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Curriculum Reform in Rural China: An Exploratory Case Study

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Abstract

This case study consisted of an examination of the perspectives of students, teachers, and administrators at the Shuangling Primary School, a rural Chinese school in Shaanxi Province, as they relate to themes of China's most recent curricular reform efforts. The intent was to understand these perspectives and determine how to best assist teachers in rural primary schools in Shaanxi Province, and perhaps more broadly in other rural Chinese primary schools, in implementing the themes outlined in the reform document (Ministry of Education of the Peoples' Republic of China, 2010). Researcher narrative describes this exploration, and data include student, teacher, and administrator reflections, notes and statements. Results indicate that participants reacted positively toward lessons embodying the active, child-centered pedagogy that school reform efforts call for. These include constructivism, diversity of activity, innovation, communication, cooperation, collaboration, exploration, creativity, analysis, problem-solving, and independent thinking.

Introduction

With tens of millions of children and millions of teachers in Chinese rural schools, state-sponsored curriculum reform, which began on a trial basis in 2001, has far-reaching implications, especially to this often-underserved population. Going to China for the first time in 2008 to conduct research regarding student music composition and cultural context in an elementary school in the city of Xi'an, I have developed a keen interest in these reforms. With the intent of providing assistance, I conducted the current study. My work, stemming from that initial visit has been with a non-governmental organization (NGO) the *China Schools Foundation*, whose mission is "transforming children's futures in remote areas of China with comprehensive, innovative school programs that promote progressive, life-long learning in enriched, healthy and safe environments" (<http://chinaschoolsfoundation.org/>). In turn, these efforts are striving to bring music education in China's rural primary schools more in line with the active, child-centered pedagogy that the most recent school reform efforts call for. My focus within this work has been on curriculum development and providing support for rural teachers to begin implementing these curricular ideas, as well as more progressive teaching strategies.

Background

During three visits to a variety of schools in three Chinese provinces, the traditional approach I have observed is comprised of teacher-directed lessons with students, passively seated in rows of desks, engaged in book-oriented activity, and chanting loudly together the answers to teacher-posed questions. I have not observed students engaged in exploration, manipulation of materials, independent thought, or creativity. Guan and Meng concur, asserting that, "the traditional delivery mode is teacher-centered, classroom-disciplined and textbook-oriented. It reflects little of inquiry-based, research-based, task-based, exploratory, communicative, cooperative, active-involved/engaged means of instruction" (2007, p. 582).

According to the *All-Round Development of Every Student—China's Curriculum Reform of Basic Education in the New Century*, an April 2010 document published by the Ministry of Education of the Peoples' Republic of China (PRC):

The tendency to overemphasize the instilment of knowledge should be changed, and students' initiative in learning brought into full play.... The undue importance attached to passive learning, rote memorization and mechanical drill should be amended. Students should be urged to take an active part in learning activities, be willing to explore the unknown and diligent in practice. They should also develop their abilities to collect and process information, acquire knowledge, analyze and handle problems, communicate and cooperate with others. (pp. 1 – 2)

I hope that the findings from this study will contribute information to assist teachers in rural primary schools in implementing themes of China's most recent curricular reform efforts.

Related Literature

A review of literature reveals that several researchers have investigated China's school reform efforts, and examined them from a variety of perspectives. Guan and Meng (2007) examined the motivation, goals, challenges, and progress of reform efforts during the first five years of implementation. Motivation includes the need for creative thinking to keep pace with international competition, liberation from exam-oriented instruction, and impacts of technology and the Internet. A key challenge is providing diverse teaching materials to ensure that the curriculum is adaptable to the economy of local regions, especially the economically depressed and rural areas. Goals include exploring and/or designing curriculum and textbooks that suit local characteristic needs and encouraging students to innovate and act creatively. In order to provide curriculum and instruction with a more close relationship to students' daily lives and modern society, teachers and schools are given flexibility to adopt alternate teaching materials and creative pedagogy that fosters student problem solving, independent thinking, analyzing, communicating, cooperating, and participating. According to Guan and Meng, curricular reform has progressed substantially in recent years, and has achieved gains in innovative thinking and practice. However, they indicate that further progress is needed, especially in the areas of designing inventive curricula involving active student experience, compiling novel teaching materials that foster connecting the known to the unknown, developing ground-breaking instruction focusing on student exploration, training innovative teachers skilled in using constructivist theory, and cultivating students who take charge of their own learning. Some of the main points addressed by Guan and Meng (2007) are echoed in other research including Zhong (2006) who asserts that the outdated test-oriented system of education that restricts students and discourages talent must end. Moreover, Chen-Hafteck and Xu (2009), Sun & Xie (2008) and Zhu (2010) suggest that effective teacher training in the new pedagogy is necessary in order to implement curricular reform and that resources are needed to adequately implement the new curriculum, especially in the rural areas.

Reflection on practice is another theme addressed in the research literature regarding school

reform in China (Feng, 2006; Zhu, 2010), and according to Yuzhen (2009), it is this critical reflection on practice that is a first step in enabling teachers to fully accept curriculum reform. These considerations necessitate teachers examining their thinking about teaching practices, and establishing new ways of organizing how they teach and how their students learn.

Ryan, Kang, Mitchell, and Erickson (2009) acknowledge that academics and teachers in China have looked to Western ideas about pedagogy and curriculum to examine what can be learned from similar reforms in other parts of the world. Studying the suitability and sustainability of these approaches in Chinese schools in terms of teacher research and professional development, and student learning, Ryan et al. (2009) found that these ideas “cross cultural boundaries and that effective and sustainable curriculum reform can be built through collaborative models that give consideration to local contexts and individual teacher agency” (p. 439). More specifically, they discovered like perspectives regarding the benefits of more openness of classrooms and of teachers’ roles shifting to facilitators of student learning. They conclude that this approach is most successfully applied when it has a strong foundation of teacher commitment, school principal leadership, and local government support; and when “partnerships and relationships (local, national and international) are constructed through mutual respect and genuine dialogue” (p. 439).

Similarly, Chen-Hafteck and Xu (2009) state that the Chinese people and government have been substantially impacted by foreign ideology, and that recent reforms are resulting in an increasingly global educational view. They assert that teacher training towards gradual implementation of the reform policies—as well as adequate financial support, especially in the historically under-funded rural areas—is essential to bridging the gap between policy and practice.

Linking successful curriculum reform to the formation of partnerships and mentor relationships and effective professional development experiences, Zuh (2010) indicates that Chinese teachers whose education and teacher-preparation were rooted in the traditional curriculum have been greatly challenged by the reforms. Especially problematic are the lack of curricular changes to pre-service programs for kindergarten and elementary education, core teacher-preparation courses continuing to focus on traditional education ideology, and the practice of most university professors continuing to lecture in the teacher-centered style of transmission in which they were educated decades before. Zhu cites this lack of teacher-training change as a main reason why constructivist, student-centered approaches have failed to become implemented in so many Chinese schools.

Feng (2006) indicates that teachers learning to reflect on their teaching, and using their reflections to guide future teaching, as positive outcomes in pilot schools that have implemented the new curricula. However, he states that problems stemming from curricular reform include increased teacher workload, cultural dilemmas, and perceived pressure to enact the reforms rapidly.

Other researchers have investigated Chinese music education in light of the new curriculum reforms including Ho and Law (2004), who have found that the traditional functions of music education in China of character shaping and transmitting official government ideology could be

enhanced through the additions of individual musical expression, and inclusion of minority, world, and popular musics. In an additional study five years later, Law and Ho (2009) write that the goal of curricular reform is to make music learning more enjoyable and useful, and to encourage students to participate more creatively and innovatively in music making. Recommending diversity of activity, format, and structure to encourage participation in active, variable, and novel music education, they conclude that, in the new national and world contexts, music teaching and learning in modern China needs to be rethought and state that the challenge is to “persuade a generation of music teachers that...they can think and teach creatively” (p. 513).

Drawing on this representative review of literature, the purpose of the current study was to explore the perspectives of students, teachers, and administrators at the Shuangling Primary School, a rural Chinese school in Shaanxi Province, as they relate to themes of China’s most recent curricular reform efforts. More specifically, I sought to examine their opinions regarding the effectiveness, appeal, and value of these pedagogical changes. The intent was to understand these perspectives and opinions, and apply them to determining how to best assist teachers in rural primary schools in Shaanxi Province, and perhaps more broadly in other rural Chinese primary schools, in implementing the themes outlined in the reform document (Ministry of Education of the Peoples’ Republic of China, 2010)

Method

In 2009, a pilot project was designed to practice and refine lessons designed to address themes provided by China’s most recent curricular reform efforts. During a three-week period, I worked in four rural Chinese schools in Shaanxi Province connected with *The China Schools Foundation*, as well as with another NGO in Shanxi Province, *The Rural China Education Foundation*, providing lessons modeling the reform themes and conducting teacher-training workshops. The Chinese workshops included developing and teaching four 2nd- and 5th-grade model lesson plans, conferencing with teachers and administrators about the pedagogical methods and lesson goals, and mentoring the Chinese teachers in their practicing and delivering of the lessons—all through the services of a translator. The model lessons used songs from the textbooks already in practice, but demonstrated hands-on learning, group work, differentiated instruction, and constructivist theory—rather than simply singing the songs, which is currently the typical form of music education. In addition to singing the songs, the model lessons also engaged the children in problem-solving activities that involved playing rhythm and mallet-percussion instruments, listening, analyzing, describing, moving, improvising, and composing.

In May 2010, I returned to the Shuangling Primary School to continue work within this project, and to conduct the current study—this time expanding the scope to include lessons for every primary grade level, kindergarten through sixth grade. During this visit, over a two-week period I taught two lessons modeling the reform themes at each grade level, and after a substantial amount of mentoring the classroom teachers at each school who were not music specialists, re-taught the same lessons. Again, a translator was employed to facilitate teaching, observing, conferencing, and reflecting. The daily procedures were as follows:

- Provide the Chinese teacher with a lesson script (a step-by step recipe of how to implement the lesson, translated to Mandarin) and give her time to read the script and formulate questions
- Engage in a pre-teaching conference with the Chinese teacher about the teaching strategies, and lesson objectives and procedures
- Teach the model lesson (researcher, with the Chinese teacher observing)
- Engage in a post-teaching conference with the Chinese teacher about the lesson— answering questions; discussing concerns; and practicing key elements, including singing melodies, clapping rhythms, conducting patterns, using instruments, moving, and dancing
- During the lunch break, the Chinese teacher eats, rests, and prepares to teach the lesson
- Engage in a pre-teaching conference, reviewing key elements, answering further questions, addressing concerns, and giving encouragement
- Re-teach the lesson (Chinese teacher, with the researcher observing)
- Engage in a post-teaching conference reflecting on the lesson events and successes, and offering suggestions for future teaching

As in the pilot project, the lessons used songs from the textbooks already in practice, but demonstrated hands-on learning, group work, differentiated instruction, and constructivist theory. In addition to singing the songs, the lessons also engaged the children in problem-solving activities that involved playing rhythm and mallet-percussion instruments, listening, analyzing, describing, moving, improvising, and composing. Most teachers and administrators at the Shuangling Primary School observed the model lessons, and on one occasion, teachers and administrators from other area schools, as well as a government official, Long Xiaofan from the Fuping Teaching and Research Section, visited a class session. After the two-week teaching period, I collected written reflections and notes, and transcribed videotaped statements from the Chinese teachers ($n = 14$), students ($n = 204$), administrators ($n = 2$), and the government official ($n = 1$) who participated in this study. Following this, all data were translated from Mandarin into English. The written reflections were guided by several researcher-developed questions. Students were asked:

1. What did you like best about this music lesson?
2. What did you like least about this music lesson?
3. What was the most different about this music lesson than the music lessons you usually have?

Teacher questions were:

1. What was most different about this music class lesson than the lessons you usually teach?
2. What aspects of this sort of class do you feel most confident and able to teach? Why?
3. What aspects of this sort of lesson do you feel least confident and able to teach? Why?
4. What would you like most to learn about in regards to teaching lessons similar to this lesson?

The researcher compiled, sorted, and analyzed the data and performed a content analysis according to the Patton (2002) model, and then coded the data and identified predominant themes.

Results

The data were examined for evidence of the effectiveness, appeal, and perceived value of the lessons that embodied the active, child-centered pedagogy that school reform efforts call for. Emergent themes included: (1) positive view of the hands-on activities, (2) positive view of the instructional atmosphere, (3) positive view of the foreign teacher, (4) challenges related to novelty.

Positive View of Hands-on Activities

The first theme to emerge was that the activities most appealing to students, and felt to be most effective and valuable by the teachers, administrators, and government official were the hands-on activities. The most often cited of these were playing the rhythm and mallet-percussion instruments, and moving to the music – including conducting and dancing. Exemplifying this positive view, are excerpts from thank-you notes written by fourth-grade children:

- Thank you for coming from afar and bringing us this wonderful music class, and teaching us how to conduct beats and play instruments.
- Thank you, foreign friend, because you taught me how to play instruments and taught me the minuet dance – I will remember this forever.

The teachers echoed this positive view in their statements regarding what was most different in the lessons from their usual teaching, and what they would like to learn in order to facilitate these sorts of hands-on lessons:

- These classes have music accompaniment, lots of instruments, and teaching of music knowledge. In a word, a more colorful and effective class.
- The students can read the notes, and play instruments in a lively atmosphere. They grow to like music, and develop capability.
- I want to learn to give very vivid and lively music classes—to make my teaching more diverse, with singing, dancing, playing, and music knowledge.
- I want to learn the methods to organize such a lively and interesting class, and how to encourage the students to create.

The teachers stated that they want to learn specific music concepts, so they can teach their students to use them in hands-on ways—reading notes, conducting beats, beating rhythms. The most often mentioned area was learning to play the instruments. They also stated they want to teach more creatively and use more diversity of activities—singing, dancing, playing instruments, creating, and teaching music knowledge. Overall, analysis indicated that the

participants responded positively toward the active, exploratory, analytical, problem-solving, cooperative activities that China's most recent curricular reform document advocates.

Positive View of the Instructional Atmosphere

The second theme to emerge was a positive view of the instructional atmosphere generated by the active, child-centered, collaborative lessons. Participants from all of the perspective groups (students, teachers, administrators, government official) commented on the happy and relaxed environment. Student reflection statements exemplifying this included:

- In your class, we feel very happy and relaxed, without any pressure.
- Thank you for giving us a very happy music class. We all feel happy and fun.

Reflection statements by the teachers, administrators, and government official also echoed this theme. The following are two exemplary excerpts:

- The atmosphere in these classes is especially lively. The professor presents a very joyful, relaxed music class. The content is designed to be rich and colorful. It is a change from the traditional teaching way in music class that only teaches songs.
- Although I have listened to many classes, and entered many classrooms, I have never seen this wonderful design. The teacher let the students enter the classroom pleasantly, which initially creates a good atmosphere for study. The students enter the classroom with expectation, and leave the classroom with a pleasant feeling.

Law and Ho (2009) write that the goal of curricular reform is to make music education more enjoyable, indicating that the traditional method is somewhat not enjoyable. I think that the reflection statements describing the reformed model of music classes as happy, relaxed, without any pressure, fun, and joyful are an affirmation that this new approach is indeed more pleasant.

Positive View of the Foreign Teacher

The third theme to emerge was a positive view of me, the researcher and foreign teacher. Students at all grade levels reflected that one of the things they liked best about the music classes was the foreign teacher. Incidentally, all 28 children in the second-grade class responded to the question with the exact same answer, "I like the music teacher best." I believe that their classroom teacher instructed the children to respond in this way, which is congruent with what I have observed on many occasions as the traditional Chinese classroom way—teachers telling students the correct answers. There is no way to know if this is in fact what the 28 children really liked best, but I believe their teacher thought that this was the correct answer. Also exemplifying this positive view of the foreign teacher, were thank-you notes written by fourth-grade and fifth-grade children. They referenced their enjoyment of the music classes and the foreign teacher's demeanor. The following is an excerpt of one of these notes:

I want to thank you for coming to our Shuangling School, giving music lessons, teaching us how to let the instruments make sound. Here I wish you, the teacher from overseas, health, wealth, and happiness. Over the past few days, I feel you are like a friend. There is an old saying: “How happy it is to have a friend come here from a far away.” I also feel the friendship between the United States and China, which is broader than the land.

My analysis indicated that these statements were a reaction, not only to someone coming a great distance to share the joy and understanding of music, but also to the different teaching methodology. Further, with one of the children feeling a “friendship between the United States and China,” there may be broader implications of our project—supporting the idea that “teacher research and professional development, and student learning, do cross cultural boundaries” (Ryan et al., 2009, p. 439).

The teachers and administrators also echoed this theme of feeling positively toward me, the foreign teacher. The following are excerpts from their reflection statements and notes:

- I thank you very much for giving me this opportunity to deliver the music class, which is really a great challenge for me. Thank you for your encouragement. I feel very happy working with you, and feel that I become younger. My gratitude has gone beyond words. I welcome your next visit, and I am looking forward to it.
 - The professor’s classes have broadened my outlook. Her language has affinity. She gave one [lesson] to our class. Our students were very happy when the professor gave a gesture or an expression to them. She is creative in her teaching. . . . The professor combines herself with the students closely, which turned the students from passive learning to active learning.
- The professor has come to our school since last Tuesday, when I was studying off-site. It is a pity I just have listened to two classes. But from these two classes, I have felt our teachers are deeply moved. Although they are all part-time music teachers, these classes can improve our music teaching. Therefore, your coming helps us make big progress in our teaching.

These statements and notes are consistent with Ryan et al. who writes that teachers recognize the benefits of more openness of classrooms and of teachers’ roles shifting to facilitators of student learning when “partnerships and relationships (local, national and international) are constructed through mutual respect and genuine dialogue” (2009, p. 439). I interpret that the teachers’ reflections illustrate that we had indeed constructed this sort of shared respect and dialogue.

Challenges Related to Novelty

The fourth theme to emerge regarded the challenges for students and teachers of participating in activities outside of their comfort zones and the challenges for teacher to give instruction outside of their perceived area of expertise. The students reflected that they liked least the stamping body-percussion action, the others’ and their own collaborative talking, playing instruments, moving to the beat, and creating motions. Of these activities, moving to the beat

and playing the instruments were also cited as being best liked. Analysis indicated that they liked the activities most that were hands-on and/or novel, but at the same time liked them least because they were outside of their comfort zone. I interpret that stamping and collaborative talking were disliked because they may have seemed unruly and/or noisy - something that Chinese children appear to be discouraged from being. Also, I believe that they perceived noisy things—students talking collaboratively and/or playing instruments in small groups at the same time—as being disrespectful to the teacher.

Similar to the students who reflected that several activities were most-liked and simultaneously least-liked, the teachers reflected that they very much liked the hands-on and creative activities, but also that they did not feel adequately prepared to give instruction of this sort. Positive statements regarding what was most different about the demonstration classes than the lessons they usually teach included:

- This class not only teaches singing, but also gives space for students' creativity and imagination.
- They let the students study on their own, cooperate in exploration, and turn the traditional teaching into active learning. Teach them how to fish instead of giving them fish.

Overall, the teachers' reflections indicated that they would be most confident using movement activities, group discussion, beat conducting activities, and using instruments, mainly because they would arouse student interest and develop expression. Conversely, they stated that they would feel least confident and able to teach using the instruments and music notation, citing as reasons not having music knowledge, practice, training, and not being music specialists. The teachers stated that they want to learn specific music concepts, so they can teach their students to use them—reading notes, conducting beats, beating rhythms. The most often mentioned area was learning to play the instruments. They also stated they want to teach more creatively, develop a more pleasant and cooperative atmosphere, and use more diversity of activities—singing, dancing, playing instruments, creating, and teaching music knowledge.

One of the mentored teachers specifically wrote about how challenging teaching in this new way is for her. This is consistent with Zuh (2010) who writes that Chinese teachers whose education and teacher-preparation were rooted in the traditional curriculum have been greatly challenged by the curriculum reform changes to academic content, teaching pedagogy, and goals of education.

Analysis indicated that these teacher statements and notes support the active, exploratory, analytical, problem-solving, cooperative methodology that China's most recent curricular reform document endorse (Ministry of Education of the Peoples' Republic of China, 2010). The teachers appeared ready to try to develop more creative lessons, to deliver a more diverse array of activities, and to teach with a more student-centered, constructivist focus.

Discussion

The reflection statements of Long Xiaofan, government official from the Fuping Teaching and Research Section, Shaanxi Province, during the post-observation roundtable discussion on the demonstration day at the Shuangling Primary School, indicated that the demonstration teaching and teacher training outcome she observed modeled themes of China's curriculum reform efforts. According to reform documents, students should be "urged to take an active part in learning activities, be willing to explore the unknown.... They should also develop their abilities to collect and process information, acquire knowledge, analyze and handle problems, communicate and cooperate with others" (Ministry of Education of the Peoples' Republic of China, 2010, pp. 1 – 2). In particular, Long Xiaofan's reflection highlighted the student-centered, exploratory, active, communication, and cooperative-learning aspects of the observed lessons. She praised the openness, flexibility, and independence promoted through large-group and small-group formats; exclaimed that the students were able to study, sense, and "explore the mystery of music, through practicing and hands-on learning;" asserted that the students were provided with "space for full thinking and creating;" and commended differentiated instruction aspects of the teaching. Another important component of the government official's comments is that this is not only a model for music education, but for other curricular areas too. Long Xiaofan concluded by stating:

I hope all our colleagues here could take this event as an opportunity and enlightenment, taking this idea back to your own schools and classrooms. Study it, and understand it, so that you can demonstrate it. Take a leading role and spread it in your schools.

Moreover, Law and Ho state that the challenge to music education teacher trainers is to convince Chinese teachers that they can "think and teach creatively" (2009, p. 513). The teacher reflections in the current research indicated that the teachers were beginning to feel that they can teach creatively, illustrated by their asserting confidence in their ability to teach using movement activities, group discussion, beat conducting, and instrument playing. Further, the teachers stated that they want to learn specific music concepts and to play the instruments—and that they *want* to teach more creatively, develop a more pleasant and cooperative atmosphere, and use more diversity of activities including singing, dancing, creating, and teaching music knowledge.

The teachers also stated feeling least confident about teaching using the instruments and music notation—mainly because, not being music specialists, they lack knowledge, practice, and training in this area. This is consistent with Guan and Meng (2007) who write that further progress is needed, and Chen-Hafteck and Zu (2009) who assert that gradual implementation of the new curricular reform policies is key. I believe that it is important to build on the perceived strengths of the teachers, and gradually move toward implementation of the perceived weaker areas. Teacher training in the areas that teachers feel least confident about will be essential to successful implementation.

Students taking an "active part in learning activities" and developing their "abilities to collect and process information, acquire knowledge, analyze and handle problems, communicate and

cooperate with others” (Ministry of Education of the Peoples’ Republic of China, 2010, pp. 1 – 2) are goals of curriculum reform efforts. The students in the current study reacted positively toward these goals, as evidenced by their positive statements regarding the active, exploratory, analytical, problem solving, and cooperative activities included in the model lessons they experienced—and by citing that playing the musical instruments and moving to music are the activities they liked best. The school administrators and government official also echoed this idea, praising the exploratory, active learning, communication, and cooperative aspects of the observed lessons.

Exploring the perspectives of these stakeholders in the current study appears to confirm some of the observations made by others who have studied China’s curricular reform efforts. Yuzhen (2009) asserts that critical reflection on practice is a first step in enabling teachers to fully accept curriculum reform. I believe that the reflection aspect of the current research contributed to the overall positive reactions of the teachers, students, and administrators in this study. Ryan et al. found that “ideas about teacher research and professional development, and student learning, do cross cultural boundaries and that effective and sustainable curriculum reform can be built through collaborative models that give consideration to local contexts and individual teacher agency” (2009, p. 439). I feel that attention given to considering the local context and teacher agency also contributed to the positive reactions in the current study. Similarly, Ryan et al. concluded that this approach is most successfully applied when it has a strong foundation of teacher commitment, school principal leadership, and local government support, and when “partnerships and relationships (local, national and international) are constructed through mutual respect and genuine dialogue” (p. 439). I also found this to be true, and worked to create an atmosphere of respect and dialogue in the current research.

Conclusions and Implications

According to Ministry of Education of the Peoples’ Republic of China, “the tendency to overemphasize the instilment of knowledge should be changed, and students’ initiative in learning brought into full play.... The undue importance attached to passive learning, rote memorization and mechanical drill should be amended” (2010, pp. 1 – 2). In accordance with this, the model lessons and teacher training implemented in this study embodied active learning, constructivism, diversity of activity, innovation, communication, cooperation, collaboration, exploration, creativity, analysis, problem-solving, independent thinking, and reflection. The data in this study indicated that the student, teacher, and administrator participants reacted positively toward the more active, child-centered pedagogy that school reform efforts call for, finding it effective, appealing, and valuable.

Results of this study imply that model lessons and teacher training was a first step in assisting teachers in rural primary schools in Shaanxi Province as they begin to implement the themes outlined in the reform document (Ministry of Education of the Peoples’ Republic of China, 2010). More lesson plan ideas, resources, modeling, training, and mentoring will be needed if the curriculum reform themes that started to be implemented at the Shuangling Primary School will continue and expand. Special attention must be given to the areas the teachers identified as

wanting to learn more about reading notes, conducting beats, beating rhythms, playing the instruments, teaching more creatively, developing a more pleasant and cooperative atmosphere, and using more diversity of activities – singing, dancing, playing instruments, creating, and teaching music knowledge. This must be done in conjunction with reflection on practice, and might reasonably be aided by an international community that moves forward with careful consideration of local context, and with the utmost respect for students, teachers, administrators, and government officials.

*The teachers I worked with were responsible for teaching some music in conjunction with other curricular subjects, including Chinese, mathematics, physical education, science, history and geography.

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