tutelage I desired even though I was in Asia and they in North America. The years of yearning for a challenge ended, as they were happy to oblige. It has truly been a joy to learn with my committee and the other professors who have crossed my path over these many years. Additionally, I would like to thank four amazing teachers: Abby Erdmann, David Moore, Ellen Kaplovitz and Dr. Janice Swab.

To my dear friends, Allysen, Ute, Andi, Tanja, Beth, Susan, Bob, Sonja, Bobbie, Sam, Chrissy, Rose, Dan, Robert, Debbie, Patty, Elaine, Lorie, Glory and Laura you have patiently listened to me talk and talk so I could better understand my own understanding. Then you challenged my understanding by asking questions. When I needed a friend, you magically provided love and support through an electrical umbilical cord, via the internet, you read my countless emails and responded with kindness.

Lastly, I dedicate this dissertation to my grandmother, Ruth Gollis Zuckerman. We shared a passion for the arts and education. On so many levels, I admire my grandmother more today. Returning to school, as an adult is something I wish we had been able to discuss. Yet, during this adventure, each time I took a picture it warmed my

heart to make friends with strangers as she often did using her camera. Mimi, thank you for the encouragement and love you always provided me.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

While in graduate school, the Director of Strategic Marketing, Robert Krystyniak, saw something more than a terrible secretary working her way through school. We worked together at various companies. He allowed me to share my thoughts and ideas, as a secretary, engineer and multi-media developer, something most other managers never considered. I completed graduate school thanks to his employment opportunities, mentorship and friendship. When our family moved overseas, he was supportive of this choice and encouraged us to seize the opportunity while many other people did not. It was always a delight to visit with him and his wonderful family during our “home visits” to Pittsburgh. Perhaps the highlight was while I defending my dissertation, he asked me questions, indicating that this body of work is not limited to academic environments rather other disciplines. That is cool!

After working with Mr. Krystyniak and moving away from Pittsburgh, I often wondered if such an opportunity to learn and develop programs using technology to help people would be available again. After taking classes online and conducting research in the People’s Republic of China using various online technologies, I found another great opportunity online, how apropos! Fortunately, while I was surfing online I learned about the Allegheny-Singer Research Institute. Dr. J. Christopher Post, Dr. Garth Ehrlich and their world-class organization presented another amazing opportunity.

Although, the timing of this prospect meant immediately leaving my son and husband in Germany and bringing my daughter to the United States, well, it was worth it.

To find the leadership which encouraged quality and creativity in another organization similar to what I enjoyed under the tutelage of Mr. Krystyniak, was magical. Dr. Post and Dr. Ehrlich have provided me with an amazing opportunity to improve the quality of science education impacting generations to come.

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OVERVIEW: CHINESE STUDENTS, EDUCATION, AND LEARNING

The purpose of the dissertation was born of my desire to apply and observe unique combinations of technology to help Chinese students surmount cultural barriers when learning how to speak English as a second language. The innovative technologies used were Cell phones, SMS Text Messaging, and MP3 players. Interestingly enough, computers were not useful. According to Wikipedia, “A telecommunications protocol that allows the sending of "short“(160 characters or less) text messages. It is available on most digital mobile phones and some personal digital assistants with onboard wireless telecommunications. The individual messages which are sent are called text messages.” Why did I decide to pursue using these technologies? In order for you to understand this, I need to tell you a little story...

It all started with an email. I received an email where I could go to The People’s Republic of China for free. Free airfare, free food, free accommodations, as part of a cultural exchange program to teach English to Chinese children in summer camp. What happened was, when I touched down in Beijing, upon arrival, our group was informed by the cultural exchange organization, by government decree,” Chinese students study enough during the year and must enjoy the summer holiday, thus no camps to teach children English this summer.” Furthermore, I was told, the agreement I signed to participate in the cultural exchange as a teacher of children was sold for a contract to work as a foreign expert. I was contracted out to teach at a private school for adults. I had to make a choice. Do I leave or do I stay? I decided to stay.

Within a few hours, I was dropped off at a school in a city whose name I could not pronounce. Later I learned I was in ShaoXing, an ancient city with black roofed boats traversing the waterway like a Chinese version of Venice Italy. Jet lagged and overwhelmed, I became energized when I met the students. They were so excited to meet a foreigner. A real native English speaker for them was a luxury. Unfortunately, their “treat” was at my expense sometimes. After being driven in a car for hours by someone who did not speak any English, a cell phone was handed to me by the driver. I was being instructed to get out of the car and take the elevator to the sixth floor. Upon entering the only option through glass and chrome double doors, I was told I had thirty minutes to clean up and rest before I would be teaching for the next eight hours. I asked for a place to store my backpack and suitcase while I freshened up in a smoke filled bathroom of burning incense.

Finally, after a long day first day, I was delivered to my “free accommodations.” The conditions I was asked to live in were deplorable. For example, I was told I had to live for six weeks with an older sticky single American male in an apartment with no toilet or shower, only one bed, no air conditioning or fans to circulate the hot humid air of July in South China. Refusing to stay the night with him, I checked into a local hotel on my own. Although I was disgusted with the situation, I had met a group of motivated Chinese students. I was intrigued with their desire to learn. So, the next morning on my way to work at the school, I made my own living arrangements at a hotel next door to the school. I knew I had a clean bed to sleep in each night after teaching nor would I have to traverse across town on foot in the dark to live with an older man in a one-bed apartment, this was progress.

While teaching at the school, the resources were limited. Classes were held in fish bowl enclosures as glass walls encapsulated a table and chairs from floor to ceiling. It became immediately obvious, this was not about learning rather; jam packing the number of people into places to optimize the return on investment of students into a space with the teacher. Unfortunately, this environment was not conducive for talking, a requisite for learning how to speak a language. Additionally, there was one filing cabinet in the office with laminated copies of lesson plans. As a teacher of English, a “foreign expert” according to my VISA, I was to take the appropriate laminated page out, photocopy it, return it to its proper place and then teach English from this copy during the one-hour class session. As if trying to teach Chinese students how to speak English in a fish bowl with lesson plans for children was not disillusion enough, there was no ventilation in the “classroom.” It was really hot and miserable. Furthermore, the only requirement for people to teach was to be a native speaker. Nevertheless, the thing was, as deplorable as the circumstances were; the students whom I met really wanted to learn. They were so excited that they could actually speak English with a real native English speaker rather than something from a computer software program. They were grateful for the chance to speak with someone who was genuinely interested in speaking with them.

At that moment in time, it seemed as if everyone in the People’s Republic of China wanted to learn English. Grandparents would greet me on the streets with a warm smile and nod to their grandchild. All of a sudden, it was as if a curtain has been pulled back and the grandparent instructed this child, “Speak English.” Proudly these children

shared the following phrase, “Hello, my name is Lilly; it is nice to meet you. What is your name?” Immediately I responded with, “it is nice to meet you Lilly, my name is Michelle. You speak English very well.” At that moment, Lilly and those that followed her smiled and I was able to take their picture using my digital camera. The grandparents of these children raced to share this exchange of a few words and watching me gesture permission for picture taking with their family and neighbors. Before I knew it, I was being asked into numerous homes to speak English and take a picture. Perhaps it was the first time these Chinese people heard English from a native speaker. Perhaps this was the first time they saw the digital image of their family on my camera’s display. Regardless, it was these moments of a desire to learn that I will always treasure.

This desire to learn is exacerbated by the decree of the People’s Republic of China, that “Chinglish” is no longer permitted. According to Wikipedia, “Chinglish (slang) is a portmanteau of the words Chinese and English and refers to either (a) English interspersed with English language errors common to those Chinese persons who are learning English or (b) Chinese interspersed with English, such as used by westernized Chinese (e.g. American-born Chinese) who are not fluent in Chinese and codeswitch English words into speech when they can't think of the correct Chinese word.” A few examples of Chinglish are, “Young chicken without sex,” “Careful Landslip Attention Security, “An Excellent Winding Smoke, ““Shangri-La is in you mind, but your Buffalo is not. “ The preparations for the 2008 Olympic Games has a hefty price tag of \$40Billion to rebuild Beijing for the anticipated 500,000 tourist expected. Along with spitting, run-down housing and bad manners, add unintelligible English to the list of things organizers of the 2008 Beijing Olympics want to ban. The government has asked

the public to help police bad grammar and faulty syntax otherwise known as Chinglish. Currently, Beijing taxi drivers must pass an English test to keep their licenses as part of annual renewal.

According to reports on state run CCTV, most Beijing taxi drivers speak only Chinese and many are skipping language classes. Yet, for those willing to work hard and save money, there are many opportunities to attend schools to learn English in the People's Republic of China. But, something odd was happening in my classes filled with eager and motivated students. The students understood they needed to speak English in order for them to be successful. Obviously, it is not enough for them to read or write English. The curricular materials provided are based on the assumption that students would speak, but they will not speak. The adult male and female students who were surgeons, homemakers, businesspersons and factory workers were terrified to make a mistake. When I asked them to talk about it, they explained a desire for perfection instilled from Chinese Culture of Saving Face.

On the first day in ShaoXing, I noticed the Chinese students' ability to read and write English was impeccable. They had all this information in their heads but something was preventing them from using it. English words would not come out of their mouths. I had to find a way to draw this out. When I went to the People's Republic of China from Germany, I had my Finnish Nokia cell phone. I had to buy a Chinese SIM card, Pop out the old German SIM card and replace it with the new Chinese SIM card in my Finnish cell phone. But, how was I ever going to find an automatic teller machine (ATM), get money, find a SIM card vendor and purchase a Chinese SIM card without speaking a work of Mandarin? Fortunately, for me, I met "Just Justin." On my first day in

ShaoXing, I was introduced to many people. Two young men shared the same name, Justin. One was Dr. Justin and the other, “Just Justin.” However, there was nothing ordinary about “Just Justin.”

On hot and humid July day, he helped me find an ATM, which would accept an American VISA card. This simple task took over thirty minutes and more than five taxis. Fortunately, Just Justin had some Chinese RMB with him. Finally, we found an ATM that would accept an American VISA card. Quickly I requested a transaction for a cash withdrawal to cover the expenses we had incurred during our search. Next, we were off to find a SIM card. For the Chinese, numbers are more than numbers. Each digit has significance as I learned when trying to purchase a Chinese SIM card. After sifting through the stacks of SIM Cards, Just Justin found one that he believed was appropriate. Within seconds, there was magic! Just Justin had begun to text message his classmates my new cell phone number using his cell phone. When I turned on my cell phone, “Voila!” I was able to make phone calls with a local phone number at local phone rates. It was with this Finnish cell phone I bought in Germany that I used in the People’s Republic of China that I discovered something amazing. With a cell phone in hand, there was no self-consciousness, no hesitation, and no cultural monitoring. For the first time, these students were speaking English and sharing adult ideas. They were inquisitive and excited to speak and have someone to listen to them, in English. I would encourage the students when they called me with simple affirmations, which were genuinely received. This gave them confidence to keep speaking.

In addition to the traditional face-to-face classes within the fish bowl environment, the school offered “English Corner.” English Corner was essentially an

open seminar class. Nearly none of the other teachers wanted to teach these sessions because preparatory work was required. Soon, I was trading my formal class sessions for the opportunity to teach “English Corner.” In addition to the “English Corner” provided by the school, some of my students developed their own version, an “Unofficial English Corner.” The students would take turns preparing a session topic for discussion by the whole group. Many came to the school only to participate in this activity. The students supported each other and corrected each other when mistakes were made. It was here that the student developed a true community of practice with a technological twist. The students were using cell phones to text message and speak in English as a way to practice communicating in English. It was at this moment, I identified my first research question. Research question 1.0: What is going on here and how can I use it?

Until this point, I was not thinking as a researcher, rather as an educator, thus I was not collecting data. The text messages were not saved and the voice messages were not saved. After six weeks, my first trip to the People’s Republic of China ended. Upon my return to Germany, I wanted to continue teaching English using what I knew about education and technology. I set up <http://ourenglishschool.spaces.live.com/> However, it did not work. Students would send me a text message to my cell phone about the website, but they would not use it. Instead, they wanted to talk thus Research question 2.0: Why didn’t my online school work?

I quickly learned the student lack the confidence with an online program. Speaking a language does not translate in the online environment I initially developed. Furthermore, computers are not for communication rather they are for work. However, in

the People's Republic of China, cell phones are a ubiquitous technology for communication. Research Question 3.0: Can I return to the People's Republic of China with these findings and implement a program, which I can monitor and evaluate? It is from this first trip to ShaoXing China that the following factors were considered for my second trip to Xi'an China. My students were reluctant to speak English face to face, there were not comfortable with computer for learning and they were eager to communicate with cell phones (voice and text messaging).

This dissertation documents two separate visits to the People's Republic of China which are outlined in Table 1. The first trip from July through August of 2005 was to ShaoXing, in the province of Zhejiang. In ShaoXing, I taught English at a private English school for adults. During these six weeks, I left my husband and children in Germany. The second trip from January 2006 to July 2006 was to Xi'an, which is at the easternmost point of the Silk Road. In Xi'an, I taught English at a private University located in Shaanxi province, but this time, I brought my two children. Additionally, before beginning my teaching assignment in Xi'an, I took my children to ShaoXing to meet the students I had worked with during my first trip.

Table 1

Travels by dates

	July 2005 through August of 2005	January 2006 to July 2006
Trip 1	ShaoXing: Teaching Adults	
Trip 2A		ShaoXing: Teaching University Students*
Trip 2B		Xi'an: Teaching University Students*

While teaching English in China to more than 300 freshmen students during the 2006 spring semester, I found a population afraid to speak in a traditional, face-to-face environment. These undergraduates were even reluctant to use electronic media, such as e-mail and Instant Messaging (IM), to further their language skill development. It became clear that a gap exists between culturally appropriate language acquisition programs and a method that benefits the current students in learning oral English. This ethnographic inquiry investigates the interaction of shyness in Chinese culture with technology in the Chinese higher education system. It is from this ethnographic adventure that I developed a new approach to help Chinese students improve their oral English and stumbled across a global phenomenon. I discovered that technology does more than provide logistical assistance; it creates opportunities. One such opportunity is a culture-free learning environment.

The current Chinese education system relies on rote memorization, which is reinforced by a cultural attention to right and wrong, while striving for perfection. Whether considering the value of a test score or a pearl, The People's Republic of China highly values perfection. A pearl has value by Eastern standards based on its color, roundness, smoothness, size and shape. There are few perfectly round, white, smooth pearls and by analogy, few students are perfect speakers of English. The standard English of Chinese students and teachers is the English spoken in Western films and television. When asked to speak English, students immediately reply, "My English is not good." They believe their English is not good because it is not like that of native English speakers. This is an impossibly high standard and is exacerbated by the Eastern cultural

tenant of “saving face.” To make a mistake would be to “lose face,” and since rote memorization reduces the chance of making a “mistake,” it is the safest way to “learn.”

In the oral English classroom, the perception is that there is only one way to speak English and that is like a Westerner. If students think they will not speak their English words like a Westerner, they will not speak for fear of “losing face.” As such, the majority of Chinese students who are enrolled in university classes to learn and improve their oral English don’t meet their teachers’ or their own expectations. There are no state-mandated objectives or curriculum to follow, leaving each professor to teach as he or she sees fit. Currently, most oral English courses in China are taught from textbooks requiring students to memorize the passages and recite. Unfortunately, this yields robotic recitations and little ability to speak English when spoken to.

What is a Qualitative Project-Brainstorming Piece?

This is a qualitative research project. As such, it was written with the qualitative experience at the forefront. “One of the keys to most forms of qualitative research is the idea of doing research in the field. The earliest researchers in the social scientists (Michelle – should this be sciences?) were the cultural anthropologists,” states Shank (2007, page 64). Perhaps I felt some sort of kinship with those earlier researchers who “went native”. You will read about my children and me, and you will read about Chinese students learning English. Below is an e-mail, which shares my reflections, one of many in the dissertation that exemplifies the qualitative experience.

E-mail 1

Thanks for your note Lisa. For class this week, my topic is food. It has been a riot to work with students brainstorming. Sharing ideas freely is not an Asian thing and my students really enjoyed just shouting out their suggestions. Within minutes the blackboard was covered with the food groups and various examples of each, including, junk/garbage food. We identified which foods we should eat this week, made a grocery list, divided responsibilities, etc. Additionally, the best part is that I am able to use this time with the students as an official session of English Corner. I was going to continue whether the university would allow me to use this time as the English Corner seminar but now it is nice to know i don't have to add another class to my schedule.

Since the Friday night dinner, my inbox has been filled with kind notes of thanks from many students. As I write about this experience, I realize how lucky I am to be doing an ethnographic qualitative research study. I would never learn the stuff I am learning about my students with a traditional quantitative research methodology. plus, today, I would not fit that mold either. It is a joy to be able to immerse

myself in the culture here. I relish the opportunity to experience as much as I am able to experience first hand both in the classroom and outside of the classroom.

In case you are wondering, our menu this week is: beef with potatoes, eggplant, broccoli, fish soup with tofu, spring rolls, egg with tomato, rice and carrots. for the number of people we will need, I think we may need to buy a whole cow. This week should be somewhere in the order of 80 people. Keep in mind, my apartment is on the 6th floor. Although we will sit outside at ground level to eat, play games, dance and sing, the kitchen is on the 6th floor.

Today many students volunteered to prepare a talent show. There will be singing, dancing, jokes, etc. I think this is a wonderful way for the students to use their English in a real environment rather than rote memorization of textbook dialogues. Plus being able to stand before a group of people also helps build their confidence. The greatest obstacle these students face with their language acquisition is fear of making a mistake. By having them play and gain confidence in a non-threatening environment, I believe students are able to overcome this huge barrier of

entry. Obviously this is a very unorthodox approach to teaching English and one which many other professors may not want to consider, however there are some alternatives which can be used in the classroom and have so far been highly effective.

For those students who want to learn, practice is key. The more they speak the better their English will be. I have inadvertently found the best method of practice is for students to use the mp3 players to record their own voices. They record original content that they write and then practice speaking these words in the recording. Most are able to get it right the first time. They are able to speak with energy, excitement and enthusiasm with the mp3 player and I hope that by the end of the semester they will be able to transfer this into the classroom or most importantly into real world situations.

Introduction

Why go to the People's Republic of China? In answer to the question, "why this?" my answer is simple. Working with and advancing instructional technology is a role I have been interested in and committed to for years and know that this is a field that

will keep my interest for decades. Over the past decade of teaching and studying, I have come to understand that my personal goal within the profession is to work with students and teachers. This requires not only a terminal degree but also the training and expertise afforded to me from engaging in research. Such work will continue to provide the tools needed to incorporate my interests and natural ability to lead with a necessary and useful profession.

As I reflect upon the past few years, I thought my chances to complete graduate work were slim when our family moved to Germany. However, the combination of too much time on my hands and the development of the Duquesne University online program have been undisguised blessings. Acceptance into this program has provided a vehicle, just as living in Germany has reinforced my determination and my ability to focus on my studies.

I mentioned a decade of discernment, but in many ways, the most exciting event of the entire decade occurred during February 2003 when I attended the 2003 NAACE conference in Torquay, UK. I went as a birthday present to myself, a little holiday away from the family. What I found was so much more than an escape! I had literally stumbled upon a place where other professionals, working collaboratively toward a single goal, shared my educational vision: the advancement of instructional technology as it pertains to information and communication technology, (ICT) training.

This was by far the most enlightening meeting I had attended in my life. The quality and content of the presentations, the collegial professionalism of the delegates, their determination to rise to the challenge was electrifying and contagious. Each presentation left me with pages of notes and the desire to research more on my own. As

each hour passed, I knew this was where I belonged. Because of this phenomenal opportunity, I became convinced that I wanted to expand my knowledge and experience in leadership, learning theories, curriculum development and become a master practitioner with higher aspirations as a visionary.

While I bring considerable experience in both instruction and technology to the table, I believe my most significant contribution to the profession comes from my passion for teaching from having been a teacher. The passion and conviction I recognized at Torquay inform my approach to education at all levels. Whether in the kindergarten classroom, corporate training room or boardroom, creating and maintaining a nurturing and motivating environment is an art form.

Although this dissertation focused on my research of teaching English as a Second Language in the People's Republic of China, this is not something I was formally trained to do. Instead, I entered the middle school science classroom as an engineer who always wanted to teach. In my own classrooms, I encouraged student to explore and ask their own questions. There were no "recipe card" science experiments. Robotic recitations of oral English were not permitted. There were no photocopied worksheets passed around to keep the students "busy." Instead, students used the scientific method as a guide to investigate stuff they were interested in. For example, students in a science classroom had the freedom to investigate rollerblades or ballet while learning about physics. Furthermore, students in an oral English class environment investigated how to learn English from various MP3 recordings exchanged with classmates and then developed their own best method.

Art and technology are an integral part of facilitating this process. Middle school students in my prior science classes learned about scientists by interviewing them, even when they were dead. They made their own costumes and then videotaped their show. Each pair of students presented the videotape to the whole class during our “meet the scientist” event. How does this translate from science to Second Language Learners? For Second Language Learners, this process included students collaborated on writing a play, making costumes and stage props, culminating in a performance of their work. In other words, the use of content taught within the social and situational context of the students’ every day existence provides learning environments facilitated by quality educators allowing students an opportunity to experience and produce a tangible product demonstrating their knowledge. But how does this happen and what does this look like? Those questions will have to wait for a future investigation.

However, something interesting happened along the way in my graduate studies. I read works by Dewey, Gagne, Papert, and Dede. And I realized, my engineering background had served me well with quantitative investigations in the past but now the desire to investigate using qualitative methods had been afforded to me when offered the opportunity to ethnographically investigate a phenomenon in China.

Perhaps ethnography, as a research method, was appealing because I have been fortunate to travel and experience new cultures. The difference this time would be in documenting the experiences from a new perspective, as an instructional technology doctoral candidate conducting qualitative research. How cool is that?

The skills set most critical to ethnography are observation and documentation requiring time and reflection while immersed in a new culture. I believe our ever-

increasing world of technology leads many people to live their daily existence on autopilot. As an ethnographer, I have to become more cognizant of my surroundings and myself. Our daily routine is filled with habits, which we rarely consider or reflect upon. Unfortunately, the longer we allow these behaviors to continue without considerations from various perspectives, the longer we remain entrenched in our singular way of being in the universe.

Fortunately, Roger-Pol Droit, a French philosopher and columnist wrote a phenomenal text, which prompts readers to explore issues in philosophy with exercises. These adventures are the epitome of hands-on learning as the reader is encouraged to discover “the starting point for that astonishment which gives rise to philosophy.” There are other worlds within ours, Droit reminds us, worlds that we might be able to see with only a metaphoric readjustment of shutters. There are exercises to calm, to disorient, to humanize, to displace; for instance, listening to shortwave radio at night, Droit writes, will help readers realize that “perpetually around you, woven into the air...are these hundreds of voices murmuring, in dozens of unknown or unrecognizable languages, of which you know nothing, expect that they spread an obscure and changing human crust, unendingly, over everything.” From these experiences, the reader learns about perception or identity, or a new way to see the world and the self.

By shifting your awareness slightly, creating astonishing feelings, seeing the world from different points of view something amazing happens. Perhaps the most amazing experiment shared in this text, one we are nearly all familiar with and one that draws direct bearing on my research is experiment number 77, “Listen to your own voice.”

Typically, when we hear a recording of our own voice, our immediate response is, “that doesn’t sound like me!” If you are not used to hearing yourself, it can be a dislocating experience, which is the point. The exercise tends to impose an objective point of view on us, hearing yourself as possibly others see or hear you. It breaks up our preconceived notions, providing a fresh look at “I” by breaking down our preconceived notions of the world and perhaps has the ability to use our senses to see, hear, smell, and feel the world in a new way. From this perspective, amazing things abound worthy of our investigation. One particular investigation occurred in the People’s Republic of China. This dissertation is an account of these efforts.

I traveled to the People’s Republic of China on two occasions. The first trip was to ShaoXing, (other wise known as my “free trip”) was during July 2005. The second trip was to Xi’an January 2006 where I conducted my ethnographic research. The validity of the ethnographic methodology in its purest form is supported three forms of data. Specifically, the three forms of data upon which this ethnographic research is grounded are: accounts of what I saw as noted in my field notes, documented face-to-face interviews, and metacognitive data from emails, cell phone text messages and archived audio files.

Specifically, this study sought to identify the catalyst for a possible phenomenon when English Language Learner (ELL) university students in the People's Republic of China learn English. A primary goal of the project was to facilitate learners of ELL with becoming less shy in the learning process and gain confidence through the learning experience. Technology played a major role in the educational delivery, communications, and learning. Instructional Technology encompasses change by virtue of its dynamic

technological nature. Students' future success depends upon their internal motivation and if they were "set up for success." How to learn also encompasses where one learns, especially in our mobile phone and wireless Internet access culture.

As an American, teaching English in the PRC, I often wondered: Are Western educators able to provide an academic environment, which is nurturing and fosters the educational process, within the context of an English university class on an Eastern university campus? From my experience, students of Eastern cultures must overcome their self-proclaimed worst enemy, their shyness. Further more, from a Western perspective, shyness can be misconstrued as a lack of intelligence. Additionally, the cultural trait of shyness has been identified as a disturbing factor among students learning English.

The synthesis of these topics, as well as the researchers observations of the students as individuals and part of a larger group, helped to provide a rich understanding about their cultural dynamic. The participant population was composed of undergraduate university students who were enrolled in a full semester course of oral English. The duration of the research was one academic semester, spring 2006, from February 2006 until July 2006.

It is the researcher's contention that Instructional Technology (IT) tools are able to help reduce the anxiety for those with shyness as a cultural trait based on the first visit. According to Dr. Chen, "there should be some degree of developmental continuity," when asked about the unique cultural aspect of shyness Chinese children exhibit while they learn as adults (Xinyin Chen - personal correspondence via e-mail August 25, 2005). In addition to traditional face-to-face class sessions and private one-on-one discussions,

we used various formats of easily available technology: electronic mail (e-mail), instant messaging (IM) with integrated web cam and audio options, and cell phones using simple message service (SMS).

By reducing anxiety to speak on the spot and provide more opportunities to increase vocabulary and by allowing reflection to occur, the metacognitive approach to education possibly provides an avenue not yet explored. This is the essence of the problem statement. This study considered how technology affects a traditional culture, such as shyness, as a possible phenomenon when university level students in the PRC learn English.

In order to explain the reason for the approach and technologies used in this study, I must first tell you a story....

About Michelle

As someone who has traveled throughout the United States, Europe, the Middle East, and South America, I didn't think the idea of going to the People's Republic of China (PRC) was a far stretch. Although I knew nothing about the culture or the languages, I felt comfortable enough with people. Perhaps this is because I don't travel with fear. Or at least I didn't as a child.

I vividly recall how strange things had become the morning I left the Nürnberg airport for China and realized this was the first time I was traveling alone since September 11, 2002. The only reason I was even conscious of that notion was because while in the airport, I noticed a man who was sitting near me. As I waited for the flight to board and collected my thoughts about leaving my husband and children for six weeks, I

couldn't release myself from this odd feeling as I watched events unfold in front of me. This man was clutching a briefcase. He would get up from his seat and move to another but leave the briefcase at his prior location. At first I thought this was odd. But he continued to change seats while repositioning the briefcase in various locations. I kept wondering if I was the only person sleep deprived and paying attention to this situation. Was this suspicious activity worthy of contacting someone? I couldn't understand why I was even thinking these thoughts. When in my life did I ever contemplate such ideas? I had no other reference point or experience to draw from. Thus, this was new to me. I had to convince myself that the nationality of the people boarding the plane to Istanbul was not an issue. I refused to allow myself to generalize a group of people as being something or anything less than a group of people. I was in awe at myself and asked, "Was this briefcase worthy of such angst?" In the end it wasn't, but I realized that this was not going to be any normal trip.

The Adventure Begins: First Trip to the PRC

During the Spring of 2005, I received an e-mail essentially saying, "teach in China, everything's included, airfare, clothes, touring, laundry, etc." I thought it was one of those "too-good-to-be-true" kind of situations, but it came from a professor at my university, so I read it again. In passing, I mentioned this e-mail to my husband. "Yeah right, like I can go off to China, we've got two kids and we live in Germany and we have no family to help us, who will take care of the kids if I decide to go off?" However, he was wonderful, kind, and loving, and said, "It's an amazing opportunity. Its six weeks. Go for it!" So I left. I knew nearly nothing about China, the people, culture,

language or history and yet I found this opportunity to learn exhilarating. I was going off to a place in the world that was new to me. Although I have traveled internationally since I was a young child and lived abroad, this was different. I was going as an adult, a mother, and an educator.

However, when I arrived in Shanghai under the auspice of teaching children in summer camps, I was informed, "The Chinese government has decided Chinese children work too hard during the school year and there is no need for them to learn more during the summer." It was at this moment in a Shanghai hotel dining room that I wondered what kind of a teaching abroad program I was with. The wild part was that I was with over one-hundred other educators from all over the United States of America. Within hours I met people from various places throughout the USA, many from places where I had lived. Yet, we were all clueless and responded differently to this situation. No one seemed to know anything. The woman who came to China from the USA who organized the trip appeared as if she was withholding information. The Chinese delegation also declined to be forthcoming with information. Perhaps, this was the first cultural difference I noticed, because I experienced it first-hand. Typically, in the West, information is shared. For example, an agenda or itinerary is shared. Here, we were told that when the time was appropriate, we would be told more information. And so we waited and wondered.

Eventually, I was told that my contract as an American English expert for the Chinese government had been sold and I was to work alone with an international web school for adults. All of the other Americans would be in groups of five or more, but for some reason, I was being sent off by myself. Oddly enough, I found this interesting rather

than being overly concerned. Perhaps from previous experiences abroad, I knew as long as I had my passport, credit card and a cell phone, nearly everything could be dealt with. Yet, this was different. I kept hearing a reference to a "contract." Now this was really interesting because most of us in the West are accustomed to signing a contract, getting information, going somewhere and doing what we were contracted to do, but this wasn't the case at all. So I had the choice: do I stick it out or do I, you know, pack my bags and go home? Of the other hundred teachers from the States who had joined in this group to teach children in China at summer camps, most of them went back because they were so disgusted with the "bait and switch" operation as some of them referred to it. But something inside of me said, "this is an opportunity and I know my husband is okay, and my kids are safe, and as far as I can tell, I'm going to survive, so let's go for it". Although I had some strange experiences that were less than ideal, I considered this part of the adventure. For example, after all the teachers were parsed out to their places of "employment," I still didn't know the name of the city where I was going. Later I would learn I had been assigned to ShaoXing along. I heard some Chinese name but was not familiar with it. When I asked a group organizer, they would correct me but I still had no clue where I was going. Inevitably, the day ended and it was too late to take me to my drop-off point. Instead, I was told at the last moment to hurry up and go in a car with a driver. This day had been the epitome of "hurry up and wait." With my backpack and computer case, I was off. The driver's cell phone kept ringing and I swear, even as one without a good sense of direction we were traveling in circles. Lo and behold, we were. Literally, it was almost a charade. I was taken into a car, driven around the city, and then

dropped off where we started, at which time I was told it was too late. So, I was to spend the night with some of the other Americans who would be staying together in this town.

The one clincher was, there were no more beds for a woman and I would have to share a room with a young man. At this point, I didn't care. I wanted a bed after having flown from Nürnberg to Frankfurt to Istanbul to Shanghai to wherever I was now. Fortunately, the young man I shared the room with was kind-hearted. He and I met a few of the other Americans and decided to check out the town for a place to eat dinner with a guide who had been left for us. The young woman, a niece of the trip organizer, kept apologizing, yet something didn't seem sincere or genuine. Some of the other Americans were hysterical and out of sorts, but I was surprisingly fine.

As we collected our wallets from our rooms, I grabbed my camera to use while searching for a place to eat something we could recognize. Tonight was not the night for an adventurous meal. We were exhausted. A few of us found a place to eat steamed dumplings and drink some beer. Gosh, that was perhaps one of my best meals in China. It was incredibly hot and humid and I was tired, but being able to sit in the company of other people at that moment in time was magical. The entire day had been pure chaos complicated by trying to decipher what the real situation was. For the first time, my own inability to read or speak the indigenous language was overwhelming and compounded my sense of being out of my element.

While walking back to our room at a local university dormitory, a young boy, probably about three or four years-old, was pushed out in front of me. His grandfather had seen us approaching. The grandfather said something to the boy in Chinese and ever so sweetly the young boy looked up at me. He smiled and said, "Hello, my name is John.

What is your name?" Immediately, I replied, "Hi, John, my name is Michelle. It is nice to meet you." John replied, "Hi Michelle, it is nice to meet you, too." I was so moved by this experience that I took some pictures of the boy, his grandfather, and my new American friends and then, of course, a picture was taken with John and me. It was at this moment any doubts about staying on were erased. I was here in China to teach and learn.

When I returned to my room, I realized I really was in China for another reason: the accommodations were different. Our room had two single beds and there was a partition for the bathroom. Although there was no toilet and the shower sprayed over the "hole," I didn't care. My only issue was that I did not have a towel with me. Silly me, I never thought about bringing a towel to China. I thought they would be supplied. Standing in the dorm room dripping wet, I used a face cloth that belonged to my roommate. Fortunately, he was next door, talking with the hysterical American, and I didn't think he would mind too much. That evening I slept. And I don't think I ever felt so grateful for a bed to place my body at the end of a day. It didn't matter that the bed was hard and there were mosquitoes everywhere. I was safe and that was what mattered most.

Being Sold

The next morning I was to meet my next driver at seven. I waited and waited. Finally, he showed up. I had no idea which city I was in or which city I was going to. I only knew I was on my way somewhere. I plopped my backpack into the back seat with my computer bag and closed my eyes. I was still exhausted from traveling to this point. Approximately four hours later, I arrived in a city. I was handed a cell phone by the driver and someone on the other end told me to go upstairs to the third floor. This was

surreal. Had I landed in some spy movie? I took my belongings, entered the elevator and went to the third floor. When the doors opened, there was a huge banner, which read, "Web School." How interesting I thought. I am studying instructional technology and here I am at the entrance of a "Web School," whatever that is.

When I entered the lobby, a young woman met me and told me to leave my bags in her office. She showed me the way to her office and then handed me a cup of water. I was so hot and the ability to quench my thirst with a cold cup of water was exactly what I needed, except the cup was filled with extremely hot water. Ah, I am in China, I thought to myself. The young woman presented me to her boss. I was told that I had thirty minutes and then I must begin teaching for the next six hours. I was asked if I could do that, and I replied in the affirmative. But where would I sleep? Where could I get something to eat? And where was I?

I began my first day and the conditions of the lesson will be discussed further on. I had put my reservations on my current situation behind me during the class, but it was clear that I would have to tackle the problems once the class sessions finished. At the end of the evening, as the school was closing up, I was pleasantly surprised to see a few students waiting. They knew I did not have a place to go yet and wanted to make sure I was taken care of. The owner of the school told me I was going to stay in a hotel until my apartment was ready. Unfortunately, the hotel I was to stay in was dirty, moldy and in a bad part of town. It was at this moment things started to change.

The next morning, as I walked to the Web School, I checked out some of the local hotels. There was a nice hotel next to the school. I entered and asked if anyone spoke English. Fortunately, I didn't have to use my skills at charades to inquire about a long-

term stay. The reservations manager quoted me a good price. I returned to the school and told the woman who owned the school that under no circumstances would I stay at the hotel where she left me last night. She was shocked that I was not happy with the accommodations. Furthermore, she told me the apartment was ready. Her husband would drive me now with my bags to the apartment. When we arrived at the apartment, there was no bed or bathroom, and I would have to share it with an older man. I returned to the school and informed the owner I would not stay in the apartment. She yelled at me and told me I had a contract and must do as she says. Additionally, she gave me my work schedule. I was expected to work each day for eight hours with one day off a week. I asked to see a copy of the contract in Mandarin because my sister was an attorney with an office in Hong Kong. (Okay, so that was a bit of a stretch. My sister is an attorney but not in Hong Kong.)

What was interesting was I don't think she had ever heard the word "no." She stormed out of the room. When she returned, she handed me a cell phone, the group organizer from Shanghai was on the telephone. I was informed that my contract had been sold and that this school was paying the cultural organization, which brought me here to teach children, 10,000 RMB to teach adults at this Web school. Now, it didn't take long for me to realize I had been had, but, I was here, and I wanted to teach. My first day had been wonderful. I told the organizer, in English, that I would not teach a single class until the money for my airfare was reimbursed in cash and that my hotel accommodations, food, etc. as stated in the agreement, were taken care of. I was instructed to hand the phone back to the school's owner. She was screaming in Chinese, and I just waited. I told her she could find me at the hotel next door if she wanted me to teach.

As I left her office, some of my students from the previous day saw me and asked how I was. I smiled and asked if they knew a good place to eat lunch. I explained what had happened, and they were incredibly kind. My students were adults, both men and women of various socioeconomic statuses. One woman called the hotel to make arrangements for a lower daily rate. Another woman helped me find a market to buy some stuff I needed, and one young man helped me buy a SIM card for my cell phone. How could I leave now? These people, who had so little, were grateful for the chance simply to be with me because I spoke English. We sat and talked for hours and kept telling them they didn't need me, their English was fantastic.

When I returned to the hotel, there was a note for me. I was instructed to go to the massage center. When I arrived on the floor of the hotel for massages, I felt out of place. Immediately, I got the sense this was a "men only place" and I didn't feel comfortable. I was asked to follow a young woman through a myriad of winding hallways.

Finally, we entered a room with a half dozen lounge chairs. Two men were fast asleep. They were awakened by the young woman who escorted me to them. They smiled and told me they had my money but had to go to my room. Lovely, I thought. I have two men in my hotel with a ton of cash and now I have to go to my room. Again, I felt like I was in some spy movie. The men gathered their briefcases and followed me to my room. They entered the room and told me that I must teach at the school because this was my contract. I told them I would not teach until I had been paid for my airfare to and from Germany, plus another agreement was needed that my living expenses would be covered. I was told yes; this was no problem. Next, a stack of money was handed to me. I was told

to count it but declined. The men left my room and I looked at that stack of Chinese RMB.

At this moment in time, I had in my possession more cash than most people in China earn in a year. I didn't know what to do with so much money. Despite all that had happened so far, I was able to relax. It was time to take a personal inventory. When considering that the annual income for Chinese in mainland China is approximately \$400 a year, my students who were working full time and taking classes were spending one fourth of their annual incomes to go to school to learn English. How could I ever explain these past few days to anyone? I don't think people would have believed me if I tried to explain what had transpired since I left Nürnberg, but, "I am fine and able to teach," I thought to myself. This truly was an amazing opportunity because I worked with an international web school, which was a very expensive one. I knew I had enough money budgeted for my meals and expenses, plus I had access to my bank account if more was needed. Now it was time to work, to teach and learn.

Feeling Like a Whore in China

I will never forget walking into the ESL teachers' room with computers placed upon desks in a configuration whereby many people were crammed together into one space. The air was hot and still. I briefly recall a woman pointing to a desk and telling me this was my office. Obviously, someone else used this space and had set up shop with their personal photographs and knick-knacks. I was told to put my stuff down and get ready to work. With all the chaos of orders being barked at me to gather lessons from the filing cabinet, I had to stop my fixation on the Santa Claus images around the room. Was

there a Christmas-in-July incentive program here in China? An older gentleman explained that I better get my stuff together because there was one copy machine, and we would all need it at the same time. “Lovely,” I thought to myself.

During that day I met other “teachers.” It was strange that none of the people who was teaching English at this private school were trained in pedagogy or learning styles. They were simply people who spoke English as their first language and wanted a chance to travel. Nearly all of the “teachers” were men with Chinese women staff and students being subservient and doing as they were told, but there was one other female. I faintly recall her first question was something along the lines of, so how much are you making? When I replied, “nothing”, I knew I had been had. Although I had a stack of cash, it was the reimbursement for my “free” airfare. This young woman explained to me that each “teacher” was getting free room and board plus 2500 RMB/week. None of these teachers was allowed to work more than six hours a day and no more than six days per week. Unfortunately, I was working daily for over eight hours with no days off. I realized at this point, I was working to subsidize the other American educators who were on this tour, and I felt like a whore.

I could have packed my bags and taken a cab to the airport and called it a day. Everyone would have understood my reason for returning, but I felt some need to stay. The students I had met in the elevator, waiting room, and hallway were kind and eager to learn. Images of teaching middle school science at inner city schools where students were sleeping, or parents from suburbia, yelling that there was no need for homework because their kid was definitely going to Duke University prompted me to stay. I was going to teach people who wanted to learn, and that had been a rarity for me.

Resources for Teaching, a Filing Cabinet

At the time I was told my contract had been sold to this company, I had no clue what that meant, but I wasn't exactly in the frame of mind to ask either. I asked what I was to teach, where, and when. As my first students entered the glass-walled classroom with stifling hot air, I chatted with them about who I was and where I came from. We then completed the canned English lesson. The school had a filing cabinet filled with sequential lesson plans. Each student had his or her own, individualized learning plan, identifying which lessons he or she were required to attend. The lessons were geared for young children, yet my students were adults. "Andragogy" kept flashing in my mind as I tried my best to present the lessons during my first day. Fortunately, the lessons were so pathetic, there was plenty of time to finish and do something worthy of the students' time and my own.

Teaching English in a Glass Fishbowl

I have taught in various environments, from inner city schools which reek of urine to a suburban oasis, during field trips and online, but never have I taught in a glass enclosed room. Imagine glass walls from floor to ceiling making cubicles approximately ten feet by fifteen feet with a table and a few chairs crammed inside. Oh wait, we can't forget the air conditioner or rather the lame excuse for an air conditioner that simply rotated the stifling hot and humid air within the fishbowl. I will never forget the sound our voices made as we spoke inside the glass enclosure. We spoke in hushed voices so as not to disturb the classes next door. The students in my classes were brain surgeons,

accountants, lawyers, and homemakers who represented an emerging middle class, and I had factory workers who really believed that if they had the ability to speak English, then they would have more opportunities afforded to them.

Unfortunately, to be an English teacher in the People's Republic of China, the criteria is simply to be a native English speaker. Although my scholarly studies do not include English as a Second Language (ESL) or English Language Learner (ELL) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL), I am an educator. Ironically, English was not my first language and my own children are bilingual. As such, it is worth noting, this project was not written for second language acquisition research per se. Instead, a trip which was supposed to culminate with American volunteers teaching English to children in a summer camp environment became an opportunity to experience something very different.

Student Motivation

According to China Daily, a daily news publication, "the voracious demand for language training has led to an explosion in the number of new schools in recent years" (Man, 2004). Furthermore, China's Education Commission has developed a new college entrance exam system which will be 'three plus x,' meaning that anyone who wants to enroll at a university must sit for exams in three major subjects (Chinese, mathematics and English), plus another subject that any department in a college requires. The exam amendment to include English as one of the three major subjects illustrates that greater emphasis is being placed on English education in the People's Republic of China. Therefore, it is quite safe to anticipate that "adjustments to the curriculum will be made

and that improvement of the quality of English instruction will become the norm from secondary school upward,” (Huang & Xu 1999). Currently, English is being taught to more than 600,000,000 Chinese at any given moment, twice the population of the United States of America (Qiang & Wolff, 2005).

English as a Currency

While teaching at The Web School in ShaoXing during that summer of 2005, I was amazed at the number of people who wanted to learn English. I could not help but wonder, “Why?” Parry sheds some light: “it is the idea that English is useful that has become dominant since 1979; the language is associated with well-paid jobs and lucrative foreign trade, and this perception has brought thousands if not millions of Chinese to night schools to learn it” (Parry, 1988, p.103). Yet, what is really amazing from my perspective is the number of government employees who are enrolled in English classes.

For some reason, perhaps my own stupidity, I didn’t think government employees of the Communist Party and Chinese authorities would be actively promoting the teaching and learning of English. Parry continues with the assertion that “English is only a tool” expresses well their apparently limited view of language learning, for they surely do not want the language to be sufficiently internalized for many Chinese to be deeply involved in English discourse” (1988 p. 103).

Yet the truth is, as evidenced by the number of schools opening and increasing enrollments, more and more Chinese have realized that English can help us connect ourselves with the outside world. As the proverb goes, “Necessity is the mother of inventions.” The need to develop our economy connects Chinese people with people

from other countries, and the need to communicate forces us to learn English” (Parry 1988 p. 116).

Whether or not the investment in learning English will pay off remains to be seen. The Chinese government is capping graduation rates to reduce the number of graduates entering the already over-saturated job market. Yet, there is so much more to be done if China is, in fact, going to be the next super power. “The rapid economic advances enjoyed by some East Asian societies may, in retrospect, have been the easy part. Retooling the social, political, and philosophical structures of their societies will be a tougher challenge, and the moment to take up this challenge has arrived” (Mahbuani, 2002, p. 12).

Why do they want to spend so much money, approximately one fourth of their annual income, to learn a language which may or may not provide them with a better job opportunity?” In ShaoXing, I was teaching English to adult professionals (the new middle class: surgeons, accountants, homemakers, auto mechanic, etc) at an expensive private school. Although this was not what I had signed on for when I went to China initially, with the intent of teaching children in summer camp, it was there where my amazing adventure began. Perhaps one of the best ways to sum up the motivations of my adult students is to look more closely at the personal goals of two students.

Dr. Justin

Dr. Justin is a handsome young neurosurgeon who is the fourth generation of neurosurgeons at ShaoXing’s Number One Hospital. The funny thing is when I first met Dr. Justin and he was introduced as a doctor, I immediately thought of the television

character, Doogie Howser. Justin looks very young, and he has this bright, delightful smile. During a class lesson when we were discussing professions, the other students were shocked to learn he was a doctor and that he was eager to learn English.

Fortunately for me, when I became ill with bronchitis, Dr. Justin noticed the symptoms as I coughed and hacked in class. He took me to his hospital and had me “registered.” Basically, he signed a bunch of papers for me, I paid money, a nominal amount, and an X-ray was taken in a dimly lit basement. This place would make the perfect set for a scary movie, I thought. With Dr. Justin by my side, the X-ray was read and a prescription for antibiotics was given. We were in search of another part of the hospital. Someone explained to Dr. Justin that we needed to take a number, wait in line, and then when it was our time, my prescription would be administered. While we waited, Dr. Justin told me about traditional Chinese medicines and their differences from Western medicines. I was surprised when he agreed with the attending doctor that I needed an antibiotic. Was this prescription provided because I was a Westerner or because it was truly in need of an antibiotic? I thought it was funny because many in the West contend that antibiotics are over prescribed and suggest the use of herbal remedies. While waiting with Dr. Justin in the hospital, I was half expecting some traditional Chinese doctor to heal me with an ancient Chinese remedy. Perhaps he noted my interest in Chinese medicine because he offered to take me shopping at a local Chinese medicine shop later where I was not permitted to take any photographs. It was while I was in this hospital that I realized how different it must be for Dr. Justin to be a physician in this environment compared to his contemporaries in other parts of the world.

Wooden tongue depressors were reused. People drawing blood from patients were with old-fashioned syringes, smoking cigarettes, and hallways were used as operating rooms. Never, never in my life had I ever seen such a world. The concepts of sterility and patient rights existed somewhere else. I asked Justin if he was aware that other hospitals were different, and he smiled. He knew, and he wanted out. Dr. Justin went into medicine because his father, grandfather and great grandfather had all been surgeons; instead, Dr. Justin wanted to be Justin, the businessman.

As a businessman, Justin believed he would be able to make a good income and be able to take care of his parents financially. The level of respect and income of a surgeon is far lower than a businessman in China, and Justin wanted to be more than a brain surgeon. I had such admiration for Justin having the courage to leave the family business. I kept asking him; actually, I think I begged him to reconsider his choice. As a doctor, he was able to save lives, which was in sharp contrast to a businessman's motivation to make money. However, Dr. Justin shared with me the pain of being a physician and not being able to operate on a patient if they don't have the money to pay, even in a public hospital. It was at this moment I realized Dr. Justin was not interested in dealing with the politics of the hospital, and I admired that.

The Other Justin

In addition to Dr. Justin, there is the other Justin or "Just Justin." The other Justin is the student who helped me with the SIM card. Both Justins are about the same age and incredibly kindhearted. When together, they introduce themselves with a smile as "Dr. Justin" and "Just Justin, the other Justin." I often wondered how "Just Justin" felt about

Dr. Justin leaving medicine to become a businessperson. Dr. Justin had a successful career in neuroscience as a surgeon. He was leaving medicine in search of a more lucrative career while the other Justin was struggling to begin a career. They both shared the same name, aspirations and they were friends. One day while a large group of us were visiting a village that all changed. Dr. Justin took my backpack filled with water and the other Justin joked about how Dr. Justin looked like a tourist from Hong Kong. It was from that moment on that Dr. Justin was now addressed as “Hong Kong Justin” and Justin was finally, “Justin.”

Of all my students from ShaoXing, it is Justin whom I have had the most contact with. Justin came from a small village, and his parents wanted him simply to get a job, find a young woman, marry and have a child: however, Justin shared with me his desire to be a businessperson, like Hong Kong Justin. All of my students believed the businessperson had the highest socioeconomic status in Chinese society, but there was more respect for teachers than doctors. Justin had gone to college and studied textiles. His work experience in textiles as a color manager provided him with experiences, but Justin believed that in order to move up he needed to know English. For a Chinese textile firm to be successful there is a belief that they must have contracts with Western nations. Justin worked extremely hard to practice English whenever an opportunity presented itself.

Why Won't They Speak?

ENGLISH CERTIFICATES AND INFORMAL LEARNING

I soon learned that this school provided a certificate upon completion and that this coveted prize was the goal of most students. Interestingly, on my first day of teaching at this school, I met some students who wanted more than a certificate; they truly wanted to learn how to speak English. These students told me what I knew, namely, that the lessons and format of the school, even with its computer lab, did not provide a good way to learn English. We knew the best way to learn was to speak, but many students were too shy to speak face to face with each other or with me.

When I asked the students directly to explain why they did not speak in class, I was bewildered by the responses. "We are shy and don't want to make mistakes or lose face." I heard this explanation repeatedly. In order for students to be successful learning oral English, they must speak. It is not enough to read or write English. Although all of the teaching materials were based on the assumption that students would speak, these students would not speak. With that, they explained to me, they were terrified to make a mistake. According to my students, the desire for perfection is instilled from the Chinese culture of saving face. The concept of learning from mistakes was foreign.

Saving Face and Shyness

So where does saving face come from and why are Chinese people shy for the most part? “In ancient times, China had an elaborate examination system to select qualified personnel for its bureaucracy. The earliest record dates back to the Three Kingdoms Period (220-265), when examinations took shape under Cao Cao, one of the most capable rulers in Chinese history. He adopted the system of “evaluation based on nine qualifications” (Parry, 1998, p. 37). “The Chinese orientation toward life was shaped by the blending of three different philosophies: Taoism, Confucianism, and much later, Buddhism. Each philosophy emphasized harmony and largely discouraged abstract speculation” (Nisbett, 2003, p. 12).

Sociolinguistic studies in other parts of the world have demonstrated that English, as an imperial language (Phililpson 1992), evokes conflicting responses, often within the same individuals” (Parry, 1988, p. 101). Parry continues to note that throughout the literature, there is a common description of “a strong desire to learn English and even spent hard-earned money on extra tuition for it.” At the same time, however, their responses to English classes and English textbooks demonstrated a considerable resistance to the language and the culture that it represents” (Parry, 1988, p. 101).

It is this oddity of wanting to learn, saving money to learn, yet not having the cultural acumen to engage in the learning process, that boggled my mind. “The basic principles of Confucianism are kindness, justice, politeness, knowledge and prestige. Knowledge here means book-learning, acquired through a system of formal education, and its inclusion in the basic principles indicates how fundamental school literacy has always been to Chinese culture” (Parry, 1988, p. 40). “Within the social group, any form

of confrontation, such as debate, was discouraged” (Nisbett, 2003 p. 6). Thus politeness as an Eastern tradition essentially equates to shyness in Western cultures. Furthermore, the concept of taking charge of your own learning and being willing to make mistakes from which to learn, especially in the presence of others, well, it wasn’t happening and now I better understand why. Nisbett continues to share that “anything resembling public disagreement was discouraged” (Nisbett, 2003, p. 6).

The major obstacle for the students to overcome was “loss of face.” They were afraid to make a mistake and to be laughed at by their peers. It was essential for the Foreign Expert to engage in self-deprecating antics which brought forth laughter from the students, showing that laughing with and at was acceptable as an integral part of the learning process. It was also essential to remind the students that the reason they were students is that they were there to learn. If they were already perfect, they would not be students. The students were constantly reminded to leave their “face” in their dormitory, and then they had nothing to lose in class. It took a while for this concept to sink in, but when it did – the personal growth exhibited by each student was heartwarming to the point of tears of joy for the Foreign Expert.

To better understand shyness and “saving face,” I asked the experts, my students. To follow are a few e-mails which explain these concepts difficult to find in scholarly literature.

E-Mail 2

“Saving face” translate in chinese meaning is “爱面子”

Michelle ,I don't think you do anything is wrong,because you and us have difference in culture black.You do anything only want to improve our English but for there is some contradictions .

I think we are the New generation,we should not saving face in studying,we should bravary,but in the influence of classic culture, we all think lose face is a pang of pain in our life,rather than die,inclouiding in learning knowledge...

On the other words,we are like do something very well before others ,no matter whether lose or not lose face behind others.

We don't like were ridiculed in the crowd,so I think take those way can save face.

E-mail 3

Michelle,i'm so glad that you care about our chinese communicate costum. In fact, saving face is very common in china, i think may be our chinese people are more shy than Americans. So somtimes they don't say everything directly,they often use some indirect way. For example, if you say something happly and absolutly you are wrong, of course, i'm not agree with you, but i won't say you are wrong,i don't like the way you

said. On the other hand, i'll say you're right, and i have some other opinions, do you want to know? That way may not hurt you! This means you have to say many things implicitly!

But to me, that's ok, if i was wrong you can tell me, i'll not unhappy. On the opposite side i'll thank you, i like someone tell me what i was wrong, i want to make progress. I think you're the best teacher i've ever seen, so i like you very much, you did very well in our communication, i have so many things to learn from you! I need your help!

Using computer, cell phone, or mp3 to get touch with you is indeed a very good way to save some people's face, i think that's feasible. But for me, i prefer to talking with you face to face, that was wonderful!

E-mail 4

Dear Michelle:

In china, many people afraid make mistakes. So we always take the perfection side of us to others. We always use all kinds of things to protect ourselves, we don't hope someone else think small beer of ourselves. And in china "saving face" is a custom.

In my opinion, using computers, cell phones, mp3 and email help us "save face". But learn language is no shy no afraid of make mistakes. This is we must known. So in the language lessons we don't need "saving face". We need more and more talks and exercise in the class.

I think in there we may like friend to talk.

Your friend

Susan

E-mail 5

1. Saving face may be a tradition in China, it is the reason why we couldn't open ourselves, it also reflect our Chinese implicit .We may feel lose face when we want to do some things but can't succeed in public and do some embarrass things in public or we talk with others they can't pay attention to us .

When we went to your house, you always enthusiastic to us. You told us to do any things we want to do and took out all your best food to us and treated us as your children, so we all think you are a good person and also a good teacher .

2. we use computer, MP3 and e-mail to discuss with you just a way to communicate with you but not stand for our shy and a way we saving face, it just convenient for us in computer classroom.

E-mail 6

Dear Michelle:

Saving face is very popular in china. Most people pay more attention to their faces. In theirs opinions, they would die rather than lose face. That's sound strange! But it's real in china. Most Chinese people like people flutter them in public, and don't want to hear some unpleasant words that they think the words make them lose face! So getting in touch with those people, we should notice the situation. If you have some comment on them, you need to find an implicit way to tell them when there is no other people in. sometimes I also don't know how to get well on with this kind people.

I have an mp3 but not a cell phone. I often listen to my mp3 with all kinds sounds. Such as

special English, songs<including Chinese and English>
my own voice and so on.

I like having class in computer room.

I love you!

Eileen

E-mail 7

Hi! Michelle

First

Some times in Chinese people`s mind "face" especially,
means "dignity"

In my high school, I was asked the same questions by a
American girl."Saving face"

She told me, one day she had lunch with her new
Chinese friend Allen, and Allen promised to pay the
money because it was the first time they have meal
together. After they finished the lunch, Allen
realized she did not take the money .the American girl
said: it`s ok I can pay for the money.

On the way they went back, Allen kept silent .The
girl asked why did she keep silent. Allen said nothing
but "I have not saved my face."

The opposite of "saving face "is "losing face".
Chinese people are always saving face because they are
afraid of losing face.

My grandma usually told me: "Trees are lived by barks, peoples are lived by face."

Second

In my memory of your class, I never think of "saving face". Because you did nothing make me lose face.

Using computers, cell phones, mp3, email, can help me learning English well, and they are have no relationship with "saving face".

I hope my explanations can help you to understand Chinese saving face.

That's all!

Nokia via Germany in China: Using Technology to Surmount Barriers

Phones, Kindness, and Fear

In hindsight, during the time when I was alone with my students, I really experienced China. I was not a tourist. It was as if I had been dropped off in a foreign land and told, "See you in six months," like an old fashioned ethnographic study without cell phones or internet access for email. What I discovered on my first day was I needed a new SIM card for my German cell phone. So I went out and I asked a student, Justin, to go with me to purchase a SIM card and he stood, I swear, twenty minutes, going through all of these envelopes with numbers on them. It was just a little envelope with a number and the number was a phone number. I couldn't understand why Justin insisted that he

look for a specific number. In China, every number has significance. He didn't want me to have a bad luck number within my telephone. So he was spending all this time, and I was freaking out thinking there was something wrong with my cell phone, I'm not going to be able to communicate with my husband, my kids are going to want to speak to mommy before bed, and it's just not going to happen. And finally I just sort of thought, wow, this is interesting: he's looking out for me, in a way that he would with everyone else that he is friends with. Once we popped the SIM card in my cell phone, the sheer number of text messages I received within the first 24 hours was amazing. Justin had put in the SIM card and he had SMS'd all of the students that were in our classes and told them, "Hey, this is Michelle's cell phone number. She's here alone. She's living in a hotel, because she was supposed to be living with this old man in this run down apartment in a bad side of town, but she's all alone, and, she's got nothing to do after class." So students would text message me the most eloquent, long-winded paragraphs. Usually, my text messages would be quite short. For example, the following exchange was typical.

MZP: Hi John.

John: Hello Michelle. How are you today? It is nice to hear from you. The weather will be very hot and humid today. You must remember to bring your umbrella to shield your skin from the sun. You do not want your skin to color.

MZP: I am fine John. Please contact your classmates to meet for lunch at noon, okay?

John: I will inform the other students. Would you prefer to dine at the restaurant which prepares hot and spicy fish or stinky tofu?

But my students would write long responses in what felt like nanoseconds compared to the hours it took me. I was amazed, this was my own language and it took me a long time to type out a short text message. Yet, my students were sending me elaborate

English paragraphs in grammatically correct English. Absolutely everything was correct – punctuation, verbs, everything!

The text messages were not the only surprises from my students. These same students who had text messaged me within my first 24 hours of contact also came to class early the next day. They just sat and waited for the opportunity to converse in English. My minimal interaction with these students in the form of lunch and text messages put forth this amazing opportunity to continue the learning experience together. Their kindness and attention were overwhelming. The next day I went to class and I said to one student, “I know you want to learn. And I know you paid so much money to come here and learn. But why won’t you open your mouth and speak? Why won’t you practice speaking English?” After all, the whole point of the class was to speak English, yet they just sat there in absolute fear and said, “Because I’m so afraid to make a mistake.” Now, coming from a Western perspective, we learned that making mistakes is great. You know, we learned that by making a mistake we had an opportunity to learn from our mistake and to move forward.

Encouraging Students to Speak

English Corner

Authentic English Corner

No one wanted to teach English Corner, no one but me, that is. I would often trade off the “easy” canned lessons for the opportunity to facilitate discussions in a

seminar format. I refused to prep for these sessions; rather, I wanted to provide the students with the opportunity to enjoy their class the way I did as a student.

One day, I bought Starbucks coffee for everyone. Imagine how cool it was to introduce Chinese people to coffee for the first time. Plus, I was able to do so because of all the places in the world to go out and buy each person a cup of coffee from Starbucks, this was where to do it. The cost was nominal and the storeowners were ecstatic to have such a large order their first day open. We were able to get various versions of the coffee drinks, hot, cold, blended, flavored, etc. so that each person had the opportunity to try it. In a country famous for its teahouses, drinking coffee with my students was a novel experience. It was fun to share with them the pop culture of Starbucks. Although many did not care for the flavor of coffee, they did enjoy sharing with me their favorite teahouse stories.

Chinese teahouses are interesting places. Unlike most American food establishments, which practically push you out the door, the teahouse provides the patron free food to accompany the tea purchased. As the students tasted coffee for the first time, I listened to their teahouse stories as we shared our conversations in English. It was a true authentic learning experience for all of us.

I couldn't help but wonder if college students hung out during finals weeks when their bank accounts were low and in need of cheap food. "How ironic," I thought, of all disciplines, learning a language provides fodder for students to engage in an authentic learning experience by using the new language being acquired in everyday situations, such as buying food in the marketplace, buying a cup of coffee or sending an email.

E-mail 8

hellow!michelle.this is darcy,i glad to receive your message.your message is the first one to me .so i am very emotional,maybei won't sleep tonight!but i need it . thank you very much ! I hope you sleep deeply tonight!

YOUR student DARCY

Field Trip

One day I took the class on a field trip to a local park, allowing them to talk with me in English about the history of the city. They were shocked that I was taking them outside, beyond the classroom, for our lesson. As far as I was concerned, it was too hot to concentrate in our fishbowl, and the fresh air would do us all some good. well, as fresh as air can be in this part of China where the air is polluted. I had a cavalier attitude. When students asked, “What if the boss found out that the students were outside of the classroom?” I replied, “If you are learning English, I don’t think it matters where the lessons take place, do you?” This was a turning point of sorts. Perhaps the teachers realized I had the students’ best interest at heart. Perhaps the students enjoyed the opportunity to be outside as much as I did. Regardless, something changed on this day.

These students started taking me places. Each night, like clockwork, they waited for me in the reception room of the school until I finished teaching my lessons. We

rotated to each other's homes for dinner and any opportunity to continue speaking in English.

Communities of Practice

According to Etienne Wenger, "This will be the century of identity, 'Who am I in this sea of knowledge?' with technology as the driving force" (2004). When considering, "How are educators developing the young minds of future generations?" Wenger states, "A community that is alive explores its boundaries and is never happy with itself" (1998). For a community of learners to be alive, the members must be meta-cognizant.

During the Spring of 2004, I had the opportunity to hear Etienne Wenger speak. He eloquently spoke about identity as a trajectory. "The sum total is where you are and where you have been, past plus the present plus future" (Wenger 2004). He further elaborated on the environment that is shared by the teacher and student as a trial marriage, a relationship where-by we must be as true as possible and as transparent as possible. He urged us to use deep knowledge and purposeful tension to pull students into real learning. By being naïve and questioning things together, both the student and the teacher are provided with increased competency by the rhythm of the experience. We must invite students into our own identity; into our community, this is the best way via sharing.

According to Wenger, creativity emerges or is created when we fully engage our whole beings with mutual invitation. This concept of creativity appears to be missing in the Chinese Higher Education program I experienced. It is based on the principle of mass

production similar to an assembly line whereby students all use the same textbooks, learn the same information in the same manner with no differentiation.

Furthermore, there is no substitute for your own intelligence. When considering the differences between declarative knowledge and procedural knowledge, as outlined by Bruning, Schreaw & Ronning (1995 p.46), I wonder where school fits into these models. Since “not all procedural knowledge is ‘higher –order,’ knowledge based on more basic declarative knowledge. Procedural knowledge can be quite simple and only loosely linked with declarative knowledge.” Furthermore, where do communities of practice enter into the picture of long-term memory? After all, when we work with a group and share what we know, isn’t this part of our procedural knowledge function within the framework of long-term memory?

As a student who was not able to memorize as easily as others and quickly considered rote memorization not a form of learning, I am biased. The concept of learning and how it relates to society relates to communities of practice because we learn what our society perceives is valuable. “What if we assume that learning is in its essence, a fundamentally social phenomenon, reflecting our own deeply social nature as human beings capable of knowing?” (Wenger 1998 p. 3). Furthermore, “[K]nowledge is a matter of competence with respect to a valued enterprise – such as singing in time, discovering scientific facts, fixing machines, writing poetry, being convivial, growing up as a boy or a girl, etc.” (Wenger 1998 p. 4).

But how do we know what we think we know? According to Wegner, “[K]nowing is a matter of participating in the pursuit of such enterprises, that is, of active engagement in the world” (Wenger 1998 p. 4). But, how often does knowing happen? Is

the process by which we gain knowledge encouraged? And from a sociological perspective, does this concept of knowing vary from culture to culture?

By interacting, clarification is needed. We must give of ourselves and be willing to share, rather than consider education a product where-by we accept what is dished out to us in our single-serving package. “[m]eaning – our ability to experience the world and our engagement with it as meaningful – is ultimately what learning is to produce” (Wenger 1998 p. 4).

Today we act as one community with members, but we live within many communities, each partial to each other. “For many students, school presents a choice between their social and personal lives and their intellectual engagement in school. What appears to be a lack of interest in learning may therefore not reflect a resistance to learning or inability to learn. On the contrary, it may reflect a genuine thirst for learning of a kind that engages one’s identity on a meaningful trajectory and affords some ownership of meaning.” (Wenger 1998 p.270)

Eureka! Cell Phones Helped

Cell phones offered an immense breakthrough for my students. With cell phones in hand, they lost all self-consciousness, hesitation, and cultural limitations. They were speaking English and communicating adult ideas for the first time. It seemed to spark their imaginations, and they were excited to speak and to be heard. Their text messages to me were long and grammatically correct.

Research Question 1.0: What is Going on Here and How Can I Use it? A Systematic Process

During my first trip to ShaoXing in the People's Republic of China, I gained insight into the hurdles facing adult Chinese students learning English, as well as technological strategies for overcoming these hurdles. My main goal at the time, however, was to focus on education and not research. As a result, text and voice messages were not saved, and data was not collected. This trip paved the way to considering the use of technology as a tool to help university students overcome cultural limitations and prompted further consideration on how to proceed with further research-based study.

Leaving China for Germany: Leaving on a Jet Plane in a Typhoon

On my last day in ShaoXing, nearly all of my students - about fifteen - showed up at my hotel laden with gifts, tears pouring down their faces. As we hugged to say goodbye and promised to stay in touch, seven students decided to escort me to the bus station. Although I knew where the bus station was, they wanted to spend a few more minutes with me. I can't begin to express the heartfelt kindness. Upon arriving at the bus station, we were told a storm was quickly approaching. My backpack and suitcase were tossed underneath the bus into the cargo area and I raced to get on board. Within minutes the engine began and out of my teary eye, I noticed a commotion by the ticket taker. My friends had all purchased a ticket to come with me on the bus to Shanghai. They had been told that a typhoon was coming through. This was the last bus leaving and they wanted to make sure I made it safely to my destination. I swear this scene was like something out of

a film. We laughed and cried, while dripping wet from the rain. We continued to chat on the trip to Shanghai. For some, it was their first time leaving ShaoXing, and I felt fortunate to have such kind friends. When did my students become friends? I don't really know. It doesn't really matter. I am simply grateful it continues.

Getting Ready to Leave the People's Republic of China

When I was preparing to leave China after my first visit, I wanted to convey my gratitude for having experienced something magnificent. Perhaps the only way to describe this sentiment is to share the following note I wrote to my students:

E-mail 9

"While in china, you have introduced me to a phenomenal world. The majesty and mystery of a land I knew nothing about has been brought to life before my eyes. Her beauty has become indelibly etched in my mind, heart and soul because of you. Please remember, as the mudan blossoms each season, my love for China will forever continue to bloom in my heart because of you. You, my dear friends have provided me with many magnificent lessons I shall never forget. I believe from the bottom of my heart when a student is able to teach a teacher and the teacher becomes a student, the educational process has been successful. Based upon this idea, you are all exceptional educators. With such quality teachers in this world, this world we

share will always be in good hands to give to our children and their children with the best education. May you remember our time together inside and outside the classroom with fond memories because I always will.

May you all enjoy good health and happiness. May you have enough prosperity to enjoy life and share your happiness with others. May you have many more wonderful opportunities to learn about other cultures and languages. May your dreams come to fruition. Most importantly, I wish for each of you these friendships which you have forged at school while learning will last a lifetime as we continue to grow our minds and learn from each other each day. Never be shy to speak and always know if there is anything I can do for you, it would be my honor to do so."

Since I left ShaoXing, the city where I worked at the Web School, I am still in touch with these students via e-mail, IM and telephone calls. Although the time difference makes it more difficult to catch up, we still try and the bonds of friendship are still very strong. Nearly each day, my e-mail inbox is filled with notes from my students eager to continue learning. I decided to set up a blog and try to help my students using a web based format so they could access the class information any day, any time and from

anywhere. It was at this time that "ourenglischschool" was created. One goal was to create an online presence. To follow is an excerpt from the blog:

E-Mail 10

August 20

Welcome!

Welcome to our school! This is a place for each of us to learn together from each other. We will use the Internet and other technology to help us learn English. From the bottom of my heart, I welcome you to our place.

Please think about what you want to learn, how you learn and why you want to learn. This may be private information so e-mail to me at parkeringermany@yahoo.com or go ahead and share this with others who want to learn.

I want to help students learn English. Each student is special with special needs. Each person's brain is unique and learns differently. I want to help you find a method to learn and succeed and set each person up for success.

Right now, the only people who are able to use this "school" are people in my MSN messenger list. If there are more people who may want to learn with us, please have them contact me and I will add them.

Most importantly, if you have any questions, please ask. Do not be shy! I am here to help you and I look forward to helping you and learning from you.
:) michelle

Although my students sent me e-mails about how happy they were to participate, they didn't actually do anything with the blog. Instead, they continued to IM me and sent e-mails when they did not see me online.

E-mail 11

Michelle,

i also want you to know, everytime when you call us ,we were very happy,i am sure ,so you don't need to worry about it ,you know when you call us you are helping us

Justin

E-Mail 12

Michelle,

In my own opinion,the website books are very difficult for us to read,i think they must be written by english

Justin

E-Mail 13

dear michelle:

you can't imagine how happy i am when i read your letters,i was deeply moved by your selfless spirit,i'd like to be your friend and student as well,and you knew something about my plan to pass the PETS exam from Amanda,so nowadays i am trying my best to study hard,even though,sometimes i'm a little bit tired ,but i don't want to give up for this,i want to prove myself how much efforts i have made,and to be honest with you,i really don't want to give up halfway. i told you that i admire someone who can speak english very well and i hope i can also do this ,so i will go online and go to your school frequently if i am available,at the same time,i will tell someone who likes to join us if i know. i know it's boring for you to do housework often,i have the same feeling as you,but we have to do it for responsibility,but i can also find something interesting to do.

may you succeed!

yours

melody

E-Mail 14

hellow!michelle.this is darcy,i glad to receive your message.your message is the first one to me .so i am very emotional,maybei won't sleep tonight!but i need it . thank you very much ! I hope you sleep deeply tonight!

YOUR student DARCY

E-Mail 15

I'M VERY GLAD TO HEAR THAT YOU WILL FOUND A WEBSIT.THAT WILL convenient for US TO COMUNICAT. I LOOK FORWARD TO READING IT.

AND THANKS AGAIN.

Our Online School: Trying to keep the Communities of Practice Alive

Shortly after I left ShaoXing, one of the students mentioned to me on the telephone that the voluntary learning group was having problems. My heart sank! These students would come to the school simply to sit together in a corner and practice talking English. They found the school-directed lessons unfulfilling and computer lab experience frustrating. As a result, this group of students developed their own lessons and took turns conducting the class. While still in China, I had noticed this group and asked what they

were up to. It was here that I first came across this voluntary learning group and the authentic learning taking place. They invited me to join them. The small, glass-walled room was jam-packed with chairs in a circle, and on the table was an assortment of dried fruits and nuts. The students introduced themselves. Some of the participants had participated in my classes, yet some were new faces. On that day, a young woman, Monica, had the responsibility of leading the discussion group. She provided an overview of piracy and the illegal pirating of DVDs in the People's Republic of China. After she presented the situation, she asked the group for their thoughts. I was amazed: before my eyes, I was witnessing the truest form of learning community. The students took turns responding in English, with an occasional comment in Mandarin. When a student spoke in Mandarin, they were quickly set back on task, as someone insisted, "speak English." Could it be that this group was fading out of existence? How could something as authentic as this pass away? To follow is my e-mail to the group describing how I was going to try and help, even from Germany. Since generating prompts for discussions was the biggest hurdle the group faced, I provided the following for their review.

E-Mail 16

Dear All,

I am trying make a website for you. Right now I have a website for my school work and I will add a section for English. If you are interested, please send me a note so I know you are interested in learning English. I want to make sure people are able to open the website I made before I add more to it. It takes a

long time to open, if it is too long, let me know. I will take the pictures out. www.parkersg.net

If you and the group need ideas for your English Corner, let me help. I have a list of topics below. Please encourage people to speak in English and write in English. Each person should keep a journal or diary. Inside this special writing place each of you needs to write in English about your feelings to learn English. It should say you are frustrated, this is hard, etc. I need to know how you are feeling so I am able to help you best. Again I know it is most difficult to write in English but, the more you write in English the more you will be comfortable with speaking. Your words will flow much better after you write them. I am now reading many books about how the brain learns languages and I think this is very important for all of you. If and only if you want to share this writing with me, please do. I will read and correct. I am not looking for grammar. Let me say that again, I am not looking for grammar. I need to hear your words on paper. Your ideas and feelings. It is fine if the grammar is not perfect, that will come. I think it would be super cool if I make a website and you are all able to add your writing to it. This way

you are able to learn from each other too. Let me work on this. Ok, here are some topics to talk and write about. May I suggest, each of you start writing about a topic and then during English corner you share your writing with the group. I don't want you to write in Chinese and then have the computer translate to English. You are able to do this work yourselves. When the computer translated your Chinese into English, trust me, I know. :) I used to do this all the time when learning German.

Topics to talk and write about:

What is something you like about yourself?

What is something you do well?

What is your favorite room in your home and why?

What is a good neighbor?

What is the worst thing parents can do to their children?

What is your favorite time of day?

If you have any questions, please let me know... I am here for you. All of you!

Love,

Michelle

Dr. Justin eloquently stated the need for an English teacher as the group started to splinter. “In sum, the cancellation of our English Corner is because we have only paid attention to the form, not really accomplished its essence, we are not teachers after all” in the e-mail which follows (e-mail communication 17). Although many software packages exist whereby a user is able to learn a language, primarily the vocabulary, the need exists to speak and share ideas in the new language being acquired.

As evidenced in the following e-mails from students, they needed, or perceived their need for a teacher, someone to lead them in their studies.

E-Mail 17

Dear Michelle :

I went to the school this afternoon, because there was a salon class. Reached there to know that they have cancelled the English corner because the topic lacked. In my view, its failure is inevitable. The first, we belong to spontaneous organization, but there are no key personnel who can manage. The second, the hold degree of our own English is limited, we cannot reach the level to describe freely. The third, none unifies the cognition, because of the difference of each one's own English level, thus it causes the understanding different from the character and function on this English corner, and the degree required is different too. The fourth, the attitude and enthusiasm of study are different, either it is half-hearted , insufficient

to prepare, or does not treat other's giving lessons kindly, thus mood is influenced.

The fifth, give the simplification of the lesson's mode, lack individuation and interest. In sum, the cancellation of our English corner is because we have only paid attention to the form, not really accomplished its essence, we are not teachers after all. I think, the purpose that we organize this English corner consciously is for improving each one's English conversation and communication ability. Not only will say but also say right.

So the person as the teacher should prepare the subject seriously, choose the difficult degree apt to be proper, and give consideration to practicability, design his own style according to each one's taste. He can already teach himself a lot of useful things in this course, can also temper the ability of language expressing in the classroom, share his own achievement with the students. And the persons as the students should respect the teacher's work, can't be passive because of having no interest, should participate in making a speech actively, study new words, new meanings and new usages, expand the knowledge base constantly, improve the ability of statement. We can't

put emphasis on the purpose for practicing to talk about simply, but neglect the study of the grammar and vocabulary. In a word, everybody has his view and interest in study, and different study ways can only be suitable for different crowds too. As it always goes, it is difficult to cater for all tastes. To me, I like methods you give me, I will doing seriously.

Justin

E-Mail 18

Michelle,

You haven't been on internet for several days, i don't know why, but when i got your e-mail today, i wouldn't worry about it again, i hope i can see you on msn soon.

Justin

E-Mail 19

Dear Michelle

You are very great indeed, you have lots of heart , you are too honest to us as a foreigner, thanks very much.

I think i'm able to chat with you in mail this's my happness , i

treasure it realy. By the way you needn't work very hard , sometimes you must take a rest.

mike

E-Mail 20

Dearest friends,

Some of you are wondering why I call or write to you. To be honest, I have been trying to figure this out. Why is it so important for me to talk with you? How come this bond between us is so special? I don't have all the answers but I can tell you this.

Although I live in Germany and we travel to wonderful destinations, most days I am home alone with my dog. My husband works many hours at work and in our home. I know this is a dream life for many people. I am not ungrateful or being disrespectful. Our children have their lessons and vacation agenda to play. This leaves me to clean, wash clothes and cook, then clean again. I realize this is my responsibility as a mother and wife. I accept this responsibility fully. It is just not a challenge and I miss doing something with my mind.

Many of you know I too am a student. I do not go to a school like you go to Web. I take my classes online. I have many books to read and write about. The amount of work to do is huge but I enjoy this challenge. For some reason each time I come back to our home in Germany it takes me time to

face the reality, this is my life. I cook, clean and clean some more.

I have always tried to be honest with my husband and myself. Yesterday I was talking with my husband and I told him how much I missed teaching and missed my friends in China. He said he knows. Everyone who knows me says they can see it in my eyes. He knows it is difficult for me to be a wife and mother only. When we moved to Germany I had to make a promise to the government that I would not work because if I take a job in Europe I would be taking a job away from a national. Since the unemployment rate is very high I am not allowed to work. This is very difficult for me. I have always worked my entire life.

I love my children and my husband more than anything in the world. Fortunately, they love and support me. They want me to be a happy person because if I am not happy as an individual, I am not truly happy as a mother or wife. Today, they understand that I am not truly happy unless I am teaching. So, I think this is a big reason why I miss

you all. Especially
now! Now that you have cancelled English Corner I wish
I were there.

So, why do I tell you all of this? I tell you so
you know the truth. I want you to know I miss you as
my friends and as my students. I want you to know when
I call, I call because I miss you and wish I were
there to help teach you. I want to use the telephone
and e-mail and MSN IM tools to help me stay in touch
with you and to help you improve your English. Many of
you have shared with me that you want to learn English
and I want to teach English. Please use my skills. Let
me teach you. This will give me lots of happiness.

I hope this letter makes sense to you. I felt I
needed to tell you. This is who I am and how I am.

Love,

Michelle

Research Question 2.0

Guess What? The Continuity Didn't Work

I thought by staying in touch online and setting up a learning environment online, students would continue to participate, but, I was wrong. My best intentions, using what I knew, didn't provide these students what they needed. In hindsight, perhaps Justin knew

something that I didn't know. It is interesting how Justin, a neurosurgeon, provided this insight regarding the group dynamic and need for leadership. As I re-read his e-mail provided earlier about the need for a person to guide, a leader, I realize the group dynamic flounders without a full-time facilitator. Obviously, being physically removed from China wasn't the issue, but rather my involvement with other stuff took me away from this school.

Another key component that added to the failure of the online school was the students' continued discomfort with the online program. Computers are rare in China and principally used for work. Paramount to the students' lacking confidence in the online program was that speaking didn't translate well in the online environment I had created. This was attributed to the cultural difference associated with communication according to Dr. Justin. Additionally, he explained why students were more inclined to text message rather than leave voice mail messages. When I asked about this, Dr. Justin explained that answering machines were a technology that did not enter into Chinese homes. Perhaps this lacking market infiltration set a precedent for lacking interest and comfort with voice mail messaging now available with cell phones.

Research Question 3.0

I couldn't help but wonder, "Why did the things I stumbled upon work during the first visit?" My students were motivated to learn as evidenced by their sacrifices and used the new opportunities like cell phones to increase their ability to speak English. Furthermore, "How can I refine and develop this in the same kind of setting?" So, in

order to answer my research questions, I needed to go back to the People's Republic of China.

In my journal I often shared thoughts and ideas of improvement, "If I could do this all over again what would I do differently?" As an instructional technologist knowing first-hand what I know about Chinese learners and their culturally ingrained silence, I developed an online program, which allowed students to communicate with each other and with various native speakers. By using mp3 digital recording devices, students are able to capture their own voice. I went so far as to prepare a business plan with the intent to return to China and open my own school because I saw so many people exploited for profit in the name of education. Chinese adult students would save money for years for the opportunity to learn English at the schools that proclaimed themselves, "The Best." But these schools did not provide what students needed academically or wanted personally. How odd for me to see the answer before my eyes. It seemed so simple; why had no one else set up shop as I thought it should be done? Was my thinking faulty?

Mission Identified and Plan Ready for Implementation

Although the students wanted to learn and as working adults most had access to computers, they didn't use the blog. The students were not interested in using the blog as a medium for learning. They wanted to talk on the phone and text message me in Germany. I couldn't understand what the difference was because they could continue their English Corners using this blog, especially since the Web School cancelled the English Corner sessions which were the purest form of Communities of Practice. I felt compelled to do something. It was at this point I realized that cell phones were far more

accessible than computers and cell phones provided a greater sense of privacy. It was from this framework I set out to return to China. I wanted to try and learn more about the cultural shyness and investigate if there were technology tools available to reduce this hindrance to the learning process.

This is What I Know

What About the Students – Look at the Details

As I was preparing to live in Xi'an, for seven months, on my second trip, I realized I needed to know something about the students that I was going to be working with. Even though I had my little introductory flavor for six weeks at The Web School, I needed to know more because now I was returning to do research. I was taking my kids with me for seven months. We were leaving Dad. We didn't really know in fact what was in store for us, but we needed to put this together. Basically, what I realized was that the current Chinese educational system relies, as I said, purely on rote memorization. This is enforced and reinforced by the cultural attention to right and wrong while striving for perfection. And it's an interesting juxtaposition when you look at the existing situation in China compared to the older learning of Confucius, while considering the value of a test score of A+ 100 is the only thing that is considered acceptable. Perfection is highly valued in China. They have internalized this. Every cell, the very fabric of their body, is about perfection and if they don't meet the internalized idea of perfection, their motivation and their self-esteem are below zero. It is absolutely amazing to see how incapacitated they are by their fear of imperfection.

Their standard of spoken English is the way I speak, the way you speak, the way they hear people speak in movies. The way they hear Westerners' speak is their concept of perfect English. As soon as they prepare to say, "Good Morning, Michelle, it's nice to meet you," they won't open their mouth because they believe that they're not going to say it in the same manner that I am able to say it, and so they don't even try. Obviously, in a learning environment, this isn't an effective way to go. Therefore, a gap exists between what is considered a culturally appropriate language acquisition program and a method that benefits the students actually to learn oral English.

I had to find a way to provide a non-threatening environment at the private Chinese university where students were comfortable to take risks. I had to engage them to participate, and I needed to catch them doing stuff well, truly well, so that I could provide them with genuine feedback that was positive. They wanted to know about American pop culture, and they wanted to speak like me, a Westerner. The answer was to tell them that English was not my first language and encourage them to try.

I asked them to just give it a try. And they were very ambivalent because I was asking them to do something which required making mistakes and learning from those mistakes, as I stated earlier. I came in and I said, "My name is Michelle. This is who I am. This is where I am from. This is what I've done. Now I want you to tell me about yourself, who you are, where you're from." The first day of class when they did this, they spoke to me in the most robotic way. When they spoke about their hometowns, it was like they were speaking from a state-sponsored brochure that the Chinese government had approved for propaganda use. There was no passion, there was no humanity, there was

nothing, and they spoke words as if they were a robot. To me, this wasn't speaking English.

They Just Don't Get It

It is odd. When I tried to explain to friends and family why I wanted to return to China, they didn't quite get it. When I tried to explain my research interest, well, that was even more bewildering. I found myself doubting myself and wondering, "What am I doing and should I be dragging the children into this?" But upon my arrival something amazing happened. When I tried to explain my research interest, both Chinese and Western educators knew exactly what I was talking about. I would say, "Hi, I'm Michelle. I'm here to learn more about learning English in China and to see if students are shy and if technology can help them with this." And everybody I spoke with said, "Well, of course, they're shy!" Both the Chinese and Western educators at the university where I was teaching stated this repeatedly. Additionally, as I met other professors in the area, namely the parents of kids who played soccer with my children on Saturday mornings, I learned shyness was a cultural aspect and occurred at other universities. It happened at both public and private institutions where students interfaced with both Chinese and Western teachers. Perhaps the wildest experience with this affirmation of shyness was by the administration during the first faculty meeting when they stated that "shyness was the greatest obstacle facing students." As I mentioned earlier, I found it interesting because, outside of China, many people aren't very familiar with this concept. For some reason, I thought I would really have to elaborate on these ideas. On the first day, I was sitting at a staff meeting at a table with my colleagues, and we were saying

hello and doing our thing. Textbooks were being handed out for us to distribute to our students. When I looked more closely at the textbook, I realized that there were a lot of tips for the student (and tips for the professor) one stated “tip for the student: look at your partner or your group in the eyes and open your mouth and speak and you will overcome your shyness.” And I couldn’t believe it! It was right there in black and white! I couldn’t find any references to this in the Western literature.

During the meeting, it was identified that there was a specific point allocation for the students during their classes. And I’m thinking, okay, point allocation – there’s going to be a midterm, there has to be a final, there has to be a participation grade, so in my mind I’m thinking, okay, this jives with what I anticipated, I can give them work. We will work with it together and we’ll continue and we’ll make progress and this will be wonderful. But I realized I was only going to have the students in my classroom for one class period each week. And I’m thinking, okay, how am I going to do this? What I did not know is that in China, students do not work. In many Asian countries there is such competition through middle school and high school to memorize and to prepare for the college entrance examination that if the child, the student, makes it that far, they get into college, and they have the most cavalier attitudes you could imagine. This phenomenon manifests itself in both the private university programs, as well as public university programs. It was very interesting to see students who would come to me and say, “Oh, Michelle, I’m so glad you’re my English teacher. You speak and you’re nice and you’re personable, I really want to learn English, because if I learn English I will be able to have a good life and I will be able to make my parents proud.” Every teacher would love to have a student come to him or her and say this. But what happened was all the students

would come to me, e-mail me, and say all these things everybody wants to have their students say, except they would leave that classroom and never do anything. So, how do I teach when I've got kids who say they want to learn, but they refuse to do anything? They're not going to work while they're in the classroom, and they're not going to work when they walk out of the classroom, but I have a job to do, and I want to find a way to reach them. I'm a sucker that way. So I found there were some things these students all have in common: cell phones, mp3 players and an interest in computers and technology. Very quickly, I threw together what I call my little 5-step mp3 technique program, and I asked the students if they wanted the opportunity to learn to speak English. When they said yes, I said, "Okay. If you want to learn to speak English we have to make a pact; we have to make an agreement." (I hoped the students would take this contract seriously since the Chinese have a deep appreciation for contracts between people.) "I cannot magically come to you with a magic wand, wave it, and 'poof!' you are now a proficient English speaker. You will make an A+, 100 percent on your national examination to graduate from your Asian university and you will then be hired by high paying IT company and you will make \$50,000 a year, which is everybody's dream, right?" It doesn't happen that way, so I told the students, "Please, trust me; I didn't speak English when I was born. I didn't speak English until I was about 6 years old" and I said, "If I can do it, you can do it." And although I didn't have Sesame Street and Big Bird, we both shared a use and understanding of mp3 players. I had this interest they had in another form of technology.

Since technology, such as personal computers with Internet connection, common to a university campus in the West, was not available, mobile technology, such as cell

phones, MP3 players and PDAs were the mainstay of the technique used. Perhaps buyers of cellular telephones never considered them as tools for improving their spoken English; however, this technology was easily accessible, available and used.

Most Chinese university students on mainland China which I came in contact with did not know how to use a computer and even fewer had e-mail addresses or IM accounts. There was a lot of work to do. Something inside me knew that if I could get them using a computer to write e-mails, journal entries, instant messages to friends, and help them belong to the electronic universe called cyberspace, these students would learn needed skills, while improving their oral English. For students who did not know how to use the various technological media during this course, written directions in Mandarin and a tech buddy were made available. Cooperative learning groups were formed out of sheer necessity to help meet the needs of the many students lacking basic computer skills. Simply, those who knew how to use the technology were paired with those who did not. When students required a computer with Internet access, the unit on loan to me by the university in my apartment became exclusive to the students for their use while I sat next to them with my personal laptop. For those students who did not have an MP3 player or a classmate to share one with, inexpensive units were provided

Take Two, Scene Two

The setting for this project was a private university in the People's Republic of China. The English course was taught to freshmen students only. The class size was approximately 45 students. Officially, students interface with the ESL instructor once a

week for 90 minutes. At the time I was teaching there were no formal guidelines or curriculum in place. Essentially, instructors are free to teach English as they each see fit. For example, textbook and media selection are left to each instructor. Historically, each of the instructors has taught from the same series of books, Expressways developed by Molinsky & Bliss. English as a Second Language instructors around the world have a wealth of standards available for guidance during the K-12 educational environment; however, at this time, the United States of America does not have a national set of standards for university-level students nor does China. Furthermore, Chinese students are required to take national examinations, in addition to college exams. Based on this unique predicament, an extensive review of the international and individual American state standards have been considered in developing this technology integrated English Language Learner curriculum. Additionally, from a preliminary English Language Learner textbook review, there is a need for a new type of textbook, a textbook that uses available technology.

University-level English language learners should have a textbook that incorporates the principles of andragogy rather than pedagogy and integrates technology into the course. Specifically, it is the belief of this researcher that there are Instructional Technology (IT) tools available that English Language Educators are able to use to reduce anxiety for those adult students with the social phobia of shyness. If technology is able to assist in forging amicable bonds between students and instructors, it may be able to reduce shyness and allow for increased interaction. Exposure to oral English may increase students' confidence when speaking in English and produce improved performance. For example, using various technical mechanisms, adult students are able to

access information needed whenever and wherever they are within their schedules. They can access feedback from archived electronic chats of oral English samples with authentic and cooperative-learning experiences.

Instructional Technology encompasses change by virtue of its dynamic technological nature. We, as researchers, are chasing a moving target. Additionally, shifts within educational psychology rooted in behaviorist, cognitivist, constructivist, humanist's camps shift, as does the pendulum. This provides the setting for authentic activities and metacognition.

The integration of instructional technology and educational psychology within the ESL classroom has a long history. Gabriel suggests that in today's information age, students need to understand how to learn (Gabriel, 1999 p. 290). How to learn also encompasses where one learns, especially in our mobile phone and wireless Internet access culture.

My Basic Design

At first, I asked the students to "write an e-mail to the professor about what you did during vacation". "Use lots of descriptive words," I told them. Specifically, "tell me your story." The next phase of the assignment was for each student to present to the class a summary of the e-mail they wrote. Nevertheless, since students were too shy to write the e-mail or speak before their classmates, the following technique was used.

Each day I recorded the class on my digital voice recorder. The audio file was transcribed and then posted onto the class website to be downloaded onto students MP3 players. Students were encouraged to listen to the class podcast and to read the transcript.

Yet, listening to the class session was not as helpful to students as having them practice speaking English. Using the following Five Step MP3 Technique, as illustrated in figures 1-5, students began to speak in a private environment and then share their work when they were proud of the quality. Furthermore, students began to use this technique each week with various prompts.

STEP 1: Record your voice



- **What did you do during spring break & why was it special?**
- **Save this as name_springbreak_1.wav**



During spring break...I went to Beijing with my family. We climbed The Great Wall of China from Baudaling. My mother said, "you are not a man until you climb the Great Wall." This was a wonderful vacation because together as explored

Figure 1. Five Step Method - Step One

STEP 2: Listen



- Listen to name_springbreak_1.wav and correct at least 3 of your mistakes
- Save this new version as name_springbreak_2.wav
- Share this new version of name_springbreak_2.wav with a friend

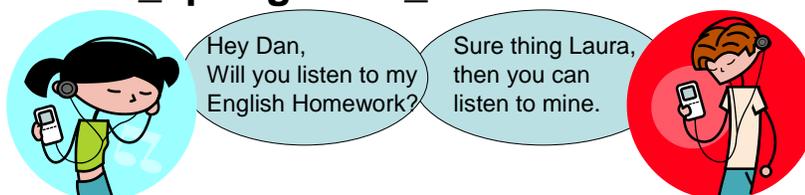


Figure 2. Five Step Method - Step Two

STEP 3: Friend listens



- Your friend will listen to name_springbreak_2.wav and find 3 mistakes



- Record your file again and save as name_springbreak_3.wav



Figure 3. Five Step Method - Step Three

STEP 4: Email

- Send me an email to michelleinchina@gmail.com
- Tell me about why your spring break was special
- Attach the three recordings
 - Name_springbreak_1
 - Name_springbreak_2
 - Name_springbreak_3
- If you have pictures, you want to share, attach them too.

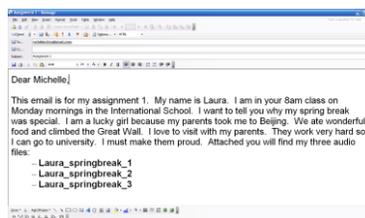


Figure 4. Five Step Method - Step Four

STEP 5: Listen to friend's MP3



- Listen to your friend's recording
friend_springbreak_2
- Find three mistakes in
friend_springbreak_2
- Tell your friend about their mistakes



Hey Dan, You did a great job with your homework. I think you could improve is your pronunciation of "river, friends and beauty."

Thanks Laura, This helps me learn from my mistakes!



Figure 5. Five Step Method - Step Five

Ultimately, the goal for each session provided is for the students to be able to speak oral English better than the last time. Since each student begins at a different level of pronunciation and willingness to speak, the use of the MP3 or designated mobile technology allows for both the instructor and the students to measure improvements. This feedback mechanism built into the learning program should allow students to hear their own improvement and note their own success. This was based on my experience teaching middle school science in the United States of America and teaching adult Chinese students English in ShaoXing. Additionally, the instructor listens to the recording and provides written documentation of comments and suggestions to each student. For students who are too shy to speak directly with the instructor, this exchange of information is extremely beneficial. This written form of communication, with positive feedback, increases student motivation and participation. For those students who are not progressing, the instructor is able to work with them more on an individual basis outside the classroom where they are less intimidated.

Most important to the assessment process in this research project was the use of weekly input provided by the instructor. As students completed their work, they submitted it by e-mail to the instructor. The instructor listened to the recording and then sent the student suggestions and comments. The majority of this feedback informed students that they are speaking well, or that they should speak louder and slower. Students were amazed to receive positive feedback, as they may well have believed that their English was deplorable. By archiving the recordings, the instructor was able to listen with the students and all could hear the improvement in the speaking. This improvement provided the student with a greater sense of accomplishment because they

were able to judge and assess their own work. Additionally the student was more motivated to continue working with the technology because they were able to hear the results for themselves.

E-mail became a very important communication tool. Although there were many students who were not familiar with e-mail prior to the course; they were happy to learn the new skill as many of their friends used e-mail to communicate. Students were then able to e-mail initial introductions to the instructor telling about themselves and what made them special. These initial introductions provided the instructor with a snapshot of the student as well as their written English and their computer skills. This information proved to be beneficial as future lessons were developed.

Research Findings

Technology to IT

To an instructional technologist, “using technology to facilitate the learning process” is essentially our mantra. According to the Association for Educational Communications and Technology’s website:

Instructional Technology is the theory and practice of design, development, utilization, management, and evaluation of processes and resources for learning. ... The words Instructional Technology in the definition mean a discipline devoted to techniques or ways to make learning more efficient based on theory but theory in its broadest sense, not just scientific theory. ... Theory consists of concepts, constructs, principles, and propositions that serve as the

body of knowledge. Practice is the application of that knowledge to solve problems. Practice can also contribute to the knowledge base through information gained from experience. ... Of design, development, utilization, management, and evaluation ... refer to both areas of the knowledge base and to functions performed by professionals in the field. ... Processes are a series of operations or activities directed towards a particular result. ... Resources are sources of support for learning, including support systems and instructional materials and environments. ... The purpose of instructional technology is to affect and effect learning (Seels & Richey, 1994, pp. 1-9).

Yet within this definition, the concepts of instruction and technology are still elusive. What exactly is technology and how does the educator use it to instruct? Furthermore, where does the educator begin when access to computers (as we so commonly consider technology in the classroom to be) is not available? From this perspective, with no money, the option was clear: I needed to use what was available. Quite frankly, cell phones were ubiquitous, as were MP3 players. Nearly each student had one device or the other. Moreover, students knew how to use them. But could we use them for improving oral English? Although I believed there was a technique using MP3's and cell phones which would help the students with their English and cultural issue of shyness, I still believed it was within my ability and responsibility to provide learning opportunities with other forms of technology, namely a personal computer with internet access for e-mails.

Students who had never used a computer were invited to my home to learn. Well, actually, everyone was invited to our home; there was an open invitation for all students.

If I was unavailable, when a student had mustered the courage to stop over, my children or another student provided basic information on how to use the computer and connect to the Internet. Typically, the first thing students did when they learned how to turn on the computer and connect to the net was to sign up for memberships with QQ, a Chinese version or AOL (American On-Line) instant messaging services.

I was delighted to watch their fingers dance across the keyboard, as they shared messages of, “my first e-mail.” They were using technology rather than being fearful of it. From the first moment I witnessed this, the children were on notice. If a student wanted to use the computer, the kids would have to wait. We agreed that we were here for a short period, and the opportunity to get my students online was a priority to online video games. Soon our apartment, a one-bedroom suite on the sixth floor of the university hotel, became a secondary classroom. Students were always with us. While some students came to our home to watch movies on DVDs in English, others were using the computer, and still more would come to play mahjong.

Our home provided students with opportunities for enrichment, but the classroom was where the challenge was. Prior to arriving in Xi’an, I planned to use a website for students to listen to class lessons with corresponding transcripts. Fortunately, creating a website with streaming audio and hosting it in Germany were not technically challenging. From my experience in ShaoXing, students who had formed their own community of practice thought this was a great way to help student improve their Oral English. From my perspective, this combination of both audio and textual information would provide an archive nicely packaged and located on the World Wide Web at <http://www.parkersg.net/eur>.

I spent some time during the first class explaining where on the web this site was housed. “Once you get to this page, simply select the button for your class,” I told the students while sketching diagrams with chalk on the board. Naively, I thought this would be a great tool, but what I did not expect was that so many of my students did not know how to use a computer.

Shyness as a Major Obstacle

Within days of my arrival to Eurasia University in Xi’an, there was no need to hunt far to find evidence of the cultural shyness I was searching for. When I tried to explain my interest in this notion, people affirmed this was, indeed, an obstacle experienced by most Chinese learners of English, whether taught by Western or Chinese educators. For some reason, I thought I would have to elaborate upon this notion, while in China, the way I did when speaking with Westerners; however, everyone I met knew exactly what I was referring to and poof, it was right there in black in white, the textbooks no less.

During the first faculty meeting, textbooks and class schedules were distributed. While I smiled and greeted my colleagues for the first time, I was amazed at what I was hearing. As we took our seats around the large wooden rectangular table in the stunning wood paneled conference room in the university hotel, the dean of the school clearly stated that shyness was the greatest obstacle. I could not believe my ears. Was I hearing her correctly? Before I could ask her for clarification, she was talking about the grading scheme. For some odd reason, I thought each teacher was at liberty to determine how

points were awarded in a class, something along the lines of a teacher's prerogative; however, that really was not a big deal. The required point allocation for attendance and participation, exercises, midterm exam, and final examinations led me to believe asking the students to do work in class and homework was acceptable. Yet, it did not take long for me to realize this was not the traditional mode of operation at a Chinese university.

As the dean continued about the textbooks and number of chapters to be covered each week, I thought this was a surreal situation. I was to create a syllabus for the students and send a copy to the dean. Additionally, the dean mentioned there were many opportunities to volunteer for extra programs offered this year, namely the CCTV English contest. While the meeting continued, I flipped through the two textbooks. I did not intend to be rude, rather I could not wait to see what these textbooks had that would provide my students with an opportunity to practice their spoken English. In addition, right there in the first book on page 3, I read, "Tips for the Student... 2. Look your partner or group in the eye and try to overcome your shyness" (Wilson & Olsen 1998). The second textbook, filled with cartoon images, also included a notation about shyness, but this was intended for the teacher, not the student. What I did not realize was that one textbook was to be used with certain students in one school and the other book for students in a different school.

What I did realize was that within the university there were various degree and non-degree programs. Somehow, that information was not understood or conveyed during the interview. "Oh well," I thought, "how different could these students be?" Soon I would learn about the nuances first-hand between students in a four-year program with an ability to "perform" (memorize) well on national exams and their counterparts in a

two-year diploma program. Regardless, from this meeting the objective was clear: it was my responsibility to engage them in speaking English everyday, but I only had class with them once a week.

With shyness considered prevalent in the English language-learning environment, the question arises, “so, what do people do about this?” Ah, but that is such silly thinking. To change something is an admission that what is currently happening is not working and to admit what is happening as not working, well, that means one would lose face. Consequently, the status quo is maintained and people continue as they have.

Technology and Culture

Authentic Learning not Fake Learning

Languages must be used to be learned and retained. The most effective way to do this is by integrating English speaking into the students’ daily lives so that it is not something they do only once a week in conversation classes. According to the Illinois State Board of Education oral language rationale as noted on <http://www.isbe.net/ils/ela/pdf/goal4.pdf>

“Of all the language arts, listening and speaking are those most often used on a daily basis at home, school and work or in the community. Skill in speaking is universally recognized as a primary indicator of a person's knowledge, skill and credibility. In person, by phone or through video, good listening and speaking skills are essential to sending, receiving and understanding messages. To understand messages spoken by others, students must be able to listen carefully, using specific techniques to

clarify what they have heard. For speaking properly and making messages understood, grammar, sentence structure, tone, expression and emphasis must be part of students' repertoires.”

Professor Gu Haibing stresses, “for English today, especially the study of spoken English, practice is very important” . As the 2008 Beijing Games approach, the potential for a positive economic impact for those Chinese who learn to speak English has prompted the increase of private English schools. Gu shares, “Without practice, the level of oral English of some people who have studied English for many years may not match those vendors at the foot of the Great Wall who often speak English with foreigners while hawking their commodities” (Gu, China Daily, 11/3/03). These schools provide students access to computers preloaded with software. For a demographic unfamiliar with computers and educational language software, the silver bullet appeared enticing. Yet most of my students shared with me their negative experience with these software packages. Many students shared, “It was not helpful to listen,” “It was boring,” and “It was a waste of money.” Unfortunately the software did not take into consideration the needs of adult learners. Adults motivated to learn in order to increase their career options need an opportunity to use their language skills. “The technology of instruction is based upon a number for different pursuits, including such practical activities as determining training requirements, designing training, selecting media, and others” (Gagne & Glaser, 1987 p.49).

Although no one really knows the history of English Corner, some urban legends contend it was when two people met on a corner and chatted in English, the purpose was clear. English Corner, according the private university where I was teaching was

developed specifically for Chinese English speakers to identify with each other and to have a forum to practice their English-speaking skills. As time passed, people started using English Corner to make speeches. Then, as the popularity of English Corner grew and became institutionalized, it was transformed into just another lecture format for Friday or Saturday evening and the original purpose was lost. According to my colleagues who teach at other universities in the People's Republic of China, most universities treat English Corner as just another lecture forum.

This discourse has resulted in a lost teachable moment. "The 'how-to-do-it' knowledge involved in these efforts has been rationally and empirically derived from a body of scientific knowledge that has accumulated over many years. This source comprises facts, general principles, and theories about human learning, including its associated processes of remembering, problem solving and reflective thinking" (Gagne & Glaser, 1987 p.49). In an effort to provide a place conducive for university Chinese students, I reformatted English Corner to fit their needs while providing a better solution relevant to their own lives.

As a visionary, Thornburg provides insight regarding "proposed solutions ... often offered only from the perspective of existing education models. This is the view from inside the cave, where the very structure of the school is acceptable without question. We encourage our students to do better in math, science, language, history, and so on, without asking if the curriculum itself is relevant to the world" (Thornburg, 2002 p. 4). My understanding of Thornburg leads me to believe, currently, knowledge is something you own rather than something that is owned by a community. Perhaps when we revisit the concept of community, education and its significance to all communities

will truly become a legitimate issue worthy of time and requisite resources. Perhaps then this will be indicative of a symbolic interaction. Until then, it is worth noting that the People's Republic of China is filled with people determined to succeed.

“In 1996 Asians already made up about 70 percent of the world population (3.5 billion out a global population of more than 5 billion). By conservative projections, the Asian population will increase to 5.7 billion in 2050, out of a global population of 9.87 billion, while the populations of North America and Europe will remain constant at 374 million and 721 million, respectively. This means that North America and Europe's share of the world population will drop from 20 percent to about 11 percent. Clearly, in the past few centuries, Europe and more recently, North America, have carried the larger share of the global burden in advancing human civilization. By 2050, when Europeans and North Americans make up one-tenth instead of one-fifth of the world's population, would it be fair for the remaining 90 percent of mankind to expect this 10 percent to continue to bear this burden? Realistically, can the rest of the world continue to rest on the shoulders of the West? If the Asian population doubles in the next fifty years, will Asians be able to carry their share of this burden?” (Mahbuani, 2002, p.19).

Perhaps what is needed is the freedom and understanding within the discipline that one size does not fit all, as it relates to students' learning abilities and theories. As each parent is able to identify the uniqueness of their children even though the children are raised by the same parents, in the same home, in relatively the same order, each child is unique: thus, we must recognize the need to treat each child as such. Consider, if you will, the literature of learning disabilities and learning theories as a tool kit from which educators are able to draw to meet the needs of the individual students in the classroom.

Furthermore, it is critical that we recognize that each educator has their own teaching style and learning style, thus the combinations of what a student encounters should reflect this magnificent blend of style. It is from exposure to these variations that students and educators develop independent educational plans for each student using the quality data which exists.

Bransford contextualizes the central issue of learning, namely we as individuals may want to learn new and exotic stuff but essentially, we must learn certain things to be able to function with each other within society. “The processes of learning and the transfer of learning are central to understanding how people develop important competencies. Learning is important because no one is born with the ability to function competently as an adult in society” (Bransford, 2000 pg 51). Interestingly, this noun has been modified lately within the realm of education. A new buzzword, “authentic learning” insinuates that earlier authentic learning educators were facilitating fake learning. Think about that for one more second: educators now have to differentiate learning from authentic learning. How ironic is that in the information age, where media inundates us with messages to experience the real world rather than the virtual we experience on television, online and in other formats! It amazes me how obsessed we are as a nation with makeovers of ourselves, families, friends, rooms and homes as if the real thing being made over wasn’t good enough and we must make it more pleasing. Using authenticity as a noun describes a core value and directly relates to the learning process. Perhaps it is the concept of authentic that needs revisiting.

We are expending energy that is creating more conflict, when we should be suggesting solutions. Perhaps, if we consider the parts of this situation as if it were a

chemical equation, it might clarify the process. By deconstructing the situation we are able to examine the parts and to understand better their interconnected relationship. In chemistry, for something to happen, a chemical, let's call it M, will change over time based on the (P) pressure it is exposed to and the (V) volume of something with which it interacts. Clearly, the emphasis and energy expended on test-taking in the United States is producing students who are good at taking tests. While this oversimplified attempt of Boyle's Law doesn't begin to convey the complexity and the minutia involved within the variables of pressure or volume in government initiative, we can start to understand that we are using a lot of pressure and money that results in better test-takers and not students who are experienced in global and real world authentic exercises.

I suggest we reduce the activation energy indicative of the current educational environment via the path of least resistance. Rather than exponentially expanding the amount of accountability energy used today, reconsider authentic learning. The authors of How People Learn: Bridging Research and Practice define authentic learning as a process that, "allows students to explore, discover, discuss and meaningfully construct concepts and relationships in contexts that involve real world problems and projects that are relevant and interesting to the learner." (Donovan, Bransford, & Pelligrino, 1999) In order for this process to occur, "learning be centered around authentic tasks, that learning be guided with teacher scaffolding, that students be engaged in exploration and inquiry, that students have opportunity for social discourse, and that ample resources be available to students as they pursue meaningful problems." (Donovan, Bransford, Pelligrino, 1999)

As an educator who has taught in various nations and observed a variety of other classrooms around the world, I am saddened to report this isn't happening in the affluent

suburban schools, high-end private international schools, “passing schools,” or inner city, low-income schools. According to my experiences, authentic learning is not happening; instead, we are encouraging our children to participate in a fallacy. Educational practices do not reflect the world in which the students will live after graduation. It is disconnected and reflects the need of politicians to test and quantitatively measure learning. Qualitative understanding and value do not exist; however, the future doesn’t have to be so bleak. The cornerstone of my research work in the People’s Republic of China identifies a place where true authentic learning takes place. It is called cyberspace.

From my first experience upon arriving in ShaoXing, I was overwhelmed by students’ prolific use of text messaging to contact me when my number was available to them. I knew something cool was going on; I just didn’t know what it was. From that first text message, I learned about the perception of identity management via texting and IM. The implications of immediacy and perception of immediacy via e-mail and IM and SMS texting are amazing. There is an online logistical fallacy, all over the Internet learning. Empirically online environment obliterates culture. Learning is able to take place on the Internet, and it crosses cultural lines and obliterates the traditional standards of cultural learning and communication.

Cultural issues disappear online. Most interesting is the fact that these students reverted to traditional boundaries and practices when we met in person. Continued research might reflect that this “dual personality” is evident in most global communications among other cultures because of the traditional grip of the Chinese culture on its people. It is important to emphasize that the Internet does

not erode cultural boundaries; rather it creates a culture free zone. Today and in the future, learners of all ages are becoming examples of a bicultural society. We exist in our “grounded” culture and the culture of “online” where we can exhibit authentic behavior and experience and create multiculturalism practices that cross the boundaries from avatar to authentic living and learning. As such, our perceptions of the process of learning will have to change. It will do so because we take the time to be authentic, to measure what is important, and to make global connections on a new level that offer a time and place for better life practices and communication.

When students engage each other online, a new type of authentic learning occurs. It occurs in this environment because there is no intersection between online and traditional cultural space. There is no inhabitation dynamic to stop students from engaging in new ideas, different conversations, and problem solving scenarios. Culturally inspired learners intuitively look at the Internet as “cultural fulfillment.”

Chinese Culture Online

Chinese students exist online free of their cultural background, the same way as American students exist online. This is exemplified in places like YouTube.com and MySpace.com. These places allow people to inscribe their own culture because these places exist like a blank slate. The clean page to be filled is “culturally free.”

Millennia of traditional Chinese cultural issues are essentially tossed out

the window, as if they don't exist, when these clean slates of technology are inscribed by students of the younger generations. Cultural-free learning zones now available are being filled at an ever-increasing rate. This is not to suggest that cultures aren't important or don't have their place; rather this simply means people are able to engage in an authentic experience, using technology in global environments.

Although some would consider this culturally-free zone a way for the Chinese to be even more Westernized, that could not be further from the truth. The Chinese, in this case, are not becoming more Westernized, but rather a simple opportunity has presented itself for a multicultural existence. This is a global phenomenon. Consider, if you will, that China, one of the most culturally entrenched societies has this phenomena happening as a daily occurrence. It is logical to assume that other cultures are experiencing the same phenomenon and that it is worthy of further research.

The Data

What Didn't Work

The website I developed to supplement the face-to-face class didn't work. Although the website provided both groups of students attending the private Chinese university the same tools, it was only moderately successful with both demographics. Xi'an Group 1: was composed of students who were attending the private university to earn a four year Bachelor's degree and had scored well on the national exam. The majority of these students had professional

parents who attended university. Xi'an Group 2: were attending the private university to earn a certificate. This second group did not pass the national exam with marks indicative of college entrance but the college experience was now available to those with money. Although more students in Xi'an Group 1 had email accounts and were, comfortable with how to use a computer, neither Xi'an Group 1 nor 2 used the website to learn. According to the website activity logs, neither group downloaded the syllabus, or viewed the pages more than once. Instead, my email inbox was filled with students audio files because the students were more comfortable using the MP3 players and recording devices on their cell phones. The following 4 figures are screen shots from the website used in Xi'an.

Error!

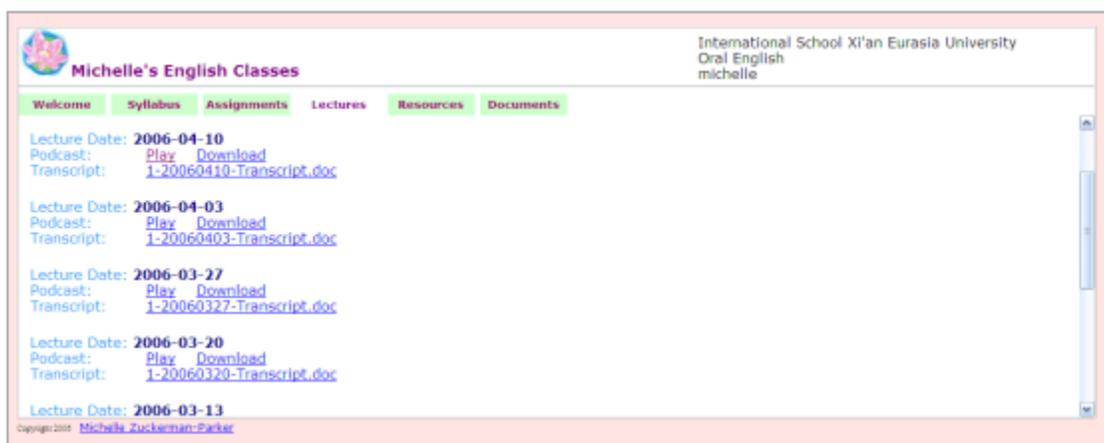


Figure 5. Welcome English Students!

Michelle's English Classes

International School Xi'an Eurasia University
Oral English
michelle

Welcome Syllabus Assignments Lectures Resources Documents

Syllabus

Syllabus for Oral English

[syllabus](#) Last updated 2006-03-06

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Figure 6. Syllabus

Michelle's English Classes

International School Xi'an Eurasia University
Oral English
michelle

Welcome Syllabus Assignments Lectures Resources Documents

Assignment 3 Due: 2006-03-13
Making phone calls
[1-3-20060313.doc](#)

Assignment 2 Due: 2006-03-04
Week 2
[1-2-20060304.doc](#)

Assignment 1 Due: 2006-02-20
How can I remember your name?
[1-1-20060220.htm](#)

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Figure 7. Assignments

Michelle's English Classes

International School Xi'an Eurasia University
Oral English
michelle

Welcome Syllabus Assignments Lectures Resources Documents

Lecture Date: 2006-04-10
Podcast: [Play](#) [Download](#)
Transcript: [1-20060410-Transcript.doc](#)

Lecture Date: 2006-04-03
Podcast: [Play](#) [Download](#)
Transcript: [1-20060403-Transcript.doc](#)

Lecture Date: 2006-03-27
Podcast: [Play](#) [Download](#)
Transcript: [1-20060327-Transcript.doc](#)

Lecture Date: 2006-03-20
Podcast: [Play](#) [Download](#)
Transcript: [1-20060320-Transcript.doc](#)

Lecture Date: 2006-03-13

Figure 8. Lectures: Read and Listen

Hurdles to Computers

Students had difficulty accessing the internet because they had difficulty accessing computers. Although students were attending a pricy private university, neither parents nor the university provided personal computers. Most computer labs on campus were locked up and for computer student use only. My students could access the web via Netbars for a nominal fee, but because a fee was associated with this use, those computers were principally used for entertainment, specifically, gaming.

Chinese Internet Use

The lack of computers on campus was contrary to the literature about Chinese Internet use. “Chinese will soon be the most widely used language on the Internet. Korean boys and girls now date in thousands of internet cafes where they play multi-user games against counterparts in Denmark and Canada. Costa Rica, Iceland and Egypt export software. Vietnam hope its software sales will top \$500 million in five years” (Toffler & Toffler 2006, p. 9).

“Does anyone really think all these chips, computers, companies and Internet connections are going to vanish?” Or that the world’s 1.7 billion mobile phone users are going to throw their phone away? In fact, these, too are daily morphing into more and more advanced and versatile digital devices” (Toffler & Toffler 2006, p. 9).

The first day of class, when I was teaching at the private university in Xi’an, I asked students, “How many of you have an e-mail address?” Very few, if any, students

acknowledged they had an e-mail account. Then I asked, "How many of you have cell phones that are used to text message?" The response was overwhelming. Nearly all students had cell phones, yet few had access or interest in using a computer. This was strange to me at first. I couldn't imagine not having e-mail to communicate and contact classmates or submit work to my professors. However, I was a student in the West where free wireless access is available and laptops are as ubiquitous as a latte. Although this is supposed to be the information age and I thought China was tech savvy, I was curious, why didn't students have e-mail accounts? This contradicted what I had read to date about Chinese Internet use. I thought there were more people online. "Certainly the most widely used feature of the Internet is e-mail. Every day millions of people from all walks of life send and receive e-mail to every corner of the globe. As more people obtain e-mail accounts, it becomes more useful all the time, and for many, has already become a real alternative to the U.S. Postal Service," according to (Crossman, 1995, p. 267). To follow is email 25, which is based on an entry from my field notes while living in Xi'an regarding the use of the Internet.

E-Mail 22

The East is different from the West, there is no doubt, and this cannot be more evident in the way in which people in China use the Internet than those in the West. Unfortunately, the researchers missed the mark on this, and I don't understand how this happened with so many Chinese people involved in the group. This report is the antithesis of the West trying to

make sense of the East by using its own logic, as if it was applicable, and it isn't here.

Specifically, online purchasing will never, quote me here, will never be popular in China the way it is in Germany and the USA. Simply put, Chinese have a long-standing tradition of bargaining. It is a cultural part of the purchasing process. Even eBay, which allows Chinese people to bid against each other, is struggling with this format of trade online here in China.

The biggest mistake is that Westerners believe this is an untapped market because there are so many people and such a small percentage is online now, for example. But keep in mind, the average income of those who are well-to-do earn about \$300/month. This is the high end of the population. Let's face it: the majority of this market, which the West thinks they will be able to tap into, are barely able to feed and clothe their families, and it is unlikely they will forego basic human needs to use the net.

The West views the East as a marketing opportunity but even the ability to target half of one percent of the total population of 1.6 billion people, well sure that would be a substantial amount of money, but what

Westerners are missing is that the Chinese want to buy locally. The Chinese buy food from local vendors on the street who have their wares in baskets attached to bicycles. The Chinese love to buy knock-offs of other stuff for a reason: it is available and the real McCoy has no value to them.

The freedom of speech available with the Internet that has allowed the newest generation under communist rule to express themselves and this is amazing. And these users do so instantaneously with IM not e-mail.

Although most studies allude to the e-mail aspect, it does not mention the essence of Chinese culture and saving face. The Chinese prefer to speak face-to-face about anything and everything, if they are going to speak. The concept of sending an e-mail eludes them. Many students attending private university in Xi'an have told me their teachers shun using the computer for doing work because it is not considered a genuine method of communication. Instead, the copious copying from ancient texts is a method preferred.

Collecting data was another aspect of communicating with Chinese students which was challenging. For example, asking students to complete a survey about their technology skills were invalid because they

simple replied as they thought I would want them to. It was astonishing; the Chinese students asked me how I wanted them to respond so they tell me in the data what I wanted to hear when I provided them surveys because they don't want to appear inadequate. This is an old aspect of their culture: thus, surveys are essentially not a good source of data.

Additionally, those who have Internet access have unlimited access. Many Chinese with Internet access at work have unlimited access to download music and movies. Security is not an issue. There is no security. The primary use for the Internet, as I have seen it, is purely entertainment. Although the movies and music may be illegally available on the net, they exist, and these files are available for downloading. Most Chinese with Internet access at work have IM available and use it throughout the day. It was amazing to watch these exchanges while standing over the shoulder of my colleagues. Furthermore, the usage of the Internet for entertainment and use of free applications for instant messaging at the work place are typically frowned upon by corporate America. This is in stark contrast to the experience of employees of

companies operating here in the People's Republic of China.

Other Ethnographic Discoveries

E-MAIL 23

I don't think I am a believer in single best practices. Best practices are best for someone to gain something in the process. In manufacturing, best practices are designed to help increase bottom line gains. The essence is never truly on quality rather the dollars to be saved or earned. In education, I think the same is true. From my experience, what works for one person may not work for another, even if it is deemed a best practice. For example, as I teach English this semester, there are identified best practices according to textbooks and research. However, when I discuss with my students these strategies they cringe. The best practice they have been exposed to until now is not helping them. Rather it discourages them from learning. They must learn very simple dialogues with rote memorization yet they have beautiful ideas and feelings to express. As the antithesis of best practice, I have asked the students to help me identify topics that they would enjoy

speaking about. One student made a wonderful comment about being shy and afraid to speak. She wants to speak about stuff that is so exciting that she will forget she is shy because her heart is pounding with enthusiasm. This is not considered a best practice for second language learners. According to the experts, the students must be conscious of the grammar and vocabulary when they speak. Unfortunately this method in conjunction with a culture imbued with shyness and shame is a recipe for disaster.

Is there a shelf life or expiration date for knowledge? Applied knowledge vs. unapplied, that is interesting, although something may not have been applied, in traditional terms, there is no way to say that it may never be applicable to something at some other time or that what was considered unapplied did not in fact have a direct or indirect bearing on something else. Furthermore, something that may be construed as not applicable may in fact lead one to something more meaningful as one stepping-stone along a lifelong path.

Josh asked a similar question but from a historical perspective. While in China he and Sarah have been learning Mandarin, Chinese history and traditional

Chinese water color painting. Josh made a statement when sharing his newest installment of Chinese history. It was something along the lines of, "why do people want power? All of these conflicts and wars are about one person wanting power from someone else who has it." Today, I think we view knowledge as power the way other resources were hoarded throughout history.

An amazing experience for all of us

THE BUS RIDE TO NOWHERE – FINAL DESTINATION – HISTORY

Once we arrived in our new digs and my children were set up with necessities of new roller blades to cruise around campus on, I left. There were a group of buses outside the campus gate and I thought what a great time to explore. I boarded the bus and when the toll collector asked which stop I wanted; I just gave her money and smiled. She did not know how much change to give me or which ticket to hand to me. Fortunately for me, she did not kick me off the bus. Instead, with a kind hearted smile she gestured for me to sit down while the driver started the engine. We were off, to somewhere. I figured worst case I had the name and address of the university in my pocket and could find a taxi to take me back if I could not find the proper bus. What an insane sense of adventure for a married woman with two children I thought to myself, or was it rather a belief that people are inherently good. Regardless, I was on a bus in a country where I knew all of 17 words none of which really applied to this situation.

As the driver arrived at each bus stop, the toll taker looked at me and smiled. Did she know I was trying to do something fun and document it for a class assignment? Perhaps she was able to read my mind even with the language difference. Perhaps she saw the happiness on my face as I gazed out the window at my new surroundings while listening to my new iPod knock off mp4 player loaded with Madonna, Jimmy Buffet, The

Beatles and Pink Floyd. Something about listening to music allows me to escape as the surge of endorphins is released. Maybe the woman collecting money from passengers was just scared of this really happy looking foreigner who kept smiling. No one else was smiling. Perhaps I would have been concerned if I were here, or maybe not.

The area directly outside the university gated entrance was very dirty. Along the pothole filled dirt road, wait potholes are from expansion of cold and heat on asphalt, do we just identify these as really just holey streets? I'm not sure. Let's just say there were lots of big bumps in the road as we left the university. As passengers boarded the bus I was tempted to ask if they spoke English, but thought that would ruin this experiment. Instead I just smiled and stayed on. I had no idea where I was going and it was fun. .

I was trying to peer over the brick walls, which lined the street we traveled upon. Both sides of the road were lined with brick walls. The walls were taller than most brick walls I have seen in other places. I am not good at estimating height or number of people in a room but they were too tall to look over from inside a traveling bus. There was something there that needed privacy and there was sure a lot of brick here. Ah, but that would make sense this is the land of the Terracotta Warriors. Lots of clay, again just like in Raleigh, NC. The dirt was red but the air was dusty along this road.

I did not count the number of stops or the number of people getting on or off the bus. Rather I did notice that immediate transformation as we drove further along the dirt road, which became a paved road still in a rural area and then, poof we were exiting the High Tech Zone. Before leaving the electrical city as indicated in English on a signpost, the dust began to diminish and an enormous furniture manufacturing facility and showroom were before my eyes. This place was huge as if there were 10 IKEA

showrooms on the ground floor and then another layer upon that. Never have I seen such an enormous building. I did not know then that this is where furniture was being made.

I must note, as the bus traveled along its route and we approached the city limits of Xi'an the passengers were far more metropolitan in appearance. This is not intended to discredit or diminish those early passengers like myself who boarded the bus closer to the point of origination, rather an observation. The first passengers were from a rural local and had the faces and clothes of hard labor. These people were older and more worn looking. Their faces were covered with defined wrinkles acquired after many years of working hard in this harsh environment.

Additionally, as I noticed the people had changed along the bus route, I noticed something amazing. Okay, it was amazing to me. In ShaoXing, the rickshaws were simple carriages powered by manual foot power of a driver on a bicycle. Last summer, I recalled how open and airy the carriage was since the weather was outrageous hot and humid. Yet these drivers churned their legs and used their energy to deliver the passengers from point to point. Here in Xi'an, the rickshaws were outfitted differently. Perhaps this is a Western cousin of the mode of transportation I saw in ShaoXing. The rickshaws here in Xi'an are powered not by foot but by motorcycle. I have to wonder is this because people weight more in Xi'an or do they have to travel greater distances or perhaps a combination of both? Furthermore, these super powerful rickshaws have temporary applied enclosures to protect passengers experienced with the harsh elements of this climate. I have been trying to find a climate similar to Xi'an situated in the United States and I can't think of one off hand. During the winter it is cold and snow while

during the rest of the year this monsoon climate experiences many extremes, yet it is very dry.

Okay, back to my bus ride to nowhere... As the bus filled with passengers I was only able to view my surroundings from one side of the bus. There were many storefront signs in Chinglish, which made the voyage somewhat humorous. “First Noodle of Happy” and U2 hair studio caught my attention. I wondered what a first noodle was and how was it related to happiness. Then I wondered if this hair salon was named with Bono’s U2 in mind or just some name made up. Most of the music, if not all of the music I hear in China, is Chinese. Some is traditional sounding while some sounds like rap and others are popular in rhythm. Regardless, each shop you pass by has speakers facing you with blaring music to get your attention. It is amazing how quickly you are able to pick up a song. There are three songs, which I know quite well just from walking around and think I could sing the next time we go to a karaoke club.

Once we were in the city limits, or at least what I would consider to be the city limits I have to say, it was awesome. It felt like home. As a kid who grew up in a suburb of Boston, this was a place I could call a real city. Lot of people, lots of traffic jams and sky scrapers as far as the eye could see. Yet this place was different. It was impeccably clean unlike my experiences last summer in Shanghai. Xi’an was very much a modern city. The stoplights have descending counters to inform drivers how much time they had to proceed or wait. There were three lanes available for traffic to proceed in each direction. The streets were tree lined and reminiscent of my journeys along Commonwealth Avenue in Boston while approaching the Boston Commons. Shortly the bus approached a place of interest.

Before my eyes was a stately building. It was the Xi'an Museum of Art. The exterior of the buildings and the grounds were impressive by all accounts and now I knew how to get there, simply take the number 706 from campus and within about 15 minutes I am able to view pieces of art from this part of the world. How exciting! Whether to take the children with me and listen to them ask "how much longer do we have to stay?" is another hurdle to jump later. For now, I have a mental note of another place to explore.

As the bus turns past the museum I notice the shops. You would think if an alien landed on this planet and encountered shops in Xi'an he would notice they were the same as anywhere else he had explored on this planet. There were shops filled with fresh cut flowers, shoes, baked goods, electronics, appliances, clothes and there were also lots of restaurants. Interestingly enough, there is a variety of food here. In ShaoXing few signs were in English and from what I tasted, the food was a local variety there. Here in Xi'an, choices abound. Korean, Taiwanese, Japanese and Western fast food chains offer their menus to hungry customers. What is it about KFC that the Chinese like? It is everywhere. In fact, the children have noticed so many KFCs we don't use it as a landmark because we will easily get lost, there are usually two on each block.

Soon the shops become high-end luxury goods. I notice Louis Vuitton has a four story shop and I wonder how many bags and shoes could one shop contain. Next door is a Salvador Ferragomo shop of roughly the same size with yet more shoes and bags. Many of the cars here are Volkswagen, Ford, Hyundai, Renault plus a few I am not familiar with. A few Audis zoom by and it is some how comforting as I recall the children mentioning, "Hey that is our car." However, I do not see the cars I saw in Beijing. Last summer Beijing was filled with Mercedes, Ferraris, Lexus and other super high-end

automotive experiences. Yet, overall, the driving here in China can only be described as the essence of a video game experience. I used to tease my children that nowhere in the world do they drive like they do in the video games. Now I stand corrected. Chinese drivers drive everywhere. Occasionally they stop. But in essence it is a constant game of chicken between buses, oncoming traffic, bikes, rickshaws, taxis, cars and pedestrians.

If I had never seen a Mario racecar video game I would never have any sort of reference to this experience. Crossing the street on foot is simply an amazing experience. You must literally look in all directions at the same time. I have found myself thinking, it is okay, they must be afraid of hitting you since you may dent their car. According to a former student who is now a police officer, police fill their days with accident reports. There are traffic accidents abounding here. If there is a good side to this, here it is. Most drivers do not accelerate above 35mph. I am not sure why. Perhaps there are just too many obstacles to run around and they can never get out of 3rd gear but at any rate most accidents occur at slow rates of speed. Not exactly a comforting thought considering seat belts and safety in general is not a consideration here. But the low speed does provide me with a false sense of security nonetheless.

I wonder at what point in my journey do I end? Should I just ride the bus all the way back to campus? Will it return to campus? Should I get off somewhere and explore some more on foot? No sooner than I begin to think this then I notice a massive wall. Before my eyes is the ancient South Entrance to the old city. I only know this from reading about it online. Soon we approach the Drum and Bell Towers and I decide to get off the bus. The same woman who allowed me to get on the bus accepts my money and gives me the change and the ticket for my destination. I have to wonder, if I were a

foreigner in another country would I have been allowed to do what I just did? Perhaps I will have to try again somewhere new.

To follow are amazing experiences in chronological order that I enjoyed while teaching in The People's Republic of China with my two children. Josh was eleven and Sarah was nine years of age during this adventure. Their input and perspectives are shared throughout this document because they were an integral part of this experience. Additionally, the children were able to speak about things I saw but with greater clarity through their fresh eyes.

First Amazing Experience: Kindness of Strangers

When I informed my students from ShaoXing that I was returning to the People's Republic of China, but this time with my two children, they were elated. I did not need to be in Xi'an until February but my students in ShaoXing convinced me to take my children out of Germany school early and come earlier to their city in January. To come to China in January and miss the Chinese New Year celebration was inconceivable to my friends in ShaoXing. When Justin and Darcy, two former students, learned that I was returning with my children to China to teach in Xi'an, they insisted that we stop in ShaoXing first. The opportunity to celebrate with friends seemed like a good way to help my children become acclimated to China.

When people began pointing to or staring at us, it hit me just how homogeneous the Chinese people are within a given region. As Americans, we truly stuck out in a crowd. Perhaps what was amazing to us was how cold we were those first few weeks because of the lack of heating in Chinese homes. Like many Westerners, we are

accustomed to wearing one layer of clothes or two, if we will be outside for any length of time. In contrast, the Chinese, based on where they live, wear a minimum of three layers and never remove their winter coats, even when they go to bed. Most Chinese wear a layer of silk undergarments, then a cotton layer, with a final layer of goose down garments. In our single layer of clothes, we were cold. I mean, truly cold, for the first time in our lives. Pointing to the open windows, I mentioned to Darcy that it was “freezing outside.” Darcy just laughed and said, “The cold air is good for us.” Later I learned about a natural demarcation line of the Yellow River, which splits the country in half, north from the south. Those living below the river do not use heat because it is “unnecessary.” It was at this point the children and I realized this country was definitely very different from the United States and even from our temporary home in Germany. It was as if there were specific dates etched in stone indicating when and whom could use heat or when one could officially take off one’s winter coat. Nevertheless, regardless of the cold, we cherished our opportunity to celebrate Chinese New Year with our friends. If the deafening and constant launching of fireworks 24 hours a day wasn’t enough for anyone to enjoy, having Justin teach us how to launch fireworks from our hotel window off a clothes hanger in the freezing cold was well worth the price of admission.

Among the most memorable things about Chinese New Year were the invitations from complete strangers. We were experiencing authentic Chinese culture via dinners and visitations to homes. Many times, Darcy would arrange for us to visit with her family for a meal. When we arrived, the neighbors would see us and eagerly invite us to their homes to toast the New Year. Of all the places I have visited in my life, there has never been such a wild display of toasting to a prosperous, healthy New Year. In the homes we were

invited to, rice bowls were filled with dry red wine, and a toast was shared, “Gumbai” (the equivalent to “Cheers”) after which each person was to chug approximately 6 ounces of dry red wine. Many of the Chinese only drink once a year to mark this special occasion. At every home, our host filled the table with cold foods to enjoy throughout the day. During the meal hours, hot food was prepared from a single wok and filled the table with various meats, vegetables, and soups. On one such occasion, my son took a ladle for the soup and dredged up a turtle shell. The look on his face was of absolute shock. He had prepared himself for the possibility of finding dog meat in China but never considered the possibility of eating turtle. Fortunately, our hosts were not insulted. Instead, when we found foods that the children enjoyed, each person had it waiting when we arrived. One family bought cases of special steamed buns for us to take to Xi’an, in case they were not available there. While visiting Darcy’s parents’ home one day, all of the children in the neighborhood prepared authentic Chinese Spring rolls with sesame seed paste.

Perhaps the best meal we had was at the countryside home of the neighbor of Darcy’s brother. We spent the day collecting a green vegetable from a communal farm and fishing from a boat. The vegetable was considered a delicacy and only available during this season from this province. It was delicious. It was a cross between cilantro and broccoli with a garlic flavor. Unfortunately, I have no idea of its name in English. The fish that we caught in nets from the boat were lightly fried, making delectable fish sticks. The children devoured them. Although the children caught some crabs and some eels and played with them in tubs at the house, they were not keen on eating creatures they had played with. This dinner was a feast for the senses. Perhaps it was special

because we had picked our own vegetables and fished for our dinner; regardless, we enjoyed each morsel. After we ate, the men and older women played dice games. My daughter was invited into the games and actually won more money than the other players. As word spread that she was winning, people came from the neighborhood to see for themselves. As the night sky darkened, we lit more fireworks that painted the sky in celebration.

One Chinese New Year tradition shared by Americans and the Chinese is watching television. Families gather to watch televised national festivities, just as many Americans enjoy bringing in the New Year with Dick Clark at Times Square. This time-honored tradition of watching television during Chinese New Year featured amazing cultural spectacles of traditional dances, singing, and acrobats from the various provinces around the country. It was at this point I noticed the ubiquitous televisions and cell phones. Each home, no matter where we were, had them. It was eye-popping to see little old women with worn, wrinkled faces and tattered clothes call friends on cell phones that they kept in their apron pockets.

In Asia, it is customary to give children a red envelope with money for New Year's. When we arrived at each home, my children were presented with this red pocket money, just as the other children were. Touched by the generosity of these Chinese people who had so little, but not wanting to offend them by refusing to accept the red pocket money, my children accepted it and later donated it to a Chinese orphanage. Overall, the genuine kindness of these strangers is something I will never forget. They lived in huts with dirt floors and they had little money, but what they had, they shared with us. From their perspective, it was an honor to have Americans in their homes,

especially during the New Year, as they hoped for prosperity and good health. They included us by sharing their food, their games, and their red pocket money.

Often, I wished there was a magic wand I could have waved to bring true the dreams of our hosts. In days, the stock of chocolate I brought from Germany was quickly depleted because I had had no idea how many homes we would visit. The best I could do was to take digital pictures and share the images from my camera monitor. It was not until after I did this that I realized this was something my grandmother had done throughout her life with people whom she met. These homes had only the bare necessities, bare electrical wires draped from room to room, one wok and wooden pantry to store food. I thought pictures of their family and friends might be a nice gift. Although these gifts were well received, I do not think they equaled the genuine feeling of kindness that had been extended to my family. I do not think I have felt this way at any other time in my life, and I wonder if I ever will.

The New Year was quickly ending but I had no idea when I would be required to arrive in Xi'an. When I contacted the university, I was given vague information, such as, "Call again in two days." In two days, I was told to "Call again in one day." Frustrated because I was not able to book airplane or train tickets, my friends convinced me to relax and have a birthday party for my son in ShaoXing. This party was amazing! A banquet hall was reserved in a stunning hotel. My friends and their families attended and showered both children with gifts. Perhaps the neatest part of the celebration was that the night before the party, my friend came to see us and measured both children. The next day they were presented with stunning traditional Chinese silk outfits which Mary's mother had spent the night sewing. Mary was a former student from my first visit in

ShaoXing. During the day, the children proudly wore them when we went to a mountain with a famous temple for good luck. Two days later, there was another surprise party for my birthday. I was concerned that I had overextended my welcome in ShaoXing, but my friends assured me they enjoyed the opportunity to visit and practice their English. Finally, I was given the green light to proceed to Xi'an and begin my work.

Universality

To be in China is amazing! Miraculously, between the dirt, destitution and despair, there is something universally stunning about the people. Is it that I am looking at this from a Western perspective? Perhaps “admirable” is a better way to describe what I see. People exist in situations which most Westerners would consider intolerable, yet these people do not look for each day to be “bigger and better” than the previous. Perhaps the best way to explain this is with the following example. Typically, in the West, if you ask a person, “How are you today?” most will respond with some affirming notion of “good” or “fine” because to say something negative is an admission that things are not perfect. In contrast, when people in China are asked, “how are you?” it is as if there is shock that someone would care to ask and the response elicited more often than not is “mamahoo” 马马虎虎, which translates into, “just so so.”

There is something magical to me about this culture, something I wish would be preserved rather than corrupted and exploited. As I witness the onslaught of Western companies vying for the money of the burgeoning middle class, I wonder how much these companies know of their potential customer. Do they care about the damage they will do to a culture? Nearly all of the people with whom I went shopping in China ever

bought anything without opening the packaging to see and hold the item in their hands. Immediately, I thought about eBay and other online auction services. When I asked students, colleagues and friends from various socioeconomic backgrounds about this concept, they all agreed it would not work in China. It just isn't how people shop here. Additionally, online purchases, in general, are not popular. Meanwhile, a part of me wishes that the Western invasion would just stop and leave them alone. The need to fatten the middle class with McDonald's hamburgers because marketing ploys have convinced the Chinese that this is what cool people do with their families is atrocious. When my students share experiences with delight and pride of having eaten at Kentucky Fried Chicken, Pizza Hut or Mc Donald's, I share with them information about the danger of these places. As a result, many students used the term "garbage food" to describe the products being sold. The students in this study were from low socioeconomic families and have maintained the notion and practice of saving money. According to Peter Ford with the Christian Science Monitor, Chinese are typically, "socking away 25 percent of their post-tax income - one of the highest savings rates in the world." (Ford, 2007)

Although throughout the world, many share the desire for something better, in China, this desire is remarkable. By saving the nominal amount of money, that they have, each action is scrutinized. Interestingly enough, the high cost of education is easily justified in China. I still recall, in utter amazement, my first visit. The amounts of money people were willing to spend to learn English was astonishing. While working at a private English language-learning center for adults it saddened me that these students were not getting a quality product in exchange for their hard earned and saved wages.

When students candidly shared their dissatisfaction with the school's program, I mentioned the opportunity to provide a school online for free, available to all to use. It was simple from a technology standpoint. I believed a new approach was needed, especially since shyness was omnipresent. Using telephones and MP3 digital recording devices students could practice individually. Once their work was completed it could be posted online for the other students and instructor to review. Essentially, from a website hosted on a server, a school could be established where collectively the students and instructor work from anywhere at anytime. The freeware exists to provide the necessary interfaces, so why not give it a try? Surprisingly, the students were eager and enthusiastic, yet reluctant. Their reluctance was rooted in the ambivalence towards learning with a machine rather than face- to-face in a traditional learning environment. I tried this format from my first visit and it became the basis for my research. Yet, these students had romantic notions that mastering English would provide a magic bullet.

Throughout the world, many people believe learning English is the ticket to a better life. Yet, most of the people I met while in the People's Republic of China have this romanticized hope. Perhaps it is the omnipresent sounds waves carrying the music of the 1950s that many young people believe as just released, or perhaps it is the way young women walk with arms around each other as a show of closeness rather than something perverse or sexual, according to Western standards or taboos. Images abound of romance rather than despair. For someone who enjoys the view from rose-colored glasses, it was easy to feel comfortable, as noted in the following e-mail from me to my friends.

E-mail 24

"I owe you all an explanation of my whereabouts. True, I have been in China. That has not changed. Things have been absolutely wonderful. I have been so busy doing and doing and recording that I have not been able to take a break long enough to write to you. This week has been especially crazy. At the last minute, literally, I was asked to judge a faculty technology competition on campus. The dean asked me to participate as a judge for two days and then I was asked to present an overview of instructional technology without influencing the contestants who had not presented yet. Very tricky! All in all, it was an outstanding experience. I was followed out of the lecture hall by professors who wanted to learn more. If that was not thrilling enough, when I got home, I found my inbox was filled with yet more requests to continue face to face on an individual basis. I am now trying to arrange something so that when Elaine and Debbie are both here in July we are able to present something to anyone who is still in town during the summer holiday. Ideally we would like to hook up a videoconference between Eurasia University and Duquesne University.

As for me personally, I feel like I belong here. Let me elaborate. The other foreign teachers are young and have very bad attitudes about China. It is obvious they need to leave. I enjoy the country, people, my students and colleagues. Although other foreign teachers complain about Chinese management for example, I have nothing to complain about. Seriously, I don't think I have ever had such freedom in the classroom as I do here. Furthermore, my time with the students is not limited to the hours in the classroom. It is not uncommon for them to eat a meal with my children. On occasion, they have come to my home to teach me how to cook Chinese food. I have learned how to make many wonderful foods. Side note about food, in China when people go to eat, they get their food, eat and then leave. It is a very rushed experience even in upscale restaurants compared to the European attitude. In Germany for example I can buy a cup of coffee and sit in a biergarten all day if I want, there is no sense of rushing out.

I mention the personal aspects of my experience here because during the times I spend with my students outside of the formal classroom environment, I find I learn far more about whom they are and what makes them

tick. In addition to eating, it is not uncommon for students to come to my home and use the computer or watch a movie in English. Each Friday night after dinner many students come and sit outside my home in the garden. We play mahjong or cards for hours and chat. To say I have jumped into this culture and embraced it, well that is an understatement. I have found richness beyond the classroom as well. My Chinese colleagues, the hotel staff and the wait staff at our favorite restaurant have become extended family. It is within this circle that I have learned many lessons.

At this time, I am preparing the interview questions. With about two months left I want to start officially interviewing and documenting. To date I have notes posted on blackboard in my site for your review and a few other pieces jotted down in my journal. I have a good sense of what I am after but hope to be amazed yet again. Interesting note, during this week of presentations, many of my Chinese colleagues shared with me that their Chinese students are shy to speak English in their classroom. We discussed the issue of many years of preparatory work in grammar and vocabulary with little emphasis in speaking until the

university level. However, most Chinese teachers simply believe students are shy because they fear making a mistake and looking bad in class thus losing face. The trick this semester has been teaching students the Western concept that we learn from our mistakes.”

Final Thoughts and Reflections

Global Phenomena

Consider if you will, that China, one of the most culturally entrenched societies, had an online logistical fallacy phenomena happening on a daily occurrence. Specifically, learning is able to take place on the Internet and it crosses cultural lines and obliterates the traditional standards of cultural learning and communication. It is logical to assume that other cultures are experiencing the same phenomenon and that it is worthy of further research. From my first experience upon arriving in ShaoXing, I was overwhelmed by students’ prolific use of text messaging to contact me, I knew something cool was going on. I just didn’t know what it was. From that first text message, I learned about the perception of identity management via texting and IM. The implications of immediate and perception of immediacy via e-mail and IM and SMS texting are amazing.

Cultural Issues Disappear Online

Most interesting is the fact that these students reverted to traditional boundaries and practices when we met in person. Continued research might reflect that this “dual personality” is evident in most global communications among other cultures because of the traditional grip of the Chinese culture on its people. It is important to emphasize that the Internet does not erode cultural boundaries; rather it creates a culture free-zone. Today, and in the future, learners of all ages are becoming examples of a bicultural society. We exist in our “grounded” culture and the culture of “online,” where we can exhibit authentic behavior and experience and create multicultural practices that cross the boundaries from avatar to authentic living and learning. As such, our perceptions of the process of learning will have to change. It will do so because we take the time to be authentic, to measure what is important, and to make global connections on a new level that offers a time and place for better life practices and communication. It is called cyberspace.

Culturally Free Switching

Culturally free switching is a bi-cultural phenomenon: the students were able to keep their Chinese culture when not on the phone, yet engaged in “culturally free switching.” The online environment provides a culturally free blank slate, yet switching, a term from Second Language Acquisition whereby a person speaks more than one language with another person within the same sentence, is applicable.

According to Vivian Cook, “code switching is going from one language to the other in mid-speech when both speakers know the same two languages” (Cook, 2001, p. 102). Since I was familiar with the practice of code switching from my own experience

learning English as a Second Language, I was fascinated when observing my students engage in code switching between English and Mandarin. With little effort, they were able to switch back and forth between the two languages and I found this capacity admirable. Hoff provides another perspective, “code switching or code mixing are terms used to refer to bilingual speakers’ use of two languages in the same conversation. ‘Switching’ implies a deliberate choice to change languages, whereas the term ‘mixing’ has sometimes been used to imply confusion as the cause.” (Hoff, 2005 p. 352). From the data I obtained in Xi’an, when the students were too shy to speak in class they were able to digitally record their assignment using digital recording devices. This technology provided them with the opportunity to code switch if needed. Allowing students the chance to do what was natural; specifically speaking in both languages, in conjunction with this technology provided them a wonderful learning environment. These built in teachable moments to re-record if they so chose using the digital recording devices was their no ones business but their own.

I Have a Dream

The five-step technique provided the students, class and instructor a powerful teaching method. As part of the final examination, students reviewed the MP3 file of Dr. Martin Luther King’s, “I Have a Dream.” Additionally, the text of this speech was e-mailed to all students and a hard copy was posted in each classroom. Students were instructed to listen to the speech and find a section that they liked the most. Next, students were to record themselves saying this portion of the speech with passion. The

following was emailed to me, along with another audio file, telling me about their true dream. From this exercise, students learned how to speak with passion and excitement, as exemplified in the following e-mail:

E-Mail 25

Michelle,

After listened and read King's speach,I learn that every us people have our own right,to be respected,to be treat equally.And if that our own rights are limited or destroyed,we must stand out.

E-mail 26

Today, I read the speech of Martin Luther King which named " I Have A Dream". I was deeply moved by the speech and the speaker, Martin Luther King. He let me be pride for human beings. I admire him from the bottom of my heart. Because of his strong brave, belief and so on. From his speech, I feel the equal is so great! He told us everybody in this world should have equal rights. Every person is equal in front of the god. Some phases what he said deeply encourage me,"those who are weak are to be bullied "don't judge a person by his appearance even more his color. The color of the skin doesn't hamper communication.

Although I couldn't understand completely, I'd like it very much, like reading it forever! It is so perfect! After reading, my heart is excited, too! Michelle, Thank you very much for telling me such a great website. This is Tony's homework.

E-Mail 27

I read the speech, and I have a feeling in my heart that Martin Luther King is very brave and he is a big man. Everybody maybe have a dream, and it must be different. In my childhood, I have a dream that I can become a princess. Yes, it just a dream and it can't be true. But when I'm a college student I found my dream had changed. I want to be a teacher, I think that is more easy to come true... Of course Martin Luther King is a hero and he must be our idol... He has more things to be learned by us. I don't know that what do you want to know from it, and that is just my opinion!

E-Mail 28

Deal Michelle,

I really love this speech from junior school when my English teacher teach it to me. Although at that time I couldn't completely know what he is talking about, his

pronunciation attracted me because it's natural and real. I can obviously feel it's an article with lots of passion because his disagreement on racial discrimination. He feels it's unfair to differ people only by colours of their skins and he was always right. So to make a speech should pay attention to express what you want to say in your heart besides to speak it frequently. Martin Luther King did it, he is great!

(Hello Michelle, I'm the new student in the class 0505

. My English name is

Fly.) According to the strong & powerful speech, I was shocked that Martin Luther King was so wonderful that it gave all of us an inspiring voice... Because he taught us how to live a life, how to struggle for the rights that we should owe. And at the same time, we learnt that a person who realizes the human's advantages while speaking with a generous voice, goes with a strong feelings, I think this one would be an very unusual man, and he'll gain the trust and hearts between home and abroad. And the people from all over the world will support him and remember him forever...

Let's remember his strong voice: I have a dream...

Free at last! Free at last!

Thank *God* Almighty, we are free at last!

I believe that all of us will realize our own dream...

Voices Heard, Experiences Shared

In one semester, students were transformed from speaking like robots to passionate people with convictions and able to speak English before a crowded theatre of strangers. What caused this to occur? Obviously, there is no simple answer to such a question; however, a combination of factors are worthy of review. Primarily, the desire to learn English using technology in a new way in conjunction with the power of the human voice allowed students to contend with a cultural aspect of shyness in a meaningful way.

After all, this was the first time students heard their own voice, literally and figuratively. They were listening to their own voices and hearing a message, their own message, for the first time. Students learned to hear their own thoughts and ideas. At the time, students in these courses continued to use the new skills to improve their English, as they continued to communicate with me by sending mp3 files attached to e-mails or IMs.

E-MAIL 29

hi michelle,

i have a good new to tell you , i pass the exam in jan.and i have a good new year . i have a good time in my new year day . i think my english haven' t improve,

because i've no time to practise it.how about you ? Do you have a good time ?

E-mail 30

Dear michelle:

i am at home now .are you in Italy now ?we will have two monthes for the winter vacation ,my mother is at my side ,she wants to see your picture ,i tell her you are a good person ,she says Sarah is a lovely girl and Josh is a handsome boy .

Happy new year !after one month we will be in new years day !

I miss you very much !

E-Mail 31

michelle

it's very nice of you.i just finished my final exam. now i have the vocation.but everything is old and boring.i got the first place in my class.but i feel nut happy,while i feel more press.though my parents were very happy.i have 3monthes before my college exam.so i'm very busy now .im sorry not to say happy birthday to you.where are you now?in your homeland?

johnson
best wishes

E-Mail 32

hello michelle ,sorry i have long time no use MSN and e-mail ,i have study in my father company,bacous in there can speak english more ,so ''''and when is you comeing to china.

E-Mail 33

dear mihelle,
waht are you doing these day?i'm missing you a week.

E-Mail 33

Michelle,
You haven't been on internet for several days,i don't know why,but when i got your e-mail today,i wouldn't worry about it again,i hope i can see you on msn soon.
Justin

Dreams to Achieve

When we learn, understand, gain knowledge or enlightenment, we all participate in an educational process. Whether it is young students in school or older students experiencing life's authenticity, we are always learning. Sometimes, we willingly engage in the process, and at other times we involuntarily, or even accidentally, learn lessons of

knowledge and life. Regardless of what country, the culture or society of that country infers values, assessment, and an authenticity on learning in education. It suggests to us what is real and how we should behave within that reality. My experiences in China suggest an alternative.

What is Known and What I Learned.

Overall, students communicated during one-on-one interviews that they: 1) gained a sense of accomplishment, 2) liked to have archives of their work, and 3) improved their speaking and technological skills. The summative and formative assessment indicates that they 1) learned how to self assess and reflect on their work, 2) learned from mistakes, 3) used the power of the human voice, and 4) learned class content.

Ongoing assessment indicates that students continue to use their new skills, as evident by their ongoing communication with me. The ultimate accomplishment for these students who sat before me their first class terrified at the native speaker before them was when they each took the stage during the last class. Each student collaborated with classmates to write a play. To watch these students, whose mouths were shut for weeks before they were able to speak, prance across a stage before hundreds of classmates, administrators and other desks was truly amazing. These students gained a sense of accomplishment because now they were able to do something they could not before, i.e. use a computer, e-mail, and speak in public in English. Additionally, each student had created a body of work he or she could review and share. Students were taught that in the West, we believe we can learn from our mistakes. By recognizing that mistakes are a part

of the learning process and incorporating this into the MP3 assignments, students began to do the same.

In addition to the benefits of ownership and accomplishment, students involved in podcasting gained skills in sharing their thoughts and ideas using a technologically contemporary resource. Most importantly, students learned how to work collaboratively, use various types of technology, improve their spoken English, and better understand the influence of shyness on teaching and learning. By doing so, I managed to teach some Chinese students how to improve their spoken English by using MP3 players. Moreover, I learned about the influence of shyness on teaching and learning.

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