


1983

An Experience in Training Chinese E.S.L. Teachers in the People's Republic of China

Albert Camhi
SIT Graduate Institute

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/ipp_collection

 Part of the [Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education Commons](#), and the [Curriculum and Instruction Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Camhi, Albert, "An Experience in Training Chinese E.S.L. Teachers in the People's Republic of China" (1983). *MA TESOL Collection*. 526.
https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/ipp_collection/526

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the SIT Graduate Institute at SIT Digital Collections. It has been accepted for inclusion in MA TESOL Collection by an authorized administrator of SIT Digital Collections. For more information, please contact digitalcollections@sit.edu.

AN EXPERIENCE IN TRAINING CHINESE E.S.L. TEACHERS
IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

by Albert Camhi

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Master of Arts in Teaching degree at the School
for International Training, Brattleboro, Vermont.

Date: August, 1983

This project by Albert Camhi is accepted in its present form.

Date Aug 16, '83 Principal Advisor Bonnie Mennell

Author: Albert Camhi

Title: An Experience in Training Chinese E.S.L. Teachers
in the People's Republic of China

Degree Awarded: Master of Arts in Teaching

Year Degree was Granted: 1983

Name of Project Advisor: Bonnie Mennell

Program: MAT (ESOL)

Author's Permanent Address: 1106 East 51 Street
Brooklyn, New York 11234
U.S.A.

Abstract: In this paper I have related the most important occurrences of my initial experiences in teacher training in the People's Republic of China. It deals with the problems I encountered working with the Chinese. It also treats the cross-cultural awarenesses that developed which helped me to deal with my trainees more effectively. Though the awarenesses relate specifically to Chinese culture, I think that anyone who plans to train teachers from different cultural backgrounds might gain some perspective from reading this.

ERIC Descriptors: Teacher Training

In August (1981), I began working as a teacher trainer here in Beijing, The People's Republic of China. I felt well prepared for the position for I had just gone through an M.A.T. program at the School for International Training. As I see the role of a teacher trainer as basically the same as that of a teacher, I thought that I would only have to apply some of the insights I gained last year to the situation here. I never realized all that I would be forced to consider in trying to become an effective teacher trainer.

The most important consideration that arose for me was cultural. Besides trying to fathom the mysteries and wonders of Chinese culture, which I believe is the key to becoming an effective teacher trainer here, I had to deal with my own cultural outlook which greatly influenced all that occurred. My ways of handling different situations changed dramatically as my perception of events changed and it was my constant reflection upon my cultural outlook which altered that perception. Closely related to this was an acute awareness of my own reactions to the resistance I perceived from my Chinese colleagues. The resistance I detected was not so much to me as an individual or a teacher trainer, but rather to the whole concept of growth and change as a teacher. Even when the need or desire for such growth and change was verbalized, no effort seemed apparent to me to make it happen. At the moment, I am rather doubtful as

to my own ability to overcome the difficulties of becoming an effective teacher trainer, so I intend to offer up an account of my experiences here in the hope that it may be helpful to others in similar situations.

This paper will be divided into three main parts. The first part will give a brief description of the program I'm working in. The second part will be a delineation of what I have actually done as a teacher trainer. The third part will be a recounting of some of the things I have learned about China and its ways that I believe influenced all I went through.

Let me give you a picture of the situation here. I was hired by the United Nations Development Project in conjunction with the Chinese government to teach in Beijing. I work at Er Wai, the Beijing Second Foreign Language Institute, in the E.S.P. program. As part of my duties, I am to teach English to Chinese students, basically scientists and engineers, who will be going abroad after a five-month intensive course. There are five foreign teachers, all from the United States, and seventy five students. Their course work is divided into: a) core classes which deal principally with grammar, speaking, reading and writing; b) basic English for scientific purposes; c) language lab; d) scientific films; and e) afternoon coaching sessions. The total number of hours for these classes amounts to 26 per week. In addition, the students have an English language feature

film or a grammar review class on Saturdays.

There are ten Chinese teachers who work with the foreign teachers and they share the responsibility for the course load. Some of them have been teachers for years in the English Department of the same institute but have had no prior E.S.P. nor intensive program experience. The others are still completing the papers necessary for graduation from the English Department. They are usually referred to as the trainees. The trainees have been in this program for one year. They spent most of last year observing other foreign teachers in the same program and had only occasional teaching duties. These ten teachers will be the core of the Er Wai E.S.P. program in the future.

As I said before, teaching the Chinese scientists is only a part of my responsibilities. I am also to help develop materials for the program (specifically audio-visual and those used for a cultural orientations course) and to help train the Chinese teachers. As the United Nations Development Project will withdraw from this project in June of 1984, meaning that they will no longer supply funding and personnel, the materials development and teacher training are considered most important. The United Nations hopes that the Chinese will be able to run an intensive E.S.P. program by themselves by 1984. According to my Chinese supervisor, courses of this type, that is, five-month intensive, E.S.P. training courses, are extremely new here in China.

Now, I would like to describe what I have actually done as a teacher trainer and some of the difficulties I have encountered. A few days after arriving in China, we began a two-week orientation program. It had a two-fold purpose, to orient us to the ways of an English language institute in Beijing and to orient our Chinese teachers and trainees to us and the materials we brought with us. These materials were determined by the foreign experts who preceded us. I was unfamiliar with most of the materials myself. It was during this orientation program that I got my first close glimpses of Chinese culture. I found the Chinese teachers (from here on I'll refer to the teachers and trainees as teachers since they have equal responsibilities within the program) to be extremely passive, without exception. I found it strange because they were all far more familiar with the program than we were. At first, I thought it was due to shyness. After a while, I began to realize that the teachers were quite comfortable and talkative with us outside, but as soon as we got to the lounge, where the program was held, they became extremely quiet. During those two weeks, they listened intently, or seemed to, but rarely spoke. Often, a question would be raised by a foreign teacher, for the group, but they never responded. Of course, the foreign teachers were all aware of this. We decided to call on them individually when we needed information that only they could give us. Then, they responded, but never at length.

The level of English spoken by the teachers was a little unsettling. They were by no means fluent speakers of English. Their pronunciation and grammar mistakes, for example, their production of (θ)/(s) and their use, or rather omission, of articles, were very much in keeping with what I had heard were difficulties for Chinese students. I theorized that that was the reason for their hesitancy to speak in the group setting. I know now that that was not the case. However, they all seemed to be very nice and I was very excited to really begin working with them.

For the last three days of the orientation program, we were divided into teams to prepare for our classes. The process of choosing the teams was an eye-opener for me. Ms. Jeanne Kent, the coordinator of the project, asked if any of the teachers had a preference as to whom they would like to work with. We were told by their "leader" that it didn't matter to any of them. Ms. Kent was told to make up the teams. I know that I certainly had preferences, as did all of the other foreign teachers. Was it possible that the Chinese really didn't care? Why did their "leader" speak so quickly for all of them? These would remain unanswered questions. We, the foreign teachers, spoke about the teams and came to a conclusion. Each of the foreign teachers was to work with two Chinese teachers for half of the semester and then the teams would change. This way, each of the Chinese teachers would be exposed to different teaching styles. They

would also be exposed to different level students and therefore, they would become familiar with all the different texts and materials.

The quietness and passivity of our colleagues and the supposed unimportance of the make up of the teaching teams were the first two facts I filed away in my memory banks as initial keys to cross-cultural awareness. Though I did not understand the whys of these, I felt assured that time would give me the understanding I needed. I was sure that this understanding would help in my work that was yet to come.

One of the two teachers I was to work with was experienced. He had worked in the English Department. The other teacher was a shy and very inexperienced young woman. She had been the quietest of all the teachers during the orientation. It was in those last three days of the orientation program that we were to organize our team teaching approach. We were to divide the responsibilities any way we wanted. Each team was responsible for itself.

On the first of those three days, we discussed our own views about teaching. As team leader, I had prepared a sheet of questions and had given it to them the day before we began working together. The questions were:

- 1) What are some of the ways you think we can work most effectively as a team?

- 2) How do you perceive each of our roles on this team?
- 3) Given the time schedule of our class, how do you see that time most effectively used? How do you see yourself fitting into that schedule?
- 4) What are some of the elements you think are necessary in order to make a class successful?
- 5) What aspects of your teaching do you consider to be successful?...unsuccessful?
- 6) What aspects of your teaching would you like to concentrate on and improve?
- 7) How do you think I can best help you with your teaching? Do you want feedback? If so, how do you want it?
- 8) What questions do you have that you think are important to our functioning well as a team?

I know that these questions seem rather scattered and certainly contain material for weeks of discussion. However, the main purposes of these questions were to get a dialogue moving, for me to get some idea of their ideas of teaching and to try to begin to establish the nature my teacher training role was to take. (I'll explain that role shortly). I had given them these questions in advance with the hope that it would make them feel more at ease with me when we met in our small group. I thought my questions were very general and would allow us to go in any direction the group deemed important.

When we began to talk about these questions, I sensed that they had spent no time, whatsoever, thinking about them. I also sensed that they were waiting for me to answer them. There was a stiffness to our discussion as we went through the questions. They had nothing, at all, to say about question #8, which was the most important question to me. As we discussed these questions, other things came up. We touched on the role of the teacher in the classroom, how learning is best accomplished, the pacing of classroom activities, the atmosphere of a classroom and student correction. It was simply a sharing of ideas on a very superficial level without any intention, on my part, to try to go into any great depth on any of these topics. I was surprised and encouraged by the similarity of their ideas and opinions with my own.

Throughout our discussion, I was aware of being the obvious leader. As I would become aware of it, I would try to get them to be more active but they never seemed to want to. They were both far more talkative than they had been, but it was always in direct response to me. At one point, I brought up the question, "How do you think we can make the students understand that there are three teachers in the class and not necessarily one foreign teacher and two Chinese trainees?" This question was a very real concern for them. Last year, they were definitely the trainees. The master teachers, that is, the foreign teachers,

taught the majority of class hours and the trainees taught about one hour a week. They did not teach on any regular basis. During their teaching, the foreign teachers would often stop them in the middle of a lesson and correct them. I told them that, though I would observe most of their classes, I would not stop them in the middle nor correct them in class unless I was asked to do so. They felt very relieved and said that this would be most helpful in setting up a three-teacher classroom. They came up with a few other ideas to that end. They suggested that I not be the one to begin the teaching on the first day. They suggested that I not observe every class and that they not observe every one of my classes. They suggested that I not teach more hours per week than either of them. They made a few other suggestions and the rationale behind each suggestion made a lot of sense to me. This discussion got them really excited and talkative. At the end of the day, I wondered why I had been the one to bring up that topic since it was obviously so important to them. I wondered if they had been aware of all of their feelings concerning this before I had brought it up. I wondered if they had been aware of and plagued by it last year. I was pretty sure that they had never spoken about it before that moment. I was growing more and more aware of the grin and bear it attitude that I now know is basic to Chinese culture. I am sure they would have never said anything, even if I had proceeded in the same manner

as their teachers did last year.

At this point, I was still trying to look for clues to why they were responding to the situations as they were. I had not, at all, begun to examine my own actions and desires which stem from my own cultural background. I had not yet begun to consider how Albert Camhi, as a cultural entity, was affecting the discussions. In my experiences as a teacher of English to students of other languages, I had always been consumed with thoughts of the cultural context of my students. I only thought and worked on responding to them rather than examine how my own cultural frame of reference might be affecting a situation.

The second day of our workshop, we looked more closely at the texts we were going to be using for our level. They included: English Structure in Focus (Newbury House), the Reading and Thinking in English series (Oxford University Press) and Intermediate Composition Practice (Newbury House). I was as unfamiliar with the texts as they were for I had never used them before. I had sat through the same general introductions as they had. Yet, when we began to talk about the texts and I asked them for feedback on them and for other ideas that they might have on how to use them, I got no response. I felt as if they hadn't responded, not because they didn't have any ideas necessarily, but rather, because they didn't know what type of answer I expected. This feeling was very strong and clear. I became

aware that they were expecting me to teach them how to use the texts. I sensed that they wanted definite rules to follow. I decided to have them look at the texts again and come up with their own ideas. I waited, with great discomfort, for an hour and nothing came of it. They both responded that they didn't know how to use the texts. They both said that they would like to work with English Structure in Focus, with which they were familiar. I felt that this was so incongruous with so many of the things they had said the day before. They both seemed to have definite philosophies of teaching that I presumed would easily transfer into the ability to devise ways of using a text - any text. I began to feel that the task of training these teachers would be more difficult than I had thought it would be.

My year in the M.A.T. program had shown me that there are many ways of teaching, each backed by a number of assumptions, whether one is aware of those assumptions or not. As I knew that our teachers were very inexperienced, I wanted to help them develop their own style based on a set of assumptions that they believed in. I felt very prepared for that task considering that I had just gone through it myself. Yet here were two teachers who were waiting for me to tell them what to do. It was so reminiscent of my own attitudes at the beginning of the M.A.T. program. I was determined to help them develop who they were, in the classroom.

That evening I went home and racked my brains out on how the M.A.T. staff helped me over my "wanting the correct answers". I could not recall any particular strategy designed specifically to help me (us) over wanting the answers. I decided to plod on, entrenched in the belief that I could never really give them my ways and that all I could ever do would be to help them go back to themselves and their own ideas and opinions. The most interesting aspect of this, upon reflection, was that I never considered any other way to help them develop their own ideas. Never once did I question my decision to have them look at the texts again and come up with their own ideas when they said that they didn't know how to use them.

The third day was spent preparing for Monday, our first day of class. We spoke further on ways to try to develop a comfortable and secure atmosphere for the students. We planned Monday's lessons together, almost every aspect of them, with those things in mind. Besides trying to set up a comfortable atmosphere in class, we also planned activities that were designed to show us if the students were placed in the right level or not. That level was determined by the scores on the CELT (Comprehensive English Language Test) test which was administered as an entrance examination. Our other main concern in preparing the lessons was the whole idea of the three teacher classroom which I explained before. There was more of a sharing of ideas

on that third day and I didn't feel so much like the leader of the team. I felt more optimistic that things would loosen up a bit and run more smoothly once we began. I eagerly awaited Monday morning.

Before I continue, I would like to describe the changes our Chinese colleagues would experience concerning their roles within the program. In doing so, you will get an idea of the nature of our roles as teacher trainers. I mentioned before that the Chinese teachers observed the foreign teachers frequently but taught only now and then last year. They also took a methodology course conducted by the foreign team. The basic text for that course was, The Second Language Classroom: Directions for the 1980's (New York:Oxford University Press, 1981). It was chosen, I believe, primarily for its availability here in China. They also saw films on English teaching such as, Using Tape Recorders in a Language Classroom, Using Magazine Pictures, Over to You and Using the Overhead Projector. These films are distributed by the American Embassy here in Beijing. This year's approach with the Chinese teachers was to be different. They were going to teach the majority of class hours. We were to deal on a far more practical level with them by working very closely with them before and after class. One-on-one discussions with me, or rather with the foreign teacher of each respective team, would make up the principle aspect of the training program. In

the future there would be, in addition, an actual teacher training workshop. They were to continue to observe our classes and to try to incorporate some of the methodologies they learned about last year into their classes. This, in effect, was to be their teaching internship. This year, they would learn more about teaching while they fulfilled all the responsibilities of being teachers.

Now, back to Monday morning, the first day of class. It was a fiasco in my opinion...but only in my opinion. What happened that morning bore no resemblance to what we had planned, or rather, my image of what we had planned. They stood in front of the class and lectured. They dictated what they wanted from behind a podium. There was much confusion due to the students' inability to understand directions. A listening comprehension activity, chosen by the two teachers, fell apart completely when the tape was unintelligible. They had not thought of listening to the tape beforehand since they had a transcript of it. They didn't even have the tape set at the beginning of the passage and so they spent about five minutes fumbling around looking for it. They seemed to have no idea how to continue after the debacle, no idea how to make something worthwhile of the planned activity. I was eventually asked to read the passage and then they continued with the exercise as planned. Much of the morning was like that. I felt very uncomfortable trying to sit back and let them be the

teachers. In addition, extreme nervousness brought about a deterioration of their speaking ability. I was appalled by what I heard from the teachers and what was allowed to pass, or rather, what went unnoticed and/or uncorrected, from the mouths of the students.

While our class was in lab, with a specially assigned lab teacher, our team had its first post-lesson meeting. It shocked me. Both of them were unrattled by the morning. In response to the question, "What did you think of the morning?", they both answered that it went rather well and just as expected. I was startled, disappointed, very upset and at a loss as to where to begin. By their response, I knew that I would have to spend a lot of time examining my own expectations before I could decide how to deal with everything. This was my first awareness that my own cultural ideas might be important. I wanted to make something of that first meeting. I found myself bringing up things that I never thought I would have to talk about. We spoke about what happened with the tape. Though I said that it may be a good idea to check and set-up tapes before a listening comprehension class, I thought that a teacher must do those things beforehand. Since nothing had gone wrong, according to them, I found myself choosing my words very carefully for fear of imposing my ideas. We spoke of their presence in the class, that is, standing behind the podium. We spoke of ways to make

sure students understand instructions given by the teacher. Since I truly wanted them to see what they thought of those things, I basically asked questions. Much of what I thought remained unsaid. I felt that we were talking about things that all language teachers took for granted and therefore never needed to discuss. Through it all, I began to feel that nothing I was saying was making any real impression. They understood my words. During the long taxi ride home that afternoon, I reached into a well of optimism and decided that things could only go up from there.

The next few days were more of the same. The two teachers plugged right into the books. They started on page one and went through them page by page, exercise by exercise. My whole, personal, approach towards teaching was being grossly violated. I felt completely confused as to what their approaches toward teaching were. I wondered how these "techniques" related back to their views of teaching as discussed during the last three days of our workshop. All I can say about their classes is that they were painful for me to sit through. Everything moved along. There were times when I saw that the students around me had completely wrong answers in their books, but the class moved on. Students were sometimes completely lost as to which page they were working on, but they went on and on. The teachers carefully read the directions, read the sentences and had the

students fill in the blanks. I was not able to grasp the incongruity between our discussions and what I saw in the classroom. As I said earlier, I found their ideas about teaching very similar to my own. So, how was it possible that these ideas resulted in this style of teaching? I say this style, in the singular, because their styles were so remarkably similar.

Within those first few days, I began to feel plagued with my own assumptions of what a teacher trainer's role was. Was my goal really to help them further develop their own assumptions and teaching styles? Could I really help them? Did they care to become better teachers? Could I accept their assumptions if they were vastly different from my own? Did assumptions really have any meaning at all? This was the biggest question for me since I found what they said and what they did to be so different. During the M.A.T. program, I had encountered many different views of teaching held by others. Though I didn't always agree with them, it was relatively easy to accept them for, at least, they fit into a system of logic that I could understand. Though we spoke much of our assumptions of teaching during that year, I only observed a few practice lessons given by my classmates so I rarely saw assumptions translated into actual classroom presence.

I truly lacked any understanding as to what, exactly, was happening. By this time, however, I was beginning to realize

that it would not only take an understanding of Chinese culture to help the situation but a complete reevaluation of my own ideas of the role of a teacher trainer. What had made me think that the only way for someone to develop their own style of teaching was to come to an awareness of it themselves? What had made me think that dictating from behind a podium had affected the atmosphere of the class in a negative way? What had made me think that a page by page, exercise by exercise, fill in the blanks approach was not effective? Moreover, who was I to come here and teach these people how to teach when I was becoming aware that, as flexible as I consider myself to be, I had very definite ideas of good and bad in the classroom? Within a very short time, I had begun to question my own ability to work through it. What kept me going was the fact that, after each day's classes, they always remarked that my lessons were very different from their own. I sensed that they preferred the way I did things and that they wanted to learn something from me.

I asked them what the differences were between their classes and mine and they said that the students were more involved and active in my classes. Other than that, they said that they couldn't put their fingers on the differences. I perceived the difference, simply, to be one of direction or rather goal orientation. In each of the lessons I had taught, I was very

aware of what structures or other aspects of the language the book focused in on. In other words, I prepared my lessons with certain goals in mind. I considered the students' knowledge of the language, from whatever cues I already had and planned activities to help them go from where they were to where I wanted them to go. This is a rather simplistic assessment of what I do but I felt that with these Chinese teachers, I had to get onto that level. I felt that they had never thought much about teaching and that all of this would be completely new. My colleagues, it seemed, did not have any goals, other than to cover the book. I had the sense that they were teaching the book, whatever that means, rather than English. Fortunately, the students already knew what they were teaching so it was more of a review and none of them got too lost.

Soon, the questions I was asking myself became too much for me. I was questioning everything I did, questioning and examining everything the Chinese did. The answers I came to were too vague and I felt that I was getting nowhere. I decided that I had to work on a lesson plan level, that is, I had to try to get them thinking more about the actual planning of their lessons rather than about what they did in class. What, exactly, did they want the students to be able to do at the end of a lesson? What were they going to do to help the students reach that goal? I had thought that that was too basic for them, since

they had had at least a year of training before we arrived, but by that point I felt that it was a good place to begin. I asked to see a sample of their lesson plans and learned that they never wrote one up. Preparing for a lesson entailed nothing more than getting familiar with the structures and vocabulary in the text, and the vocabulary was the more important of the two. I wrote up the following sheet and told them that they would have to fill in the sheet and hand it in to me before each lesson.

Lesson Planning

Goal: What do you want the students to learn/be able to do by the end of the lesson? (For example: Do you want them to be able to practice the structures in the book, to use a certain grammatical structure freely, to fill in the blanks, etc.?)

I. Presentation

- A. What are you presenting?
- B. How are you presenting it? Make an outline of the development.
- C. Why are you presenting it in this way?
- D. How do you plan to check to see if the students understand what you are presenting?

II. Controlled Practice

- A. What are they going to practice?
- B. How are they going to practice?

III. Free Practice

A. What are they going to practice?

B. How are they going to practice?

IV. Homework

A. Are you giving the students homework and, if so,
what is the purpose of this assignment?

V. Things to be aware of

A. Blackboard use

B. Visual aids

C. Giving instructions

1. Are they clear?

2. Do the students understand?

3. How do you know?

D. Teacher talk-time vs. student talk-time

E. Ways of dealing with correction

F. Problems you think you may encounter during the
lesson

This lesson planning sheet was determined by what I consider a basic lesson. By no means do all of my lessons run in this way. However, I felt that a very structured approach was necessary at the beginning. I thought that having them come up with a lesson plan format would be too difficult a task for them. I figured that we would discuss variations when the need arose. It never did. I was aware that, by this time, I had taken

command of our team, yet, I felt it was necessary. I had been reassured by other Foreign Experts that Chinese students learn in spite of the teaching but I can't say that that made me feel comfortable. In the end, reasonably or unreasonably, I felt ultimately responsible for the quality of instruction the students got.

I was beginning to do things with my Chinese colleagues that were not me. To even admit to myself that I did not believe my colleagues were capable of coming up with their own lesson plan format created such turmoil for me. These teachers were intelligent adults, yet within I knew how I felt. Taking command of the team was also difficult. I value the idea of a team working as equals toward a goal. I didn't want to be the leader, yet here I was, beginning to think it was necessary. I thought that that was what the Chinese expected of me and therefore, would make us work better as a team.

In the first few days of working with this lesson planning sheet, I learned that this orientation towards teaching was completely new for them. Neither teacher could answer the questions. The questions did not seem to make sense to them. They remarked that there were so many questions about the students rather than their teaching. This was a very clear indication of their attitudes towards teaching but I was unable to perceive it at the time.

The classes continued as before. The teachers were more and more aware of the differences between their time in class and mine. They seemed sincerely interested in wanting to know why. I kept bringing my answers back to this lesson planning sheet. I explained that I thought I had relatively simple goals for each lesson. I told them that in the preparation of each lesson I thought, at length, of my presentation and development. Ways of checking to make sure students understood and the amount of time I would spend talking were also things I thought of during my preparation. I told them that I also considered the problems I thought I might encounter at each step. These were aspects of teaching that I was sure they never regarded as important to do before a lesson. I suggested that they put more thought and energy into the lesson planning sheets.

There were no immediate changes. As the term progressed, they grew increasingly more aware that students often did not understand them, or rather what they wanted of the students. For example, sometimes they wouldn't get homework from the students because the students did not know that they had been given homework in the first place. We would meet after each class and discuss what happened. They seemed to be able to tell me what was necessary for a "good class" yet unable to put any of those things into effect. What was so unsettling was the fact that other than in our talks after class, they didn't seem

at all interested in doing anything about the situation. They rarely consulted me in their lesson planning and never asked for related material.

About a quarter of the way through the semester, there was a complete turnover in the program. My older, experienced teacher was mysteriously dismissed from our program along with another teacher (they were placed somewhere else within the institute). There was a slight freeze on the relations between the foreigners and our Chinese colleagues. Our younger teachers began to retreat slightly into their original quietness. All of the inquiries made by the foreigners were greeted with confusion as to why we were so concerned. It was obviously an internal Chinese matter. The fact that one of the dismissed teachers was on my team made no difference. We decided to condense five classes into four to free our coordinator from her teaching load. My class was disbanded and the students dispersed to other classes. I became the team leader of two other Chinese teachers, one man and one woman. Since the other foreign teachers were experiencing the same problems as I was in working with the Chinese, I decided that I had to try a different approach. For one thing, I felt that I had to willingly accept the lead in directing the team. Willingness was the key. I felt that leading the team was expected of me and if I could fulfill this expectation, maybe it would make the Chinese teachers more comfortable and therefore,

more able to change. It is interesting to note that, by this point, I had realized that I wanted them to actually change. I went through weeks of struggling mentally. On the one hand, I wanted to help them develop their beliefs and styles. On the other, I found their styles unproductive, deadly for the students (boring), and completely inappropriate given the nature, goals and duration of our program. Most of our students came with years of grammatical background and years of explanations about English. Still, many were incapable of giving an appropriate response to, "How are you?" Something had to change and quickly. I also decided to try not talking about what should be the elements of a successful class but rather, deal only with what was happening in the class. They always seemed to know what "should" be done.

Since my two new teachers were even younger and less experienced, I decided to work more closely with them in the actual preparation of the lessons. I decided to have them use my lesson planning sheet as well for I thought it was basic and that I would be able, in time, to teach them to plan a lesson with certain things in mind. The most exciting part about this new start was that I thought that these two teachers had real desires to become better teachers. It was clear within the first few days that my new teachers enjoyed teaching, which I cannot say for the other two. Though most aspects of their teaching

styles were frighteningly similar to my other teachers, the general atmosphere of the class seemed more comfortable. It is my belief that this was a reflection of their own personalities.

As time passed, I began to have many awarenesses that helped me to approach my Chinese colleagues in a different way. For example, in my classes I started to perceive a rather peculiar phenomenon. I noticed that the students often shared the exact opinion about almost everything. It seemed that every question could have only one correct answer. All other answers, or opinions, were obviously "wrong thinking". As my friendships outside of class, with Chinese, developed, I would often hear the phrase, "right thinking." It was often in the English language newspaper as well. I started to extend this idea of right and wrong thinking to our Chinese teachers. They had read a few American books on E.S.L. teaching and I finally realized that these were the source of the ideas they shared during our workshop at the beginning of the term and our after class discussions everyday. Printed matter here in China is always the source of "right thinking." Never is "wrong thinking" printed, especially in recent years. I began to wonder if any of the ideas about E.S.L. teaching that they spoke of really made any sense to them or if they were just relating the "right" answers to me. They had certainly never seen any of their Chinese colleagues display the types of things they had read

about. This awareness affected my approach greatly. No longer would I be confused and upset at the inconsistencies between what they said and what they did. I would work only with what they were doing. I realized that these teachers were responding to a whole new role as teacher. If they stayed strictly within the bounds of the books, as their teachers before them had, they would never have to be threatened with free questions, which they might not be able to answer. It was too bad that I realized this so late in the term for it was the same problem my first team had had and I didn't have the insight to perceive it. I also think it was too bad that my Chinese teachers were unaware of this or incapable of telling me. We started to work on this right away.

One day, one of the teachers was giving a lesson which included a dialogue from a restaurant. The class generated a whole bunch of words of western foods that the teacher wrote on the blackboard. They included words such as steak, hamburger, tuna sandwich, french fries, etc. These words obviously meant nothing to the students. After class, I asked the teacher what the purpose of writing the words on the blackboard was. He said he wanted them to become familiar with some western foods since they were going to go abroad after the program. I asked if it were important that they understand the words. He said it was but that he didn't know them himself, though he had heard of them.

I asked him what would have happened if he had tried to get the students to explain them. He was sure that they wouldn't have been able to. He was afraid that they would ask him. At this point, it dawned on him that I had been there and that I could have easily explained. He said that he was sure that the students wouldn't have expected him to know them since he had never been abroad but he had been afraid, nonetheless, of not being able to answer. I take this small incident to be the first breakthrough, of sorts, for him. It was the first time I had seen any of the Chinese teachers question or analyse their own response in a given situation. Coming to this awareness, I believe, was truly the beginning of his growth as a teacher.

At this point there was a gradual change. I found that they were able, through the lesson planning sheets, to tell me what they were going to teach. It was no longer that they were going to teach page 21, so to speak, but rather what they thought the people who wrote page 21 wanted to get through to the students. I felt that this was another breakthrough.

The next breakthrough came when we completed the Intermediate Composition Practice book. We had no other text to replace it which would develop reading and writing skills. I told the female teacher that we would have to improvise. She knew all of the materials we had at hand far better than I did, yet was completely overwhelmed by the prospect of having to find her own materials

all the time. I told her that she would have to decide what skills were important for the students to learn and then decide how to teach them and with which materials. She also had to tell me all of this before class. I was very aware of telling her what to do. As difficult as this was for me, considering what I wanted and expected of working as a team, I felt that I had to do it this way. If we discussed what skills were important for the students beforehand, as my own desires and concern for the students dictated, I'm sure that she would have hung on to my ideas as "truth". She had never had such responsibility before but she lived up to it. I worked closely with her as she began to adjust the materials at hand to meet her needs. She managed to find appropriate materials everywhere. She wanted to find another text to plug into but fortunately we didn't have a class set of any of them. Working without a text is something they had seen the foreigners do but shied away from themselves. Though her classes did not change drastically, I did notice that she was more comfortable with the materials and the lessons seemed to have, all of a sudden, a fairly developed plan. Before that, it was start where you left off last time and finish with the ring of the bell. She even seemed far more interested in her own lessons.

Taking the text away seemed to help so much that I decided to try a similar thing with my other teacher. I told him that

since we were nearing the end of the term, there were a few grammar points that I wanted to teach and that he should work from Exploring Functions (one of the Reading and Thinking in English series). He was very intimidated by the book but had seen me use it many times. I often concentrated on certain parts of the book, omitted others and taught many of the things in a completely different way than the book. We had often spoken of what I did and why I did it. I told him that we didn't have enough time to cover everything in the book so from then on he would have to decide what to cover. He, too, easily lived up to the responsibility. A weight seemed to be lifted when he learned that he didn't have to cover everything. He basically followed the book but all of a sudden his classes became more animated. He even began to develop his own materials, many of which worked extremely well.

The two teachers both began to enjoy teaching a little more than they had before even though the preparation for the classes created a lot of anxiety. The students began to respond more favorably as well. This seemed to affect the teachers greatly. Though the classes didn't change that much, the students, without their heads buried in the books, began to speak more and more. The classes had a much more relaxed atmosphere. The two teachers were rather surprised by the accepting attitude of the students. What they never seemed to understand was that by

using our communicative texts in an exercise by exercise fashion, they became dense, heavy and extremely boring. I call them communicative texts because I found that the material and design of the books easily lent themselves to the possibility of lots of student participation.

I don't mean to make it sound as if everything changed overnight. It didn't. There were only slight changes in actual classroom management. I can go on and on with the difficulties I continued to have with my Chinese colleagues. Our after class discussions always seemed to bring about a new awareness of teaching, but one that rarely transferred itself to the classroom. They lectured on or rather explained things most of the time. They tended to accept only the answers that they expected. Often, an appropriate response would be negated and sometimes student input would get no response at all. I found this most peculiar. Sometimes they would not even acknowledge a question asked by a student. They continued to trudge through their material, in a linear fashion so to speak, whether the students could ever use the language material taught or not. It was clear to me that they thought a teacher's responsibility was to talk about or explain the material (pages). Once done, the material was considered covered and nothing else was needed to be done.

- - - - -

Near the end of the term I began to understand our teachers

more and more. Culture became the key. A clearer understanding of the Chinese system of education helped me to understand much of what had happened. I will now talk of some of the conditions that prevail here that I'm sure greatly influenced my dealings with my co-workers.

Where to begin? A little bit about our teachers' educational experience might help. Our older, experienced teachers have always been given a book to teach from, page by page... often word by word. Intensive reading has been and remains the foundation of all types of language training in China, that is, in programs run by the Chinese themselves. This is the traditional system, the system used by our older teachers and the system from which our younger teachers have just come. Though our texts did not lend themselves easily to this methodology, our teachers knew of no other ways to use a book. They often thought that the differences between their classes and mine were due to the fact that I could speak better than they. I really believe that they could not even perceive that I was not teaching word by word because they had never been exposed to a different frame of reference. This is why I thought that getting them to teach away from a book was really the first step for them. I also believe that getting them to realize the goals of a lesson, through the lesson planning sheets, will help them to view teaching in a new way.

Another aspect of the Chinese educational system that I would like to mention here, for I think it will shed light on some of the difficulties I had with the teachers, is the power of students in this society. I have seen some remarkable things concerning teacher-student relationships since I arrived. I often detect in our teachers a fear of the students. I often thought that my teachers were hiding behind their texts because they were afraid their English level would be tested by freer activities. I don't think that that is it completely, though certainly a part of it. In the last few weeks, the students have gotten more demanding, and everything they demand, they get from the Chinese teachers. The students will go to the "leader" who will then dictate to the teachers what they must do. For example, recently, the students demanded test preparation exercises. Within a day or two, our whole staff, excluding the foreigners, was pumping out exercise sheet after exercise sheet. The foreigners were not even consulted because the Chinese teachers knew we would want to discuss it first. Since the students wanted it so badly, it was obviously not a matter for discussion. The students also demanded additional afternoon hours and got it. I could go on and on. Expanding on this, maybe the hesitancy of our teachers to experiment with new teaching methodologies was due to their fear of not meeting student expectations. Given the power of the students to dictate

policy, I would say that being a teacher is not an enviable position. I do know that our teachers are terribly afraid of being criticized. This may explain their traditional methods of teaching even though they say they agree with and want to try some of the new things they have learned. In the face of this, the Chinese teachers must decide if they are going to stay with what the students expect or try to teach in a different way. Had I known this earlier, I could have tried to find ways to help make them feel comfortable with bucking the system. I could have eased them into that. Instead, I pushed. Now, my two teachers see that the students, in this class at least, have responded favorably to their different techniques. I don't know if my teachers are ready or willing to expand that to Chinese students, in general, or all students. So, whether they will continue to experiment or not, with future groups of students, remains to be seen.

The "iron rice bowl" phenomenon is another factor that I'm sure influences our teachers greatly. Once a Chinese person is placed in a work unit, s/he will forever have a job and be paid. S/he has virtually no chance of changing her or his position. A few of our teachers never wanted to be English teachers. One is interested in music, another in economics and another loves to play with audio-visual equipment. How can I help these people, who never wanted to teach in the first place, to become better

teachers? Whether they work one hour a day or six, in preparation, does not make any difference in their salaries or chances for promotion. Whether their lessons are dynamic and interesting or dull and boring makes no difference. They seem to be driven most by what is easiest. They are all set in their positions forever, no matter what they do. This is something that I, as a teacher trainer here in China, have no control over, but realizing it earlier would have helped me to understand when I thought they weren't putting enough effort into their class preparations. I could have tried to approach them in a different way. I believe that it is much easier to prepare for a lesson in the mold of my lesson planning sheet, that is, once it truly makes sense, than to prepare oneself to explain every vocabulary item and grammar point. I could have tried to make them see that the first step, understanding how to really use the sheet, was the only big hurdle for them to get over.

There are other factors that influence our situation. Weekly political discussion meetings that warn our Chinese colleagues to beware of the foreigners do not help matters. Having to constantly evaluate what we do, as good or evil, probably sets up a bit of unconscious resistance. It certainly sets up a situation where trust is an ever-present issue and I would hardly consider that conducive to a good working relationship. The fact that the E.S.P. program is considered a

hardship post cannot help either. Our teachers have an extremely heavy teaching load, when compared to the teachers in the English Department, and they don't get any extra benefits. Most teachers in the English Department have a second job to supplement their incomes. It is impossible for the teachers in our program to do this. I've heard that the only reason the older teachers from the English Department come to our program is for the opportunity to go abroad. They hope to return to intensive reading, four hours per week, in the English Department when they return from the U.S.

Understanding all of these factors was just a part of my learning process. I still feel as if I know just the tip of the iceberg of cultural factors that made our Chinese teachers respond in the ways that they did. The other important part of this learning process was the examination of my own reactions. Beliefs that I held so firmly (so firmly that I no longer even thought about them) came under fire throughout the term. My notions, and I believe all of them are strongly influenced culturally, of working on a team with colleagues went through many changes. At first, I wanted each of the team members to be equal. That meant that what was taught during the term and, to some extent, how things were taught would be decided by the group. As team leader, I thought I would only aid in clarifying what was brought up by the team members. Expressing, as they

did at the very beginning, that it was important to establish themselves as teachers in the class rather than trainees, I assumed that my concept was similar to their own. However, making decisions on how and what to teach was completely new for them and truly outside their frame of reference. As the leader, it was expected of me to make those decisions. (And that would be very comfortable for them, for they would never be held responsible for something I had decided). I struggled between team member, as I viewed it, and team leader, as they viewed it, for most of the term. As I became more of what they expected, I had to sacrifice what I expected. My final goal was to help make them more effective teachers so I did what I felt I had to. This is not to say that I believe a teacher trainer must accommodate the expectations of his or her trainees. The trainer must be flexible enough to change if necessary. Each situation requires a constant awareness of whether what is being done is helping or hindering the attainment of the final goal. Had I insisted on being the team leader I initially envisioned, I believe we would have gotten nowhere.

Ways of influencing the learning process of my teachers also underwent many changes. At first, I thought that discussions on "what is necessary for a good class" would suffice to make my Chinese colleagues reflect upon, evaluate and alter, if necessary, their teaching styles. In other words, I thought that by

discussing teaching, they would learn to be better teachers. Within a very short time however, I learned that these discussions were having no effect in class. Repeating what they obviously thought were the right answers did not help them to learn to be better teachers. I had to take a big step to move from these after class discussions to actually affecting their in-class performance. The preliminary step was the lesson planning sheet. I felt they had to have a model lesson plan before any meaningful change could take place. In time, those sheets, too, had "right answers" and still little change took place. Each day they seemed to understand or learn something new but there were never any noticeable changes in the classroom. How could I change what they did in the classroom? That was the biggest dilemma. Then, almost by accident, I found the answer. As the team leader, I began to decide, not how they were to teach, but what they were to teach. By taking the book away from one teacher and imposing limitations on the use of a book on the other teacher, they both came up with slightly different teaching styles. In both cases, fortunately, they were more effective than before. The exact learning process they underwent in the face of the new situation is not clear to me. Whether they reflected on any of the discussions we had had or responded merely to the panic of the new situation, I'll never know. If I hadn't accepted the new role as team leader, I may have never stumbled upon this way of helping

them. Flexibility, once again, proved to be the key. Since I believe that a person must come up with his or her own answers before they are meaningful, I could have easily continued to ask them what they thought they should do. That, I believe, would have gotten nowhere. Now, I have a new understanding of what it may take to help someone come up with their own answers. In the end, even though I told them what to do, they came up with how to do it by themselves.

The most difficult adjustment I had to make over the course of the term was to accept the fact that I wanted them to change. I struggled with this the longest and it's still not completely resolved. What right did I have to expect them to change their ways? I was a foreigner in their country, working within their system. Still, undeniably, I wanted them to change. I used every rationalization I could find for support for I felt a need to justify wanting them to change. (I've come to believe that wanting someone else to change is reprehensible). These teachers would forever be working in this program, that is, a short term training program designed to prepare Chinese students for work and/or study abroad. Did they really need to examine their ideas about teaching? If they believed that a grammar translation approach was the best but took time, that would not help them in this situation. Their students would go abroad after five months. The teachers would have to

adjust their ideas. Getting the students to memorize dialogues, do intensive reading and listen to tapes over and over so as to be able to catch each and every word would never get these students ready for their experiences in the United States. This was a new program with new needs and goals. Our teachers would have no choice but to change. Though I understand this intellectually, I have yet to feel completely comfortable with it. I am sure that this will come up for me again in any future teacher training positions I may have.

Where will we go from here? In a few days, Victoria Badalamenti, one of the foreign teachers, and I will conduct a six-week teacher training workshop for our teachers and teachers from an Australian E.S.P. program. It will be an even more concentrated effort to help our colleagues develop a deeper awareness of teaching. Having spent so much time examining my role as a teacher trainer and all that goes into training others, I think this workshop will be more successful. We will do our best to avoid any in depth discussions of what teaching should be. We will work more with actual lesson planning and execution of those lessons through peer teaching. We will try to bridge the gap we've found between objectives, when we've found that there were any, and what is actually being done in class to achieve those goals. Though we can do nothing about the "system" here in China, we will try to show our colleagues that teaching

can be fun and rewarding. I believe that this, too, is a new concept for our colleagues. We will try to throw them into a learning situation that is different from anything they have ever experienced before. We hope that they will learn that they, as students, can be pleased and feel that they are learning even when in a completely different type of learning environment. The goals of our five-month training program demand a vastly different approach to teaching. We will continue to try to help them understand that. Understanding that they, as teachers, might have to adjust to the different goals and needs of a different kind of program, especially within this tradition bound educational system, must come as a shock to them. Only when they realize this will they be able to truly develop effective teaching styles.

We've only just begun to show our Chinese colleagues what can be done. They are beginning to see teaching differently. They're experimenting a little. Soon, when they've begun to think more about all of the possibilities and realize that they can choose (within the bounds of what would be acceptable here), then will come the hard part... the decisions as to how to teach. Until now, they really have not had that choice for examination of different approaches to teaching was not part of their education. In fact, teaching itself is never discussed at all. Once one knows the subject matter well enough, it is assumed that he or

she can teach it.

I've learned a lot this term. Teacher training, like teaching, is not only a matter of transferring what the teacher knows to the student. It is so much more. The cross-cultural difficulties kept (keep) me on my toes throughout. By being forced to constantly examine my own ideas, I think I have grown as a teacher. The most important thing I've learned is that knowing what one should do does not necessarily mean that one can do it in the classroom. Observing this in others has made me realize that I may do the same thing. Knowing this has opened up a whole new area for me to look at in my own teaching. I have truly learned a lot from this experience in China

- - - - -

Epilogue

It is now one year later. All of the teachers mentioned in this paper are now studying in the U.S. Five teachers have just returned, three from the E.S.L. program at Georgetown University and two from the School for International Training. They have all had at least one year in the U.S. When I first began to work with them in September, I had a deja vu of last year. Once again, I could easily understand their views and found most of them consistent with my own. I braced myself for another year just like last year. I must admit that this year abroad has greatly affected their teaching styles. Though they teach in a

way similar to much of what I've described, there is definitely an awareness of a different way of teaching. They are now struggling with how to put what they've learned into practice. They are consciously working to cease endless teacher talk, to help the students actively learn, to find ways to become more aware of students' mistakes and ways of correction and to develop more appropriate materials. They are just beginning to develop effective approaches to teaching. This is no small matter when you consider that there is only one acceptable approach to teaching here in China. It's still a slow process with our new teachers but changes are taking place every day.

As for the teachers who are now abroad? Well, they began their professional growth very slowly last fall. With continued close attention during the spring term, I think they progressed as well as could be expected having never personally experienced any different ways of teaching for any extended period of time. It's one thing to have a new concept explained and another to live through it. I believe that these teachers will be better prepared for their education abroad than the last group. For the first time, I have hope that, when the U.N.D.P. pulls out of this project, there will remain a viable and vibrant program left behind.