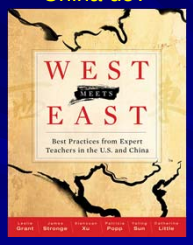
Connecting the Cultural Divide:
What do Great Teachers in the United States and China do?



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Yaling Sun, Yunnan Normal University
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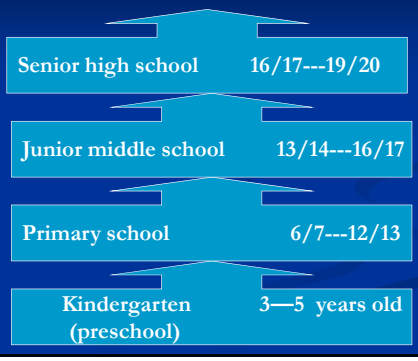
Question 1:

How does the context for K-12 education differ in China and the U.S.?

Education in China (a little context)

Public School System in China



Context

- United States
  - Federal: Accountability (e.g., NCLB, RTTT)
  - State: 50+ systems of education
  - Focus: Standards and individuality
- China
  - Nationwide curriculum reform since 2001
  - Old focus: memorization, drill, and prescribed textbooks
  - New focus: individuality, self-expression, inquiry, creativity, and creative thinking skills

National Context of Education Reform

	United States	China
Curriculum	Development of state standards in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, spurred by NCLB (2001)	Revision of national curriculum to emphasize higher-order thinking and making curriculum relevant (2001)
Instruction	Emphasis on what to learn rather than how to learn	Change from passive to active learning, from drill and rote memorization of information to analysis and synthesis of information
Assessment	Development of state assessments, spurred by NCLB	Continued use of national examinations, with an increasing degree of decentralization

Typical Class Size - Larger

Even in Elementary Years

Typical Classroom

Classroom in China

Classroom in the United States

55 Identified Minority Groups …

Framework for Study:
Award-winning Teachers

National Award-Winning Teachers

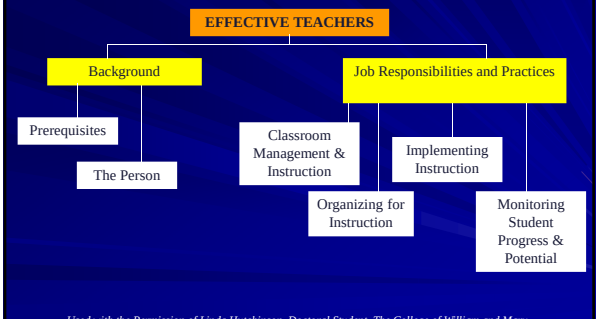
16 Teachers

15 Teachers

Methods

- Data Collection and Analysis
  - One-hour classroom observation of a lesson
    - Instrument: Differentiated Classroom Observation Scale (Cassady, et al., 2004)
      - Student Engagement
      - Instructional Activities
      - Cognitive Levels Evident
      - Learning Director
    - Analysis: Descriptive Statistics
  - Semi-structured interview
    - Instrument: Protocol based on frameworks for effective teaching
    - Analysis: Constant comparative analysis for categories and themes

Qualities of Effective Teachers



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United States Frameworks		China Frameworks		
Stronge, 2007	**Danielson, 2007**	**Bai, 2000**	**Cui & Wang, 2005**	**Sun, 2008**
Prerequisites of Effective Teaching	Planning and Preparation			
Teacher as a Person	Professional Responsibilities Classroom Environment	Reflective Practitioner	Student Understanding Continuous Reflection	
Classroom Management	Classroom Environment	Classroom Management and Student Engagement	Learning Environment	Classroom Organization and Management
Planning for Instruction	Planning and Preparation	Instructional Planning	Teaching Objectives and Organization of Content	Teaching Objectives and Learning Activities
Implementing Instruction	Instruction	Effective Instruction Models and Teacher-student Interactions	Learning Opportunities	Instructional Delivery
Monitoring Student Progress and Potential	Planning and Preparation Instruction	Feedback and Review		Monitoring Teaching and Learning

Beijing Teacher: Yayue Gao

Question 2:

How do China and U.S. teachers compare on ***instructional planning?***

Instructional Planning

What Works?

What Doesn't?

Instructional Planning Similarities

- **Planning based on the curriculum, textbooks, and student learning needs**

"The first is to analyze the curriculum and clarify what should be taught. Effective teaching requires that there is a progressive and coherent set of learning objectives. The second, even more important, is that planning is not just about the curriculum or the textbooks. It is about the students." (China Teacher)

Instructional Planning Similarities

- **Using mental planning process**

"I don't plan! [Laughs.] Let me start from square one. I've done this for so many years that I'm kind of an expert at third grade curriculum. But I have fully developed units that have the goals and objectives established…I'm always very cognizant of what my anticipatory set will be, how I'm going to have closure, what I'm going to do for a quick evaluation, whether it be a thumbs up thumbs down... I didn't have to write lesson plans that day. But I had it all laid out, on what they were going to do. So that's how I plan." (U.S. Teacher)

Instructional Planning Similarities

- **Allowing lessons to follow a different path**

"I try to make sure that I have a linear way of planning so you can follow through and each day's building on the next. But I also try to take the opportunities when they arise, if something crops up to link the outside in, so flexible but structured as well." (U.S.)

"I'll put things in front of them and we may take a different path than what I had anticipated. …. Because I've been teaching the same grade for so long, I understand what I'm supposed to teach, and I'm not afraid to let the kids take me off topic and go down a different path, …." (U.S.)

"I know my students' learning fairly well. My teaching is flexible and what I am doing is totally contingent upon the students." (China)

Instructional Planning Similarities

Instructional Planning Strategies	*Percentage of China Teachers (N=16)*	*Percentage of U.S. Teachers (N=15)*
Planning based on the curriculum, textbooks, and student learning needs	100%	100%
Using mental planning process	100%	100%
Allowing lessons to follow a different path	67%	77%

Instructional Planning Differences

China teachers

- Anticipate students' misconceptions while planning
- Follow the textbook and the teacher reference book closely, both of which were developed by the Ministry of Education
- Frame lesson plans around three key terms:
  - "Knowledge points" (zhishi dian)
  - "Key points" (zhong dian)
  - "Difficult points" (nan dian)

Instructional Planning Differences

U.S. Teachers

- More autonomy and creativity in instructional planning
- Incorporate assessment of student learning in planning (backward planning)

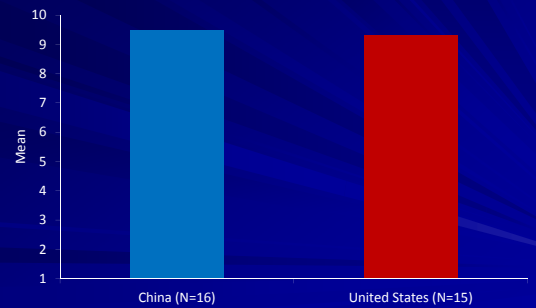
Instructional Planning Differences

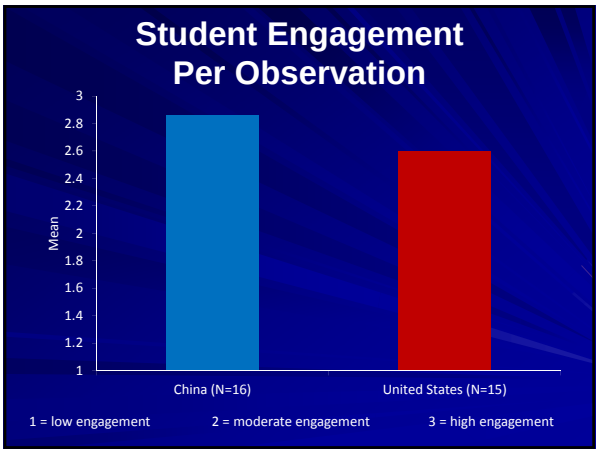
Instructional Planning Strategies	*Percentage of China Teachers (N=16)*	*Percentage of U.S. Teachers (N=15)*
Anticipate students' misconceptions	100%	15%
Follow the textbook and teacher reference book closely	83%	0%
Frame lesson plans around three key terms	75%	0%
Autonomy and creativity in planning	0%	61%
Incorporate assessment into planning	0%	46%

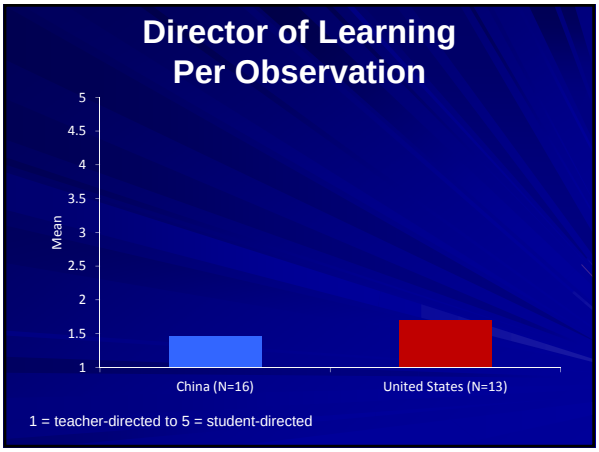
Question 3:

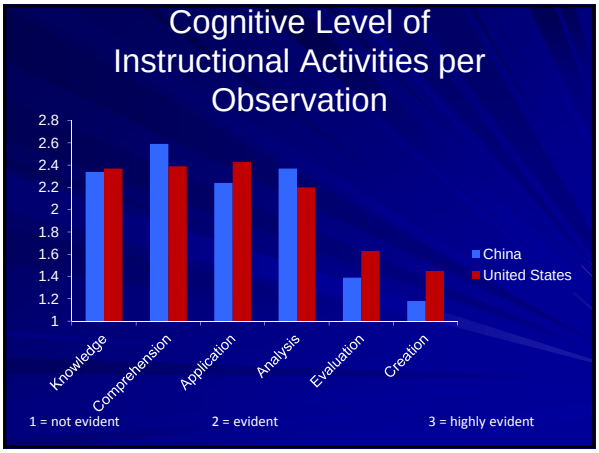
How do China and U.S. teachers compare on ***instructional strategies?***

Instructional Activities Per Observation




Student Engagement Per Observation
Mean
3
2.8
2.6
2.4
2.2
2
1.8
1.6
1.4
1.2
1
China (N=16)
United States (N=15)
1 = low engagement
2 = moderate engagement
3 = high engagement


Director of Learning Per Observation
Mean
5
4.5
4
3.5
3
2.5
2
1.5
1
China (N=16)
United States (N=13)
1 = teacher-directed to 5 = student-directed


Cognitive Level of Instructional Activities per Observation
2.8
2.6
2.4
2.2
2
1.8
1.6
1.4
1.2
1
China
United States
Knowledge
Comprehension
Application
Analysis
Evaluation
Creation
1 = not evident
2 = evident
3 = highly evident

Most Frequently Used
Instructional Activities per Country
(Percentage of Observation Segments)

Instructional Activity	China (N=89)	United States (N=109)
Questioning	84%	62%
Student Responding	83%	64%
Lecture	82%	17%
Technology Use-Teacher	40%	17%
Lecture with Discussion	30%	11%
Student Working Individually	29%	16%
Teacher Interacting with Individual Student	8%	24%
Teacher Interacting with Group	4%	24%

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Instructional Strategies: Similarities

- ✓ High engagement
- ✓ Wide variety of instructional strategies which spanned the cognitive levels
- ✓ Knowledge and Comprehension most evident
- ✓ Teacher-directed learning
- ✓ An optimal learning environment
- ✓ Teacher expertise and professionalism

Instructional Strategies: Differences

- China
  - Anticipate students' misconceptions while planning
  - More whole group instructional activities used
  - Lecture is the prevailing instructional strategy
  - More challenges with differentiation
  - More challenges with authentic learning
- United States
  - More autonomy in instructional planning
  - Mixture of whole group and teacher-student interaction
  - Incorporate assessment of student learning in planning and instruction

The Person, the Teacher

- Fostering and maintaining *positive, productive relationships* with students and parents
- Having a *sense of purpose and responsibility* that extends beyond the day to day learning in the classroom
- Engaging in *professional development* over the course of a career
- Engaging in *self-reflection* to improve teaching and learning

Climate and Culture

- Climate
  1. Effectively using available resources
  2. Maintaining high levels of student engagement during lessons
- Culture
  1. Engaging in positive discipline
  2. Developing respectful relationships

Metaphors for Teaching

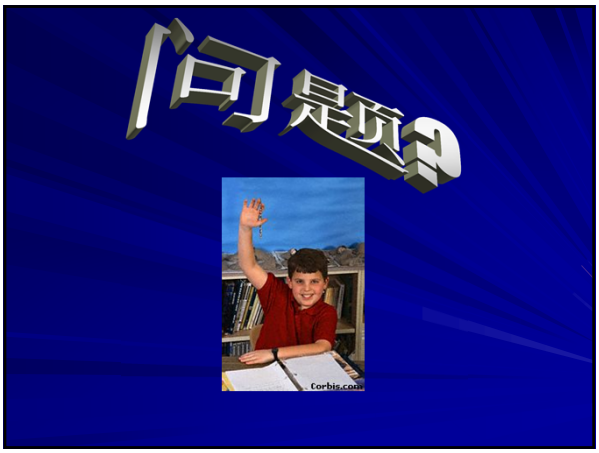
Teaching is like fostering (planting) a piece of seed. You must have a correct values like nutrition, correct view of knowledge like sunshine, correct methods like the farmers' work.

-- Mei (China)

Metaphors for Teaching

Teaching is like a roller coaster. There are incredible highs and incredible lows but eventually you reach your destination if you just hang on. If you don't mind being on a roller coaster it's the thrill of a lifetime.

-- Tanya, U.S.



Thanks for your attention!