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**Developing positive teacher pupil  
relationships in response to current  
Chinese educational reform**

**– The potential contribution of Circle  
Time**

**By**

**Ling Wu**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**Institute of Education, University of Warwick,**

**December, 2009**

## Acknowledgement

First and foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Peter Lang, for his guidance, support, understanding and encouragement throughout the process of completion of this thesis.

I would like to offer my deepest appreciation to my colleagues and friends at the Institute of Education. Dr. Chou, Shiao-Yuh, Dr. Tam, Po Chi; Dr. Wu, Wenli, Dr. Bai, Lu, Mr. Tan, Wee Hoe, Ms Chang, Li-Yu, Miss Hu, Jie, Miss Xie Lida and Ms Rossana Espinoza. They offered their support emotionally and technically in expanding my knowledge and research skills. Special thanks to Professor Pia Christensen, Dr. Michael Hammond and Sue Johnston-Wilder. Their comments and suggestions helped me to improve this thesis.

Special thanks to Gill Shipp, Christine Crout and Jackie Reilly, for their encouragement and language assistance.

Deepest gratitude to my parents, for their endless support emotionally and financially.

I am also indebted to all students and teachers engaged in the field work, without their contribution, I could not have completed this research.

To my husband, Yue Zhang, who has spent years accompanying me during this study. I deeply appreciate his love, support and even complaints.

To my dearest daughter Anran Zhang, she is the gift from God, to colour my life during the doctoral study.

## Declaration

I declare that all the materials contained in this thesis are my own work and which have not been published before. This work has not been previously submitted for a degree at another university.

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**Ling Wu**

Papers in Conference Proceedings by the author:

Wu, L. (2008). *Democratic education practice in A Chinese secondary school – Introducing Circle Time to develop equal teacher-pupil relationships in changing traditional hierarchical school culture* Paper presented at the APERA Conference “Educational Research for Innovation & Quality in Education. Singapore: National Institute of Education. 25-27<sup>th</sup> November.

Wu, L. (2009). *The power of praise – A Circle Time design in developing students’ self-esteem.* Paper presented at the 3rd Redesigning Pedagogy international conference. Barcelona: University of Barcelona. 1<sup>st</sup> -4<sup>th</sup> July

# Abstract

This mixed design research sought to introduce, conduct and investigate Circle Time as a pedagogical practice for developing an equal and positive teacher-pupil relationship in a Chinese secondary school and as a contribution to current Chinese educational reform.

This study started from exploring English secondary students' experience of and perspectives on Circle Time. Therefore, a Chinese secondary school was chosen as an experimental school to investigate the operation of Circle Time, students' and teachers' reaction to Circle Time and affective education. The adoption of western pedagogy into Chinese schools resulted in an examination of both the contexts: the practical pedagogy, Circle Time; and the environment, the Chinese secondary school. The first concept was that Circle Time is a tool to be examined as a contribution to students' personal and interpersonal development. Could Circle Time function in the same way as it does in Western Countries? The second concept was that Circle Time is an intervention, to investigate the issues of teacher-pupil relationships and affective education in the current Chinese educational system.

Although this study was not a pure comparative study, the significance of comparing the students' experience and understanding of Circle Time in both the UK and China firstly provided guidance about the conduct of Circle Time in Chinese school; and also drew a comprehensive picture of how to do Circle Time in Chinese school by comparing students' views and opinions. For the Chinese school, the comparative results provide

an opportunity to examine the pedagogical practice. For the English school, they provide the chance to understand how Circle Time functions in other cultures. However, this study was not just about comparing students' experience and opinions about Circle Time, but exploring Chinese teachers' and students' perceptions and reactions to affective education by investigating their attitudes and experience of participation and reflection on this.

The findings showed that Circle Time not only provided an exceptional opportunity in which students could express feelings, release burdens, understand and learn from each other, develop personal and interpersonal skills and potentially raise their self-esteem and achieve emotional competency, but it also created a unique environment in which individuals were respected and encouraged to develop an equal and open relationship among students and between teachers and students. The study also looked at issues that arise for Chinese teachers in transferring their traditional hierarchical role to an equal and democratic teacher-pupil relationship and in adopting a child-centred teaching method to replace or supplement the current examination-orientated teaching. The findings also showed that Chinese teachers are in need of motivation and support in adopting new pedagogy, teaching methods and social economic change.

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# Chapter 1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the thesis. The historical background of Chinese moral education and political, socio-economic and cultural development in the last 30 years will be discussed. The current emotional needs of Chinese children will be considered in order to draw attention to the potential for greater personal development that exists. The rationale for introducing Circle Time to Chinese secondary schools and using Circle Time as a starting point to investigate Chinese affective education will be explained. Having presented the research questions, the motivation for doing this research and my journey in conducting this research will be outlined. The significance of this research will be explained. Finally, the structure and content of this thesis will be introduced

## 1.1 Context and background

China, with thousands of years of feudal imperial history, has strong centralized political traditions; the present government is led by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). It was considered a centralized political system which had a closed door policy towards the western world until at least the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976. Since 1978, when Deng Xiao Ping came into power, the government started opening up and reforming. China not only opened the door to the western world but also opened up opportunities and resources for development within China. Profound changes at economic, social and even political levels have been taking place since then. During the last 30 years, China's economy has experienced an 8% rate of increase (A. Hu, 2007). Along with tremendous economic development, the Chinese are also learning from the western world and



progressing dramatically with the resultant lessening of social differences between China and the rest of world.

In spite of the opening market and growing economic development, traditional culture still plays an important role in Chinese society. Confucianism is widely recognised by the Chinese as the typical Chinese traditional culture. It was criticised during the Cultural Revolution, and now is being revived in China to fill the 'belief vacuum' left by the decline of communist ideological influence (Bell, 2008; Tan, 1999). However, this revival in Confucianism is also striving to discover the humanitarian aspect of Confucianism rather than just to restore the older, traditional ideas. I will discuss in Chapter 2 the revival of Confucianism in relation to Chinese affective educational reality and current Chinese educational reform. In short, the compromise between Chinese tradition and western values focuses on individuals and personal needs. There are three reasons for this.

Firstly, socio-economic development makes the individual's personal wishes possible to achieve. As a result, personality, personal interests and opinions are encouraged and enabled to develop with economic support.

Secondly, the only-child policy instigated in 1979 also changed the structure of the family and family values. The only child became the focus and treasure of each family. Traditional father-centred family structures and values have changed to centre on the only child. Although the understanding of 'child-centred' is not the same as in western pedagogy, it still puts the child as the primary concern. The only-child policy also enables the family to offer higher levels of material and educational resources for their child. The

only children have become the new generation with greater potential for personal identity and characteristics (Cai, 2003).

Thirdly, the phenomenon of globalization is changing the Chinese understanding of educational trends and reducing the educational gaps between east and west (W. O. Lee, 1997; K. Liu, 2004; Watkins, 2007). Globalization has also caused conflict between Chinese traditional educational thinking and new ideas. As the current globalization is still influenced by western values and economic models, people's moral integrity and personality has been regarded as more important than obtaining adequate skills for economic growth (Nolan, 2004; N. Zhang, 1992).

In 2008, as the Olympic Torch was relayed around the world to the Olympic Games being hosted in Beijing, great attention was paid to China. Criticisms from the west were made especially about China's lack of openness, democracy and human rights. Democracy cannot develop without education. However, traditional Chinese education ignores individuals' needs and rights (Tan, 1999). Decisions are always made from the top-down for people rather than people joining in decision making. This system produces hierarchical relationships. Children are more likely to value social conformity and to assume authoritarian beliefs (Hofstede, 2001). Hofstede (2001) has coined the notion of the PDI (Power Distant Index) to interpret relationships in family, schools and organizations in different countries in consequence of different disciplines. Eastern Asian culture shows a significantly high PDI index, which could significantly reflect on Chinese society.

With a long history of centralization, an examination system designed to select academic excellence and the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution, Chinese education focuses on

academic achievement and examination (Qi & Tang, 2004). Current reform has started transferring education towards students' holistic development. However, without practical models in schools and with hierarchical relationships between teachers and pupils and between teachers and management strata, student-centred reform is unclear in terms of the direction it should take.

This study seeks to make changes possible from the practical level, and therefore will formulate practical behavioural change between teachers' teaching and thinking. In the next section, the motivation and rationale for this study will be explained and interpreted.

## **1.2 Research motivation and rationales**

The initial motivation for this study comes from my personal experience and research interests. I started my teaching career in China in 1993 and worked in the profession for 8 years. I had experienced the Chinese Education system first hand as I grew up. When I became experienced in teaching, I had more and more questions about the issues of the Chinese education system. As a teacher, the tense teacher-pupil relationship increased teaching pressure and the learning burden. Confusing educational reforms and strenuous examination traditions made me question our teaching methods and traditional teacher-pupil relationships in schools. Specifically I queried areas of dissatisfaction for both teachers and pupils. Teachers were working hard to improve students' academic achievements; students were forced to learn and often did not appreciate their teachers' efforts. The conflict between students' real needs and what the teachers were attempting resulted in poor teacher-pupil relationships in Chinese schools. Goodwill and effort from

teachers did not seem to achieve students' satisfaction. School life did not appear enjoyable for either teachers or students. I sought changes that could result in positive development of Chinese education and for the wellbeing of Chinese children.

When doing my Master's degree in the United Kingdom, I experienced culture shock myself from the differences in teaching and learning. Teachers and students often have an equal relationship in the UK. Teachers acted as facilitators rather than the sole source of knowledge. Students were expected to solve questions with their own ideas rather than get unique answers from the teacher. I became more aware of teachers' attitudes and behaviour in school and teacher-pupil relationships became the centre of my interest. My Master's dissertation investigated Chinese students' views of differences in teachers and teaching in China and in the UK based on Chinese students' schooling experience (L. Wu, 2003). Another study of mine also compared Chinese and UK students' perspectives on good teachers and teaching (L. Wu, 2008). These studies focused my interest on teacher-pupil relationship in schools.

In UK schools, teachers and students are more equal than their counterparts in China. I realized that hierarchical relationships within Chinese society, school and family are predominant and influence teachers' behaviour and have therefore brought that same influence to Chinese children. Can the UK experience address Chinese issues and if so, how? It is not possible to change teachers' attitudes and behaviour by spreading new theories. Research should start from a practical level to enable people to change their ideas from experience.

I gradually became interested in Circle Time because of its practical nature. Circle Time is a structured activity (Kelly, 1999; Mosley & Tew, 1999), in which teachers and

students sit at the same level in a Circle and discuss and address issues related to Affective Education. Students can talk about their feelings; voice their opinions on certain issues by speaking and listening to each other (Bliss, Robinson, & Maines, 1995; Lang & Mosley, 1993; Lown, 2002; Taylor, 2003)(also refer to §3.5). Circle Time can help students to develop their listening, speaking and social skills. Sitting in the Circle at the same level with students, teachers can easily have eye-contact with everyone in the Circle. The climate created by the 'magic circle' (Lang, 1998a) encourages people to express feelings, voice opinions and discuss issues. By following the same rules in the Circle, teachers and students can develop a warm and relaxed relationship. I began to understand more deeply about Affective Education and personal social development by taking part in Circle Time myself.

The term AE (affective education) has various meanings in different countries (Best & Lang, 1994; Lang, 1998b); and the meanings are even more divergent between the Chinese and UK educational cultures (X Zhu & Liu, 2004). As interpreted by Lang (1998b; p. 4), AE operates on at least three levels: the individual, the group and the institution.

- The individual; attention directed to individual students, their self-esteem, emotional literacy, study skills, their life and career plans;
- The group; attention to the nature and quality of interactions within the groups in which students work and relate;
- The institution; a concern for the quality of the climate and ethos of the school itself, the guidance and support it offers students; its care and concern in relationship to their welfare.

The 'Individual' component is the core of Affective Education; however, the individual's holistic development cannot progress on its own. Within the group, a positive relationship and atmosphere can help the individual to develop his/her study and social skills, raise self-esteem and achieve emotional literacy. Positive relationship means each individual in the relationship has the feeling of belonging, of being loved and being capable of cooperating within the 'group'. The groups can then enable the school to become a 'caring' society (Best & Lang, 1994).

The individual's welfare and interests are the essential preoccupation of Affective Education because 'respect and care for the individual should be a fundamental concern of all democratic societies' (Lang, 1998b). Lang (1998b) particularly stresses that 'pupils are in fact also people'; education is not just to develop students' cognitive ability and to produce academically processed pupils but also, most importantly, to enable students to contribute to society and to be ready for their future life where they should be equipped to go beyond basic skills and academic knowledge and, hopefully, achieve holistic development.

However, Affective Education is still an underdeveloped area in the Chinese education system. There is some expression of Affective Education, in the term *Qinggan Jiaoyu* in Chinese (Zhu, 1993, 2005); however, the term is different contextually from that in the west. *Qinggan Jiaoyu* in the Chinese context is under the umbrella term of Moral education and more related to psychological concerns. Moral education, with roots in the Confucian tradition, is imposed within a political context, and is expressed through clearly articulated moral components of culture; this has existed for over two thousand

years. This can be seen as the origin of Affective Education in Chinese society (Hsu, 2003). As it exists within the centralized political arena, Chinese moral education contains less consideration of individual's needs and their personal social development and is in need of reform in the light of modern social and economic developmental theories (§2.6).

The current educational reform (§2.5) is considered the only way of reducing Chinese students' learning burdens, and there has been a move towards considering individualism as social and economic change which has occurred in the last three decades. The reform is trying to reinterpret Confucianism and seeks links between AE (affective education) and ME (moral education). In this respect, even under the strong ME tradition, AE starts playing important roles in education and has been considered essential to students' holistic development (Ban, 2003; Tan, 2006; Xiaoman Zhu, 1993, 2005). However, current debates from various Chinese educators merely focus on theoretical discussions. The educational theory of the Russian educationalist Sukhomlinsky (Xiaoman Zhu, 1993, 2005), Carl Rogers' client-centred therapy (Yuan, 1999) and Dewey's democratic educational theory have been quoted in arguing for new trends in current Chinese educational reform, and claims that it should abandon the examination-oriented education of the current student-centred system (B. Liu, 1997; Xiaoman Zhu, 1993). However, these debates rest only on theoretical discussions rather than practical research and suggestions. There are strong demands for research in personal and social education in Chinese schools.

Suzhi jiaoyu (quality education) started as a term of students' all-round development in 1988 (S. Yan, 1988), introduced by the government (CCPCC, 1988, 1994, 1999), with the aim of developing fully the character of students, tapping the potential ability of the

educated person and promote the whole moral, intellectual and physical development of students in all the various aspects of education (Y. Li, 2001; G. Wang, 2002; S. Wang, Guan, & Jiang, 2000; R. Wu & Dou, 2004; S. Yan, 1988). However, after 20 years, the situation in schools remains unchanged. Chinese education is still examination-centred (Wen, 01/03/2007). The students' learning burden and pressures are increasing. Little research has been done at the practical level to shed light on how the idea of quality education can achieve the aim of students' all-round development, stimulating students' potential ability and personal and social skills. Articles about quality education mainly focus on the argument of current education problems and perfect the theories and ideas of quality education (Y. Li, 2001; B. Liu, 1997, 2000; Ma, 2004; G. Wang, 2002; S. Wang, et al., 2000). The need for and shortage of practical research about students' personal and social development will be discussed in depth in Chapters 2 and 3; it has motivated me to introduce Circle Time as a western pedagogy that possesses great potential benefits for Chinese secondary school students' in their personal and social development.

### **1.3 Objectives of the study**

There are three objectives for carrying out this research. Firstly, it introduces Circle Time, a western pedagogy with potential benefit, into students' personal social development within the Chinese school setting. Secondly, based on this experiment, Circle Time is taken as an intervention with which to examine, explore and interpret current Chinese Affective Education and reform. Thirdly, by comparing the Chinese and UK students' experience and opinions of Circle Time and examining Circle Time within the Chinese context, the usefulness of the pedagogy is seen in the context of current use and function of Circle Time within UK schools.



The first objective is an attempt to introduce Circle Time to the Chinese secondary school for students' personal and social wellbeing and to develop equal and democratic teacher-pupil relationships. No Chinese schools had ever adopted Circle Time for students' personal and social development before this study.

The literature of Circle Time from the UK and other western countries provides evidence that Circle Time can enhance children's confidence in speaking and listening; it can also promote children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (Canney & Byrne, 2006; Kelly, 1999; Weatherhead, 2008). Will the western seed of the Circle Time pedagogy, flourish in the eastern soil that is the Chinese educational system? I constructed experiments to test the function of Circle Time in a Chinese secondary school. I formulated tests, questionnaires, documentation and interviews of both students and teachers to triangulate the experiment's outcomes. As this is an introductory study, a preliminary study was carried out in a UK secondary school to provide comparative aspects for the experiment, but this research is not a true comparative study in itself. The pedagogical concern is more significant in that I was learning by doing. One of the important aims is trying to introduce equal and democratic perceptions into Chinese education by doing Circle Time.

The second objective of this study was to investigate Affective Education in the Chinese educational context and, thereby, to offer appropriate suggestions for teachers and education practitioners to support students in their personal and social skills development, based on insights from this study. As mentioned previously, Affective Education in Chinese schools is long on theory and short on action. This study attempts to interpret theories from action, addressing issues teachers are facing in the field to improve

educational action (Bassey, 1999). (See §7.) It is a researcher's responsibility to suggest desirable change for policy making (Robson, 2002). Circle Time is considered as a starting point in Chinese schools to enhance the ideas of Affective Education and to develop a positive teacher-pupil relationship that encourages equality and democratic strategies instead of the existing traditional hierarchical pattern.

The third objective is to seek to reflect on Circle Time and UK Affective Education. Circle Time is under the umbrella term of Affective Education in the UK for students' personal and social development. By examining Circle Time in the Chinese context; the pedagogy of Circle Time can be tested from another angle. Therefore, the comparative aspects of this study can also shed light on the current UK system by 'comparing, importing and exporting ideas'; by 'making the strange familiar' and 'making the familiar strange', to increase our understanding of our own society, culture and ways of educating (Alexander, 2000; p.27). 'In studying foreign systems of education, we should not forget that the things outside schools matter even more than the things inside the schools, and govern and interpret things inside' (Sadler, 1902;cited in Alexander, 1996,2000)'.

## **1.4 Research questions**

This study investigates Chinese Affective Education. It introduces a western pedagogy – Circle Time – to a Chinese secondary school, examining the hypothesis that Circle Time is an effective method for students' personal social development based on the experiment. At the same time, Chinese students and teachers' perceptions of Affective Education were generated through their experience and opinions about the experiment. The aim is to explore the issues of Chinese affective educational practice in depth. The teacher-pupil

relationship is the focus concern of this study. The Chinese have long been experiencing centralization and conformity rather than individuality, but this study tries to demonstrate equality and democracy between teachers and pupils; as a result the individual's point of view is highly valued in this research. As this is a mixed design, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected and interpreted to explore students' and teachers' perspectives in great detail.

The research questions comprise three levels:

Firstly, to examine the hypotheses that Circle Time can develop students' listening, speaking and interpersonal skills and develop positive relationships in Chinese schools.

Secondly, to compare the different opinions and experiences of Circle Time between Chinese and UK students.

Thirdly, to explore the issues of Chinese educational reform for Affective Education.

## **1.5 A brief outline of the research design**

This study is a mixed design based on an experiment to introduce, conduct and examine Circle Time as a pedagogical practice to develop an equal and positive teacher-pupil relationship in a Chinese secondary school, and thereby, to shed light on current Chinese educational reform in the area of Affective Education. This study was seen as 'throwing a stone and watching ripples'. Since our childhood, we like to throw stones into water. Our main interest is not in the stone; it is more likely that we watch the ripples or the sound made by our actions. Sometimes, we could possibly encounter a startled fish or bird as a

result of our throwing stones. This could explain how a mixed design could actuate planned results or sudden unexpected results. Therefore, a follow up study will greatly benefit research in this field. In addition, it combines a variety of methods which could make the research claim stronger (Gorard & Taylor, 2004).

By comparing English and Chinese students' perspectives of Circle Time, firstly, it will guide Circle Time activities in Chinese schools; secondly, it can allow reflection on UK Circle Time experience and thus encourage the development of literature and pedagogical practice. Circle Time can assist in developing an equal, caring teacher-pupil relationship; this kind of relationship can help students to develop their personal and interpersonal skills, to raise their self-esteem and to achieve emotional competency. As Saarni (1999) indicates, emotional experience and social experience are reciprocally influential, as 'we are the products of our relationships' (Cassidy, 1994; cited in Saarni, 1999; p.9). Teacher-pupil relationships are different within the eastern and western cultures; therefore, the educational products will differ in certain ways. This research examines both the pedagogy (Circle Time) and the environment (Chinese secondary Affective Education). Can Circle Time function as it does in western countries in the Chinese environment? How do Chinese teachers and students react to the western pedagogy?

This research began with a preliminary study observing Circle Time in an English secondary school to generate English year 7 students' opinions of experiencing Circle Time with teachers and their peers. This phase is an ethnographical study that explores English students' experience and opinions. I participated in Circle Time sessions to learn through my own experience. The main study, based on the English school's Circle Time experience, set up a quasi-experimental study in a Chinese secondary school with year 7

pupils. Four classes were chosen as experimental classes. Two of the experimental classes are boarding classes (experiment 1). Students in these classes do not live locally (city centre), their local schools (urban schools) were not as desirable to the parents and students as the experimental school. Students in the other two classes are day pupils (experiment 2); they live in the city centre. Their parents work either for the government or for companies which have offices in the city centre. There were control groups corresponding to the two experimental groups respectively. Questionnaires in the self-esteem test were given to all year 7 students at the beginning and end of term to get a general impression of their self-esteem attainments. Students' academic results were also collected as support evidence. After examining independent variables of the pedagogical experiment, questionnaires and interviews were also adopted to gain Chinese students' perspectives of experiencing Circle Time.

In this mixed design, questionnaires, interviews, documents and observations have been employed in collecting rich qualitative and quantitative data. The experiment and quantitative questionnaires established a framework in answering the research questions; qualitative data, therefore, enriched the framework with in-depth investigation. The interpretation of both qualitative and quantitative data assists and triangulates in supporting the validity of findings. Data from questionnaires, different peoples' interviews, documents and researchers' observation notes bring perspectives from different angles in order to provide a holistic picture of Chinese Affective Education.

## **1.6 Significance of the study**

This study aims to shed light on the application of Circle Time to current Chinese educational reform in the domain of Affective Education. New insights are revealed from the perceptions of teachers and students. This research examines perspectives of students and teachers of Circle Time and Affective Education by collecting data from various sources. Findings from this research provide information from multiple angles to present a comprehensive picture of the reality of Chinese Affective Education from the specific practice of using Circle Time to expand the perspectives of students and teachers.

The significance of this study provides valuable information in order to 1) supplement the limited pool of current Chinese affective educational literature by presenting a practical model that can be adopted by action, thereby generating theories within the Chinese context; 2) provide valuable information for students, and especially for teachers to understand the importance of providing children with opportunities to listen to each other, express feelings and discuss issues; 3) enrich the literature of cross-culture study by developing borrowed pedagogy and introducing it to different settings.

## **1.7 Outline and structure of the thesis**

Including the current introductory chapter, this thesis comprises eight chapters. The thesis provides in-depth descriptions, interpretations and discussions of Affective Education in Chinese terms and the study of Circle Time as an intervention within the Chinese context, therefore the implications are significant in understanding Chinese traditional culture, current social-economic reform and predictable educational reform. Each chapter can be briefly outlined in this section.

**Chapter One** is the current introductory chapter which gives a brief introduction to the thesis. The outline of the whole paper includes the background information on this study, research motivation, rationales and research questions of this study.

**Chapter Two** begins with the economic and social background of this study, discusses the changes in the economy, society and politics of China in the last 3 decades along with China's opening-up and reform policies, then draws attention to the one-child policy and its influence together with the social and economic development and Chinese educational reform. In such circumstances, the transition from traditional culture and current social values, and the 'belief vacuum' are also presented to help with understanding the trend towards reform. The chapter continues with a background description of examination-orientated educational tradition and correlative problems of that system. Old Chinese moral education is explored in order to reconstruct Affective Education in the Chinese educational reform. This chapter sheds light on theoretical concerns for Affective Education in the current Chinese educational reform from a historical perspective.

**Chapter Three** starts from the individual's needs as the core of Affective Education, and goes on to build up arguments for the individual's needs and personal skills, relationships and interpersonal skills to be developed to facilitate positive relationships. In turn, positive relationships will contribute to personal development and raise the self-esteem of individuals. This chapter develops the theoretical framework of Affective Education from the individuals' basic needs to individuals within relationships; and from relationships, that influence personal development, to the cultivation of personal emotional literacy and interpersonal social skills. Following on the theoretical discussion, Circle Time is described and interpreted and is introduced in this chapter as an effective pedagogy in

developing children's interpersonal skills and for raising their self-esteem. The definition of Circle Time and the aim and function of Circle Time in relation to Affective Education and personal development are interpreted in this chapter. The significance of introducing and studying Circle Time within the Chinese context is also argued.

**Chapter Four** presents detailed descriptions of the research methodology, a philosophical discussion, the research design, and the process of conducting this study. The research design is based on best answering the research questions. The epistemological assumption of this study is rooted in a pragmatic stance. The design of this study is a mixed design with qualitative and quantitative strategies and methods. As no Circle Time research had been done in Chinese schools before, the design started as a preliminary study in an English school in order to examine firstly the research methods and also create comparative factors to examine the Circle Time experiment in the Chinese school. Although this is not a rigid comparative study, comparative elements play important roles in this study.

Next there is an in-depth argument explaining the choices of the research design. The chapter continues with an interpretation of the way the research was conducted. The selection of samples is introduced; the structure of the experiment is explained. Then, the instruments of the research are also presented in detail and further discussions are put forward elucidating the advantages and disadvantages of questionnaires, interviews, observations, and the documentary methods employed and integrated in collecting and triangulating both qualitative and quantitative data. Furthermore, this chapter also concludes with an explanation of how the data were analysed and interpreted. Issues of the role of researcher, validity and reliability, and ethical issues are also discussed in relation to the research.



**Chapter Five** draws attention to the data used in analyzing the method of Circle Time within the Chinese context. Findings from the experiment of Circle Time in the Chinese secondary school are described and interpreted in this chapter. Firstly, the dependent variables of the experiment are examined and explained to show evidence in examining the hypothesis that Circle Time can develop students' self-esteem. Secondly, the questionnaires about students' experiential opinions of Circle Time are also interpreted. The questionnaires include both Chinese and English students' opinions; the comparison helps this study to draw a preliminary picture of Circle Time within the Chinese context, and also to reflect on Circle Time in English schools and the teacher-pupil relationships within English perceptions.

In order to understand the function of Circle Time in developing students' personal and social behaviour and interpersonal skills, findings from in-depth interviews are also interpreted in this chapter followed with the evaluation of the questionnaires. A specific session of Circle Time will be presented in this chapter to show a detailed picture of how Circle Time was conducted in the Chinese school and how students reacted to Circle Time.

**Chapter Six** throws light on teacher-pupil relationships and the teachers' role in adopting a new pedagogy, on building up an equal, democratic relationship and transitioning from examination-oriented education and teacher-centred teaching to student-centred education.

This chapter starts from English teachers' points of view about the differences of teaching, learning and teacher-pupil relationships and between Chinese schools and English schools, combined with Chinese students' perspectives of teachers and teaching

in both China and the UK (Wu, 2003), and seeks to present a picture of the Chinese education system. Finally, the Chinese teachers' opinions of Circle Time are presented and discussed in depth. Chinese teachers' reactions to the intervention, their concerns, and situations of work and their emotional issues are the focus of discussion in this chapter.

The special case of Miss Chao's achievements in tutoring and her understanding of education as well as her perspective of Circle Time is presented and argued to help understand a Chinese teacher's attitude to the current educational reform.

**Chapter Seven** involves discussion which seeks to reflect on research and related societal issues. This study attempts from a practical level to initiate an opportunity for individuals to experience listening to each other, talking about feelings in groups and developing interpersonal skills. Therefore, individuals are seen to be valued and are encouraged to express personal feelings as well as to build up an equal and democratic relationship within the centralized tradition. The vision of this study is to change society by the individual's development at a practical level.

This chapter firstly discusses the influences of traditional culture on contemporary social values and how those influences are related to this research. Then from the phenomena of this research the aim is to reflect on the transition from traditional culture through globalization and social economic development in China. The different understandings and perspectives between Chinese teachers and students are also worth investigation and include the conflict between new personal and social needs and strong traditions. Western influence and eastern rejection and assimilation are also noted to aid further understanding of Chinese culture and educational reform trends.

The comparison between Circle Time in the Chinese school and in the English school also reflects the differences between the east and west. The study of Circle Time in the English school suggests the potential for the utilisation of Circle Time within the English school culture and the resultant advantages.

**Chapter Eight** concludes the study with a summary and review of the theoretical background, research design and analytical framework, then evaluates and reconsiders the research design, the experimental field work and the findings in relation to the research questions and the research background. Therefore, the accumulation of knowledge in this study and personal fulfilment are also discussed in order to look at and reflect on the research questions and in-depth discussions of the existing literature, research findings and limitations of the research. In particular, the conclusion also gives in-depth understanding and further implications of the current study as well as subsequent correlative suggestions for future investigations into Chinese Affective Education, teachers' emotional development and Circle Time within a 'big ground' context.

# **Chapter 2 Background to the research – Educational reform in a Changing China**

## **Introduction**

Over the last three decades, China has been experiencing profound economic, social and political changes. The transition started with the economic opening up to the western world and the reforms from a planned-economy to a market economy (Qi & Tang, 2004), which has had the result, as Thornton (2008; p.vii) summarized, that China's last 30 years of development can be found in today's headlines as follows: "China is the third largest economy in the world; a land of 200 million internet users with 500 million mobile phones; is a significant actor in some of the most pressing international concerns (North Korea, Iran, and Africa); and is one of the keys to whether humankind succeeds in addressing the common existential challenges of environment, energy sufficiency, and global warming." Bell (2008) also argues that compared with the United States' constrained political future, China's political future is wide open.

In 1911, the last Chinese feudal emperor ended his reign and also ended two thousand years of imperial history in China. Dr. Sun Yat-sen (also called Sun Zhongshan) founded the Republic of China and tried to establish a democratic commonwealth in China, Although he had to compromise with stratocracy during his time, the idea of democracy and a republic spread in China. His followers, ideological or official capitalists, were close to western countries and to adopting western policies to develop capitalism in modern China (Chow, 2007). When the CCP (Chinese Communist Party) won the Civil War (1946-1949), socialists introduced Marxism to China combined with Chinese

traditional “balance” (均 jun) of thought. Mao Zedong and his CCP government tried for nearly 30 years to get rid of social classes in China (Deng & Treiman, 1997), and they rejected capitalism. From 1949 to 1979, political events, such as the great jump and the Cultural Revolution took place in China, which led China to be closed to the rest of the world; the Chinese economy fell behind western economies and some Asian countries and also ideologically China was isolated from other countries. Since Deng Xiaoping came to political power after the Cultural Revolution, his policy stressed economic reform and opening up, which is close to capitalism – an economic policy found in most western countries.

Westerners tend to view China’s last 30 years of change just in terms of economic development and some social change; political change is thought to be coming more slowly than capital expansion (Thornton, 2008). China is seen as a centralized country led by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP); it retains a socialist system but has a strong element of the market economy (Williams, Liu & Shi, 1997), which is officially named “Socialism with Chinese characteristics (具有中国特色的社会主义)” and named by Nolan (2004) as ‘market socialist’ because it is still at the “Primary stage of socialism (社会主义初级阶段)”. The current Chinese characteristics suggest that politically it is a collectivist society; but the government has become separate from enterprises and allows enterprises greater autonomy to make decisions (Chen, 2004). The Chinese have experienced dramatic changes in the last 30 years. Some changes were predicted, some were unexpected and some are still anticipated. China is certainly not considered a democratic country from western countries (Nolan, 2004), however, much is taking place – in the government, the CCP, the economy, and society at large (Thornton, 2008).

Since 1978, when China adopted the policy of ‘opening up’, it has been facing profound social, economic and political transformation (Chen & Liu, 2000; Lee, 1997; Liu, 2004). Along with constant and rapid economic development and the spreading and expanding of western ideology, the ordinary Chinese people have more and more opportunities to make their own choices and to achieve their personal goals in life and in work (Williams, et al., 1997). The opening up happened immediately after the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), when traditional values were undermined and the communist dream was seen as an illusion. The ‘belief vacuum’ (Bell, 2008; Tan, 1999) has led to the current desire for ideological, spiritual and moral education which the Chinese are now addressing.

Changes also happened because of the birth control policy or the one child policy. In 1979, the Chinese government introduced the one-child policy to bring the birth rate under control, and to alleviate the social and environmental problems of China (J. Q. Chen & Goldsmith, 1991; J. H. Yang, 2007). Short *et al* (2003, cited in J. H. Yang, 2007)) point out that the one-child policy shapes children’s well-being by fundamentally shaping family life. The single child’s advantage in education, stated by Yang (2007)) might result from the fact that the reduced birth rate – and thus a smaller sibling size – increases parents’ abilities to provide higher levels of education for their children. As a consequence, the one-child policy and economic growth have changed the values and attitudes of parents, thereby influencing current Chinese social values and educational reforms (Romanowski, 2006).

This chapter will focus on the economic, political, social and cultural changes in contemporary China, and therefore the influences for ideological change, Chinese moral educational concerns and the current Chinese educational reforms. In so doing, the aim of this chapter is to draw a picture of the background of affective education, from Chinese

traditional values to the modern social transition. The objective is to answer the question of why research into the affective domain in China is worthwhile, and the rationale for adapting and conducting Circle Time as set out in this study as meriting attention.

## **2.1 Profound change since the opening-up policy and subsequent reforms**

‘Before the reforms and opening-up, Chinese society can be considered to have been closed, conservative, authoritarian and hierarchical’ (Qi & Tang, 2004; p.466). Under a single-party system which was established in 1949 when the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) took power, the central government not only regulated industry and farming resources and products and neglected markets and pricing, but also tightly controlled political and cultural tendencies. Under a planned economic model and centralized politics, where the individual’s interests were not really respected and valued, it was not possible for personal initiative and self-determination to be fully developed, not only in the economy but also in political and social life. “A highly centralized state does not operate its political and social life completely in accordance with the legal system, but depends on enforced administrative order and the personal authority of a leader to ensure a submissive relationship in every aspect of society” (Qi & Tang, 2004; p.466).

Since 1978, China has begun to make major reforms to its economy and has opened the door to the western world. The Chinese economy has been changing from being centrally planned to market based, has a strong potential for further development.

China's per capita income has grown at an average annual rate of more than 8% over the last three decades (Hu, 2007). According to The World Bank (2001), China's annual GDP growth rates in 1980-1990, 1990-2000 averaged 10.1% and 10.7%, respectively. Starvation and poverty in China have been reduced but this rapid growth has been accompanied by rising income inequalities (Hu, 2007). It is not my intention to discuss the income inequalities in China. However, 'China's economic successes have also generated inequalities and social exclusion (Chan, Ngok, & Phillips, 2008; p.5)'; which exerted pressures for social and political change. Economic change brings a chance and challenge for other changes.

The Chinese leaders adopted a pragmatic approach to many political and socio-economic problems, and sharply reduced the role of ideology in economic policy. Liu (2004) analyses the globalization and cultural trends in China, and points out that, under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, China has abandoned Mao's revolutionary idealism and has adopted an economic developmentalism in order to build a modern, market-oriented post-socialist nation (p.5). He also noticed that Deng's developmentalist strategy was to integrate China into the capitalist world-system only in the economic and technological sectors. Since 1978 when economic reforms were instituted, the government's role in the economy has been lessened to a great degree (Chen, 2004; Goldstein, 1996; 2004)', while in political, social, and cultural spheres there was never a clearly articulated acceptance of the norms and values of global capitalism. Integration into globalization, therefore, was never conceived as a total submission to capitalism in a strategic sense. However, an inevitable trend towards full-scale integration into globalization has clearly appeared in the last two decades, because modernization itself cannot be parcelled out into disjunctive segments. By virtue of its omnipotent sweep, globalization makes any fragmented,



piecemeal way of reform implausible and untenable. To be precise, China can never remain only “partially globalized” and must come to terms with all aspects and complexities of the consequences of globalization (K. Liu, 2004; p. 11). Long traditions such as Confucianism will still hold their important position. Although Mao Zedong tried to wipe out Confucianism after the establishment of his PRC, his own rule was actually influenced considerably by Confucians (Hofstede, 2001). Liu (ibid) also indicated that since Dong’s opening up and reform, Mao’s revolutionary idealism has been replaced by economic capitalism, while in terms of political and cultural idealism, the lack of a new ideological orientation now amounts to a serious crisis. The system of dictatorship and centralization of state power has been a basic feature of traditional Chinese politics. This kind of political organization is no longer appropriate for Chinese society in the new situation of the ‘socialist market economy (X. Chen, 2004; p.4), globalization and value pluralism (Qi & Tang, 2004; p. 472).

The introduction of the market economy in China has not only promoted economic growth, but has also gradually changed people’s thinking, motivation and behaviour towards financial interests, material consumption and individual identity (Qi & Tang, 2004). In this change, China faces both internal and external challenges. Along with its rapid growth in the last decades, the Chinese people desire a free ideology, open government and democratic politics after gradually achieving economic prosperity and technological advancement. Awakening individuals voice their views via the multimedia and internet, and put pressure on the government to be more open and to accept change (Bell, 2008). With the world’s largest population and the largest population of internet users, the pressure for the government to be open and efficient is powerful. 2008 witnessed the earthquake in Sichuan, the torch relay and demonstrations around the world,

the Olympic Games in Beijing, the poisoned milk powder and economic crisis after the Olympics. Although criticism still focuses on lack of democracy, human rights and freedom in China, undeniably the Chinese government has shown itself to be more open to the world and to its own people; the rest of the world expects China to be a member with open and reliable promises and a similar approach to other nations. The Chinese people are seeking ways to join the western world while at the same time having to compromise the strong traditions that exist.

Another essential social change is China's birth control policy. In the next section, the only-child policy and its influence on social and educational change will be introduced and explained in depth.

## **2.2 The only child policy and social change**

As mentioned earlier, since the Chinese government introduced in 1979 a one-child policy to control fertility, and to alleviate the social and environmental problems of China, demographers have established that the policy has successfully curbed population growth. Short & Sun (2004) emphasize that the one-child policy shapes children's well-being by fundamentally shaping family life. The traditional pyramid type father-centred family shape transferred into the inversed pyramid type, the 4-2-1 syndrome; therefore, the only child became the centre of family life..

Since the one-child policy was implemented, family structure has changed in China. The traditional family of more than three generations that is big in size and grandparent-centred with a filial piety structure has now been transformed into the smaller sized

family structure and the “4-2-1 syndrome”, so called because four grandparents, and two parents pour their attention on to one spoiled child. The traditional Chinese family was highly hierarchical and founded on the older generation. “And family relationships are resolutely hierarchical” (Hall & Ames, 2003). The traditional family relationships are based on Confucian philosophy, which create community as an extended family (Hall & Ames, 2003). Children in the family were expected to obey parents and particularly grand parents. ‘Filial piety’ was the sole morality – the correct way that enabled the family to maintain order and stability. Children were not encouraged to leave the family; and they were expected to look after their parents when the parents became old. The family size was normally big because of tradition and less travel. However, the new family has become smaller. People are willing to be more independent of their family and to have more ‘personal space’. As each new family is entitled to have only one child, the parents pay much attention to their own family and the only child. The advantage of this policy is that the only child family has the possibility of a higher quality of parenting, with more care and less neglect, as a greater portion of China’s limited resources goes into a small group of healthier, better educated children (Tobin, Wu, & Davidson, 1989). As far as education is concerned, the single child’s parents are able financially and emotionally to provide higher levels of education for their children (J. H. Yang, 2007). Also, the new system reduces the hierarchy within the family and replaces it with more democratic relationships.

However, the only child in the family can be paid too much attention and indulged by as many as six doting adults, and is likely to come to think of her/himself as ‘a little sun’ or ‘a little emperor’. Without siblings’ company and challenge, the only child has fewer chances to experience caring, sharing and negotiating with others. Only children were

constantly reported as being more spoiled, more selfish, less independent and as demonstrating less emotional well-being (Chen & Goldsmith, 1991). Chen & Goldsmith (ibid) suggest that the “4-2-1 Syndrome” creates a special home environment which may lead to a certain impoverishment of social perceptions, willingness to share, and interest in helping others. On the other hand, with the traditional Chinese culture of filial piety, the only child becomes the hope of the family and is expected to have a better future for her/himself and for the parents’ retirement. Therefore, the only child’s success in studying and future career choices becomes especially important. Children’s academic achievement is regarded as one of the factors which may ensure a bright future (Chen & Liu, 2000). Although a child is the treasure of the family, the child is expected to work hard so as not to disappoint the family, as the only child policy has increased the weight of expectation on each child. There is no chance for any family to risk the failure of their only child.

The perfection of human nature through education has always been emphasised and has influenced Chinese forms of education (X. Feng, 2002). In this respect, from a very young age, Chinese children are expected to follow traditional Chinese norms including respecting teachers, parents, and elders, working hard in order to achieve, and balancing the intertwined relationships between the individual and the collective. ‘In all cultures, children display an apparently inherent motivation to become competent and to construct knowledge about themselves and about social interactions (Edwards, 1986; cited in Schneider, 1999; p.73).

The family structure has changed from the traditional one. China was a society which upheld filial obedience. Younger people should respect older people most of the time.

Family life should be based on the desires of the older generations, ‘if the parents are still alive, the son should not travel far away.’ (父母在，不远行) (The Analects). However, the traditional culture has changed recently because of the change of family structure. Most families are formed from only two generations. Grandparents live on their own; or live with their offspring in order to look after their grandchildren. Only children hold incredible power in the family as a result of their unrivalled position (Zeng, 2009). As they are pampered, they do not think too much about caring and sharing with others. Mark Mullen, NBC News Correspondent in Beijing, notices that Chinese ‘little emperors’ do not learn how to share with others. Chinese parents try to protect their ‘little emperors’ even in the play ground (Mullen, 2008). Moreover, the ‘little emperors’ start challenging the power of their elders – parents and teachers in particular – because they are the first authorities they have to face and challenge, and then later in the society at large, traditional values are challenged by these new generations. In 2000, a 17 years old boy killed his mother because she pushed him to study hard to get a better result (Pan & Zhou, 2000). The shocking news made the whole nation review our educational attitudes and the relationship between parents and children.

In October 2008, there were 3 cases that shocked Chinese educators. A boy from Shanxi province killed a teacher in the classroom. In his dairy, he wrote that, he was a ‘bad student’ and had no respect from parents, teachers and peers. He had no hope of life. He decided to kill a teacher randomly. Two weeks later, another teacher was killed by her student on her way for a family visit. A week later, a university professor was killed while teaching (Y. Mu, 2008; Xin, 2008; H. Zhang, 2008). Although these cases were just incidents, however, questions were raised: what are the conflicts between children

and parents and between students and teachers? What kind of problems are children facing? What is the problem with education? What educational research should be undertaken?

In educational settings, school and traditional teacher-pupil relationships are starting to change. However, most teachers in school did not grow up in a one-child family and were educated in traditional ways. The issue of teacher-pupil relationships is still an essential issue in developing pupils' personal and interpersonal skills and self-esteem.

An overview of research (X. Feng, 2002) found that only children display many negative personal characteristics, such as being more self-centred and less cooperative, sociable, responsible and less able to take care of themselves than children with siblings, since their family environments lack peer communication, and only children are often spoiled by the indulgence of parents or grandparents. However, rather than blaming the misbehaviour of the only child, educational researchers should take responsibility by investigating the problems and seeking solutions through problem solving. Children do not have the right to choose whether to be an only child or not. If educational researchers cannot predict the consequences of policy making, then problem-oriented research is also necessary. As an old Chinese saying goes, 'it is still not too late to fix the sheepfold even if the sheep have run away (亡羊补牢, 为时不晚).'

Above all, research on developing a new style of teacher-pupil relationship, especially with regard to how this kind of relationship can be encouraged, is important and should be investigated as soon as possible to meet children's needs. What schools can do to develop children's personal well-being and their interpersonal skills to respect,

communicate and cooperate with other children and teachers should be all important targets for schools to work towards. The core idea is to be student-centred or human based.

In 2004, the current leader, Hu Jintao, proposed the building up of a harmonized society. A harmonized society should have positive relationships among people. Positive teacher-pupil relationships and positive peer relationships in school appear to be amongst the most important educational reform aims in school. In order to achieve harmony, some have paid attention to Confucianism, in order to seek ideas from tradition. The next section will discuss the revival of Confucianism. .

## **2.3 The Revival of Confucianism<sup>1</sup>**

Deng Xiaoping's opening-up and reform policy started in 1978 immediately after the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), which ended with Mao's death in October 1976. During the Cultural Revolution almost all secondary schools and tertiary level institutions were shut down from 1966 to 1968, most institutions remained closed until 1972 (Bernstein, 1977; Q. Gao, 1985; Unger, 1982). Teachers were criticized, denounced and even tortured by students. Some were arrested or 'sent down' (Xiafang) to work at farms and factories. After 1972 when schools reopened, there was not only a shortage of teachers, but also chaos in organizing the curriculum, where students mainly studied Mao's quotations (Deng & Treiman, 1997; Q. Gao, 1985). Political loyalty was the only concern of education at that time. Both traditional values and western ideas were

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<sup>1</sup> Same sub-title as Bell (2008; p.8)

abandoned. The Cultural Revolution and previous political events not only hampered Chinese economic development but also caused a ‘belief or moral vacuum’ and virtual spiritual starvation for the Chinese people (Bell, 2008; Tan, 2006). Since the opening-up and reform policies began, besides economic, social and political changes, the Chinese people are seeking ideological and spiritual comforts from traditional and western ideas. Confucianism has been reinterpreted in contemporary China to fill the belief and/or moral vacuum (Bell, 2008).

Confucius, also known as Kong Zi (551BC-479BC), was born 551 years before Christ. During his time, Confucius established schools to teach his philosophy. His ideas were widely accepted by a broad spectrum of the community, especially the emperors in different dynasties, which resulted in Confucianism being promoted by successive governments. A summary of Zhu (1992; p.4) follows: ‘commonly shared characteristics of the official Confucian education’ of China’s middle ages can be divided into five points:

1. The training of talent loyal to the government in power was its guiding principle.
2. It always saw the purpose of education in terms of utilitarianism, that is to say, its usefulness to those in power at the time.
3. The main instrument for its utilitarianism was the “mastery of the classics”, that is, a thorough knowledge of the texts and commentaries that had been officially approved.
4. It always measured its success by “the mastery of the Classics for utilitarian purposes” with reference to “classical techniques” (Jingshu, 经书), that is, the techniques of power needed by the government of the time to maintain its rule.



5. Its examining standard for whether one had become skilled in “classical techniques” was the ability to draw analogies from the sacred sayings of the classical texts.

Loyalty to the government is one of the most important factors that Confucianism advocated. In terms of utilitarianism, emperors could choose educated scholars and officers to work for the government in order to maintain their reign; on the other hand, this also gave the chance for educated scholars from lower social classes to reach higher positions, change their social background and also to achieve their ideals of contributing to the country and the people. The win-win model meant that Confucianism was highly valued, interpreted and reinterpreted so that it might best serve the emperors' reign. For the ordinary people, Confucianism was not just a chance for them to gain a higher social position, but also to cultivate their children's loyalty and filial piety to the family and to maintain the best interests of their family. The interests of both the sovereign and the ruled made Confucianism and the examination system well known and highly respected in China. At a personal level, according to Confucius, the individual should experience a coherent, positive moral education when young, so that good habits of conduct could be cultivated from early childhood and bad conduct could be eliminated. Along with the idea of giving positive moral education from early childhood, another fundamental idea of Confucius is to prevent faults before they happen (Wang, 2004). Young children are not considered to be able to understand the difference between right and wrong; it is the parents' or teachers' responsibility to distinguish right and wrong, teach them truth, values and morality by providing children with a pure environment in which to become a 'gentleman' in society. 'Gentleman' (Junzi) is a term from Confucius. A gentleman should always cultivate himself in order to possess all the accomplishments and virtues

that are desirable. Gentlemen (Junzi), according to Confucius, should possess all the accomplishments (Jun zi bu qi); should always cultivate themselves to be calm but not proud (tai er bu jiao), be restrained but not contentious (jin er bu zheng), be sociable but not cliquy (qun er bu dang); should seek justice but not personal benefit (Junzi yu yu yi, xiaoren yu yu li) (Wang, 2004).

In order to become a gentleman (junzi), education is important. Confucius thought everyone should have a chance to be educated (you jiao wu lei). He taught students by multiple methods according to their personality (yin cai shi jiao). The goal of education, apart from that of cultivating gentlemen, was to make good scholars who should work for the government (xue er you ze shi). The story about Mencius' mother moving house three times to find good models of neighbours for Mencius is commonly known in China via *Three Word Bible (By Wang Yinglin on the Song Dynasty)*, a book with three word rhymes, that has been extremely well-known in China for hundreds of years and which trains children in moral education.

Confucius' ideas became the core of Chinese education and also have greatly influenced other East Asian countries, including Japan and Korea. Confucianism has been severely criticized and abandoned twice in modern China as a hindrance to democracy and freedom. During World War I, after the end of the monarchy in 1911, 'the new culture movement (新文化运动)' was trying to introduce democracy and freedom in China. People in favour of the new cultural movement criticised a number of aspects of Confucianism - the three obediences (the subjects must obey the emperor, the son must obey the father, the wife must obey the husband) (三纲五常); man's superiority to

woman (男尊女卑); arranged marriages (包办婚姻) and feudal monopoly (封建专制). Confucianism was at first criticized as being opposed to democracy and freedom. This was also the first time individualism was prominent in Chinese culture, largely due to western influence. During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), Confucianism was also considered as an old tradition compared to Marxism, Leninism and Maoist teaching and was forbidden in China. (Qi & Tang, 2004)

After the Cultural Revolution, Marxism appeared to have failed in China, traditional values were questioned and summarily abandoned. People are now seeking a new ideology to fill the 'moral or belief vacuum'. Thus Confucianism has been reinterpreted to fill the gap (Bell, 2008).

Yu Dan, professor at Beijing Normal University, is well known in China as she is reinterpreting Confucianism, Daoism, and other traditional literature in TV programmes. Her books have sold over ten million copies (including six million pirated copies) (Bell, 2008). Supporters think her lectures have brought calm and peace to hearts in a troubled society. However, criticism has also been made of her inaccurate understanding of traditional literature. Some critics think she speaks for bureaucrats to fool people in order to make people obey the authorities. It is not my intention to argue about Yu's interpretations, whether they match the original Confucianism at an academic level; or whether she should encourage people to accept actuality and/or to obey the authorities. The fact is that there is a huge demand from people to express feelings, to be listened to, or to listen to others; as well as to share something from the heart.

One person left some comments at Yu's blog (2008)

不知从什么时候开始，我们的心灵不再宁静，总是充满了躁动和欲望，却不知所措，而追寻内心的安宁，便不自觉地成为我们的一种奢望。是于丹和她的讲座犹如丝绸般的流水伴随着静谧的音乐划过我们的心灵，在抚平内心的躁动，同时也让我们豁然开朗，原来生活可以如此简和随性。                      谢谢你，于丹老师。

*I didn't realize when it started, my heart is not peaceful any more; it is full of apprehension and restlessness. I have no idea how to deal with it. It is extravagant to have peace of mind. Yu Dan's words pass my heart just as softly as silk - like water with peaceful music. They calmed my restlessness, and opened my heart. I learnt that life could be so easy and not haphazard.*

*Thank you, Professor Yu (my translation)*

Apart from Yu Dan, other Chinese literature scholars – Yu Qiuyu, Yi Zhongtian are also reinterpreting Confucianism. As Bell (2008) argues ‘people seem to derive comfort from Confucian values.’ The reason for the revival of Confucianism is because Confucianism has been deeply rooted in Chinese culture. Even Mao Zedong, who was strongly against Confucianism and tried to demolish Confucianism during the cultural revolution, was influenced by Confucianism in his own rule, as argued by Hofstede (2001). The other reason for the revival of Confucianism can be seen as the new demand of individualism and personal liberty rather than the reconstruction of tradition. Individualism is always the most important concern in Confucianism. When, in 1949, the People’s Republic of China was established and the Communist Party came to power, centralization continued to be promoted in Chinese society according to the communist ideology; individualism,

on the other hand, was criticized as selfish and a negative characteristic in Chinese morality. Therefore, the development of the individual personality is not encouraged in Chinese tradition.

Chinese culture seems to be more self-consciously moral than many others are, and to have long and rich traditions of morality (Chow & Ding, 2002). The traditional Chinese values of harmony, respect for hierarchy, power distance, face-giving, reciprocity, holistic values, long-term perspectives, discipline, obedience and self-denial all contribute to shaping certain kinds of conflict handling behaviour (Ibid). The Chinese culture pays considerable attention to “Mianzi” (face). “Gei mianzi” (giving face) means showing respect to others. However, the person could be “Gei mainzi”, one who holds a higher status in the society. “You Mianzi” (having face) means being respected. If these signs of respect were from people who were in a higher position, that should make “You Mianzi” more significant. “Diu Mianzi” (losing face) is to be humiliated in public.

In Chinese society, individuals are not likely to express their emotions openly or to act on them publicly. They would choose to hold a relatively indirect, inactive stance towards conflict, such as avoiding and ignoring the conflict and trying to avoid open debate and direct confrontation (Bond and Hwang, 1986; cited in Chow & Ding, 2002).

Along with opening-up and reform policies, economic development has raised Chinese living standards. Transactions that take place in enchanting the everyday lives and experience of Chinese people in their schools, workplaces, and homes (K. X. Zhou, 1996)’. An individual’s personal interest and goals have come to be more attainable than ever before. The opening-up policy not only results in economic development but also

brings the opportunity for the Chinese to learn western ideology and culture. The one-child policy has changed the family structure therefore family values have also changed. Along with the rising 'living standards' (Dello-Lacovo, 2009; p.9), 'individual-oriented social values' and 'individualism' have been rising (X. Chen, 2004; p.4). Personality is now being encouraged to some extent which also brings the need to seek new ideologies appropriate for individualism. Chinese education was not prepared for these individual demands. Research and appropriate practice are needed to suggest ways in which to fill the vacuum (refer § 2.2).

Current examination-oriented education systems, however, based on Chinese traditional educational perspectives and attitudes and compounded by parents' high expectation for their only children to have a secure future, still remain implacably positioned and contain obvious problems. In the next section, the history of the examination-oriented education system will be discussed and the issues will be examined.

## **2.4 Examination-orientated education**

Examination-oriented education has long been embedded in Chinese culture and society. 1300 years ago, in the Sui Dynasty, the imperial examination system was established to select officers for the government, which has influenced Chinese political and ideological culture ever since, and has impacted significantly on the Chinese education system. Formal education revolved around the hierarchical, highly centralized series of government examinations which were stepping stones to official status and power (Dello-

Lacovo, 2009). Although the imperial examination system was abolished in 1905 (P. Sun, 2000), it still influences Chinese culture, society and education in various ways. Because Confucianism was one of the classical texts in the examination, both Confucianism and examination acted as tools for the government to select officers, for scholars to be approved officially, and it has also become the symbol of education.

Criticisms about the competition within education, and the burden of learning, have long been made and discussed in Chinese society (Li, 2003; Zhu, 2005). Although the examination-orientated education system limits children's creativity (Y. Li, 2001) and emotional well-being (Zhu, 2005) with more than one thousand years of historical tradition and the current need, it is still not easy to abolish the examination-system in the short term. People in favour of examinations (Liu, 2003) think that the examination system and policy to select are based on ability. This system also brings a chance for people from poor backgrounds to become officers and to make greater contributions to society. The long history of this educational system has guaranteed the educational quality of officers and governors, which also encourages a culture of education in society, and creates a stable society. For students from lower social backgrounds, peasants and workers, to have the chance of changing their social status, of getting better jobs and even of having a better future, no other way can be fairer than examinations (Y. Li, 2001).

As Li (2001) argues, there are two main issues in examination-oriented education. Firstly, it neglects the development of the majority of students and focuses on the minority of "excellent" students; secondly, the teaching context of examination-oriented education overlooks moral education, physical education, aesthetic education and labour education; and ignores developing abilities and personality. As a result of the influence of the

imperial examination system, the existing examination-oriented education stresses knowledge and academic outcomes. It is geared to the needs of a minority of students at the expense of pupils' whole development. In addition to Li's summary, examination-oriented education also employs limited ways of teaching. Teacher-centred teaching and rote learning force students to gain a broad knowledge spectrum. Assessments which cannot be represented by way of examinations have a limited chance to be developed in Chinese schools. Affective education (refer to § 3.1) or, in Chinese terms, moral education, derives from the Confucian tradition and is used today in modern Chinese education and current education reform. It has been taken seriously and is considered to be amongst the most important factors for children's well-being and all-round development (Zhu, 2005). However these factors are still at an exploratory stage and await practical application.

The Confucian tradition gives education a high status and Chinese parents want their children to have a good education (Simpson, 1987). Chinese parents always want their children to be successful and outstanding in life. In Chinese society, success is seen as passing the national university entrance examination, becoming a university student, studying for a higher degree, working for the government, and being promoted to a higher position. As a result, parents push their children to work hard and at the same time, push the schools and teachers to work hard on their children to make them 'successes' or even 'outstanding'. It is not possible for everyone to achieve the same success level, and as a result the 'successful' are very distinguished in society. This always results in competition. As a result, Chinese parents hold high standards for their children's



academic achievement. A Chinese story pokes fun at the high standards Chinese parents hold for their children.

*A Chinese mother is talking to her children: “What grade did you make on your reading test today in school? 93? If you had studied harder you would have been able to make 94.” The child returns after the next week’s test. “You made 94. You can do better than 94,” suggests the mother. “Just spend a little more time at your studies.” Finally, the next week’s test was 100. “But will you be able to keep it up?” inquires the mother. (Stevenson & Stigler, 1992, p.123)*

Chinese parents and teachers rarely praise children for a single success; they think children will become reluctant to work hard to stay at a high level. Chinese children are encouraged to work harder and harder to be better and better. Parents think it is wise to give few rewards and to put more pressure on their children.

Hofstede (2001) has coined the PDI (Power Distant Index) to interpret relationships in family, school and organizations in different countries as a consequence of different disciplines. According to Hofstede, eastern Asian culture shows significantly high-PDI phenomena, which may reflect Chinese society’s attitude to students’ status in their family and at school, and even later on in their social life at work.

**Table 2.4 Key Differences between Low- and High-PDI Societies: Family, School, and Work Organization**

Low PDI	High PDI
In the Family	
Parents treat children as equals. Children should enjoy leisure. Infertility no reason for divorce. Children should respect rules of civil morality. Children treat parents and older relatives as equals.	Parents teach children obedience. Children should work hard even if this is a burden. Infertility may be a reason for divorce. Informal lenience toward rules of civil morality. Respect for parents and older relatives is a basic virtue

Children expected to be competent at a young age, especially socially.  
Children play no role in old-age security of parents.

Small enterprises set up for job reasons.

and lasts throughout life.

Children not seen as competent until at a later age.

Children a source of old-age security. Especially to fathers.

Small enterprises for family interest.

## At School

Teachers treat students as equals.  
Students treat teachers as equals.  
Students-centred education.  
Students initiate some communication in class.  
Teachers are experts who transfer impersonal truths.  
Parents may side with students against teachers.

Quality of learning depends on two-way communication and excellence of students.  
Lower educational levels maintain more authoritarian relations.  
Educational system focuses on middle levels.  
More Noble Prizes in sciences per capita.  
More modest expectations of benefits of technology.

Students dependent on teachers.  
Students treat teachers with respect, even outside the class.  
Teacher-centred education.  
Teachers initiate all communication in class.  
Teachers are gurus who transfer personal wisdom.  
Parents are supposed to side with teachers to keep students in order.

Quality of learning depends on excellence of teachers.  
Authoritarian values independent of educational levels.  
Educational system focuses on top level.  
Fewer Noble Prizes in sciences per capita.  
High expectations of benefits of technology.

## In motivation

Traditional children's stories stress strong achievement motivation.  
Hope of success.  
Preference for tasks with uncertain outcomes, calculated risks, and requiring problem solving.

Traditional children's stories stress strong security motivation.  
Fear of failure.  
Preference for tasks with sure outcomes, no risks, and following instructions.

## In the work situation

Weak loyalty to employer, short average duration of employment.  
Preference for smaller organizations but little self-employment  
Skepticism toward technological solutions.  
Innovators feel independent of rules.  
Renegade championing.  
Top managers involved in strategy.  
Power of superiors depends on position and relationships.  
Tolerance for ambiguity in structures and procedures.  
Appeal of transformational leader role.  
Many new trademarks granted.  
Innovations welcomed but not necessarily taken seriously.  
Precision and punctuality have to be learned and managed.  
Relationship orientation.  
Flexible working hours not appealing.  
Belief in generalists and common sense.  
Superiors optimistic about employee's ambition and leadership capacities.

Strong loyalty to employer, long average duration of employment.  
Preference for larger organizations but at the same time much self-employment.  
Strong appeal of technological solution.  
Innovators feel constrained by rules.  
Rational championing.  
Top managers involved in operations.  
power of superiors depends on control of uncertainties.  
Highly formalized conception of management.  
Appeal of hierarchical control role.  
Few new trademarks granted.  
Innovations resisted but, if accepted, applied consistently.  
Precision and punctuality come naturally.  
Task orientation.  
Flexible working hours popular.  
Belief in specialists and expertise.  
Superiors pessimistic about employees' ambition and leadership capacities.

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Source: Hofstede (2001; p.107-108)

As a High-PDI society, at home Chinese ‘parents teach children obedience’; ‘children work hard even if it is a burden’; and have to respect parents and older relatives because of their age and status. At school, ‘students treat teachers with respect even outside classes’, just like they respect parents and the older generations, because teachers are considered to have the same position as parents. “One’s teacher should be one’s father all his life”. The Chinese are expected to show the same respect to teachers as to their fathers. ‘Parents are supposed to side with teachers to keep students in order’. However, this is not really true nowadays as parents side with their child sometimes for social benefits and other matters; but when it comes to subject studies and academic outcomes, parents have no debate about with whom they should side. They side with the teachers every time. It is the same with the western low PDI societies. Children are also encouraged to be a success. However, in the low PDI societies, children hope to succeed, while in China, especially for parents with an only child, both parent and child have a particular fear of failure. When children grow up, they will maintain the attitudes they have learned, even at work and in society. They respect authority, and have confidence in specialists and expertise. Chinese society certainly matches the high PDI society as Hofstede (2001) has described it. Individuals, especially children, are educated to efface their personality, and to develop well acknowledged abilities and morality in order to satisfy the group and society to which they belong or aspire to.

As Schneider (1999, p.73) indicates ‘in a collectivistic culture, one’s identity as a member of a group moves to the forefront. Compared with an individualistic culture, the group’s goals achieve greater importance, with individual goals becoming concomitantly less important. Members of a collectivistic society assume greater responsibility for each others’ welfare. In many if not most cases, this responsibility includes shared concern for

each other's children, and, very often, collective child-rearing arrangements.' Hofstede (1983, 1984; cited in Schneider, 1999; p.74) also established that individuals in certain cultures more easily accept that power is unevenly allocated. In high-power-distance cultures, children may be more likely to value social conformity and to assume authoritarian beliefs. Children's relationships with adults would be based on unquestioned obedience.

Half a century ago, the celebrated Chinese writer Lu Xun (1995) stated in one of his articles that the childhood experience would be children's future fate. Half a century after Lu Xun's statement, from Hofstede's research, compared with western societies, it still can be seen that in family, school and work organizations (the society), Chinese children still have to obey and depend on parents, teachers and authority without question and to seek 'hierarchical control roles' to be ahead of others when they start working in organizations. When they grow up, they will pass these values on to their children; and to other generations, who will in turn repeat the same fate. Traditional culture indeed applies strong influences to social and educational systems.

However, along with rapid economic growth after the opening-up and reform in the last 30 years, those who were born after the 80s only-child policy was first introduced have grown up with changes in family structure and personal values. Chinese children's status in the family and at school, and even later on their social position in society, has been raised and demands further changes. Communist ideology is weakening (Bell, 2008) as a result of the expansion of the market-economy and capitalism. The Chinese have been experiencing profound changes and transitions. Although examination-oriented education and traditional values still hold important roles, these roles have been questioned and

challenged by Chinese society. Parents expect their only child to be offered a better education; the only children want to have more personality; society wants more freedom and liberation. There are strong needs for current Chinese education to change.

A new wave of educational reform in China started soon after the opening-up policy and economic reform. However, current ‘quality education’ reform has been introduced (Su Zhi Jiao Yu) and has gone from an idea to action over more than two decades. The key issues remain the same “What is quality education? How can quality education be conducted?” In the next section, Quality Education (Su Zhi Jiao Yu) will be explained, and the issues existing within the current reform will be discussed and argued.

## **2.5 Current educational reform – Quality Education (Su Zhi Jiao Yu) and relevant issues**

*Su Zhi Jiao Yu* (Quality education) is considered to be the opposite of examination-oriented education, and has been advocated since the mid 1980s, initially by Deng Xiaoping. But in Deng’s time, he merely stated that the aim of education is to promote the quality of the whole nation (L. Li, 2003). Quality education is the country’s strategy to stress the training of children’s comprehensive ability instead of focusing only on their performance in study.

The term “Quality Education” first appeared in the article “Quality education is the new target of the junior high school” (Yanshi, 1988, cited in Y. Zhu, 2004). Since then,

“Quality Education” has been argued about, debated and questioned in China. In 1994, the National Educational Council (Ministry of Education) announced at a press conference that reform was the only way to reduce Chinese students’ learning burden. They urged schools to change examination-oriented educational patterns, strict teaching hours and controlled examinations (CERN, 2001). Although this was just an announcement, it shows that the learning burden was not just on students but on the whole nation. The aim of Quality Education is to focus on students’ well-rounded development rather than only on ‘memorisation and examination scores’ (Dello-Lacovo, 2009). However, Dello-Lacovo (ibid) also points out that the purpose of cultivating these “high quality” people is not their own personal fulfilment but to meet the needs of the nation.

In 1999, the central government published the report *Decisions on Deepening Education Reform and Promoting Character Education in an All-round Way* (Guanyu shenhua jiaoyu gaige quanmian tuijin sushi jiaoyu de jue ding (CCPCC, 1999). The main theme of this conference was the motivation of all the CCP party members and all citizens to an extensive educational system reform, with the goal of advanced quality education conducted comprehensively in order to raise the nation’s quality and creativity; and to develop the country’s scientific and educational standards. The decision also stressed that the tenet of quality education was to raise the nation’s quality of education; to produce cultivated students possessing creativity and practical ability; to be communist successors with high ideals, morals, literacy and discipline and to develop moral, intellectual, physical and aesthetic potential. In particular, the decisions also stress the teaching methods of moral education, and encourage teachers to combine moral education with subject teaching that is relevant to student’s everyday life and social practices and that

overcomes formalism by paying attention to effectiveness. This conference was the first time that the nation was officially mobilized to implement quality education, thereby marking a new stage of progress.

The aim of quality education is to cater for all students, fully develop their character, tap the potential ability of the educated person, and promote the whole moral, intellectual and physical development of students in all its aspects (Y. Li, 2001; B. Liu, 1997, 2000; Ma, 2004; G. Wang, 2002; S. Wang, et al., 2000). Zhao (J. Zhao, 2003) points out that quality education should be based on the nature of humans, and the character development of individuals. Chen (2001) argues that equality consciousness should be considered as the primary element in quality education. Students should be thought of as equal to teachers.

Although the idea of quality education is to develop the whole person of the child and to reduce the learning burden for students, putting the ideas into practice in schools is not as optimistic as was anticipated by policy makers. Although the state council has determined and advocated that promoting quality education is the core of educational reform, some issues have emerged which cast doubt on the practicality of quality education in the current Chinese educational system.

Firstly, the main issue in developing quality education is that it is understood in different ways. Cao (2004) summarizes the different understandings or definitions of quality education.

1. Some consider quality education equivalent to creative education; it means that students should be encouraged to develop their creativity.

2. Some consider quality education to be the development of the whole person. However, they think the development of the whole person means that students need to learn not only mathematics, language and science, but also art, music and PE; this understanding also neglects pupils' inner development as individuals.

3. Some think that the nature of quality education is a kind of guidance or counselling programme to "rectify a deviation". This suggests that quality education should correct behavioural and mental problems which stem from the system, especially those which come from stress, because of the proportion of students entering schools at a higher grade.

4. Some even think that the aim of quality education should be to abolish examinations. They believe that examinations are the cause of learning burdens.

Cao (*ibid*) argues that quality education has not been accurately defined and understood by educationalists and teachers. He suggests that in order to promote education, firstly, educational theories are needed to underpin it; secondly, a new, democratic teacher-pupil relationship is demanded; thirdly, relevant educational equipment is necessary and the curriculum also needs to be changed; finally, the examination system should be reformed. Other articles also share Cao's view (Gong, 2004; J. Zhang, 2004a; J. Zhang, 2004; J. Zhang, 2004b; J. Zhao, 2003).

A survey by the People's Daily (2001) shows that parents and teachers do not understand what quality education looks for. Over half the surveyed parents selected "enter a college or university" as their expectation for their children, followed by "live a happy life", and



then “be a useful person to the society and the country.” Over 32% of teachers surveyed had no idea that they should play their own part in the drive or objective.

Gong (2004) criticizes the fact that quality education is considered to be the opposite of examination-oriented education. However, Chinese education has inherited the characteristic that it cannot eliminate examination-oriented education completely, to establish and perfect quality education immediately. He suggests that quality education should embrace both the examination sector and the non-examination sector. If the examination-oriented education cannot be negated completely, then the idea is simply to restore the balance in favour of quality education.

An interesting issue in quality education is that little research has been done in this area, although there are articles written by people from a range of backgrounds.

A review of the articles about quality education, which were published before 1999, shows most of them were in favour of the idea of quality education. Some of them were written by education officers<sup>2</sup> and journalists rather than educationalists. In 2000 and 2002, articles started analysing the development of quality education (Z. Chen, 2001; Daily, 2001; Z. X. Li, 2002; B. Liu, 2000; J. Sun & Xie, 2000; S. Wang, et al., 2000). Sun & Xie (2000) argued that Quality Education should be transferred from theory to practice. However, their article suggested only that action was needed, but did not conduct research on what to do or how to do it. More recently, articles have started to

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<sup>2</sup> Educational systems are different in China from the western ones. Education officers may not be educational researchers.

question and criticize quality education, because it has not moved from the theoretical level.

Another significant issue is that researchers do not, in the main, write articles on quality education. Journalists, officials and non-researchers have played an important role in talking about quality education. However, it is hard to find research about quality education in practice.

What is the reality of quality education in schools? I worked in a secondary school from 1995-2001. In 1997, the National Educational Council held a National Educational Conference in Yantai, my home city, to exchange experiences of conducting quality education in primary and secondary schools. This conference was considered to be a milestone in advancing quality education (Zheng, 1998). As secondary teachers at that time, we, my colleagues and I were not clear about quality education. We knew the term quality education, but we did not know its significance, as how to teach students in a “quality way”. In our school, what we construed as quality education was that we taught pupils the entire curriculum, but sometimes we did not pay serious attention to the arts, physical education or even history and geography. The students understood quality education as “quality-examination education”.

As I mentioned before, the idea of Quality education advocates treating all students equally and developing every student holistically. Putting it simply, this embraces two main elements: the first is the teacher-pupil relationship, and the other is the pupils’ personal development. The teacher treats every student equally, this means that the teacher respects the individual, and the education is based on the different needs of

individual students. The individual student has the right to be taught and to learn. Individuals are encouraged to learn on their own initiative (B. Liu, 1997, 2000). It is universally recognised that in schools teachers do not treat pupils equally. One reason is that teachers and pupils do not share equal relationships; another reason is that teachers do not treat every student in the same way. Most teachers favour students who perform well in their subject, who study, or whose parents have special authority in society.

One more issue about quality education is not just relevant to the curriculum setting, but also, most importantly, is interrelated with pupils' holistic development – that is to develop the whole person rather than just to learn academic knowledge. It means that schools should not focus just on academic teaching. They also need to be concerned about pupils' physical and emotional development.

In the China Education Yearbook 2007, Mu (2007) states that in 2007 Quality Education is still the focus of Chinese education. The Ministry of Education, the CCP Propaganda Department, the Institute of Social Science and the CCP Youth Pioneers have conducted a study about quality education in 2006. The issues raised from their results have three aspects: firstly, new and old conflicts; secondly, system barriers and policy issues which coexist; thirdly, education systems and society which influence each other. The existing phenomena are still affecting pedagogy, neglecting the teaching of morality and unilaterally affecting college entrance rates. Students' learning burdens have not been reduced.

In fact, quality education is just one name or idea of Chinese educational reform, along with the economic and social change. In 1993, the State Council issued an Outline of

Chinese Education Reform and Development (Zhongguo Jiaoyu Gaige he Fazhan Gangyao)(CSC, 1993). It stated that along with the deepening of reforms in the economic system, political system, and technology system, the educational system reform should match the others and should change the old pattern of too much control, with a step-by-step building of a multi-functional system. That means educational reform has fallen behind other reforms. In 2005, the Ministry of Education announced six key emphases in educational innovation and development; one of them was to boost quality education. ‘The essential of education is educating people, the principle of education is morality. Morality and moral education is at the core of Confucianism and Chinese culture (Qi & Tang, 2004).

In the Guardian newspaper, a report (Meek, 2004) about Chinese children from Shanghai can give us some perspectives about Chinese children’s lives:

“We don’t sound like children, do we?” asks one boy, Zhang Zhe Yuan, who, like several of these children, has lived abroad. (Even those who haven’t, speak to me in astonishingly fluent, expressive English.) In their Uniform of blue and white tracksuits, with red scarves at the neck, they have a keen, active look, but they say they do nothing but study. “...for us it’s a very hard life now,” says another child; “The competition is intense”. One girl, Xie Lu, who lived in Leeds for a while, “It’s so much pressure; the child has too much to live up to,” she says.

At No 2 Fudan Affiliated, where entrance exams for high schools are coming up, the 14-year-olds say it is normal to work 14 hours a day. It is not believed by the journalist, however,

“We do!” insists Zhang Zhe Yuan. “We wake up at 6:30am, we don’t have enough hours to eat, I skip my dinners for homework. We’re not supposed to have this much pressure at school, because we’re kids, we’re children!” Another boy, taciturn until now, speaks up: “I think I’m just like a robot.”

The paper also talked about the Chinese children’s views of their parents:

The good parent’s job, accordingly, is to create a perfect studying environment. “Our parents sometimes do lots of things that we should be doing for ourselves because they want us to concentrate on our grades,” says Zheng Xiu Yi.

Yes, the children say, their parents love them. “They put so much love on us that love becomes a reason to do everything.” Xie Lu explains. In particular, love is the reason they must work hard at school.

These stories about Chinese students’ school and family lives appeared in a newspaper in 2004, when *Su Zhi* (quality) education had been advocated for 10 years. Shanghai, the Chinese economic centre and most developed city in China, has an education system, which is ranked as one of the highest in all of the provinces. Children there, however, still suffer learning burdens and other pressures:

[Zhen Xiu Yi says] “You give’ em As, they want A-plus, you give them A-pluses, they want A-plus plus and plus. Maybe I’ll get 98 %, and my dad goes, ‘what went wrong? It is common, apparently, to score 100% in a school test, and then be urged to try harder next time”. (Meek, 2004, p.2)

The fact is teachers and parents require students to achieve as high a grade as they can. Once children believe that they cannot achieve the academic success demanded by teachers and parents, they feel a sense of alienation and disconnectedness from those key-socializing influences (Cheung & Tsang, 2002). Because pupils are engaged too much of

their time in subject study or other studies required by teachers and parents, they have little chance to express and explore their feelings and to experience interpersonal relationships. They learn inequality from their relationships with parents and teachers. They have to compete with their peers with less chance to learn cooperation, team work and discuss feelings between peers.

A report from Shandong Province (Shang, 2002) shows that in the Quality education pilot project schools, teachers still concentrate on the textbook rather than the new curriculum standards. In fact, there are few textbooks for teachers to choose from, and assessments in schools are still based on the knowledge of textbooks. Teachers prepare some ‘show lectures’ for inspectors but most of the time they still force students rather than facilitating them to learn.

However, the term moral education in the Chinese context is different from the western understanding. In the next section, I will present a brief introduction to Chinese Moral education, and its relationship with affective educational understanding.

## **2.6 Chinese Moral education**

In China, moral education is considered the soul of education (Qi & Tang, 2004). In the Chinese educational system, *Si Xiang Pin De Jiao Yu* (Ideology and Moral Education) is the nearest equivalent to affective education in a Western context, and is emphasized and generally known as ‘moral’<sup>3</sup> education. Zhu and Liu (2004) define Moral Education in

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<sup>3</sup> The term “moral education” in the Chinese context is much broader than in other settings.

mainland China as an umbrella concept that consists of education within the communist ideologies of politics, law, morality, mental health and so on. They point out that, strictly speaking, “moral education” in the Chinese context cannot be translated as moral education in English, however, there was no other more suitable word that could be used.

The Outline of Secondary Moral Education (MOE, 1988) categorizes moral education content into 8 aspects:

1. patriotism education
2. collectivism education
3. socialism education
4. idealistic education
5. moral education
6. labour education
7. socialist democracy and legal compliance education
8. favourable personal mental health education

The content from the outline is still based on the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference common programme of 1949 (Zhongguo Renmin Zhengzhi Xieshang Huiyi Gongtong Gangling), which prescribed ‘loving the country, loving the people, loving labour, loving science and loving public property’ as the public morality of the Chinese citizen (Lee, 2004). The 1988 outline of Moral Education (MOE, 1988), emphasised patriotism, collectivism and socialism, but personal development and emotional well-being appeared relatively less important. Moral education, as described in the Outline, includes:

Chinese traditional morality, social ethics, the ability to distinguish right and wrong, preliminary professional morality, environmental morality and students' daily behavioural norms of education and discipline

The 1988 Outline also states that personal mental health education comprises:

Self-esteem, self-love, honesty, integrity, aggressiveness and optimism; youthful mental health, sexual morality, right relationships between boys and girls and friendships; healthy life style, personality and specialities; the cultivation of strong willpower, character and self-discipline.

In comparing the Outline with “SEAL” in England, we see that SEAL stands for ‘social and emotional aspects of learning’, which include five broad aspects of learning: self-awareness, managing feelings, motivation, empathy and social skills (DfES, 2007).

The language in the Outline about personal mental quality education draws a picture of a ‘healthy’ student, and sets a standard for teachers and students to achieve. It is still for the policy maker, or social morality teacher to consider what the students should have or achieve. The SEAL is more concerned with the students’ viewpoint, in the understanding the self, the managing of feelings and the development of social skills. It is not my intension to judge which is better. but it can be seen from the documents, that the influence of culture remains significant.

Chinese moral education shows strong influences from Confucianism. Confucian moral education aims at a noble person who is characterized by superiority of mind, character, ideas and/or morals (Wang, 2004). In Confucian philosophy, there were two kinds of



people in the world, the noble people or gentlemen (Junzi) and the ignoble people. Confucian always stressed the virtues the noble people should have, and what the noble people should do when in a certain situation. Everyone was encouraged to be a noble person. A noble person was also too exemplary to have problems. If one has problems, it also means a failure in becoming a noble person.

When talking about the term ‘affective education’, we must consider that firstly, affection was not to be shown in public in Chinese traditional culture and was not encouraged; secondly, there was no term such as ‘affective education’ under the umbrella of moral education; finally, even the translation of an ‘affective education’ is not totally the same as the western term. In fact, affective education in China is almost totally orientated towards values and moral education in school (Katz, Romi, & Qui, 2005) rather than towards pupils’ personal and social development.

Traditional Chinese culture stresses centralization rather than the individual, so for many years the personality of the individual has been mainly ignored and has not had consideration and/or has not been developed (P. Li, Zhang, Lin, & Zhang, 2004; J. Sun & Xie, 2000; Y. Zhu, 2004). Since the reform and opening-up in 1978<sup>4</sup>, tremendous changes have taken place in China. Rapid economic development has caused changes in the “material and spiritual life” of the Chinese (Meek, 2004). Capitalist and communist economies both exist and influence Chinese political and social values and morality. Along with reform and opening up, at the same time, the one child policy I mentioned earlier was introduced in the late 1970s, which changed the Chinese traditional family

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<sup>4</sup> Reform and opening up – In 1978, China changed planned economics into market economics, and started to encourage foreign capital to invest in China. This was followed with political, social and cultural changes in communist China.

structure and therefore social relationships. These changes also challenged the traditional teacher-pupil relationship and the pursuit of correct ways for handling the relations between diversification and centralization. This led to reconsideration of the relationship between the individual's values and the core values of moral education (S. Yang, 2004). Ye (2001) and Tan (1999) argue that traditional moral criteria are disappearing whilst on the other hand, new values and morals have not yet developed. A "Belief vacuum" is one of the reasons for social moral issues and moral education in school remaining ineffective and inefficient. Scholars from Mainland China (Xu, 1996; cited in Lee, 2001; Qi & Tang, 2004; Tan, 1999, 2006) share the opinion that China is at a transition stage, and is facing conflicts between eastern culture and western culture, traditional culture and modern culture, self-centredness and collectivism. Zai (1998) reveals the dispute about whether the social values in China are collective-oriented or individual-oriented. Along with the process of implementation of a market economy, altruism has declined and individual-oriented social values or individualism has obtained tremendous attention from the public and individuals. The rise of individualism in China means that the ordinary Chinese may have the opportunity to make their own choices and to achieve their personal goals in life and in work as well (Williams, et al., 1997). The most fundamental change is the loosening of state control of production by separating government from enterprises and allowing enterprises greater autonomy to make decisions (X. Chen, 2004).

The old, firm social system has been broken, traditional culture is questioned; however, a new, steady, active and open society and affiliated value system has not matured enough to be accepted by the public. There is no clear vision to represent a future value and moral system. Marxism and Leninism are neglected or ignored and not mentioned in the

main by Chinese scholars. Bell (2008) thinks that the reason Chinese officials and scholars do not talk about communism is that hardly anybody really believes that Marxism should provide guidelines for thinking about China's political future. Lee (1997) studies moral education documents issued by the CCP Central Committee (1988) and the State Education Commission (1988; 1990). He points out that the expressions of moral educational policies are always "problem-oriented". When each educational document is issued, it starts with a statement of the problem, and then suggests solutions. All problems are analysed and solutions are suggested and are grounded in ideological discussions, which reflect the government's ideological stand at the time. Lee (1997) also suggests that the call for reform in moral education by the CCP Central Committee was to develop the kind of moral education that could meet the needs of the early stage of socialism and market economy, that could be based on pedagogical principles, and that could be youth-centred. Of course, all are based on the guiding principles of Marxism and Socialist spiritual concepts. More recently in response to the rapid social and economic changes, Chinese educational reform and innovation has started emphasizing the individual's development (Lee, 1997) This is essentially affective in nature and to some extent parallel to Western developments. As Lee (1997) has summarised, the CCP Central Committee has paid attention to youth-centred and pedagogical principles. However, Marxism and Socialist spiritual conceptualization are still stressed as the guiding principles. Lee (2004) points out that after the Cultural Revolution Confucianism was once again utilized as a means of rationalizing communist politics. On the other hand, traditional cultures are deeply rooted in China. Marxist and Leninist beliefs have been formulated and gradually have become flexible and loosened following economic development. Li (2001) also points out that this is because in mainland China, moral policy is centred within the state apparatus, and is divorced from reality, because it no

longer coincides with the individual's need of independence, freedom and development of the personality. As a result, school moral education does not tally with social and family values. This causes inconsistency of speech and action. Personal needs are neglected and ignored. In fact, the current moral educational approaches to affective education in China tend to be based on theory rather than actual pedagogy. Sadly this is seldom articulated at a practical classroom level. As Zhan & Ning (2004) indicate; there are many inconsistencies between teachers' theoretical knowledge and their actual teaching methods in moral education. One of the most widespread problems is that moral education teachers are familiar with teaching facts and information, but they lack experience in facilitating students' learning through practice. This presents a major difficulty for the advance of moral educational reform.

The conflict between personal-developmental function and social-political function causes tension in integrating collectivism and individualism (Cheng, 2008) in contemporary Chinese moral education. Some scholars (Qi & Tang, 2004; Tan, 1999; Fengyan Wang, 2004) reinterpret Confucian moral philosophy to accommodate contemporary changes. Others (Tan, 1999, 2006; W. Zhu, 1992) criticize Confucian political utilitarianism. They think political morality started its transition to democratic morality along with the plural ideology. Personality and individualism are developing quickly and seem likely to influence moral education. Tan (2006) thinks that current social morality is changing, developing and transforming.

## Conclusion

This chapter discussed the Chinese examination-oriented education system, current reform and the development of moral education following economic, social and political changes and the influence of opening up and reform in the last 30 years. China is being forced to make difficult adjustments as it rethinks, reflects and is reborn.

Since the opening-up policy and reform, starting from economic transition and development, and encompassing social and political change, China has opened to the world and also started to learn from other countries. New technology and new ideas have come in to modify old ideas and consequently engender new interpretations. It is time for China to reform and develop in a variety of ways.

The Only Child policy contributes to reducing the population. On the other hand, however, it changes the family structure and traditional family and social values. It brings children more chances and materials for education, but also creates personal, emotional and social problems which educators need to research and attempt to solve.

Because of the Cultural Revolution and western influence, people are reinterpreting Confucianism with the hope of filling the moral vacuum. Current educational reform is still suffering from the conflicts between the old tradition and newer thoughts, east and west social values, systems and personal needs, individualism and collectivism. Moral education, especially in terms of social value changes and the reform of ways of teaching, needs to seek new frameworks and contents.

In conclusion, educational reform is essential. Moral education needs to be more thoroughly researched in order to gain a theoretical definition and to validate practical patterns for guidance.

# Chapter 3 Personal social development in Chinese affective education and Circle Time

## Introduction

The previous chapter has discussed current educational reform along with social, economic and political changes in China. This chapter focuses on the theoretical framework that informs this study.

Centralization has been valued in Chinese political culture for over two millennia since the time of Qing Shihuang, the first emperor. In his time the feudal centralization of state power was established in 221 BC, and a uniform ideology was viewed as an important factor in uniting the whole country (P. Sun, 2000; X Zhu & Liu, 2004). In order to consolidate his reign, Qing Shihuang ordered the destruction of books and the execution of hundreds of scholars, which was called “Burning books and burying scholars” (*Fen Shu Keng Ru*), as a way of reinforcing his control of ideology and culture. Centralization has influenced Chinese political culture from then onwards. Education became the tool of the emperor’s political ends and was promoted by successive Chinese governments, and this has influenced the educational attitudes of the Chinese people (W. Zhu, 1992; p.80). Confucianism, with the characteristic of obeying and serving authority, was advocated by all the subsequent emperors and governments; later followers of Confucianism reinterpreted Confucius’ original ideas and developed Confucianism in ways that are more in favour of political centralization and control. Confucian educational ideas were indeed influential in China’s traditional education and their influence can be properly understood only through historical investigation (W. Zhu, 1992).

As I argued in the previous chapter, the Chinese political tradition of centralization has existed for more than 2000 years; currently the PRC (People's Republic of China) is still a centralized power. In traditional Chinese social values, individualism is frowned upon within society generally and within small organisations such as the family. Personal needs have to be subsumed to the needs of the family, the organisation, and society. Thus, although people in higher positions could satisfy their personal needs up to a point, they still had to defer to those above them.

Centralization certainly resulted in Chinese society being very hierarchical. In such a society, personality and personal needs are neglected and inhibited. The Cultural Revolution (1966 -1976) in particular trampled on the individual's privacy, human rights and personal basic needs. However, since the opening-up policy and reform over the last 30 years, along with rapid economic growth and social political transition, the market economy in China has not only promoted economic growth, but also has greatly changed people's thinking, motivation and behaviour towards financial interests, material consumption and individual identity (Chan, et al., 2008; Goldstein, 1996); this, in turn, is also changing Chinese educational objectives and attitudes.

Current educational reform in China (see § 2.5) stresses student-centred education instead of traditional teacher-centred teaching; this can be understood to be the result of the increasing demand of personal needs and the development of individualism. However, little research has been done on students' personal and social development in China. Under the umbrella term of moral education (see § 2.6), affective education has not been adequately considered in relation to students' holistic development.



This chapter will start with definitions of affective education in eastern and western contexts by discussing the importance of education for the individual's needs, and then will argue that students' emotional maturity (Lang, 2005) and positive interpersonal relationships will contribute to their self-esteem and holistic development in school.

Firstly, in section 3.1 the affective education terminology from both Chinese and western contexts will be reviewed and interpreted from theoretical understanding to its practical implication. The meaning and dimensions of affective education are different in China from the west (Zhu, 1993). This section will draw attention to the affective understanding in the Chinese context. Secondly, the section also engages with and interprets individual's needs and emotional development, children's self-esteem, relationships in school and the interpersonal social skills for students to learn in order to develop equal and positive relationships and self-esteem, which is also discussed in the following sections. Section 3.2 starts from the individual's needs and moves to the centrality of the individual's emotional development. It argues for the importance of Chinese students and teachers pursuing personal needs. Section 3.3 draws attention to students' self-esteem and emotional wellbeing. The terms 'emotional intelligence', 'emotional literacy' and 'emotional competence' will also be discussed, to assist in the understanding of individuals' emotional needs and self-esteem. Section 3.4 continues the argument that relationships in school play important roles in developing students' and teachers' emotional wellbeing and in fulfilling individuals' personal and social needs. The theory and pedagogy of Circle Time and its potential contribution to children's personal, social and emotional development will be presented and explained in terms of its significance for this study. As a Chinese educational researcher studying in a western context, introducing western theory and pedagogy to the Chinese educational system, my personal

experience enables me to look back at Chinese contexts from the outside, which widens my horizon and enables me to have a deeper understanding of Chinese education. And also, the Chinese context gives a chance to test western pedagogy from different points of view. By interpreting the definitions of Chinese affective education and moral education, it is intended that there be an effective comparison, importation and exportation of educational ideas (Alexander, 2000). Sections § 3.5, § 3.6 and § 3.7 consider Circle Time in terms of developing students' personal and interpersonal skills thereby arguing that Circle Time could possibly change peoples' relationships practically by changing ideas, thoughts and behaviour. This chapter will draw conclusions from theoretical concerns to explain that, in this study, Circle Time is essential at a practical level in developing Chinese students' personal and interpersonal skills and positive teacher-pupil relationships.

### **3.1 Affective education – western terms and eastern meanings**

In the West there is some tradition of the significance of that dimension of education described as affective education (Best, 1998; Bloom, 1982; Gysbers, 1994; Lang, 1994; Lang, 1998b). Affective education, according to Lang (1995), is manifested in different ways throughout the world, examples being pastoral care, personal and social education, counselling and guidance, comprehensive guidance, socio-emotional learning, emotional literacy, character education, holistic education, life education etc. "Certain subject areas such as personal, social and health education, moral education or citizenship education have evident links with affective education as well as arts education in its many forms

(music, the arts, drama, poetry, architecture, film and dance) (Puurula, 2005; p. 5).” Lang (1995) defines affective education as part of the educational process that concerns itself with the “attitudes, feelings, beliefs and emotions of students; it is concerned with personal and social development of the individual’s self-esteem and relationships with others (p.276)”. Researchers in an international research project (A. Puurula, et al., 2001; p.166) describe affective education as “a significant dimension of the educational process and teaching concerned with the feelings, beliefs, attitudes and emotions of students, with their emotional literacy, interpersonal relationships and social skills, i.e. with the non-cognitive aspects of students’ development”.

The definition of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development from Ofsted (1995; p.19) exhibits the western perspectives; it is said that it

- provides its pupils with knowledge and insight into values and beliefs and enables them to reflect on their experiences in a way which develops their spiritual awareness and self-knowledge;
- teaches the principles which distinguish right from wrong;
- encourages pupils to relate positively to others, take responsibility, participate fully in the community and develop an understanding of citizenship; and
- teaches pupils to appreciate their own cultural traditions and the diversity and richness of other cultures.

As has been argued in the previous chapter (see § 2.6), the moral education covered by the Chinese term is different from that covered by the western term. Hsu (2003)

compares primary affective education in Mainland China and in Taiwan; she thinks that moral education can be seen as the origin of what is now identified as affective education in Chinese society. However, moral education in the school curriculum is just part of affective education with guidance or educational counselling being equally significant. Because of political influence, the moral educational context is different in mainland China from that in Taiwan. It is not easy to find a similar term in the Chinese context that can be equated with Affective education in the western context. The closest analogy is Chinese personal, mental health education (MOE, 1988), which comprises:

self-esteem, self-love, honesty, integrity, being active and/or optimistic; youth mental health, sexual morality, right relationships between boys and girls and friendship; healthy life styles and personality and speciality; cultivating strong willpower, character and self-discipline.

(From *Outline of secondary moral education*, 1988, my translation)

It is also helpful to understand the meaning of affective contexts from textbooks rather than to look at the specific terms, as the curriculum brings a clearer picture about what exactly is happening currently in Chinese schools.

Current Chinese educational reform seeks to move from teacher-centred to student-centred education (Lee, 2001). Political and ideological aspects have been reduced significantly in textbooks. If we look at the table of contents of the Compulsory Education Standard Experiment text book (Table 3.1), it can be seen that the contents are now closer to students' lives.

**Table 3.1 Table and content of Ideology and Morality (Year 7, first term)**

<b>Unit 1 Smile at new life</b>
<b>Lesson 1 Treasure the new starting points</b>
New school, new classmates
Create a new group
<b>Lesson 2 Adjust to a new study tune</b>
New world of study
Enjoy studying
<b>Unit 2 Knowing about your new self</b>
<b>Lesson 3 Treasure life</b>
The world becomes wonderful because of life
Human life is special
<b>Lesson 4 Happy youth</b>
Walk into youth
Understand youth
Greeting youth
<b>Lesson 5 New self-expectation</b>
Update myself
Find out my potential
New image of myself
<b>Unit 3 Have an interesting life</b>
<b>Lesson 6 Be the master of your emotion</b>
Diversifying emotion
Learn to control your emotion
<b>Lesson 7 Quality life</b>
Temperament and interest
Seeking elegance in life
<b>Unit 4 Have a healthy and safe life</b>
<b>Lesson 8 Learn to reject</b>
Temptations around you
Learn to reject what is bad
<b>Lesson 9 Protect yourself</b>
Danger and protection around you
Violation and protection

**Source** [Compulsory education standard experiment textbook – *Morality and Ideology education*(C. Sun, 2004), Year 7, term one; my translation]

The four units and 9 lessons in the textbook are designed for first year secondary students; the content comprises information about the understanding of self, the environment

around the relationship between self and others; knowledge about growing up, emotional issues, and handling relationships. Therefore, it is mainly relevant to personal and social development. This is a good sign of transformation to student-centred education in China. As the textbook is at the experimental stage, the training for teachers to adapt to the new content is not up-to-date and at a practical level, new teaching strategies are still in need of reform and of being researched. Yang (2004) argues that traditional moral education adopted the lecture and modelling guide to deliver moral values, which cannot transmit morality to students; in fact, it has caused doubt among students and caused them to question moral values.

Ban (2003), the chief editor of the current experimental textbook *Ideology and Morality*, points out that the reform of Chinese moral education should change from ‘cultivating’ to ‘learning’, therefore, he recommends ‘moral learning’ by which he means learn to care. According to Ban ‘learning to care’ changes traditional moral education from the top-down pattern of the teacher dominance to students’ learning through a democratic model where everyone is a learner. Therefore, it will create an equal relationship between ‘you and me’. Learning to care includes care about self, care about others, care about society and care about nature. It not only adjusts the human-human relationships, but also adjusts the human-nature relationships. It covers issues which are human, societal and environmental. The core context of ‘learning to care’ is caring for people, especially caring for people’s spiritual and emotional development, namely, ‘emotional caring’. Ban’s thinking and ideas show that some Chinese educational researchers and educators have recognised that the traditional teacher-pupil relationship and the way of teaching should change. His idea of moral education encourages a change from the theory of teaching to learning, from knowledge development to learning and developing together,

which suggests a more equal and caring teacher-pupil relationship. Although Ban hasn't done any research about how this kind of new teacher-pupil relationships can be established and developed, at least the focus has been transferred from a knowledge base to a human base. The humanistic idea puts human beings forward as the principal concern. The human-human, human-nature relationships have been presented in textbooks for students' personal and social development.

This is a significant change and positive starting point for Chinese children and educationists. After 30 years of rapid economic and material development, attention has now been paid to individuals' development (Williams, et al., 1997). The needs and emotional development of individuals is not just theoretically discussed by researchers, but also examined as to how they can be achieved. In the next section, I will argue for the initial educational concern – the needs of individuals from the influence of humanistic psychology and socio-emotional stress.

### **3.2 The needs of individuals**

The word 'individual', according to the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary (2000), means that 'a person is considered separately rather than as part of a group, or refers to one who is original and very different from others, or is a person of a particular type, especially a strange one.' The definition explains the term 'individual' as a single, special and unique person. The needs of the individual, however, are not the needs of a particular person, but the needs of individuals as human beings. Given the focus of my research, it is important to understand the needs of the individual.

Maslow (1987) conceptualizes different needs in terms of a basic needs hierarchy:

- The physiological needs
- The safety needs
- The belongingness and love needs
- The esteem needs
- The self-actualization needs

□

The physiological needs are stronger than the safety needs, which are stronger than the love needs, which in turn are stronger than the esteem needs, which are stronger than those idiosyncratic needs which Maslow has called the needs of self-actualization. This term, first coined by Kurt Goldstein (1939, cited in Maslow, 1987; p.22) refers to 'people's desire for self-fulfilment, namely, the tendency for them to become actualized in what they are potentially.' This tendency might be phrased as the desire to become more and more what one idiosyncratically is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming.

Glasser (1986, cited in Cheung & Tsang, 2002) also points out that people have five basic needs: the physical need of survival and safety, and four psychological needs of fun, power, freedom and belonging.

Valett (cited in Moskowitz, 1978; p.13-14) categorized children's basic needs into six areas; in each area, the needs are explained in detail:

- Physical security – food, clothing, shelter, good health



- Love – attention, encouragement, praise, physical contact, warmth, support
- Creative expression – promoting sensory capacities, gaining pleasure in expressing oneself creatively, exploring new ways of expressing oneself
- Cognitive mastery – achieving relative competency in basic skills
- Social competency – acceptance and interaction with peers, getting to know and relate to peers better
- Self-worth – strengths stressed and weaknesses played down

From the definitions of needs above, the common characteristics can be categorized into two main types: physical needs and emotional needs. Both physical needs and emotional needs vary along with individual's cognitive and perceptive competency development. As Maslow indicates:

The human being is a wanting animal and rarely reaches a state of complete satisfaction except for a short time. As one desire is satisfied, another pops up to take its place. When this is satisfied, still another comes into the foreground, and so on. It is a characteristic of human beings throughout their whole lives that they are practically always desiring something. (Maslow, 1987; p7)

As with an individual person, people's needs vary compared to others at different stages. During the last 50 years, the Chinese people, in satisfying their physical needs have had experiences ranging from starvation to unprecedented material affluence. The emotional needs or psychological needs 'dignity, respect, belongingness, love and esteem' (Maslow, cited in Moskowitz, 1978) have become essential to individual Chinese (Williams, et al.,

1997). In schools, students desire respect from teachers and their peers, wish for a feeling of belongingness to their group and desire to be liked and accepted by others.

However, if students lack the power to influence their own environment, their psychological needs cannot be met (Cheung & Tsang, 2002). In this way, the students will find alternative ways to meet those needs. These ways will lead to results such as bullying taking place in school. On the other hand, when students are empowered, they have the opportunity to affect their school culture. This will in turn make their learning more satisfying (Cheung & Tsang, 2002; p.12). The UN Convention for the rights of children clearly states that ‘children have the right to say what they think should happen, when adults are making decisions that affect them, and to have their opinions taken into account (UNICEF, 1989).’ However, the current school environment of Chinese children still needs to be improved. Chinese children seem to be treated as objects to be taught and machines for study. They not only suffer burdens of learning, but their personal feelings and interpersonal development are neglected (Ban, 2003; A. Hu, 2007).

In relation to this, there are increasing issues of children’s mental health problems in China. Yang (2004) suggests that there are 30,000,000 Chinese children who have emotional difficulties and behavioural problems. Research by Beijing University shows that in Beijing 10.9% of children had behavioural problems in 1993, and the figure had increased to 18.2% by 2003 (S. Yang, 2004).

Teachers face the great challenge of social and economic changes too.

**Table 3.2.1 Chinese Primary school and Junior middle school enrolment 2004-2007 (Numbers based on thousands)**

	Primary schools				Secondary school (year 7-year 9)			
	Number of schools	Enrolment	Number of current students	Number of teachers	Numbers of schools	Enrolment	Number of students	Number of teachers
2004	394.2	17,470.1	112,462.3	6,171.4	65.2751	20,946.4	65,275.1	3,500.5
2005	366.2	16,717.4	108,640.7	6,132.2	62.486	19,875.8	62,179.4	3,492.1
2006	341.6	17,293.6	107,115.3	6,120	60.885	19,295.6	59,579.5	3,475
2007	320.1	17,360.7	105,640	6,133.8	59.4	18,685	57,361.9	3,473

From the numbers in table 3.1, along with decreasing numbers of students enrolling in school each year, the number of schools and the number of teaching positions are decreasing as well. From 2004 to 2007, numbers for primary schools dropped from 394.2 thousand to 320.1 thousand; numbers of secondary schools dropped from 65.2751 thousand to 59.4 thousand; that means that 74.1 thousand primary schools and 5.8751 thousand secondary schools have been closed in the last four years. There were 37.6 thousand primary teachers and 27.5 thousand secondary teachers who left their teaching positions. This is another result of the one-child policy which has caused a decreasing birth rate. The government reduces school and teaching staff numbers to economize in educational expenditure. The reduction in the number of schools can consolidate educational funding to raise the quality of education, and also raise the pressure for teachers to work hard to achieve higher teaching standards in order to retain their jobs. However, a report (Human Resources Report, 2003, p5) also shows that there is a serious

shortage of teachers in China especially at secondary level. As a result high school (year 10 -12) education cannot be made compulsory. Another reason for school numbers decreasing is that educational funding in China is low and uneven (Dello-Lacovo, 2009). As shown in table 3.2.2, the government funding in Chinese education has never reached 4% of GDP as planned, it does not match the average 10% economic growth in China, and is lower than in most countries.

**Table 3.2.2 The proportion of GDP spent on education in China**

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
GDP(Billion¥)	74463	78345	82068	89468	97315	105172	117252	136515
Educational funding (billion ¥)	1862.54	2032.45	2287.18	2562.61	3057.01	3491.40	3850.62	4465.86
%	2.50	2.59	2.79	2.86	3.14	3.32	3.28	2.79

*Source: The development report of China education 2005 (Feng Wang, 2006; p.34)*

The educational expenditure is also uneven between key schools and ordinary schools, between city schools and rural schools, and there are huge differences (D. Feng, 2007; H. Y. Zhou & Shen, 2006).

Although unequal educational expenditure, qualified teacher shortage, school closures and the high student drop-out rate (nearly 25% at year 9 level (Human Resource Report, 2003)), have implications for current educational reform and affective education programmes, I shall concentrate on the arguments of teacher-pupil relationship and students' personal development.

Teachers are also expected to develop new styles of teacher-pupil relationships, however, they themselves were educated in the traditional manner, and they have to adapt to the new situation. Teachers are under great pressures from society, the school management, the parents and the students; a significant number of teachers have mental health problems. A survey by Shanghai Star shows that, in Shanghai, 48% of the primary and secondary teachers have mental health problems (Shanghai Star, 2004). A recent study in Shanghai (Tang, Zhang, & Zhu, 2009) discovers that 77.5% primary and secondary teacher feel great pressures at work and over 30% teachers are weary of their profession. In Hangzhou, 44.12% of teachers feel that they are under great professional pressure (J. Yang, Bian, & Jiang, 2006). A psychological study about teachers' mental health in Huangshi suggested that of 1664 elementary and secondary school teachers, 51.3% had psychological problems, with 28.1% of those teachers displaying obvious psychological symptoms; in 2% of those cases, the problems were considered serious (Wei & Xiong, 2008). Teachers' mental problems can directly influence pupils. They cause tense teacher-pupil relationships and affect pupils' personal and social development (Jin, Xing, & Yu, 2008; Sutherland, Lewis-Palmer, Stichter, & Morgan, 2008).

According to the BBC news (2002), from the age of 16 to 34, suicide is the leading reason for death among Chinese young people. It has caused 19% of the deaths in this population. In analysing the reasons of Chinese students' suicide, Xie, Ma & Zhu (2002) includes four aspects: firstly, the educational system attaches importance to academic teaching rather than moral development; secondly, too much attention has been paid to the student by family and society; thirdly, individual support and counselling systems have not been established in Chinese universities; and finally, the media need to adjust the way they report suicide cases.

A survey by the Guangzhou Youth Club (2008) to investigate The Best of All of 5-12 year old children in Guangzhou has provided interesting information about children's relationships with each other. 90.2% of the children like play the most. 38.32% are afraid of loneliness, 36.7% are afraid of comments from parents, 31% of the children choose their classmates as their most disliked people, and 13% are afraid of darkness. The survey indicates that students want to have more time to play, they want to have companions but have problems relating to their peers and that they have pressures from parents.

Although there was not enough evidence to show that there is a poor peer-relationship between the only children in school, from the data about 31% of students most dislike the people who are their classmates. While it is important to consider the reason behind this phenomenon, one can argue that most students spend most of their time with peers and it is easy to like or dislike classmates as they have little choice as to whom they can relate to. There is no study about who are the most disliked people of western school children for comparison, however, the data can still cause alarm and as a result researchers pay attention to the Chinese 'only child' and his or her relationships with peers. Children from an 'only-child family' do not usually have a chance to experience communicating, cooperating and compromising with siblings before they come to school. Does school bring them opportunities to develop their personal, interpersonal and social skills? From the 38.2% of children's loneliness statistic, and the 31% of children disliking their classmates, there is certainly the suggestion that attention is needed to study Chinese children's personal, interpersonal and social development, especially in their relationships in schools and how Chinese schools teach pupils in fostering those skills and abilities.

There is an increasing personal need for Chinese students to develop their relationships in schools (Nolan, 2004). The economic development and the one-child policy make it possible for the family to spend more money on children's education and also to improve the standard of education. Students not only want to pass examinations and go to university, but they also want to be cared for and respected in school and want to have more equal teacher-pupil relationships and positive interpersonal relationships with other students. The relationship can help students to establish an equal school environment, in which they can develop confidence and trust. A useful approach to 'adolescent needs' suggested by Giles *et al* groups them into six main categories:

- Establishing personal relationships;
- Establishing independence;
- Understanding human behaviour;
- Establishing self in society;
- Normality;
- Understanding the universe.

(Giles et al., cited in Dearden, 1972; p.55)

The above categories by Giles *et al.* are concerned also with relationships which are described as essential to 'adolescent needs'. When children start their secondary school and when they become physically and emotionally independent from parents, they start building personal relationships with others and being recognized as individuals in society. They need to be empowered to be independent, to be confident in personal relationships, to understand they are equal to others, to be themselves in society, with self-esteem. As a result, interpersonal relationships and communication skills to achieve positive relationships are essential for students' emotional development and to raise self-esteem.

In the next two sections, the individual's emotional development and their self-esteem will be discussed initially, in section 3.3. Then, in section 3.4, the importance of students' interpersonal relationships and the development of their social skills will be discussed.

### **3.3 Self-esteem and emotional development**

Self-esteem, as defined by Humphreys (1996) has two central dimensions – the feeling of being lovable and the feeling of being capable. Being lovable is the relationship with others when children feel they are being accepted by others and belong to the group; the feeling of being lovable will raise self-esteem that facilitates feeling the same as others. Being lovable also means that the person is willing to share that love with others as well as to love others. Being capable is the assurance of self to be able to do things and to take responsibility. Being capable brings about an understanding of the self from the inside, which is built up from affirmations by others and oneself. Mruk (cited in Miller & Moran, 2007; p. 602) has also shown that, historically, the main definitions of self-esteem actually fall into two categories: those which focus primarily on feelings of self-worth, and those which are based upon an individual's judgment of their personal competence. To achieve self-esteem, individuals should firstly understand their own feelings or emotions and abilities, understand that they are in a kind of relationship in which they are loved and understand that they have competence in handling things around them.

Rogers (1982) has summarized two classic contributions to the study of self-esteem in an educational context: William James and George Herbert Mead.

First, James (1890; cited in C. Rogers, 1982) is 'credited with the elaborating the distinction between the "I" and "Me". The I is the self as subject, the knower, while the



Me is the self as object, the content of what is known.' In Roger's view, the distinction of 'I' and 'Me', is entirely necessary, and can be the basis for detailed research into the self-concept. "What a person knows about him/herself is determined both by the characteristics of the I and the Me". The self as Me, the object of our own self-perceptions, was divided by James into four aspects: the spiritual, material, social and bodily selves. These aspects were considered to be of greater significance for the determination of levels of self-esteem.

James (1890; cited in C. Rogers, 1982) thought that self-esteem was the second aspect of self-concept that was of particular significance. He defined 'self-esteem as a person's success divided by his aspirations'. That means that a person's self-esteem is related to her/his goal and achievement. If an individual was very successful in achieving their goals, they might have high self-esteem. On the contrary, if the final achievement is lower than expected, then it will result in lower self-esteem; 'Low self-esteem can be raised by obtaining greater success, or by lowering aspirations'.

The implications of this statement for education will also be affected by cultural issues. As discussed in the previous chapter, Chinese parents always wish their child to be outstanding among others. They always set higher goals for their child to work towards. Children are pushed to achieve a certain level of 'success' in the short term, however, this will not necessarily bring the children higher self-esteem in the long term.

Mead (1934, cited in C. Rogers, 1982), is one of the leading exponents of symbolic interactionism, particularly the development of self in social interaction. 'Symbolic interactionism' assumes that people respond to their environment and in turn, the

environment has an influence on them during the process of social interaction. The attitudes of others, “particularly significant others such as parents are eventually taken as attitudes that one holds towards oneself. If parents or other significant people interact with children with favourable attitudes, then in response, the individual will have favourable attitudes to themselves.” Rogers (1982; p.165) points out that a child’s self-concept is essentially a reflection of the attitudes that the child sees others holding towards him, and his self-concepts will have a determining effect upon the child’s behaviour. So, if a teacher has unfavourable attitudes towards a child, the child will notice this, incorporate it into their self-concept and begin to act accordingly. Teacher expectations become transformed into pupil performance.

The terms ‘emotional literacy’, ‘emotional competence’ and ‘emotional intelligence’ are also relevant to self-esteem. Emotional literacy, defined by Weare (2004; p.2), is the ability to understand ourselves and other people, and in particular to be aware of, understand, and use information about the emotional states of ourselves and others with competence. It includes the ability to understand, express and manage our own emotions, and respond to the emotions of others, in ways that are helpful to ourselves and others.

The definition of emotional competence defined by Elias *et. al.* (1997; p.2) overlaps emotional literacy: ‘it is the ability to understand, manage and express the social and emotional aspects of one’s life in ways that enable the successful management of life tasks such as learning, forming relationships, solving everyday problems, and adapting to the complex demands of growth and development’.

Saarni (1999; p.127) also categorized the skills that children need to have in achieving emotional competence:

1. awareness of one's own emotion
2. the ability to discern and understand others' emotions
3. the ability to use the vocabulary of emotion and expression
4. the capacity for empathic involvement
5. the ability to differentiate internal subjective emotional experience from external emotional expression
6. the capacity for adaptive coping with aversive emotions and distressing circumstances
7. awareness of emotional communication within relationships
8. the capacity for emotional self-efficacy.

Another popular term 'emotional intelligence' which is used particularly in the USA, was introduced by Mayer and Salovey. It is defined as:

the ability to perceive accurately, appraise and express emotion; the ability to access and/or generate feelings which facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; p.10).

'Emotional literacy', 'emotional competence' and 'emotional intelligence' and other terms such as 'mental health' (Hartley-Brewer, 2001) and 'emotional well-being' (Stewart-Brown, 2002) all comprise the awareness of one's own and others' emotion, and the ability to manage one's own emotion and deal with the relationships with others. These are the kind of abilities or skills that can be taught, practised and ultimately

developed (Panju, 2008). As Griffiths (1984; cited in Lin, 2006) claims: 'education is an emotional matter, and it deals with emotional matters' in a wider sense, the education of emotions uses these encounters to help the students to become aware of their own and others' emotions and to help them to express or regulate their emotions in a productive way.

Dunlop (1984:p.1; cited in Lin, 2006) comments on the phenomenon that 'the cognitive or intellectual components of education are usually first thought of in terms of achievements, the emotional or affective components are normally thought of first in terms of deficiencies'. Students are often rewarded and praised for their various achievements in the 'acquisition of knowledge, their ways of looking at things, their theoretical procedures and methods and their concepts, languages and forms of discourse'. In contrast, students are rarely valued and praised for their achievements when they are able to understand emotions, are capable of expressing their emotions and/or solve problems with an appropriate emotion. It is often taken for granted by adults that children should be able to understand emotion and express their feelings at a certain age. Emotional development, therefore, is not seen as a skill a child can learn, but rather as an ability they should possess. When emotions come to light, they are often problem-oriented and accompanied with certain symptoms, such as apathy, self-centredness, emotional volatility, over-excitability, sentimentality, lack of self-control and self-knowledge. These symptoms often easily build the impression that people who have emotional or behavioural problems also always have other kinds of problems. Emotions in schools and in society are usually unseen and may even be negatively labelled. 'The deficient tendency traps emotions into a pathological symptoms' hole '. As Tew (2000) comments, the British education system has largely separated the cognitive and affective

curricula. In the Chinese education system, few studies about pupils' emotions have been undertaken. The curriculum of moral education is that students read or memorise politicians' words. When emotions are taught in school, students, are still given texts to read and memorise, and then they have to reflect their understanding. Class teachers who deal with pupils with emotional issues discover that those students usually have behavioural problems and/or their academic achievements fall to unexpectedly low levels.

Raising an individual's self-esteem to make them lovable and capable of caring for others can be achieved by individual learning interpersonal and social skills and building up positive relationships (Humphreys, 1996). Individuals can also learn to be able to do things and to take responsibilities. In the next section, I will draw attention to the establishment of relationships and how to develop social skills.

### **3.4 Relationships and social skills**

This section focuses on the function of personal and social education. As McNiff (1986) suggests, the function of personal social education can be defined in two ways. Firstly, it focuses on establishing relationships. It encourages pupils to develop appropriate attitudes to the well-being of society, and trains pupils to cope with stressful situations and learn how to avoid them. Secondly, it empowers pupils to understand their full potential in a complex and fast-changing society. Self-respect is the basis of many of the qualities which help people live what Aristotle called the 'good life'. Unless people respect themselves they cannot truly respect others (Talbot, 2000; p.17). 'Trust is an

essential condition of a good relationship...in school, pupils must feel able to trust teachers, teachers, in turn, must feel able to trust the management team and each other, all must trust the head (Talbot, 2000; p.17)' Values are important in school to build trust, and therefore to develop positive relationships which foster a trusting environment for pupils' personal and social education. Traditionally, school takes the initiative in developing the personal and social education of pupils alongside their academic remit because of their contact with pupils, families and the local community (Tew, 2000).

Research shows that social skills and group acceptance are essential for people's normal life outcomes. In the child psychology literature, the degree to which children are accepted by their peers is used as a way of assessing their level of social adjustment (Hartup, 1978; cited in Bigelow, Tesson, & Lewko, 1996: p.7), which in turn has long-term implications for their subsequent success in academic achievement, job and marital stability, and mental health (Bigelow, et al., 1996) By contrast, children who are least liked by their peers more often have problems with self-esteem (Duck, 1991; cited in Bigelow, et al., 1996), and have trouble handling peer conflict (Asarnow, 1983). There are other outcomes arising to some extent, such as problems in academic achievement, job and marital stability and mental health as I mentioned above.

Roffey (2006) suggests that to build a psychologically healthy community means raising awareness of what is involved in positive relationships at all levels – not teaching social skills just to vulnerable students or to those who have difficulty in controlling anger. An emotionally literate school acknowledges the importance of people's feelings and gives relational values and skills high priority.

Peers are the same aged children with similar physical needs and emotional developmental levels. Pellegrini and Blatchford (2000) define ‘peer’ as referring to individuals of equal status, who share similarities in a number of ways.

Recently psychologists, educators and others interested in children have become more concerned with the cognitive aspects of children’s behaviour than with the social aspects. Piaget (Pellegrini & Blatchford, 2000; J. Piaget, 1932, 1962; J. Piaget, 1970) stated that peer interactions were the best context for encouraging children’s cognitive and social development. Children learn from others’ different viewpoints to develop their concepts of the world. As a result, different peer configurations have potent effects on children’s behaviour. In the peer group, children come to realize that if they understand themselves, it will help them to understand others better (Curry & Bromfield, 1998). On the other hand, the more they know about others, the more they understand themselves.

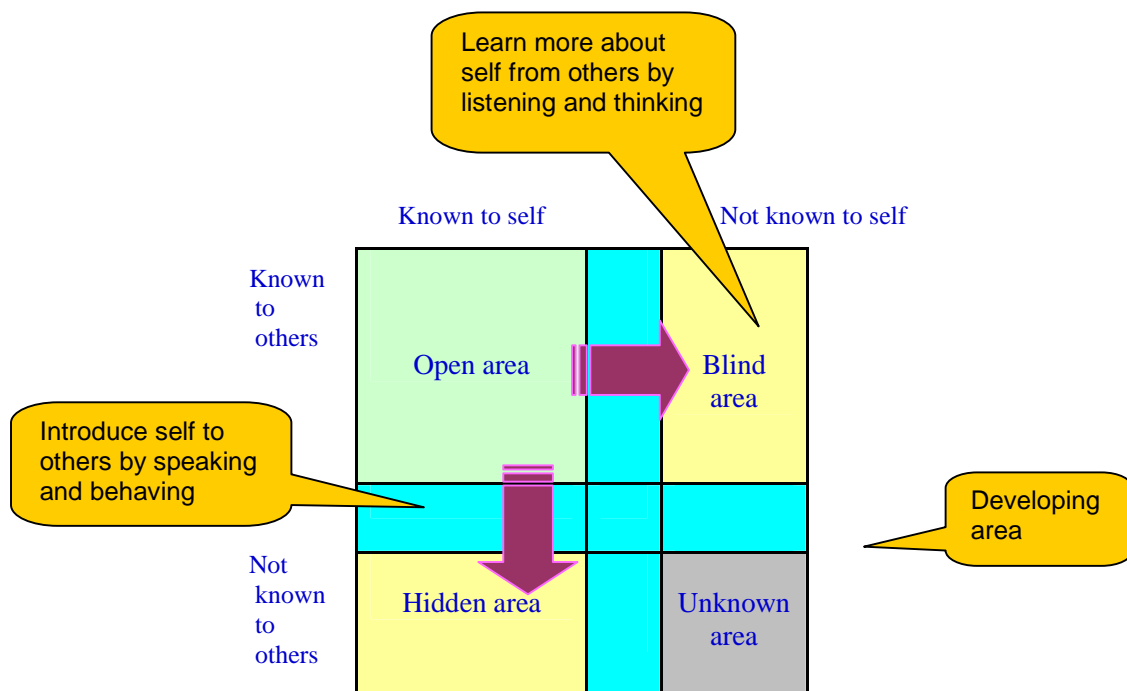
The Johari Window (Table 3.2) is a valuable way of conceptualising this.

**Table 3.2 Johari Window**

	Known to self	Not known to self
Known to others	Open area	Blind area
Not known to others	Hidden area	Unknown area

There are 4 areas in the Johari Window (Luft & Ingham, 1955). The open area is the aspect of self which has been acknowledged by self and others. The hidden area is the private self which is not known to others; the blind area is the unconscious self which is known to others the aspects, which neither the self nor others know is the unknown area. The Johari Window cannot be viewed just as a four quartered area in understanding the self, but as representing a process of personal and social development. Figure 3.3 introduces an extension of the Johari window.

**Figure 3.3 An extension of Johari window by Ling Wu: Communication can develop one's self-esteem**



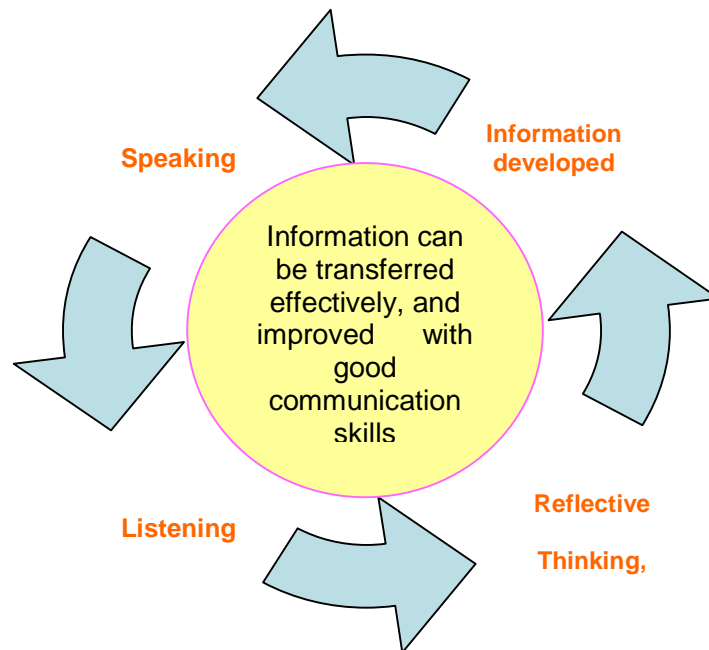
As shown in figure 3.3, the open self-acknowledged area can be extended by communication and development of positive relationships. The more one is open to others and oneself, the more confidence one can build up. The interpersonal skills can



help people to develop their self-awareness and their being known and accepted by others. Individuals can explore unknown areas of the self and reveal hidden parts of the self by communication, verbally or behaviourally. One can introduce the self to others by speaking and behaving, and learn more about individuals from listening to and thinking about others. These communication and social skills can be developed through education. Communication can help people know more about the self, and also help others to know more about others. The more discovery there is about 'self' and the more of a release to others, the greater the resultant development of one's open area. By extending one's open area, the hidden area and blind area will be reduced and therefore, there should be less of the unknown self. The open area means more self-awareness and more communication and better interpersonal relationships. In contrast, if communication is not going well, or there is no communication at all, this could possibly cause a decrease of self-awareness and being known and accepted by others. Children known less to others will also have less self-awareness and will be lacking in self-esteem.

In the personal development process, communication and social skills are important factors for individual growth in these areas. Communication is one of the basic ways to deliver messages and information. Effective communication involves listening, speaking and reflective thinking and then information is developed for the next communication circle of speaking, listening and reflective thinking (figure 3.4).

**Figure 3.4 Communication Circle (created by Ling Wu)**



Effective communication can develop personal awareness through listening to others, presenting self to others and reflecting on the responses from others. It can also help the individual to know more about others, by listening and reflective thinking, and building up knowledge about others. Effective communication can develop interpersonal relationships as shown in figure 3.3.

Communication skills are important in interpersonal development; however, there are other important social skills. Rustin and Kuhr (1989; cited in Canney & Byrne, 2006: p.31) provide a framework which categorises social skills under four headings:

- Foundation skills – such as observation, eye-contact, gesture, facial expression
- Interaction skills – such as initiating conversation, reflecting back, repairing breakdowns, turn-taking.

- Affective skills – such as recognizing one’s own feelings as well as others’ feelings, trust, disclosure;
- Cognitive skills – such as social perception, problem solving, negotiating, self-monitoring.

Those skills are usually stated within the academic subjects or curriculum, however, they are important for students to develop in a socialization process during their school experience in the hidden curriculum (Jackson, 1968). However, students can also obtain those skills by training (McNiff, 1986). What kind of teaching or training school can offer these skills to students? What kind of techniques can teachers adopt in delivering the skills? Especially in the Chinese context, as we argued, less attention is paid to students’ emotional and social development; little research has been done in affective aspects; but there is an increasing demand for personal, interpersonal and social skills development to coincide with the rapid social and economic change that is occurring. Action and/or research at a practical level is essential rather than the existing limitation of theoretical arguments about the importance of developing students’ or individuals’ interpersonal skills. With this in mind, Circle Time, which is also named ‘magic circle’ (Lang, 1998a), can be considered as a pedagogy or method to respond to this need. In the following sections, attention will be focused on Circle Time and the reasons it is the focus of this study.

### **3.5 Circle Time**

This section will focus on Circle Time, the practical pedagogy which is considered the appropriate method to fulfil the needs of the individual, to deliver personal and social

skills for students to understand and express personal feelings, to build up positive relationships and to raise self-esteem. This section will start from an explanation of Circle Time, to describe the theoretical framework and functions of Circle time; to explain the aim of using Circle Time; to interpret the process of using Circle Time for students' personal and social development; and to deconstruct and reconstruct the conceptual framework of Circle Time.

### **3.5.1 What is Circle Time?**

Mellor & Munn (2000) describe Circle Time, as an open circle of chairs or cushions, which are all the equipment that is needed. There should be no tables or desks, which could act as a barrier – or a support for slumping heads! Care should be taken so that the circle is as perfect as possible, allowing each face to be seen by all other participants. Tew (1998) describes Circle Time as a whole-class meeting where everyone sits in a circle. It is a forum that is bound by strict ground rules to ensure emotional 'safety' and respectful listening. Taylor (2003) considers Circle Time as a "carefully structured rule-bounded activity". Circle time is a technique used to help children to understand and express themselves, to promote children's self-esteem and to develop inter-personal relationships. Circle time involves activities aimed at developing participants' awareness of themselves and of others; raising self-esteem; and promoting mutual trust, developing listening skills and positive interpersonal behaviour. A basic tenet of Circle Time is that all participants are equal and each person's contribution is equally valued (Canney & Byrne, 2006; p.20). Tew (2000, p.176) indicates that Circle Time offers children a regular, practical, opportunity to discuss concerns, consider and debate moral values, practise

positive behaviour, work out solutions and make action plans in a fun context which is highly motivational.

Circle Time brings together teachers and children in an enjoyable atmosphere of cooperation. It is time set aside each week when children and their teacher sit in a circle and take part in games and activities designed to increase self awareness, awareness of others, self-esteem, co-operation, trust and listening skills. The activity helps everyone to understand what is important to them and their friends (Bliss & Tetley, 1993; p.4). Fischer (1990) indicates that the child has a growing understanding of her/himself as a person and of relationships with others. In the pre-adolescent years the child shows a growing ability to discover, to see the viewpoint of others, to appreciate jokes and to understand complicated social interactions. Lang & Vasileiou (2005) share the experience of teachers who employ Circle Time. They think that one of the positive outcomes of Circle Time is to assist pupils to “express and manage their feelings”.

‘Sitting in a circle as a means of group communication [...] creates an informal atmosphere, to avoid a more hierarchical arrangement so that everyone can see and hear each other easily (Lang, 1998a).’ However, Circle Time is not just simply sitting together in a Circle, Circle Time is generally seen as an effective method to enhance pupils’ self-awareness, build up self-esteem, and also help pupils to learn and practise inter-personal skills and co-operation with others. Circle Time is also taken as one of the methods which can help pupils to fulfil their potential in academic study.

Lang (1998a) has reviewed three different traditions of Circle time – the American tradition, the northern European tradition and the Circle Time in Italy. The American

tradition called 'The Magic Circle', which is closely tied to 'humanistic pedagogy' or a particular 'psychological approach (humanistic)', was founded in California in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This model has spread to Canada and Israel. The rationale of 'The Magic Circle' was also close to Rogers' client-centred therapy (as mentioned before) and Glasser's 'social-problem-solving meeting'. Glasser (1969, cited in Lang, 1998a) was very specific in his recommendation that classroom meetings are best conducted in a Circle, which enables all participants to see and hear each other, which could then facilitate the establishment of communication and result in a successful meeting.

When Northern European Tradition of Circle Time with its very long and strong tradition from Friedrich Froebel was introduced, its democratic dimension was stressed. It was later used to foster democratic values in Sweden after 1945. The North European tradition, as Lang (1998a) has indicated, has two significant strands, one is particularly concerned with the personal and social development of children; another is tied to pedagogic theory emanating from the Americans' theoretical psychological formulations.

The contrasting Italian model was developed by Donata Francescato (Lang, 1998a), and was described as an 'Integrated Methodology of Socio-affective Education for pupils, teacher and parents'. This model has been systematically evaluated and developed as a detailed and extensive training programme involving the equivalent of 2 to 3 weeks of work spread over a period of more than a year. Francescato (1998; cited in Lang, 1998a; p.7) has described the development of the Italian model of Circle Time: 'from humanistic psychology we took the ideas that the learning process can best take place in a context of positive interpersonal relationships and, furthermore, that classrooms should provide opportunities for the development of social and interpersonal as well as cognitive skills.'

Lang (ibid) values the Italian model of Circle Time and suggests it is unique in theory and methodology.

Apart from the three models, Lang (ibid) also introduced the work of Mosley (Mosley, 1993, 1996), White (1991, 1992) and Bliss, Robinson & Maines (1995), each of whom has promoted a model of Circle time which had all the general characteristics of the process.

Mosley (1996), in particular, has developed a 'Quality Circle Time' model to develop pupils' self-esteem.

Circle Time is a group process. It involves the whole class, including the teacher, meeting in a circle at least once a week to look at issues relating to personal, social, moral and health education. The circle meeting has five structures that encourage the development of positive relationships: self-discipline; self-regulating behaviour management; conflict resolution; assertive communication and democratic group processes alongside the skills of speaking, listening, observing, thinking and concentrating. Of paramount importance to circle time is emotional 'safety', which is produced by clear ground rules and an attitude that values every person's contribution. (Mosley, 1996, p.5)

In her 'Quality Circle Time' module, Mosley (Mosley, 1993, 1996; Mosley & Tew, 1999) divides Circle Time session into four phases: introductory phase, round, middle phase – open forum, and the closing phase. Mosley's module has been widely accepted and used in UK primary schools and extended to secondary level, although there is a shortage of theoretical analysing. Mosley & Tew (1999) state the value of Circle Time is

that ‘the more pupils understand their emotions, the less likely they are to feel disaffected from the learning process. Instead of channelling their emotional difficulties into bullying, conflict and confrontation with school authorities, they will be able to find ways of engaging in a positive way with the opportunities for many different forms of learning being provided within the school (p.6).’ Tew thinks that Circle Time contributes a powerful impact on a school in the areas of:

- The quality of relationships throughout the school
- The levels of positive behaviour
- The quality of teaching and learning
- The sense of belonging to, and ownership of, the school motivation.

(M. Tew, 2000)

The premise is that the Circle Time approach develops a classroom and school climate in which children are listened to, respected and helped by adults and peers (Mosley & Tew, 1999). As a result of this, they are more likely to feel valued as individuals and experience a sense of self-worth. This reflects the sociological perspective of self-esteem exemplified by Rosenberg (1965); it is based on the assumption that the self is a social construction and that we can enhance self-esteem by addressing external conditions – in this case the social and interpersonal climate created in the classroom. However, Circle Time in England was promoted at a practical level without reference to theory or a very specific methodology (Curry and Bromfield, 1994, cited in Lang, 1998a). Most researchers (Mosley & Tew, 1999; Taylor, 2003; M. Tew, 2000) pay attention to the aim, process and function of Circle Time without clarifying conceptual framework. In the



following sections, after explaining the aims of Circle Time (§3.5.2), the author is trying to deconstruct and reconstruct the connotation of Circle Time (§3.5.3).

### **3.5.2 The aims of Circle Time**

Taylor (2003) has identified the aims of Circle Time from different aspects based on her research. These seek (p.5):

- To develop self-knowledge and enhance confidence and self-esteem
- To develop the ability to share and discuss thoughts and feelings
- To develop empathy, cooperation, caring behaviour, respect for the feelings of others and a sense of belonging to a group or community
- To promote problem-solving and conflict resolution
- To develop trust, responsibility and other qualities of character
- To create shared rules endorsed by pupils, including sanctions and rewards which promote positive behaviour
- To develop skills of speaking and active listening, taking turns, questioning, hypothesising and critical reflection
- To encourage pupils to recognise their own worth and value and that of their peers
- To help pupils engage in personal reflection and clarify their own values.

Promotion of self-esteem of students is one of the key aims of Circle time according to Taylor's summary. She aims to use Circle Time mainly towards students' personal development needs.

Another researcher Tew's (1998; p.22) aims in using Circle Time seek:

- To build a 'sense of group', which would affect cooperation and friendship in the class,
- To foster positive relationships between pupils,
- To create a climate of openness that would permit honest discussion of the topics covered and the possibility of changing self-perception
- To model a teacher role that was facilitative, not authoritarian.

Tew emphasizes that teachers' facilitative role in Circle Time should be modelled. Circle Time is considered an approach that aims to develop interpersonal relationships between students, and between students and teachers. It can help students and teachers to create a climate of warm trust and relaxation. Within such a climate, students could develop their self-esteem because of their positive experience.

Sitting in a circle, students can easily see and hear each other. It brings them the opportunity to have eye-contact, show facial expression and gestures, and also to observe each other, therefore to practise the foundational skills of listening and speaking. Talking in a circle also brings the chance for students to practise interaction skills. When discussing issues about feeling, the climate Circle Time can offer to students can be one to build trust, the ability of self-expression, understanding, the sharing of feelings and consequently to come to the point of recognizing one's own feelings as well as those of others from these affective skills. Through Circle Time, students learn problem solving and negotiating skills by discussing issues to solve conflict, which could develop social perception and cognitive skills. As Biddulph (2007) indicates, in Circle Time children have an opportunity to experience cognitive and affective learning via the sharing and exploration of emotional experience.

Roffey (2006; p.80) thinks that one of the main aims of Circle Time is 'promoting class cohesion and a supportive group ethos'. Circle Time activities 'encourage people to know one another in different ways - to discover what individuals have in common, explore the different groups to which we all belong, break down stereotypes and weaken cliques in the class. They are intended to foster a sense of connection. This includes defining trust and support and exploring how we might value diversity both for ourselves and for others'. Potentially, group work challenges the traditional role of the teacher, i.e. as the one who is in control of knowledge and organization of the classroom (Bruner, 1996; Kutnick & Rogers, 1994). And the use of particular groupings will be affected by the teachers' own education, ideology and preferences (Alexander, 1984; cited in Kutnick & Rogers, 1994). Dunne and Bennett (1990; cited in Kutnick & Rogers, 1994) found that groups do have their positive points for pupils. Pupils familiar with the ideas being discussed and the materials available will have little need of teacher attention and are very capable of looking after each other. Pupils who experience effective group work understand that they can learn from one another, and find security in doing so. Children's liking for group work is strongly associated with the legitimacy and structure given to classroom groupings by the teachers. Their liking is also affected by the relationship that children engender amongst themselves. For groups to be effective, pupils must feel secure, have the ability to communicate effectively amongst themselves, and understand that the teacher approves of such behaviour (Kutnick & Rogers, 1994).

Having examined Circle Time and its aims, the process and the practice of Circle time should be explained and interpreted. The rationale and theoretical concern of Circle Time will also be considered in the following section.

### **3.5.3 Deconstructing and reconstructing Circle Time**

Based on previous discussion about the definition and aims of Circle time, there are some important elements in Circle Time. Firstly, people should sit in a circle. Secondly, a talking piece is employed. Thirdly, Circle Time will start with games to warm up. Fourthly, there are rules in the circle. Fifthly, specific topics are discussed in each round, addressing students' personal and social issues. Finally, there will be a closure to celebrate the reaching of agreement. These elements are obviously used during the Circle Time process without conceptual clarification. This section will explore and interpret these elements from theoretical angles to deconstructing the reconstructing Circle Time.

Firstly, the physical elements of Circle Time: physical space and the talking tool. The first condition about Circle Time is that students and teachers need to sit together in a circle. The shape is important in Circle Time (Curry & Bromfield, 1998; Glasser, 1969). Students need to sit in a proper circle, which will enable all members to be mutually visible, so that there is eye contact and the opportunity to pay attention to the one who is speaking. By sitting together in a circle, it will be easier to foster an atmosphere of belonging to the group. It is important that each participant is enabled to talk freely. The talking tool – a soft toy or anything else can be passed around the circle. Only the person who is holding the toy can speak. The talking object can attract attention and help the person who is talking to relax, and sometimes it with significance to the group emerges (Mosley & Tew, 1999). Certainly, Circle Time also includes a range of games and activities which do not involve talking objects; such as games of changing places; or activities where it is necessary to work in pairs. However, while participants need to talk, the talking tool is essential. Other physical considerations also involve the physical space

where people will sit: the venue, either classroom or somewhere else? the furniture, chairs, cushions or floor? Lang (2005) thinks that the important is that students and teachers should sit at the same level, no matter on chairs or cushion. From the convenience of playing games, the chair should be a better choice.

Secondly, games normally are welcomed by students. Games can greatly reduce tension, help to relax and warm up before the topic begins, and ease tension after serious discussions. Burry and Bromfield (1998) have summarized all the advantages of games – They are to (p.13-14):

1. provide a structure for learning;
2. defuse tension;
3. initiate group work skills;
4. build trust and sensitivity;
5. provide an opportunity for everyone to participate;
6. break down pupil/teacher barriers;
7. promote good communication;
8. improve group functioning;
9. increase self-awareness;
10. increase concentration and time on task;
11. improve listening skills;
12. encourage creativity and lateral thinking;
13. enhance academic achievement;
14. enhance self-esteem.

Thirdly, topics are the content of Circle Time. Each Circle Time session will include one or more topics relating to students' interpersonal and social issues to be discussed during the rounds. To choose topics which are suitable to a certain age of, and a certain group of

children, it is crucial for teachers and facilitators to prepare carefully before the Circle Time starts.

Fourthly, the golden rules can be considered as the software of Circle Time. It is important to regulate behaviour and keep the Circle Time progressing smoothly. Once students have adapted to the golden rules, they can transfer these rules to their daily life.

1. Only the person who has the talking toy can talk. No disturbance is allowed when the other person is talking.
2. Raise your hand if you want to speak.
3. Use the term “I” rather than “you”.

Mosley (1996) states that all the games and activities promote certain golden rules. Circle Time is the forum for initiating and refining a group consensus on Golden Rules. Golden rules is the social value delivered through Circle Time.

Finally, in the process of Circle Time, the ‘closure’ is also a vital element. Students’ different views are valued and respected, however, to reach agreement on a certain point is also a significant achievement of Circle Time in the development of students’ personal and social understanding of morality and integrity. Teachers have to be aware of their roles as facilitators, avoiding imbuing personal values in students rather than encouraging them to develop their own ideas.

To summarise, the elements of Circle Time can be categorized into three levels: physically, the space, the setting and the tool; emotionally, the topics and the rounds; functionally, the games and the rules. The aims of Circle Time affect the preparation and consideration of pre-Circle Time activities. It is also worth thinking about how the skills developed during Circle Time influence students' daily life. This has the potentials for further research about Circle Time.

The critique of shortage of theoretical concerns about Circle Time will be addressed here. As Mosley (1996) indicates, Circle Time has been used for a long time without careful debate historically, psychologically, sociologically or philosophically. It is impossible to date Circle Time's origins. 'The circle has always been a symbol of unity, healing and power'. The North American Indians have the tradition to sit in a circle passing a talking object talking around a campfire. The tale of King Arthur with his round table knights is widely told in Britain. In terms of Circle Time, Moreno's group work theory and Dreikurs' classroom management theory have been considered by researchers (Curry & Bromfield, 1994; Mosley, 1996). However, Carl Rogers' student-centred teaching theory could provide the rationale for Circle Time at the pedagogical and psychological level.

Built on the concepts of client-centred therapy, Rogers (1951) developed student-centred teaching. He took Cantor's idea (1946, cited in Rogers, 1951) to stress such points about student-centred teaching as:

- The teacher will be concerned primarily with understanding and not judging the individual.
- The teacher will keep at the centre of the teaching process the importance of the

students' problems and feelings, not his own.

- Most important of all, the teacher will realize that constructive effort must come from the positive or active forces within the student. (p.385)

From both of their viewpoints, the preliminary concern in student-centred teaching is the students and their feelings and problems. Teachers should arouse and encourage students' potential to learn and to solve problems on their own initiative.

Hutchins (1949, cited in Rogers, 1951) has stated some basic elements of the student-centred type of teaching:

“The foundation of democracy is universal suffrage. Universal suffrage makes every man a ruler. If every man is a ruler, every man needs the education that rulers ought to have ... The main purpose of a democratic educational system is the education of rulers”. (P. 387)

The idea of Hutchins' democracy education is that everyone is equal to others. Rogers also elaborates that the goal of democratic education is to assist students to become individuals

- Who are able to take self-initiated action and to be responsible for those actions;
- Who are capable of intelligent choice and self-direction;
- Who are critical learners, able to evaluate the contributions made by others;
- Who have acquired knowledge relevant to the solution of problems;
- Who, even more importantly, are able to adapt flexibly and intelligently to new problem situations;
- Who have internalized an adaptive mode of approach to problems utilizing all



pertinent experience freely and creatively;

- Who are able to cooperate effectively with others in these various activities;
- Who work, not for the approval of others, but in terms of their own socialized purposes (C. R. Rogers, 1951; p.387).

Before sitting in Circle Time, Carl Rogers' suggestions are important considerations for teachers or the leading person of Circle Time. Carl Rogers states that when the central aim is the process of students' development, the concept of role of the 'leader' in an educational setting can be modified from the norm:

1. Initially the leader has much to do with setting the mood or climate of the group experience by his basic philosophy of trust in the group, which is communicated in many subtle ways.
2. The leader helps to elicit and clarify the purpose of the members of the class, accepting all aims.
3. He (she) relies upon the students, desire to implement these purposes as the motivational force behind learning.
4. He(she) endeavours to organize and make easily available all resources which the students may wish to use for their own learning.
5. He(she) regards themselves as a flexible resource to be utilized by the group in the ways which seem most meaningful to them, in so far as he/she can be comfortable operating in these ways.
6. In responding to expressions from the group, he(she) accepts both the intellectual content and the emotionalized attitudes, endeavouring to give each aspect the approximate degree of emphasis which it has for the individual and

the group.

7. As the acceptant classroom climate becomes established, the leader is able to change their role and become a participant, a member of the group, expressing their views as those of one individual only.
8. He(she) remains alert to expressions indicative of deep feeling and when these are voiced, endeavours to understand these from the speaker's point of view, and to communicate this type of understanding.
9. Likewise when group interaction becomes charged with emotion, he/she tends to maintain a neutral and understanding role, in order to give acceptance to the varied feelings which exist.
10. He(She) recognizes that the extent to which they can behave in these differing fashions is limited by the genuineness of their own attitudes. To pretend an acceptant understanding of a viewpoint when they do not feel this acceptance, will not further, and will probably hinder, the dynamic progress of the class.

(C. R. Rogers, 1951; p. 401-402)

It is important to notice that Rogers's theory is not totally the same as Circle Time. Often the person running circle time is seen more as a facilitator rather than as a leader; the golden rule in Circle Time should be agreed and adhered to by everyone in the circle including the facilitator, who is normally the teacher. However, the fundamental concept for a person leading Circle Time is to put students at the centre and put their needs before any other concerns. Furthermore, the facilitator in Circle Time needs to possess the skills Rogers suggested for the 'leader'. The person also needs to understand his/her role in the group has to be neutral in attitude and manner and to be able to accept various feelings and opinions from students and also make them feel accepted. It is not necessary to

accept students' points of view but rather to show an understanding, and that you are able to accept the diversity of different understandings towards issues. It is also crucial for the leading person to be flexible in transferring his/her role from operator to participant, to be alert to incidents and to reduce any tension in a relaxed way to keep the Circle Time running smoothly.

The nucleus of circle time is that the teacher adheres to the same rules as pupils (Lang, 2005) "the teacher should act as a facilitator and ultimately equal partner during the actual practice as much as possible". During circle time, teachers and pupils are equal and participate together to share with each other. This is the best way to help Chinese teachers to change their attitudes towards pupils by utilising this new concept and activity, and also will give pupils the impression that they also can work with teachers at the same level.

Circle Time can give students a chance to be listened to and to listen to others, to express feelings, to discuss issues, to learn language for expressing themselves and to share and to learn from others' experiences. This is a practical method that develops students 'Emotional Maturity' (Lang, 2005). Circle Time, in a way, reflects Confucian's educational thinking: 'preventing a fault before it happens', which can channel pupils' emotional development in an appropriate direction and thus reduce the chance of pathological symptoms occurring. It is crucial to establish Circle Time research for secondary students. They are maturing to physical and emotional independence; they start being able to think about self, build up personal relationships and to have some influences on and from their peers. However, they are not mature enough to be totally

independent. Guidance is important at this stage for them to understand others and self; to develop an understanding of feelings and to develop skills of communication and cooperation. In the next section, the idea of conducting Circle Time research at secondary level will be fully argued.

### **3.6 Circle Time and the secondary school**

Tew (1998) observes that, in secondary schools, many systems reflect a traditional, didactic approach to knowledge and learning. Teachers control knowledge and experiences, they dominate the learning situation. The 'hidden' curriculum (Jackson, 1968) is that some pupils learn they have very little creative contribution to make to the learning process. It is as if their experience and world have little validity. Many secondary school teachers in Tew's research said that they have been used to "standing at the front and directing the lesson" (p.21). It is uncomfortable for them to change their style of delivering information. However, changes have to come even if teachers do not want them. The importance of changing teaching attitudes and methods has been discussed for years. There has been no shortage of theoretical discussion before and after Dewey (Dewey, 1915, 1938, 1954), however, at the practical level, there are some methods which are effective in personal social education, but little research about those methods has been done with detailed investigation.

In many secondary schools, nearly all teachers are tutors and often they are required to deliver the PSE or pastoral programme. As subject specialists, they have received little or no training in teaching PSE and have limited experience of the basic techniques for

teaching it effectively. Circle Time could help teachers to develop these skills. As Lang (1998a) has pointed that, in England, there is little theoretical concern about using Circle Time. This is a limitation at one point; at another point, it brings teachers freedom in conducting Circle Time as long as they follow the basic rules.

Some research that has been done in UK primary schools (Mosley, 1996; Taylor, 2003) provided evidence about the benefits Circle Time could bring to children. Lown (2002) investigated the perceptions of teachers and pupils of Circle Time and produced evidence that teachers thought Circle Time had developed pupils' listening skills, cooperative skills, self-esteem, turn-taking skills and ability to express feelings. Teachers in this research commented that Circle Time had enabled them to have a better understanding of children and the problems they faced, giving more opportunity for the delivery of positive comments, although there was little support for the view that classroom behaviour had improved as a result of Circle Time. Lown (2002) discussed about the length of time the technique had been used, and the need to introduce it at the beginning of the year.

However, research at secondary school level is also needed. One reason is that most secondary teachers are used to teaching a subject. The class setting in a secondary school is different from that in a primary school in the UK. In UK secondary schools, teachers stay in a fixed classroom while students come to join teachers according to their timetable. Students have just 15 to 30 minutes time to meet their peers and tutor in the morning. The rest of the day, they mainly have a chance to meet their classmates in different subject learning times. They have few chances to communicate, share and learn from each other about their personal feelings. Circle Time at secondary school could bring students the chance to discuss issues relevant to their lives and emotional issues;

and can help them to develop positive influences about the hidden curriculum. In China, secondary students are facing great pressures to go on to higher education. Academic outcomes will affect their entrance to junior high school or university. Secondary teachers stress the importance of subject teaching and learning and pay less attention to students' personal development (refer to § 2.4). How can Circle Time function in a secondary school? How can secondary teachers and pupils think about Circle Time? How can Circle Time be improved to fit the needs of a secondary school? These questions need to be answered.

Secondly, secondary students need extra help in personal and social development. Teenagers are in the difficult process of growing up, they are facing the change from being a child to an adult and they have more problems in understanding personal feelings and interpersonal relationships. Using Circle Time for secondary students' personal and social development and investigating students' opinions of adopting these methods will reveal the positive functions of the method. Students will voice their need to use certain methods for encouraging their emotional well-being, developing their social skills and building up positive interpersonal relationships.

No research about Circle Time had been done in Chinese primary or secondary schools before this. This research has been conducted in a secondary school in China. I had already worked in secondary schools for 8 years; my experience helped me to build up deep understanding of pupils and teachers in secondary schools. The class setting in a Chinese secondary school is different from that in the UK. Chinese students stay in the same classroom with their fixed peer group; students may be at different levels of ability. Teachers come to the classroom to teach the subject. There will be one teacher appointed

as class teacher to take responsibility for students' daily life. Therefore it is understood that the same research conducted in China or the UK may potentially have different results.

Researchers have shown that Circle Time can be employed in secondary schools and can even work with adults (Mansfield, 2004; Mosley & Tew, 1999; M. Tew, 1998); however, there are still difficulties in conducting Circle Time in a secondary school. It is important for the researcher to consider the potential difficulties before conducting the research.

Firstly, as Tew (1998) found in her research, many secondary school teachers are accustomed to 'stand at the front and direct the lesson', and it was uncomfortable for them to change their style of delivering information by sitting at the same level with their students and following the same rules. For Chinese teachers, who are used to be in an authority position, to be equal with students will be a challenge. However, this study attempts to introduce a democratic pedagogy to Chinese schools, to change teachers' attitudes to students and to develop an equal and positive teacher-pupil relationship.

Another issue which arises is the size of the class. In the UK, each class has a maximum of 30 pupils. In China, there is no national regulation for class size, but normally, each class has more than 50 students, which is much bigger than in the UK, especially in secondary schools. Although the class size is important, it is not always necessary for the whole class to participate in the same round as this can become tedious or repetitive or can lead to too many pupils saying "pass" and thereby avoiding making any contribution. It is possible to consider having two rounds on the same theme with each half or even a smaller group of the class participating in each round. Even if the class size is considered

as an issue in conducting Circle Time, there is no evidence to show it is impossible to have Circle Time with a big group. As mentioned in §2.4, China is considered a high-PDI society (Hofstede, 2001), in which students are obedient to their teachers and authorities, therefore, even a bigger Chinese group will be easier to manage than smaller groups in the UK. If Chinese students change their behaviour during Circle Time, it will be significant evidence for using Circle Time. It is worth trying.

Other difficulties raised by Mansfield (2004) in her report:

- Interruptions from some ‘silly children’
- Exposing yourself
- Practical considerations, e.g. having to move the furniture
- Comments made reflecting general poor management

These issues are a very important experience for this study to draw lessons about setting a comfortable environment physically and emotionally, group management and encouraging students to take part.

To sum up, research on the personal and social education of secondary students is important as they are at a crucial development stage. As few secondary schools have adopted Circle Time in the UK, and less research about Circle Time has been done at secondary level, it is essential to research in this area. In the Chinese context, there is no example of Circle Time that has been introduced either at the primary or the secondary level of education. It is recommended that there be an experimental start at a secondary



level because this would show its significance to both primary and secondary students in their personal and social development.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter focused on the needs of the individual in personal and social development; and discussed the importance of social skills for the individual to develop intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships.

Emotional literacy, emotional literature, emotional intelligence, mental healthy and emotional well-being were argued to be interconnected and interdependent. All these terms stress emotional awareness of the individual and awareness of others' emotions, and learned ability in developing positive relationships by effectively handling personal emotion and interpersonal interactions. The Johari Window was suggested as showing the development of the individual's emotional awareness of self and others.

Firstly, by sitting in a circle, the arrangement could easily provide students with the opportunity to see each other within the circle and to have eye-contact, to observe gesture and facial expressions and to communicate. Sitting in a circle could facilitate the foundational skills. Secondly, Circle Time allows students to talk about issues freely together. With the soft toy 'talking' piece in hand, students could easily talk in turn by passing the 'talking' object, and continuing their conversation. Thirdly, in terms of affective skills, by talking issues over together, students listen to each other and express feelings, which help them to understand themselves and in turn to understand others. Finally, in terms of cognitive skills, in Circle Time, by listening to others, expressing themselves and sharing problems, students can understand social perceptions from

different points of view and build up their own understandings, to learn and practise problem-solving skills. The social skills defined by Rustin and Kuhr (1989) could be cultivated by using Circle Time. The listening and speaking skills practised within Circle Time can also be transferred to students' daily life, to help them to build respect and trustworthy relationships. These positive relationships, in turn, can create a safe and reassuring environment and help students to raise their self-esteem.

Although in Chinese schools there is no clear definition and content of the term 'affective', the recent reforms bring the possibility of a personal educational curriculum for development. Circle Time is suggested as a practical vehicle for Chinese educational reform.

# Chapter 4: Methodology

## Introduction

The literature review in the previous chapters introduced the historical, economic, social and cultural background of Chinese affective education within current educational reform trends; it has also developed a theoretical framework of children's basic needs, emotional literacy and suggested Circle Time is a practical pedagogy for students' personal and social development. The research described in this thesis attempted to introduce Circle Time to a Chinese secondary school and to examine the function of Circle time in developing positive teacher pupil relationships, and thus, to investigate some issues of Chinese Affective Education implementation. This thesis sought to test three propositions suggested by the literature review:

Firstly, to test the hypothesis that Circle Time can develop Chinese secondary students' personal and interpersonal skills and raise their self-esteem; therefore, to question this investigation whether it will contribute to fostering an equal and democratic teacher-pupil relationship in Chinese schools to replace the current hierarchical situation?

Secondly, to compare the differences of conducting Circle Time in English and Chinese secondary schools from students' and teachers' experience and perspectives; thus, examining Circle Time pedagogy in different cultural and educational settings.

Finally, by examining Chinese students' and teachers' perceptions, to interrogate Chinese

personal and social education at a practical level and to identify the kernel relationships between current Chinese educational reform and affective education?

The research questions are of key significance to the organization of the research, since the research design must be appropriate to the research questions or the research area (Bryman, 2008; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000; 2004). By introducing Circle Time to a Chinese secondary school, this study firstly attempted to test the pedagogy of Circle Time with an experiment; then to ‘borrow’ Circle Time as an intervention to explore teachers’ and students’ reaction to Chinese affective educational issues. Both descriptive and explorative research questions were integrated in this research. Unpredictable issues were expected during the field work and a pragmatic stance guided this research.

Based on the assumption of pragmatism, a mixed methods design (Bryman, 2008; Creswell, 2003; Gorard & Taylor, 2004; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998) or combined methods design (Gorard & Taylor, 2004) was adopted in seeking to answer the research questions of this study. Interview, test, questionnaire, observation and documentary evidence have been used in data collection.

In this chapter, section 4.1 will explain the rationale of the research design and the choice of research strategies based on the research question. Sections 4.2 and 4.3 will introduce data collecting methods and procedure. Section 4.4 focuses on data analysis considerations. Other corresponding issues, such as research validity and reliability ( § 4.5), the cultural issue, the role of the researcher ( § 4.6) and the ethical issue ( § 4.7) will be discussed in turn.

## 4.1 The pragmatism stance and mixed design

Most researchers (Bryman, 2001, 2008; Cohen, et al., 2000) share the view that social research is influenced by ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions and those which are concerned with human nature. Hitchcock and Hughes (1995, cited in Cohen, et al., 2000; p.1) suggest that ontological assumptions, epistemological assumptions, methodological considerations and issues of instrumentation and data collection are mutually interactive. Gray (2004) also argues that methods of data collection are influenced by the chosen research methodology; the methodology, in turn, will be influenced by the theoretical perspectives adopted by the researcher, and in turn, by the researcher's epistemological stance. However, Blaikie (2000) argues from a different angle that methodology refers to discussions of how research is done, or should be done, and to the critical analysis of methods of research. It deals with the logic of enquiry of how new knowledge is generated and justified. The aim of methodology, is 'to describe and analyse methods, throwing light on their limitations and resources, clarifying their suppositions and consequence, relating their potentialities to the twilight zone at the frontiers of knowledge' (Kaplan, 1973; cited in Wellington, 1996; p.16). Before introducing the chosen methods of this research, this section will build an argument about the pragmatic stance and the choice of mixed design according to ontological and epistemological traditions.

#### **4.1.1 The ontological and epistemological justification**

Axinn and Pearce (2006) point out that making distinctions between types of research designs, data collection techniques, data coding strategies, and analytic approaches is at least as useful as considering the notion of qualitative versus quantitative approaches.

From the philosophical point of view, ontology is the science or study of being or existing (Blaikie, 1993; Corbetta, 2003; Gomm, 2004; Gray, 2004; Hughes & Sharrock, 1997). It concerns what knowledge is. According to Corbetta (2003), ontology is the question of “what”, which asks whether the world of social phenomena is a ‘hard’, ‘real’ and ‘objective’ world, as natural phenomena which autonomously exist outside the human mind and independent of the interpretation given to them by the subject; therefore, whether social phenomena are ‘things in their own right’ or ‘representations of things.’ While epistemology, in his understanding, is the relationship between ‘who’ and ‘what’, and concerns the ‘knowability of social reality’ and the ‘relationship between the observer and the reality observed’; which deals with what is understood to be knowledge and how knowledge is to be obtained or sought (Blaikie, 1993, 2000; Gomm, 2004; Heylighen, 1993; Hughes & Sharrock, 1997; M. J. Williams, 2001). The answer to epistemology depends on the answer to the ontological question. That means that the ontological assumption of understanding of the social world will influence the epistemological assumption of how to know about social phenomena.

Positivism and interpretivism are commonly considered as two opposite epistemological positions by researchers (Bryman, 2001; Hughes & Sharrock, 1997; Wellington, 2000). Maykut and Morehouse (1994) define positivism as objective inquiry based on

measurable variables and provable propositions. The positivist research orientation, in their view, holds that science is, or should be, primarily concerned with the explanation and the prediction of observable events. From the positivist position, the world is constituted with 'facts', 'things' and 'objects', positivist knowledge is therefore deemed to be objective, value-free, generalizable and replicable, independent of the knower (David & Sutton, 2004; Gray, 2004; Neuman, 2000; Wellington, 2000). Robson (2002) indicates that positivists seek the existence of a constant relationship between two variables. Adopted from natural science, positivism is the dominant epistemological paradigm in social science (Neuman, 2006). The canonical term 'positivism' has been widely accepted and used to describe quantitative research, and sometimes it is called 'positive orthodoxy' (Hughes & Sharrock, 1997). According to Wellington (2000; p.15), positivists believe in objective knowledge of an external reality which is rational and independent of the observer. He thinks that the aim of the positivist researcher is to seek "generalizations" and "hard" quantitative data. While, for qualitative research, terms are employed by different researchers, 'anti-positivism', 'interpretivism' or 'constructivism' are described in different books. 'Interpretivism' will be used as the opposite to positivism here. In contrast to quantitative research, which is linked with objectivism, positivism, deductive reasoning, theory testing and number, qualitative research is linked with subjectivism or constructivism, interpretivism, inductive reasoning, theory building, hermeneutics or phenomenology (David & Sutton, 2004). Constructivism, being interpretive or naturalistic (Robson, 2002; p.27), considers that the 'task of the researcher is to understand the multiple social constructions of meaning and knowledge', and thus tends to acquire multiple perspectives to view the methods of interview and observation.

The most significant distinction between quantitative and qualitative approaches is how the data is analyzed and whether the data is in the form of numbers. If the data is coded into numbers and the numbers are analyzed with statistical methods, these procedures can be described as quantitative. If on the contrary the data is left in the form of text, the procedures of interpreting these texts are described as qualitative (Axinn & Pearce, 2006; Neuman, 2000; Punch, 2005). David & Sutton (2004) also argue that although quantitative research is commonly associated with the deductive approach to ‘test’ a hypothesis, while qualitative research is associated with the inductive approach to explore a field, sometimes quantitative research is exploratory and qualitative research starts from the formulation of a hypothesis. Data can be analyzed into either a qualitative or quantitative format based on the needs of the research questions. Qualitative data gives richness and colour, while quantitative data provides structure (Wellington, 2000). Qualitative data can be presented in a quantitative study and quantitative data also can be used in supporting qualitative research. The decision in choosing methods and data depends on the need of answering the research question.

Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003b) argue against thinking about a paradigm before framing the research question; they think paradigm and methods are separable; they argue that there is no point in choosing a methodological ‘track’ (qualitative or quantitative) before initiating a research question. They believe that stressing research questions, using both qualitative and quantitative approaches can eliminate some dilemmas and confusions. Silverman (2000) also states that it is highly dangerous to divide qualitative and quantitative measures into dichotomies or polarities in social science. There is no reason to prefer any form of data, the only question which needs to be asked is whether the methods of research are appropriate to the nature of the question being asked.



Some researchers (Coyle & Williams, 2006; Fine & Elsbach, 2006; Wellington, 2000) argue that the distinction between positivist and interpretivist paradigms is based on the false assumption that quantitative methods are founded on the epistemology of positivism, while qualitative approaches share the epistemological stance of anti-positivism (interpretivism, constructivism) (Bryman, 2001). It is necessary to understand the difference between qualitative and quantitative research. However, it is not wise to assume quantitative and qualitative research are antithetical (Fine & Elsbach, 2006). Both quantitative and qualitative methods are tools of research; these methods are employed to present relevant data and to best answer the research questions. There is no divergence between qualitative and quantitative methods in terms of producing a piece of research. As Hamersley (1993) indicates, whatever methods are used in research, the process of inquiry is the same.

This study firstly seeks to investigate the assumption that Circle Time can develop Chinese students' personal and social skills and create a positive teacher-pupil relationship in a Chinese secondary school. An experimental strategy was designed to transpose the western theory of Circle Time to a Chinese context for the first attempt (Bryman, 2008). As to the Class size issue, usually, there are around 50 students in each Chinese class while Circle Time was suggested for around 15 students (Mosley & Tew, 1999). The experimental school X school was willing to and able to try Circle Time as they had smaller class (26 pupils) and aimed to use new methods for students' emotional development. Apart from comparing the experiment results between the experimental groups and other classes, English secondary school pupils' perceptions were also taken into comparative consideration (refer to § 4.2.2). Secondly, by introducing Circle Time,

the experiment is also taken as an intervention to explore Chinese affective education from individuals' perspectives; and as a result develop new theory based on Chinese students' and teachers' experience and perceptions. This research borrows some elements from action research; however, it could not be defined as action research for lack of teachers' involvement and introducing. In order to explain this kind of situation, mixed method research has been considered as a third research paradigm based on pragmatist epistemology by an increasing number of researchers (Creswell, 2003; R. B. Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Maxcy, 2003; Joseph Alex Maxwell, 2006; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, 2003a, 2003b). Qualitative and quantitative paradigms since Kuhn (1970), focus on methods of data collection, analysis and presentation rather than on research questions. However, educational research should consider the research question in the first place and decide what methods of collecting data can best fulfil the need: qualitative, quantitative or mixed design. Both quantitative and qualitative research should be valued. The research questions of this study assume both positivist and interpretivist epistemological stances and quantitative and qualitative research strategies and data collecting methods. Mixed methods do not replace either of these approaches but rather draw from the strengths and minimize the weaknesses of both in single research studies and across studies (R. B. Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Tashakkori & Teddlie (1998) reckon that the best method (or methods) is the one that produces the most "effectiveness". There is no best method among the others, but there is the best or most appropriate method or methods to suit a study.

As Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004, p.15) indicate, 'taking a non-purist or mixed position allows researchers to mix and match design components that offer the best chance of answering their specific research question'. Pragmatically, mixed and multiple

methods have opened up the language of social science. 'It allows a number of projects to be undertaken without the need to identify invariant prior knowledge, laws, or rules governing what is recognized as true or valid' (Maxcy, 2003; p.85).

This study introduces a western pedagogy for Chinese students' personal and social development. Mixed design allows both deductive theory testing and a new departure of theoretical induction (Bryman, 2008). The next section will focus on a discussion of the advantages of mixed design.

#### **4.1.2 The pragmatic stance and advantages of mixed design**

Pragmatists propose that the truth is 'what works' (Audi, 2002; Cherryholmes, 1992; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). They look not at the origins of the idea but instead of its 'destination'. What counts is not where you have been with an idea but rather where it takes you (Maxcy, 2003). Pragmatic research is driven by "anticipated consequences" (Cherryholmes, 1992). A pragmatic approach, defined by Robson (2002), is:

'Use whatever philosophical or methodological approach works best for a particular research problem at issue. This leads to mixed-method studies where both quantitative and qualitative approaches are adopted.' (p.43)

Increasingly researchers have been adapting multiple methods to achieve broader and often better results (Fontana & Frey, 2003). The major strength of mixed methods designs is that they allow research to develop as comprehensively and completely as possible. Using more than one method within a research programme enables the

researcher to obtain a more complete assessment of human behaviour and experience (Morse, 2003; p.189); and enables the researcher to answer simultaneously 'confirmatory' and 'exploratory' questions, and therefore verify and generate theory in the same study (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003b; p.15).

Quantitative and qualitative approaches can facilitate each other: quantitative research may help with the choice of subjects for a qualitative study, and help to generalize findings of qualitative investigation to a wider population (Coyle & Williams, 2006). While qualitative data can enhance the quality of quantitative data in four ways (Barbour 1999, cited in Coyle & Williams, 2006; p.320):

1. Identifying relevant variables and themes for investigation;
2. Giving explanations for 'deviant' cases or anomalous findings;
3. Generating hypotheses and research questions; and
4. Providing insights into the process of knowledge production.

Axinn and Pearce (2006) suggest two themes which are revealed from mixed method data collection strategies. One is that "mixing multiple methods affords opportunities to use the strengths of some methods to counterbalance the weaknesses of other methods". The other theme is that "mixing multiple methods is a valuable strategy for producing a comprehensive empirical record about a topic". In particular, they indicate that varying data collection approaches can

1. Provide information from one approach that was not identified in an alternative approach;
2. Reduce on-sampling error by providing redundant information from multiple sources; and
3. Ensure that a potential bias coming from a particular approach is not replicated in alternative approaches. (P.1-2)

This research was not only examining pedagogy, but also exploring pupils' experience of and perspectives on it. An experimental approach can investigate the method, but it is not enough to explore pupils' feelings in depth, combining multiple methods is essential in answering research questions. There is a similar study by Milgram (1974; cited in J. A. Maxwell & Loomis, 2003), which combines experimental manipulations and intervention, quantitative measurement and analysis with qualitative data collection and analysis to answer both qualitative and quantitative research questions. The result is that the potential validity threats to this study are prevented by integration of qualitative and quantitative elements (J. A. Maxwell & Loomis, 2003).

Distinctions between research designs are particularly important for telling us what types of questions a specific research project may be able to answer and what threats to validity a project may face. Because different data collection methods have different strengths and weaknesses, combinations of methods may be advantageous for achieving a variety of goals.

Mixed research brings different levels of triangulation: theoretical triangulation, methodological triangulation and investigator triangulation (Robson, 2002). Triangulation provides the security of giving a fuller picture of phenomena (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Triangulation not only extends understanding but also adds breadth and depth to research analysis. Combining multiple methods will reduce the bias of each method and increase validity and reliability.

This research is designed to test the use of Circle Time in developing pupils' personal and interpersonal skills. Based on the intervention of Circle Time, it also attempts to

investigate teacher-pupil relationships in a Chinese secondary school, suggests that Circle Time may contribute to introducing a democratic teacher-pupil relationship in the current Chinese educational reform. The preliminary study took place in an English school to generate English students' perspectives on using Circle Time for personal and interpersonal development. On the basis of the findings and insights gained from this preliminary study, an experiment was conducted in a Chinese school to test the hypothesis that Circle Time can develop Chinese secondary students' personal and interpersonal skills, raise their self-esteem and develop a positive teacher-pupil relationship. At the same time, the experiment was also made as an intervention to investigate Chinese affective educational issues. The preliminary findings of English students' perceptions were also taken to compare with Chinese students' opinions, and by triangulation to understand Chinese students' experience and perspectives. In order to investigate participants' attitudes and perspectives from their experience and understanding of Circle Time, combining multiple research strategies and methods was essential. In-depth interviews and participant observation in particular can gain data for exploring from the participants' point of view. Coyle & Williams (2006) conclude that qualitative approaches are able to facilitate quantitative methods in many more diverse ways than quantitative techniques are able to contribute to qualitative methods. The examples of how data were triangulated in this study will be introduced in § 4.4.

In the next section, I will introduce the procedures through which the research was conducted.

## 4.2 Research Procedures

The field work ran from April 2005 to January 2006, one term (summer term) in an English secondary school – W school and one term (half a year term) in a Chinese secondary school – X school. Table 4.2 shows the field work schedule in the two schools.

**Table 4.2 Field work schedule**

	Preliminary field work	Field experiment and in-depth investigation - The main research
Time	April- July 2005	September 2005- January 2006
Site	UK	Mainland China
The secondary school	W school	X school
The role of researcher	Participant	Facilitator

The aim of the preliminary study in W school was to understand how Circle Time was conducted in an English school. There was no pre or post test or specific hypothesis at this stage. I attended their Circle Time sessions to explore students' experience and opinions. The reason for choosing W school was because they use Circle Time as one of the methods for students' affective education and there were few secondary schools in the UK using Circle Time. Circle Time is mainly used in primary schools in the UK.

The experimental school, X school, specialises in foreign language study, mainly English. X school is one of 17 foreign language schools in China. It is considered a key school for cultivating foreign language specialists for the country. The reason for choosing X school as an experimental school was because of the practicality of the class size being small; X school uses smaller sized classes (26 pupils) in its English teaching. That makes Circle

Time feasible. In addition, the head teacher was interested in having the experiment in her school.

The next section will introduce the preliminary study in W school, an English secondary school.

#### **4.2.1 Preliminary study in exploring Circle Time in an English secondary school**

This study was divided into two phases. The first phase was a preliminary study which took place in W school, an English secondary school. This section will introduce the choice of the English school, and the procedure for conducting the exploratory study.

It seems almost certain that no Circle Time has been used in a Chinese school before this study. The researcher needed firstly to have an empirical understanding of Circle Time from the students' point of view and also to test their preliminary concerns and the design. As Robson (2002) suggests, 'a pilot study is a good way to see whether your idea is feasible'. This preliminary study also has pilot function in testing the instruments of data collection. I participated in Circle Time in an English secondary school to observe their Circle Time sessions and investigate students' experience and perspectives of Circle Time. The aims of the preliminary phase were threefold:

1. By participating in and observing Circle Time in an English secondary school, W school, talking with teachers and students to extend my practical knowledge and experience of Circle Time. I experienced Circle Time as a learner, a participator and a researcher in the authentic setting. I observed the way they conducted Circle Time; how the students behaved and their views about Circle Time; the interaction between



pupils, and between teachers and pupils

2. Using questionnaires and interviews to consult with the teachers and students in the school, to explore and investigate in detail the questions and issues which emerged.
3. Examining questionnaires, an interview questions to perfect research design.

The preliminary study was an ethnographical study in W school to explore English pupils' perspectives of Circle Time. The reason for choosing W school for this study, was it was one of the few secondary schools which used Circle Time for students' personal and social development in England.

The preliminary study was the first stage of this research. The Circle Time theory needed to be 'inducted' by exploring Circle Time functioning in an English secondary school, then introducing it to a Chinese secondary school (Bryman, 2008). This stage firstly needed to answer the questions:

- How does Circle Time function in an English secondary school?
- What are students' opinions of Circle Time?
- Are there any issues in conducting Circle Time?

From March 2005 to July 2005, I visited W school every week. I did not stand outside the Circle to observe but participated in the talk and shared with the pupils. I also had the opportunity to run Circle Time with English students in W school. Being a participator in Circle Time, I learnt and experienced much about the practice, discussed the issues with the pupils and teachers and watched the way they dealt with issues within the Circle.

Participant observation was also employed collecting data during the preliminary study. Observation gave the researcher the opportunity to look at a real situation and gather

“live” data (Patton, 1990:203-5; cited in Cohen et al. 2000). Cohen *et al.* (2000) indicate that observation enables the researcher to understand the context of programmes, to be open-ended and inductive, to discover things that might not be freely talked about in interview situations and to access personal knowledge. As I participated in Circle Time with students and teachers together, I made notes after each session of what I had observed and my reflections on this.

Morrison (1993, cited in Cohen *et al.* 2000) argues that observation could help the researcher to gather data from the physical setting, human setting, international setting and programme setting. In this research, I discovered not only what happened during Circle Time but also relevant issues in school and the pupils’ daily life, e.g. environment, climate, members, the process and a variety of the other factors. From a qualitative stance, I sought to examine the nature of the event rather than testing a hypothesis. Questionnaires and interviews were used to get a general impression of pupils’ and teachers’ opinions of Circle Time.

Data from the preliminary study was used in three ways: firstly, the English teachers and pupils’ viewpoints could be taken into consideration when introducing Circle Time in a Chinese school; secondly, the preliminary finding tested the instruments of data collection; finally, these will be taken as comparative factors to triangulate the results from the Chinese teachers’ and pupils’ viewpoints to assess whether there are differences and possible reasons for them. Comparisons can help to draw a clearer picture of using a western pedagogical method in an eastern culture.

The next section will discuss the comparative factors in this study.

## 4.2.2 Comparative considerations

“Educational problems have to be examined in the light of culturally determined needs, objectives, and conditions (Raivola, 1986: 261)”. No social phenomenon can be isolated and studied without comparing it to other social phenomena (Øyen, 1990). This study was intended to investigate teacher-pupil relationships in a Chinese secondary school and therefore how the relationships affect students’ disciplinary and emotional behaviour. In order to give a holistic picture of Chinese schooling, teacher-pupil relationships in a Chinese school and the emotional development of pupils there, an English school, in which Circle Time was employed to develop pupils’ personal and interpersonal skills, was taken as a comparative case in this study. This design brought the opportunity for the researcher to understand how Circle Time operates in an English school, and to become proficient in manipulating Circle Time in a Chinese school. Bearing comparative thinking in mind, the researcher was prepared to encounter unexpected issues in a different cultural setting. Circle time was taken as a starting agent, a conjoined element to make a link between the two cultures. However, it was not the researcher’s intention to investigate the difference between the two countries in doing Circle Time. The research was seeking Chinese participants’ attitudes and perspectives when first facing a western pedagogical method. Comparisons reflected on and highlighted the differences, and also brought opportunities to western audiences to understand Chinese culture, to test how the same pedagogical method operated in different cultural settings.

Comparative research, generalized by Øyen (1990), has synonymous concepts such as cross-country, cross-national, cross-societal, cross-cultural, cross-systemic, cross-institutional; and is usually based on the units of countries. But Øyen (1990) argues that

using countries as units in comparative research is not the most 'fruitful' approach. He indicates that national boundaries are different from ethnic, cultural and social boundaries. However, the world in fact is divided according to these administrative units. It is convenient to adapt information from these administrative units. Comparative study is the best way to learn from different cultures. The variety of geography, history, economy and culture shapes the non-equivalence of concepts and characteristics, and makes for complexity in interpreting comparative study; however, this also makes comparative study important in understanding different cultures and settings by finding links, patterns and relationships and reducing variance.

Robinson-Pant (2005) suggests that for international students working with two or more languages within their field, research can be an advantage in some respects. Firstly, they are constantly comparing and refining concepts between different languages and cultures, analyzing data in terms of what it means within that particular discourse. Secondly, international students using two languages in research may develop greater sensitivity both about their own identity as 'insider' and 'outsider' researcher, and the strategies they adopted in their research. The researcher equipped with 8 years working experience in Chinese schools and 6 years studying and researching experience in the UK, has the advantages of language, perspective, experience and both insider and outsider thinking. However, it is still wise to discuss the potential issues of the researcher's role. The researcher has to understand the cultures and the systems better in different cultural institutions, and also needs to be aware of their own role and knowledge in the research setting, to reduce bias. As Raivola (1986) argues, within international comparison, the researcher needs to be aware of the danger that one's assumptions, system of values, and prejudices, could lead to a cultural bias in the gathering and interpretation of data. By the

same token, it can be difficult without comparison to learn to recognise and appreciate the special characteristics of one's own culture, simply because one is accustomed to react automatically to them.

Moghaddam *et al.* (2003) think that the very nature of culture is social, shared, continually changing, collaboratively constructed, and collaboratively sustained. They presume that culture is a normative system, which influences what the people do as to what it is proper or desirable to do. As a consequence, growing up in a society, as individuals appropriate cultures, they not only behave in ways demanded by local norms, but they come to have culturally distinctive subjective and private experiences. Chinese students have been influenced by the culture of the society in which they grew up; they might understand and react differently toward Circle Time compared with their peers in the UK. It is worth investigating Circle Time taking place in a very different society. Circle time is considered to be a practical method in developing pupil's emotional wellbeing and raising pupil's self-esteem. The golden rule in doing Circle Time is the equality between teachers and pupils; in achieving this equality, Chinese teachers should show more respect to pupils than previously, which would change both a Chinese teachers' and students' way of thinking and acting within their cultural educational setting.

Moghaddam *et al.* (ibid.) suggest that researchers should give full and serious consideration to the difference between the culture of the researchers and that of the participants in the research project. Therefore, they indicate that mixed methodologies could help a researcher to cope better with the opportunities and limitations imposed by the recognition of the role of culture in the realm of human thought and action.

The researcher also needs to consider the personal cultural background, values and experience which will influence the research. In the next section, I will discuss and reflect upon my consideration of the role of the researcher.

There are differences between Chinese X school and UK W school, however, ‘it is reasonable to suggest that the national culture in which all schools in a country are embedded, and which all teachers and pupils in that country share, is as powerful a determinant of its character as are the unique institutional dynamics and circumstances which make one school different from another; and therefore, that any one school says a great deal about the national system of education of which it is a part (R. Alexander, 1996).’

In W school, I participated in and observed their Circle Time sessions; in X school, I designed and conducted Circle Time sessions. Rich data was collected from questionnaires, interviews, observation and documents during field work; I will focus on the Chinese school to interpret the findings.

#### **4.2.3 Procedure of conducting the main research**

The second phase took place in a Chinese secondary school, where a quasi-experimental strategy was employed using Circle Time to interact with the experimental group to test the hypotheses that Circle Time can help Chinese students to develop their personal and interpersonal skills and raise their self-esteem. It can help Chinese students and teachers to establish a more equal and democratic relationship. In an effort to shed light on student participants’ points of view, questionnaires, observation and interviews were used to

investigate students' attitudes, comments, critiques and suggestions; and also to explore the meanings behind the phenomena. However, to investigate the further development of teacher-pupil relationships in a Chinese secondary school, an experiment is not enough to answer the questions in depth. When we throw a pebble into a pond, our main interest is not the pebble. On the contrary, we expect something to happen as a result of the intervention. This study was to introduce Circle Time - a western educational pedagogy to a Chinese secondary school to develop a democratic teacher-pupil relationship. An experiment to test the Circle Time was used as a pebble. Based on the experimental framework, in order to explore the ripples on the pond, Chinese affective education, an experiment was designed not only to test the hypotheses but also as an intervention to investigate in-depth Chinese affective education from students' and teachers' experience and the perspectives of using Circle Time. Both qualitative and quantitative strategies and methods were employed to investigate Chinese students' and teachers' reactions and perspectives of the experiment. Mixed methods were adopted in investigating participants' perspectives of Circle Time and using Circle Time in developing their personal and interpersonal skills and raising their self-esteem. By introducing Circle Time to a Chinese school, Chinese secondary school's personal and social education system and teachers' attitudes to adopting new pedagogy in students' personal, emotional development and raising their self-esteem were investigated and interpreted. Consequently, a combined methods (Gorard & Taylor, 2004) or mixed methods (Bryman, 2008; Creswell, 2003; Gorard & Taylor, 2004; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998) design is most suitable for the purposes of this study rather than a quantitative experimental design.

I introduced Circle Time to teachers and pupils, and co-operated with them for half a year. We worked together to examine and develop Circle Time in the Chinese context.

Questionnaires, interviews and participant observation were employed in collecting data in the Chinese school to investigate further questions. This research involved an experimental study in the Chinese context to offer some points of comparison with what happens in a western culture. This research also introduced Circle Time as a new method for pupils' personal, social and moral development, to enhance their interpersonal skills.

A pre-test was given to year 7 groups to analyze pupils' self-esteem, inter-personal skills and the relationship with teachers (Appendix 1.1). The same test was given to pupils five months later after the experimental study. I sought to find out from the results whether there were differences between the experimental group and the control group; and if there were what they were? Observation was used as the main method in data collection during the experimental study. Questionnaires and interviews were conducted with pupils and teachers to explore their opinions about Circle Time.

In this section, the design of the experiment was simply adopting a western pedagogical method, Circle Time, directly, to apply to the Chinese school, making the method work in the Chinese educational setting, in a similar way to that found in UK schools. In this setting, the following research questions were raised:

- What do Chinese students think about Circle Time?
- Would Circle Time help Chinese students to develop their personal and interpersonal skills and raise their self-esteem?
- Would Circle Time facilitate teacher-pupil relationships?
- Would Chinese students act in the same way as English students? What kind of differences would there be?



I firstly introduced Circle Time to teachers who participated in this study, then negotiated with them to decide the group size, location, and potential issues; and to talk in the Circle about relevant complications. The meetings also continued during the period of fieldwork to improve the experimental design.

#### **4.2.4 The field experiment**

‘Prospective’ and ‘reflective’, according to Cobb *et al.* (2004) are two faces of experimental design. A primary goal in experimental design is to improve the initial design by testing and revising conjectures as they are informed by ongoing analysis during the field study. Some limitations of experimental study should be carefully considered in advance.

An experimental design is the traditional approach to conducting quantitative research (Creswell, 2005), while Gomm (2004) introduces the term ‘field experiment’ to describe the kind of experiment where the researcher ‘injects’ some control into an otherwise naturally occurring situation. ‘Field experiment’ is an extension of laboratory experiment in social research. Oakley (2000) declares that although ‘experimental’ is usually associated with ‘quantitative’, it is not necessary to stipulate that a design for prospective studies employing experimental and control groups should eliminate ‘qualitative’ methods or data. This design combines quantitative and qualitative research strategies and methods.

Another type of experimental design has different subjects but similar treatment (Gomm, 2004). Group A and group B are selected as different in some aspects, while treated as similarly as possible. (In this research, in-island classes & out-islands classes).

This study was to examine whether Circle Time could work in a Chinese secondary school, with a bigger group of pupils. Why does it work (or not)? Are there any issues which influence Circle Time in a Chinese secondary school? How can it be developed? To achieve the best answers, both quantitative and qualitative data are needed. In this mixed design, firstly experiments are used to examine the questions; pre-test and post-test were applied to compare the effect. Questionnaires were employed to generate students' opinions about their understanding and feelings of Circle Time. In-depth interviews were used to gather information from the participants.

The experiment in this study attempted to answer the question: Can Circle Time can operate effectively with Chinese secondary children in Chinese school? The experimental group was randomly chosen from a year 7 group within 12 classes. "Schools are natural laboratories" (Oakley, 2000; 165). It is easy to choose samples randomly in school. 'A representative sample is best gained by using random sampling techniques'(de Vaus, 2001). Usually, in a Chinese school, students in the same year group are divided into several classes; each class has the same proportion of successful students based on their academic results from the previous year's examination. The purpose of this kind of division is to avoid putting pupils with better academic results into one group. As a result, students with different academic outcomes are in the same group; the average score of each subject of each class of pupils is almost the same. Thus the experimental group and control group are naturally randomized.

In this study, year 7 pupils were divided into 12 classes. Apart from one class who were learning German, Japanese and French, four experimental groups were randomly chosen from the other 11 classes, which were all learning English. Two of the four experimental classes were chosen from 3 boarding classes. The students in these classes were from rural areas. They came to this school, which is one of the best in the city, after reaching its high demands in their entrance examination. Their family also needed to pay extra tuition fees for their study, because they were not residents of this region. Although extra tuition fees were required, there was still a huge demand from parents and pupils to struggle for a place at the best school in order to gain a better future.

In these three boarding classes (referred to as out-island classes), pupils stayed in school during the week and went home at weekends. There were boarding staff at school to take care of their sleeping time and their life during the week. The class teacher would look after their emotional feelings if they were lonely or homesick. There were 7 pupils whose homes were too far from the city centre, who might take more than four hours to travel back home, or whose parents were doing business in other parts of China who had to stay at school almost the whole academic term – five months. These students are intelligent in their academic studies; however, as their primary schools did not offer the best facilities of study, they generally do not have the same outcomes as students from other classes. While in other classes, for example, 40% of students have learnt to play the piano, 10% have earned a piano playing Certificate. In the boarding classes, just half the number of students compared with their day peers had had a chance to learn piano and they did not reach such a good standard.

The homes of students in the other classes (called in-island classes), are not far away from the school which is close to the city centre. In China living in the city means they can easily access the best facilities, including school and education<sup>5</sup>. For most of these students, both their parents are white-collar professionals, who are not only well-educated, but also well paid; therefore, they can offer their child the best education theoretically and physically.

However, the difference between individuals must be considered. The objects of educational research are human beings. Students in each class have different teachers, who will influence students' daily discipline, ways of learning and relationships with teachers and between peers. These factors cannot be controlled outside laboratories. Each class has been randomly appointed a class teacher. The class teachers are different in gender, age, experience, personalities and ways of teaching, which will influence students in various ways.

After one week of negotiations with different departments in X school, the sessions started in week 2. Within 12 classes in year 7, 4 classes were randomly chosen to be experimental groups (table 4.2.4A). As there were two classes which were boarding classes, the experimental group had to be divided into two groups. Although this resulted in more difficulties in data collection and analysis, the findings revealed significant differences between the two types of students. Class 12 is a special class with both

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<sup>5</sup> This is another problem of the Chinese education system, which has to be explained. Even compulsory education in China is not totally free. Schools in the cities have the best facilities for study: the best teachers, best classrooms and best opportunities, while rural schools especially western rural schools are as far a part as heaven and earth. There are differences between city schools and rural schools even in most developed cities in the east; the differences of schooling between east China and west China are vast. The school in this study has been equipped with multimedia teaching facilities in each classroom; all teachers have a computer in their desk and are connected with internet. There are music and painting rooms, physical, chemical and biological labs, language teaching rooms, a trapeze room, a library with 55,000 books and other facilities, while in western Chinese rural schools, some students do not even have a proper classroom, study desk or textbook (see Chapter 2: Current issues of Chinese education).

boarders and day pupils. They chose German, French or Japanese as their major foreign language study, so it was considered a special reference group.

**Table 4.2.4.A The experiment group arrangement**

<b>Year 7 class</b>	<b>Group types</b>	<b>Students types</b>	<b>Shorter form</b>
1	Control group 1	Boarders	C1
2	Experiment group 1	Boarders	E1
3			
4	Experiment group 2	Day pupils	E2
5			
6	Control group 2	Day pupils	C2
7			
8			
9			
10			
11			
12	Non-experiment group	Mixed specialist language class: Boarders and day pupils	S1

Experimental group 1 (E1) and experimental group 2 (E2) started their Circle Time sessions from week 2; each session was based on one topic, mainly according to their daily life. Before the mid-term examination, all topics were decided by the researcher. Some topics, such as *idols*, *generation gap*, *boys and girls* were decided by students according to their interests. All sessions are summarized in Table 4.2.4 B.

**Table 4.2.4.B Session Plan and content of Circle Time Experiment schedule**

Week	Time	Circle Time Session
1	5 <sup>th</sup> September – 9 <sup>th</sup> September	<i>Time arrangement</i>
2	12 <sup>th</sup> September – 16 <sup>th</sup> September	Coming to a new place (first session)
3	19 <sup>th</sup> September – 23 <sup>rd</sup> September	<i>Hosting National educational conference for Student-centred Education</i>
4	26 <sup>th</sup> September – 30 <sup>th</sup> September	Making friends
5	National Holiday	<i>National holiday</i>
6	10 <sup>th</sup> October – 14 <sup>th</sup> October	Holiday and internet friendship
7	17 <sup>th</sup> October – 21 October	Death and life
8	24 <sup>th</sup> October – 28 <sup>th</sup> October	You are the best
9	31 <sup>st</sup> October – 4 <sup>th</sup> November	How do you feel about examinations
10	7 <sup>th</sup> November – 11 <sup>th</sup> November	<i>School Mid-term examination</i>
11	14 <sup>th</sup> November – 18 <sup>th</sup> November	Idols
12	21 <sup>st</sup> November – 25 <sup>th</sup> November	Generation gap
13	28 <sup>th</sup> November – 2 <sup>nd</sup> December	Boys and girls
14	5 <sup>th</sup> December – 9 <sup>th</sup> December	Moral conflict
15	12 <sup>th</sup> December – 16 <sup>th</sup> December	Ideals (some groups did not have it as the venue was occupied)
16	19 <sup>th</sup> December – 23 <sup>rd</sup> December	Merry Christmas and Happy New year Party)
17	26 <sup>th</sup> December – 30 December	Making a tower together without verbal language (whole class session)
18	3 <sup>rd</sup> January – 7 <sup>th</sup> January	Conclusion and questionnaires

This mixed study was mainly based on the experimental design – introducing Circle Time to a Chinese secondary school. There was no evidence about any Chinese school using Circle Time for students’ emotional development and communication skills; neither

has research about Circle Time been done before in China. In order to examine these experimental results, apart from pre and post-experimental self-esteem score tests, students' academic performance was taken into account in dependent value analyses. Year seven students' entry academic results and their end of term academic results were compared as pre- and post-experiment test elements.

Apart from using questionnaire, semi-structured interview, test and field observation for data collection, and paying attention to experimental groups, the researcher was also open to different data sources and targeted a wide research population. In the next section, attention will be paid to some unexpected groups, who joined the study on their own initiative; however, they made a considerable contribution.

#### **4.2.5 Unexpected participants – year ten students and large sized groups**

This study was designed to focus on year 7 students, as they were the first year to starting their secondary school lives. 4 experimental classes' students and 8 experimental teachers attended Circle Time over five months. These participating students and teachers were appointed by the school. They did not have a choice. Their attitudes in taking part in this study varied. Most students were happy to have Circle Time sessions to have a happy and relaxed time (chapter 5). Teacher participants, however, exhibited various attitudes according to their working experience, personal interests, job positions and teaching methods (chapter 6), and these will be discussed in chapters 6 and 7.

After one month's field work, some other teachers from the senior high school discovered this study and approached the researcher to show an interest in taking part. Then unexpectedly two other groups were enthusiastic about participating in this study. The two groups are both from year 10. One was class 7 with 52 students just like the other classes. Another was a special group from Xinjiang province with 40 students from Uigur, Kazak, Mongolia and the Hui nationalities. These students were also selected according to their academic performance and personal ability. They travelled four days from Urumchi to the south east coast and they would go back home only once a year. The reason for them to travel so far to study in X school was one of the government policies in reducing the gap between western China and eastern China. From 2000, the government started funding Xinjiang students to study in eastern developed cities. 24,000 Xinjiang students had enrolled in eastern schools since then. They were recruited from 28 big cities in the east. There have been 50 schools involved in having Xinjiang students. 90 percent of these students would go to universities after their secondary study. They were expected to go back to Xinjiang to contribute to local development with the knowledge and skills they had acquired.

X school took extra care of these students. An experienced teacher was selected to be their class teacher. Because of their religion, they have their own chefs from Xinjiang, in their own kitchen and dining hall. Apart from their class teacher, there were also two teachers from Xinjiang who stayed with them to look after their residential needs. As I was living in the same building with them, I had more of a chance to get to know them.

Their class teacher, Mr. Chen was an experienced teacher; he wanted me to help him contribute to these Xinjiang students' all-round development after learning of my research. So did the Class 7 teacher Miss Xue. I then introduced the Circle Time session



*'You are the best'* to the Xinjiang group. As there were 40 students and 4 teachers attended the session, we had a special Circle Time session lasting one and half an hours. The process and result were significant (§5.4).

The session included four steps: Step one; games were used to warm up. Step two; they were encouraged to call out their own names. Step three: praising each in turn. Step four: symposium.

During the session, I had chance to take some pictures of the students and teachers, which, surprisingly, presented interesting results (§5.4.4). Both teachers and students were interviewed after the session. The results will be interpreted and discussed in section 5.4. *You are the best* was one of the Circle Time sessions designed in this study (table 4.2.4 B). This session will be taken as a special case discussed in the next chapter.

The next section will introduce and explain the instrumentation and methods of data collection of this research.

### **4.3 Instrumentation and Methods of data collection**

Research projects usually include a number of different research questions. So a research method appropriate for one question may be inappropriate for another (Gray, 2004). Each method of data collection has certain advantages as well as some inherent limitations (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 1996).

Adopting mixed design in this research also brought more opportunity for using multiple methods in data collection. Multiple methods of data collection, especially combining quantitative and qualitative data can increase the likelihood that the research questions are being understood from various points of view.

Questionnaires, participant observation, interview and documentation were adopted in this study. The procedure in handling each method of data collection will be described in this section; the awareness of disadvantages of each method in designing questionnaires and interview questions will be discussed in this section.

### **4.3.1 Questionnaire**

#### **4.3.1.1 Self-esteem questionnaires (test)**

Self-esteem questionnaires (see appendix 1) were designed based on Queensland<sup>6</sup> self-esteem test questionnaires and considering secondary pupils' characteristics. 15 closed questions were chosen to test students' self-esteem scores and to generalize each class students' average self-esteem level. Pre-tests were given to all pupils in the second week of term. Post-tests were given to students after 12 weeks' experimentation, and before the end of term.

Johnson & Turner (2003) indicate that tests are commonly used in quantitative research to measure attitudes, personality, self-perceptions, aptitude, and performance of research participants. They also suggest the strengths and weaknesses of tests:

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<sup>6</sup> Queensland- The land of test. (Web source) *Self-esteem tests*.  
Available at: [http://www.queendom.com/queendom\\_tests/transfer](http://www.queendom.com/queendom_tests/transfer), accessed on 18/06/2005

**Table 4.3.1 Strengths and Weaknesses of Tests**

**Strengths:**

- Can prove good measures of many characteristics of people
- Strong psychometric properties (high measurement validity)
- Availability of reference group data
- Possible to be administered to group
- May provide “hard” quantitative data
- Allow comparability of common measures across research population
- Instruments usually already developed
- Wide range of tests available (with most content able to be tapped)
- Response rate high for group-administered tests
- Ease of data analysis
- Research-designed tests possibly tailored to local needs

**Weaknesses**

- Can be expensive if test must be purchased for each research participant
- Possible reactive effects (e.g., response sets)
- Possibly not appropriate for a local population
- Sometimes biased against certain groups of people
- Potential nonresponse error to selected items on the test
- Might lack psychometric data
- Psychometric data possibly do not apply to local population

Source from Johnson & Turner (2003; 312)

The questions in the test have been carefully designed and chosen to make them appropriate for students. At the beginning, I wrote 30 questions, and then chose 15 in the end (see appendix 1). For example, in order to examine the students’ relationship with others, the question ‘I would like to make friends with everyone in the class’ was replaced by ‘I would like to be deskmate with everyone in the class.’ Students could rate their choice within five levels: strongly disagree, disagree, not sure, agree and strongly agree. The consideration was based on reducing possible bias and effects that might disturb the findings.

In this study, questionnaires were completed within each class, and were analyzed based on the class units. Considering privacy, anonymity and confidentiality, individual students were not asked to write their names, they could write down their names if they

wished; otherwise they were not given. Questionnaires were handed out and collected by class teachers. One experimental class lost 7 questionnaires as the class teacher left the questionnaires with the students. The others all came back in full.

The self-esteem questionnaires were analysed with the assistance of the SPSS programme, which is effective and reliable in obtaining results.

#### **4.3.1.2 Circle Time questionnaires**

Experimental groups were also given a Circle Time questionnaire (see appendix 2.2) to gain students' opinion of Circle Time. This questionnaire mixed closed and open-ended questions, which could bring both general information and more specific opinions from each individual.

This questionnaire was given to students at the end of the experiment. The same questionnaires (see appendix 2.1) were given to UK students to ascertain their general opinions of Circle Time. Closed questions were analysed with SPSS; open-ended questions, were coded with QSR Nvivo 7.

#### **4.3.1.3 Foreign teachers' opinion questionnaires**

The study school is a foreign language school; there were 5 foreign teachers working in this school. An open-ended questionnaire (see Appendix 5) was also designed to seek the foreign teachers' opinions about the difference between Chinese schools, students and teachers. These foreign teachers were from the UK, Canada and the USA, English

speaking countries. Their experience and understanding of Chinese education, Chinese teachers and students will give a picture of Chinese schools from a different point of view. This questionnaire was given to teachers either on paper or via email. It is really convenient to get people to answer questions via email. Nowadays, more and more people have got used to typing rather than hand writing. It is easy for teachers to type their answers to open-ended questions rather than writing. In response to these questionnaires, participants who returned their questionnaires via email have written more than the participants who returned papers.

A follow-up interview with one of the foreign teachers was conducted after the questionnaires came back to me. The interview brought rich information which the questionnaire could not provide.

#### **4.3.2 Interview**

“Interview is one of the most common and powerful ways in which we try to understand our fellow human beings (Fontana & Frey, 2003).” Fontana & Frey also summarize that the form of interview involves not only an individual or group face-to-face verbal communication, but also includes mailed, self-administered questionnaires, and telephone surveys. Interviews can be structured, semi-structured, or unstructured. They have been employed for various uses in our lives. In this ‘interview society’(Atkinson & Silverman, 1997), everyone, not just social researchers, relies on interviewing to gain information. According to Fontana and Frey (2003), interview is not just seen as a tool of data gathering but as an interaction between two (or more) people leading to negotiated, contextually based text results.

Wellington (1996) defines some characteristics of a semi-structured interview:

- More controlled by interviewer
- Flexible
- Not completely pre-determined

Oakley (2000) also points out some strengths of interview as a qualitative method to make face-to-face connection between researchers and people being studied; enabling the 'silent' to be heard. Maykut and Morehouse (1994) indicate that in-depth interview can develop surface talk into rich discussion about thoughts and feelings.

Johnson and Turner (2003) summarize some strengths and weaknesses of interview, listed in the table below.

**Table 4.3.2 Strengths and Weaknesses of interviews**

<p><b>Strengths:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Good for measuring attitudes and most other content of interest</li><li>Allow probing by the interviewer</li><li>Can provide in-depth information</li><li>Allow good interpretive validity</li><li>Low drop rate for closed-ended interviews</li><li>Very quick turnaround for telephone interviews</li><li>Moderately high measurement validity for well-constructed and well-tested interview protocols</li><li>Can use with probability sample</li><li>Relatively high response rates often attainable</li><li>Useful for exploration and confirmation</li></ul> <p><b>Weakness</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>In-person interviews expensive and time-consuming</li><li>Possible reactive and investigator effects</li><li>Perceived anonymity by respondent possibly low</li><li>Data analysis sometimes time-consuming for open-ended items</li><li>Measures in need of validation</li></ul>
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Johnson & Turner (2003, p.308)

This study values participants' opinions and encourages participants to voice their view freely. Semi-structured interviews were mainly used to discover English and Chinese students' and teachers' perspectives.

#### **4.3.2.1 Interviewing pupils**

In the Circle Time Questionnaire, pupils were told that if they would like to attend an interview, they could leave their name on the questionnaire. I would contact them to arrange an interview, to ask them what they thought about Circle Time, and how they thought it could be developed. These interviews took place after school. We met in either a classroom or a meeting room provided by the school. I also suggested that even if they did not write their name they could find me if they had anything to talk about. I stayed outside their classroom during the lunch hour. Everyone could see me. I also approached students to ask them questions. Some students just came to me and talked directly about what they thought about Circle Time; some came to arrange a time with me, then we met and had an interview after school; some handed me a piece of paper then ran away and left what they wanted to say was on the paper. As a result, the interviews with pupils include both unstructured and semi-structured: semi-structured interview based on the questionnaire of Circle Time (Appendix 2). Unstructured interview was mainly based on students' interests. Some students wrote to me to talk about their feelings. For example a girl wrote:

Since I started in this school, the pressure from study is so high, I can barely breathe.

The study is not that easy, really, a person like me is starting to feel unsure.

Although I am still smiling, things behind smiling are sad which include uncertainty,

parental expectation and examination scores..... Maybe it is not good, but for different reasons, I don't like any lesson except the circle time. I feel unspeakably comfortable and am hoping I can retain my joy in this lesson. It never fails to provide a feeling of comfort and relaxation. In this lesson, I can give up my burden and be very relaxed. No, it's not a lesson, it is play, the natural gift of a kid. I have, at least expectation for a certain thing (in this school). I am so afraid if I won't have it anymore, what I am going to be? Hate the school? I don't know, maybe it won't be that serious. (SG26)

I have categorised students' writing as interviews as they use this way to tell me how they feel about Circle Time. Some shy students wrote more than they said in person.

Interviews with pupils brought me rich data for the research but also brought me difficulties in handling and analysing these data (refer to § 4.4 data analysis).

#### **4.3.2.2 Interviewing teachers**

A semi-structured interview has been employed to investigate teachers' opinions about teacher-pupil relationships and teachers' understanding of students' emotional development. 8 teachers and 1 head of year were interviewed. During the interview, I was aware of what Fontana & Frey (2003) suggested, that the researcher should avoid getting involved in a "real" conversation in which he or she answered questions asked by the respondent or provided personal opinions on the matters discussed.

Interview with teachers took place after I had spent half a year in X school. I had developed a good relationship with them. We arranged a private and calm environment



for the interviews to take place. Questions started from their personal history of being a student and being a teacher (see appendix 4). Teachers seemed to like to have the chance to share their experience.

### **4.3.3 Participant observation**

One of the advantages of observational methods, as Axinn & Pearce (2006: 9) point out, is that they can be 'relatively unstructured', and have the potential to 'yield unique sources of insight and introspection'. They also quote from Burawoy (1991, cited in Axinn & Pearce, 2006: 9) that participant observation methods provide the opportunity to researchers to put themselves "in the shoes" of the people they study and use introspection as a tool.

The qualitative researcher's field notes contain what has been seen and heard by the researcher, without interpretation. In other words, the participant observer's primary duty is to record what happened without inferring the feelings of the participants (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; p.73) As Denzin and Lincoln (2003) indicate, there is no 'pure', 'objective', 'detached' observation, because all observations involve the observer's participation in the world being studied. The effects of the observer's presence can never be erased from affecting the feelings of the participants. The researcher was trying to limit her interfering during the fieldwork. In this two phase study, the first phase was carried out in an English secondary school. I attended and experienced their Circle Time. As it is the nature of Circle Time that everyone should be encouraged to be involved, I observed while participating. I wrote a report to describe what happened after each session, just as I did for Circle Time in the Chinese school. I conducted Circle Time

myself in a Chinese secondary school in the second phase of the study. There were difficulties in reporting the observation, as I had to conduct three Circle Time sessions in one afternoon; I made notes after the afternoon sessions. I did not intend to write down every sentence the students said, while I described what happened, and made notes of the students' reactions. When trust was built up after several weeks, I started using a tape recorder with the students. I found that although students agreed to my recording what they had said, some students were not comfortable in using it, and some suggested I should get rid of it. I gave up using it although it could have helped to produce a more detailed observation record. Participants have a right to know what is going to happen to them or around them and to agree or disagree to taking part (Angrosino & De Pérez, 2003). This also relates to ethical issue for researcher's consideration (refer to § 4.7). In so doing, students were offered a more free and comfortable environment to express their feeling and reveal their issues. Combining multiple methods, data collected by the other methods could supply the information needed without the tape recorder. During the fieldwork, students and teachers were encouraged rather than required to participate in studies (de Vaus, 2001).

#### **4.3.4 Documents**

Two kinds of documents were used in this study: personal documents and school documents. Firstly, it is possible to find out some interesting data from students' personal compositions and diaries.

Some students wrote a composition for their Chinese literature subject. When their literature teachers read that, they were quite interested to show me and talk about what

we had done during Circle Time. Students in their compositions show strong positive views towards the Circle Time sessions.

“...Actually, everybody should be a listener. A listener is a person can listen to others and learn from others as well. An expressive person is a person has his/her own ideas which mean the thought is moving on with the lesson. In fact, I think all lessons should focus on talking about the feeling, listening to others, and playing games for relaxing.” (CD-03)

In most Chinese schools, it is common for students to write a weekly report about their feelings. It is a way to talk about some issues, to discuss with teachers. The class teacher will write a comment or response to their problems. Some students also wrote about their feelings about Circle Time which took place in that week.

“Today was our turn to have the circle time session. It was delivered by Miss Wu Ling who is very kind. I like this subject because it’s easy and we can also play games. Miss Wu Ling teaches lesson from a fun perspective, I think many students like her. Otherwise, we from Class B wouldn’t fight with Class A for the sessions.

Today, we talked about boys and girls. The teacher asked us a first question: ‘what do you think is better to be a boy or a girl?’ Everyone had an answer, especially a girl said, ‘I wish I was a boy’ because if she was a boy, life would be simple.

Another boy wanted to be a girl because he thought now when girls hit boys, it is fine; but boys cannot fight back (as teachers said boys should behave like gentlemen).

Miss Wu also asked: ‘in your mind, what do you think a good boy or girl?’ We answered that boys should be like gentlemen, sunny also; girls should be like ladies, smart and kind.

Personally, I think a good boy should be gentle and a good girl should be kind, lovely and soft...

After the session, Miss Wu also led us to have a game. That’s the end of this week’s session.”

(CD-05)

The official document of students’ academic results is also used in this study to assist as evidence. As I mentioned before, the students in each year group were equally divided into 12 classes. The 12 classes have almost the same number of boys and girls, the same number of successful students and lower achieving students. As a result, the average scores of each subject had only a slight difference. At the end of term, the students’ academic results were evaluated again, to analyse teachers’ and students’ work.

These kinds of data will be used as part of pre-test and post-test to generalize and support the experimental study (refer § 5.1.3).

#### **4.3.5 Data**

With all the methods mentioned above, rich data have been collected during this research (See table 4.3.5). SPSS 15 and Nvivo 7 were employed in supporting data analysis. Apart from analysing quantitative data using SPSS 15, the analysis of qualitative data did not rely totally on Nvivo 7, as I found that Nvivo could not do the entire job properly. When using word frequency, some obvious mistakes appeared. It is wise to prepare data

carefully before importing it to Nvivo and to double-check manually to make sure the coding really represents the study and the ideas of the researcher.

**Table 4.3.5 Data collected during research**

<b>Data Type</b>	<b>Data name</b>	<b>Quantity</b>	<b>Analysis</b>
<b>Questionnaires</b>	Circle Time questionnaires (English)	92	SPSS & Nvivo
	Circle Time questionnaires (Chinese)	207	SPSS & Nvivo
	Self-esteem test	1131	SPSS
	Western teachers' opinions	4	Nvivo
<b>Interviews</b>	Interview English teacher	1	Nvivo
	Interview English students	15	Nvivo
	Interview Chinese students	33	Nvivo
	Interview Chinese teachers	18	Nvivo
<b>Documents</b>	Chinese students' academic results	2	SPSS
	Chinese students' summaries of Circle Time	64	Nvivo
	Students' diaries and compositions and letters	12	Nvivo

Different data have been analysed with the support of software SPSS or Nvivo. The aim of using this software was to assist the procedure of data analysis. The researcher believes that software provides tools to support research work; it is the researcher's job to decide how the data will be presented in order to answer research questions. The next section will introduce and discuss the concerns of data analysis.

## **4. 4 Data analysis**

Both quantitative and qualitative data were gained from this mixed design through the field work (See table 4.3.5). In such a huge collection, coding and interpreting data is

essential to the research. Robson (2002) suggests that for a fixed design, data should be analysed after they have been safely gathered; while for a flexible design, data analysis should take place in the middle of the process. As a mixed design, however, data analysis in this study started from an early stage and throughout the whole journey of this research. Under pragmatic guidance, the data should work for the research questions.

Data from English students' questionnaires and interviews from the preliminary study firstly was used to test the design; and therefore, were taken as comparative factors to classify the different perspectives of using Circle Time between English and Chinese students. In the main study, pre and post-experimental tests and Chinese students' academic results gave a basic idea of how Circle Time worked in a Chinese school (refer to § 5.1), while students' and teachers' interview data provided triangulation in supporting detailed information to draw a holistic picture of Chinese affective education. Both quantitative data and qualitative data answer the relevant questions respectively. For example, students' questionnaire mentioned their positive view of Circle Time: "You can express yourself and communicate with others on your own initiative; you can exchange your ideas with the others. It helps us to build Friendship Bridges because we can have better communications (QC2-Q5-228)". Students' interview data provided more detailed information about what they like about Circle Time and what they can gain from Circle Time: "...During this lesson, I felt relaxed and happy. It was delivered in an active way. We can play games and have no distance with the teacher. We talk whenever we want to talk, with no restriction. During the session, the teacher always played games with us. Every time I went through, I felt so proud of myself. We had some questions which helped heal the wounds in our mind. On the whole, I like this subject and can't live

without it (SG 21).” Teachers’ interviews also provided evidence about students’ perceptions of Circle Time from a different angle: “Circle Time for students is a time to relax. It can develop their friendship. Students in class 5 have a very close relationship. I think because they have Circle Time while the other class I teach doesn’t (ITC1-6T).” The data provided strong evidence for the validity and reliability of findings.

Data from the experimental design was analysed with the SPSS system. The analysis and interpretation of the qualitative data was based on carefully going through the data, making decisions about coding and categorizing, making sense of the meaning of the words and language, to make the data speak to the research questions. With the support of Nvivo, raw data were firstly categorized according to topics and concepts, and then linked to the research questions, reflecting from the concepts of research questions and data, to develop catalogues for detailed interpretation. As I have mentioned in section 4.1.2, mixed design enabled triangulation at different stages. Table 4.4 shows the abbreviations of how data sources were coded and displayed.

**Table 4.4 Abbreviations of data source**

	<b>Type of Data</b>	<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Example</b>
1	Circle Time questionnaires (English)	QE-Q(number of question)-(number code)	QE-Q5-1003
2	Circle Time questionnaires (Chinese)	QC(class's code)-Q(number of questions)-number code)	QC3-Q5-334
3	Western teachers' opinions	IT(country's initial)E-(number code)	ITCE-03
4	Interview English teacher	IET(teachers' initial)-(number code)	IETF-01
5	Interview English students	IEB (number code) IEG (number code)	IEB 03
6	Interview Chinese students	ICB (number code) ICG (number code)	ICG09
7	Interview Chinese teachers	ITC(number)-teachers' initial	ITC10-YE
8	Chinese students' summaries of Circle Time	SB (number code) SG (number code)	SB25
9	Chinese students' diaries and compositions and letters	CD(number)	CD07
10	Research note	RN(number code)	RN12/10/05

The next section will build arguments to test the validity and reliability of data and findings.

## 4.5 Validity and reliability

Validity is concerned with whether the findings are 'really' about what they appear to be about. Reliability is concerned the consistency or stability of a measure (Robson, 2002). In order to achieve this goal, Cohen *et al.* (2000, 105) suggest that validity might be addressed through the honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data achieved in qualitative data; while in quantitative data, validity might be improved through careful



sampling, appropriate instrumentation and appropriate statistical treatment of the data. The most practical way of achieving greater validity, according to Cohen *et al* (ibid) is to 'minimize the amount of bias' as much as possible. One potential bias is that of the researcher; as argued before, the researcher is an individual human being, her background, experience, value and ethics will influence the research design, the kinds of questions asked, the interviewee being chosen, the behaviour during research. It is impossible for a researcher to be bias-free, however, it is important to state clearly the potential bias, and be aware of it when operating research, in order to reduce bias and thus achieve higher validity. The other bias stems from the participants, and also involves the researcher in identifying and diminishing it by carefully formulated questions, thorough training as an interviewer, awareness of the possibility (Cohen et al, ibid.).

Triangulation is a powerful way of demonstrating concurrent validity, particularly in qualitative research (Campbell & Fiske, 1959; cited in Cohen *et al.*2000; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Some researchers (Gray, 2004; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003) consider the multi-method approach as triangulation in achieving broader and often better results. This study triangulates different data sources of information and uses them to build a coherent justification. Taking Creswell's (2003) suggestion, this clarifies the bias the researcher brings to the study (refer § 4.6).

Reliability, defined by Cohen *et al.*(2000), is 'a synonym for consistency and replicability over time, over instruments and over groups of respondents.' For quantitative research, if the same methods are used with the same sample then the results should be the same. While, for qualitative research, reliability can be regarded as a fit between what researchers record as data and what actually occurs in the natural setting that is being

researched, i.e. a degree of accuracy and comprehensiveness of coverage (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, cited in Cohen *et al.* 2000).

The reliability was thus enhanced in this research making the report clear and explicit in the design strategies, research procedure and data collection and analysis.

In this study, the role of researcher shifted at different stages and also developed during the procedure. It is important for the researcher to justify and understand the development of her role in conducting the research. The next section will discuss the researcher's role.

## **4.6 Reflexivity and the role of researcher**

According to Bryman (2008), reflexivity has several meanings in the social sciences. Firstly, social researchers should be reflective about the implications of their methods, knowledge, values and biases in understanding their own social world. Secondly, reflexivity entails sensitivity to the researcher's cultural, political, and social context. As such, 'knowledge' from a reflexive position is always a reflection of a researcher's location in time and social space. Researchers are in the world and of the world (Cohen, *et al.*, 2000). They should acknowledge and disclose their own selves in research. McCormick and James (1988; cited in Cohen *et al.*, 2000) argue that combating reactivity through reflexivity requires researchers to monitor closely and continually their own interactions with participants, their own reactions, roles and any other matters that might bias the research.

Reflexivity has been defined by Hertz (1997: viii) as viewing the self and the process of data collection and interpretation in a critical and detached manner 'through internal

dialogue and constant (and intensive) scrutiny of “What I know” and “how I know it” in the development of knowledge claim. The key issue here is to see oneself as ‘interlinked with others and undergoing processes of change’ (Grbich, 2004: 60).

Grbich (ibid) argued that the researcher cannot be separated from his/her background, life experiences and memories. Therefore, it is important to recognize that the ‘self is not a clean slate waiting to be written on’ (p.60). The role of the researcher was partly discussed under the comparative consideration (refer to § 4.3).

With eight years’ working experience in Chinese secondary schools, the researcher knew the Chinese educational system well and also understood the daily life of Chinese students and their relationships with teachers. The motivation for the researcher to conduct this research was the idea that the teacher-pupil relationship in Chinese schools was in need of change. I was seeking the answer – how?

How can Chinese schools develop a positive teacher-pupil relationship during the reform? As an international student in the UK, I experienced culture shock and thereby understood western culture from an outsider’s viewpoint. This view of UK education might differ from UK native researchers’, however it refreshed my pedagogy and rebooted my understanding of how to develop positive teacher-pupil relationships. I wondered what I could learn and what I could do.

As a researcher, I participated in a UK school, to observe pupils, teachers and their activities during Circle Time. Their opinions have been gained via observation, questionnaires and in-depth interviews. During the experience of participating in Circle Time in English schools and talking with English pupils, I enhanced my Circle Time

knowledge from a theoretical to a practical level and therefore expanded it. During this process, I kept reflecting on my role from outsider to insider. As Merton (1972) suggested, “all of us are both insiders and outsiders in various social situations”. In the first phase, when I went to an English school, ‘I’ was a foreigner from outside the organization, the school, trying to understand its activities. ‘I’ participated with students and teachers to experience Circle Time as an outsider. In the second phase, when I went to the Chinese school, the role of researcher can be considered more as an insider-outsider continuum, and in both directions (Hellowell, 2006). I am an insider of Chinese culture with teaching experience in Chinese schools, so I have the advantage of understanding Chinese culture and the school culture (Hockey, 1993). By adapting western pedagogy into Chinese culture – outside-in, ‘I’ also bear some outsider positions; especially, for the Chinese school, I am an outsider. Reflexivity is seen as the conscious revelation of the role of the beliefs and values held by researchers.

I reflected on questions all the time, challenging my old acquired thought, replacing it with new comprehensive ideas, and gaining confidence in doing research and building up theoretical and practical knowledge.

At the second phase, I introduced Circle Time into a Chinese secondary school, to examine its functions and the effect of using it in developing pupils’ personal and interpersonal skills and self-esteem; and to investigate the pupils’ experience and opinions of it. Adapting western pedagogy, and western research policy to apply in a Chinese school setting, I would not be able to predict the result, even with plenty of working experience in a Chinese secondary school. However, my personal experience

would help me to understand deeply when unexpected things happened in the field, as I was familiar with the Chinese educational setting.

In these circumstances, pedagogies were compared, and therefore the elements deriving from pedagogy. Different cultures create different education systems and different pedagogy; a development and change in education can also have an influence on the culture. It was a sequence of looking, thinking, questioning, understanding and reflecting. During this process, the researcher's awareness of self, the impact of one's own intellectual baggage and life experiences, the relationship between the 'self' and the study were critical (R. Lee, 2002).

One views oneself and others from different perspectives; the understanding of self and the others' view of self are also unlike. Reflexivity can help the researcher to understand self and the study. The researcher's cultural, social and educational background influences the view of the world and knowledge (Moghaddam, et al., 2003), the way of gaining knowledge, the strategies in conducting research and even the procedures in manipulating methods in data collection. However, considering the reflexivity of the researcher, meticulous preparation in this mixed design can minimise potential issues and enhance the validity and reliability of this research.

Creswell (2003) suggests that bias from researchers should be clarified. There is typically a close relationship between the researcher and the setting, and between the researcher and respondents (Robson, 2002). Robson (2002; p.172) argues that 'researcher bias refers to what the researcher brings to the situation in terms of assumptions and preconceptions, which may in some way affect the way in which they behave in the research setting,

perhaps in terms of the persons selected for observation or interview, the kinds of questions asked, or the selection of data from reporting and analysis’.

This research was conducted by the researcher with the support of a supervisor. The question of the role of researcher and the kind of behaviour a researcher should follow were discussed during the process. By means of ensuring a technique to adopt research methods and instrumentation appropriately and to emphasise ethical and cultural issues, the journey of this study was also a process for the researcher of reducing bias internally and externally.

As a PhD student, the journey of conducting this study was also a process of learning, developing and changing the researcher’s view of approaching and interpreting knowledge. The researcher needed to reflect and adjust her role and her stance to facilitate the research during the procedure.

In the next section, the discussion about ethical issues will also bring some reflexivity towards the role of the researcher in order to achieve the validity and reliability which the research required.

## **4.7 Ethical consideration**

Ethics is the making of moral judgment about the aims and methods of the study (Aubrey, 2000). Cohen *et al* (2000) indicate that ethical issues may stem from the problems investigated by researchers and the methods they use to obtain valid and reliable data. They also point out that social scientists have a responsibility not only to their profession in its search for knowledge and quest for truth, but also for the subjects they depend on

for their work. One common and fundamental ethical theory in research stated by de Vaus (2001) and Fontana & Frey (2003) is that “no harm (physical, emotional, or any other kind)” should come to participants. Whatever methods are employed should put this initial concern in the first place. Especially in educational research, the objects of inquiry are growing human beings. They are in a position which needs protection. The researcher should keep their rights, welfare and future development in serious consideration.

Approaching the field, permission from the gate keeper is essential. In both schools, permission to get into the school and permission to approach students were gained from the head teacher before accessing the fields. W school in England was a partner school of the researcher’s university affiliation; the teacher leading Circle Time had a good relationship with my supervisor. It was a pleasant journey to attend and experience Circle Time during the study. I participated with pupils, to observe, share their ideas and happiness; to experience their development during Circle Time.

I met the head teacher of X school when she was visiting the UK. She was interested in my research, while I found the class setting of her school made my study possible. After a full discussion of pedagogy and Chinese education; the final decision was made to make my experiment in X school. The primary factor which impacted on the decision was the class setting. As a foreign language school, X school’s pupils had a chance to study their English within a smaller size group. They divided a normal class which had 52 pupils into 2 groups, each with 26 pupils. Although the size was still bigger than Mosley and Tew’s (1999) suggestion of 15, considering the culture difference, it provided the opportunity to conduct the experiment.

Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (1996) indicate two ethical issues which are associated with fieldwork: the potential deception problem and the impact the fieldwork might have on the people being studied. They suggest informed consent of the participants, anonymity and that confidentiality of the participants should be seriously considered during study. Researchers should provide anonymity by separating the identity of individuals from the information they give. Even though the researchers are able to identify a particular participant's information, they will not reveal it publicly. Ryen (2004) suggests that ethical challenges are expected to be handled in accordance with the official ethical codes and regulatory institutions. However, Ryen (ibid.) also notices that there is no international agreement or regulation of ethical standards in research. She suggested three main issues for social researchers to consider:

- Codes and consent
- Confidentiality
- Trust

No 'harm to participants' was the primary ethical concern of the researcher during this research. Anonymity and confidentiality were assured to the participants. For some challenges encountered during the field work I had to refer back to the relevant literature. When I was told by pupils the conflicts between their class teacher and them, I had to question what I should do as a researcher. Should I be a judge? Should I tell the teacher the problem and suggest a change? Should I just record and leave myself transparent? The moral role of self and the ethical role of researcher struggled constantly during the field work.



As Oakley (2000) indicates, it is difficult to interpret the findings of an experiment without knowing what people were told about the research. Not only were the participants informed about the research, but also what they were told could lead to different results. Then, how much should the participants be told about the treatment within an experimental study? de Vaus (2001) answers this question carefully. He points out that there are no hard and fast rules about how much information should be provided to participants, however, it is safest to minimize the detailed information provided to the participants before the experiment is completed. This study focused on the experimental group pupils' experience and perspectives of using Circle Time in developing their personal and interpersonal skills, therefore, encouraging a positive teacher-pupil relationship. Teachers and pupils were fully informed about the research from the beginning to the end.

When entering the field, getting permission is the first thing to do either in the UK or in China. I applied for a CRB check before visiting W school in the UK, and the participant teacher helped me to get permission from the head teacher. The school had just introduced Circle Time in year 7, which allowed me to join and observe in a relaxed situation. While in X school in China, getting the permission from the head teacher was not the end of the story. I had to negotiate with the head of year to choose the experimental group, to sort out the time and venue, and to organise the attendance of teachers. I always asked permission in advance, guaranteeing anonymity and confidentiality before asking questions. As de Vaus (2001) suggested, it is better to encourage rather than require people to participate. Although sometimes some teachers would not turn up, they would come if they wished. I would not expect the teachers to attend compulsorily. I did not urge them to fit into my research while as a researcher I

observed and recorded what happened in the field. Later on, most of the teachers would cite work as the excuse for their absence; none of them told me their absence was because they were not interested. This phenomenon will be discussed in a later chapter (refer to chapters 6 &7).

When acquiring questionnaire, interview and documentary data from pupils, they were also assured of anonymity and confidentiality. The pupils' rights were guaranteed to be protected.

## 4.8 Language consideration

According to Ungerson (1996), language is an important issue which could influence the understanding and interpretation of data. He suggests it is always difficult to understand the meaning of language fully without considering broader cultural contexts embodied in the use of language. In that sense, it is important to understand the meaning of language within the context within which the use of language is embedded.

This research involved rich data from Chinese students' and teachers' interviews and documents; to translate and interpret these contexts, Chinese culture and school culture should be seriously considered in the disclosure of meanings. Bai (2007) shares some experience in interpreting Chinese into English. She enumerates some examples:

'face' literally means the front of the head and outward appearance. In Chinese, its deeper meaning means the 'glory' (*mian zi*, 面子) of a person (Bond, 1991).

Another example, 'control' (*guan*, 管) always relates to restraining or having

power over something or someone; however, in Chinese, 'control' also means 'to love' or 'to care for'. (Bai, 2007; 160)

Hsu (2009) also concerns with ensuring the equivalent translation from Mandarin to English in her study. As a consequence, recognising the superficial and the deeper meanings from a particular culture is essential in interpreting language during social research. As Ungerson (1996) pointed out, most researchers may not have command of more than one language and are unlikely to consider how to deal with language especially when contextualising the data. The meaning of data may be corrupted by translations.

Robinson-Pant (2005), values the ability of international students in handling language and cultural issues. He gives an interesting example in translating and interpreting data. Huda Al-Yousef, a Saudi Arabian English teacher, an international student from the University of East Anglia in the UK, uses her experience of translating data from Arabic to English as an example for translating data from another language into English. Al-Yousef contributes her work on translating interview data from Arabic into English; firstly, she translated the interview data by herself, as she is the person who did the interview, more capable of understanding the interviewees' opinion, thought, culture, terms of language. Secondly, she read the data transcript in the original language – Arabic and highlighted quotes that she thought would be important and directly relevant to her topic, then she translated only these quotes. Thirdly, she used discourse analysis to discuss the data in detail. Fourthly, she found the equivalent terminologies in both languages; if there was no equivalent term or vocabulary available, she employed the methods of 'compensation' to use different words that gave a more accurate meaning in the context. Finally, she considered the language used by adolescents as an important issue; they have their own terms of expression and explanations. As Osborn (2004)

emphasises that there was no real equivalence between two languages, it is important to find comparable ideas rather than words. The experience of Al-Yousef set a very good example for this study in translating data from Chinese into English.

At the preliminary stage of this study, I interviewed 15 English students about their views and experience of Circle Time, then transcripts were read carefully and the words and terms they used were considered when translating their Chinese counterparts' interview and questionnaires.

I think I get to *understand myself better* – because I can say how I feel...and I think I can understand the others more because if I don't like them – then I can find out the *other side to them* – and they could *be friendly*. (IEB05)

Now I have more ideas of different things, talking with people with a decent manner. I don't know why, it might be because people understand each other more. It pulls together our relationships. (ICG09)

However, sometimes, it is not easy to translate Chinese into English with the exactly term and words. For example, a Chinese boy talked his feeling during a Circle Time session:

“...When it was my turn, I was so shy and my face turned red, I don't understand why, I was kind of ‘thick skin’” (SB26).

When he talking about ‘thick skin’, he meant that he was not a ‘shy person’, was not easily moved. When dealing with Chinese teachers' and students' interview data. I firstly read and coded them in Chinese, after first round code; I then translate the coded part into English for further coding and interpreting. In so doing, addressed the culture and linguistic issue to reduce error in understanding and presenting data.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, a detailed description and discussion about the chosen methodology and mixed design has been introduced and carefully dissertated. The mixed methods adopted in this study and the procedures of data collection were argued and explained in detail to present the consideration of reducing bias during the research process by the research technique. The role of the researcher, ethical issues, and the research validity and reliability were also discussed. Finally, discussion about how to deal with the linguistic issues was also addressed.

# **Chapter 5 Chinese students' perspectives of Circle Time in Chinese secondary school**

## **Introduction**

This chapter analyses the result of an investigation of Circle Time in a Chinese secondary school. Data from a preliminary study with year 7 students in UK W School are also discussed in comparison with their Chinese counterparts to assist in the understanding of Circle Time and its results. In a comparison of UK students' views of Circle Time with those of Chinese students, the findings intend to draw a holistic picture of how Circle Time was conducted for the first time in a Chinese secondary school. Although this is not a true comparative study, the comparison is necessary. As Alexander (2000: p.26) states "comparing... is one of the most basic of conscious human activities: we necessarily and constantly compare in order to make choices and to judge where we stand in relation to others and to our own past. In the more specific context of education it is important to distinguish the comparing, importing and exporting of ideas, which is an activity intrinsic to educational development, from the task of attempting to devise rules of and procedures for doing so in a systematic way."

In addition to the cultural issues, as this study introduces western practical pedagogy to an eastern setting, the experimental results have to be discussed within the cultural context. Only in this way can the experiment make sense as an interpretation of my hypothesis. The experimental process as an intervention in eastern culture, provoked reactions which reflect the experiment itself, and the western pedagogy will also bring

new thought to the pedagogy and to the culture at large. ‘the things outside schools matter even more than things inside the schools’ (R. Alexander, 1996; Sadler, 1902)

This chapter focuses on Chinese students’ perspectives of Circle Time. Firstly, section 5.1 compares students’ self-esteem test results and academic achievement between the experimental groups and the rest of the classes, to provide basic knowledge for investigating whether Chinese students can develop their personal and social skills and raise their self-esteem via Circle Time activities. Secondly, both Chinese and UK year 7 students’ experience and their opinions of Circle Time will be explained and interpreted through questionnaires and interview data in section 5.2. To help in understanding Circle Time within the Chinese school and Chinese students’ perspectives, there are reflective questions about Circle Time taken from students in the UK secondary school. Thirdly, Chinese students’ opinions and suggestions about Circle Time will be stated and discussed in section 5.3. Fourthly, section 5.4 introduces a special Circle Time session *you are the best*; Circle Time with a big group of students in Chinese secondary school will be explained and interpreted in detail.

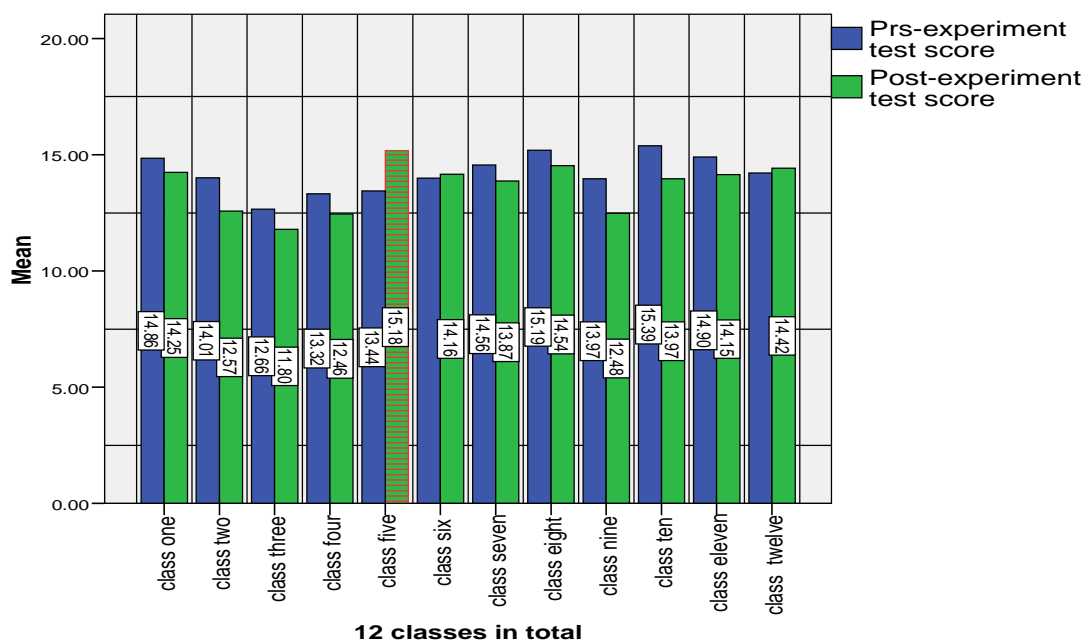
## **5.1 Circle Time in a Chinese secondary school – the experiment**

### **5.1.1 Experimental results 1: self-esteem test**

Self-esteem test questionnaires were designed based on the Queendom online self-esteem test. The questions were redesigned according to Chinese students’ interests as I have explained in the previous chapter (see appendix 1.1 & 1.2). At the beginning of the term in September 2005, all students in year 7 were given a test based on their class arrangement. There were 12 classes in total. 3 classes were boarders; 8 classes were day

pupils; and one class was mixed boarders and day pupils as they were learning German, French or Japanese as their specialist language respectively. Two boarding classes (E1) and two day classes (E2) were chosen as experimental groups, the rest of the classes were considered to be control groups. All classes were given post-experimental tests in January 2006. The final self-esteem results can be seen from graph 5.1.2.A.

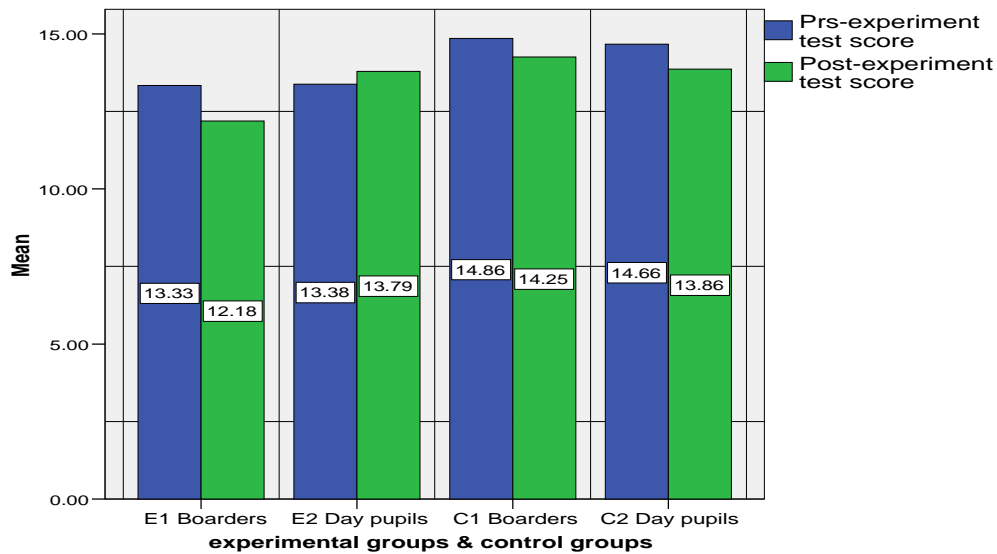
**Graph 5.1.1.A Chinese Students' pre & post experiment self-esteem test**



It is sad to discover that Chinese students' self-esteem scores decreased after half a year of their secondary school experience. In only three classes did students increase in their self-esteem. One E2 class - class five had a dramatic increase as highlighted in the graph; the special language class and Class 6 had a slight increase. Chinese students' self-esteem becomes lower after they have spent half a year in secondary school. However, Graph 5.1.2.B shows the difference between experimental groups and control groups.



**Graph 5.1.1.B Chinese students' pre & post experiment self-esteem tests between groups**



From graph 5.1.2.B, first of all, it is interesting to see that the two experimental groups' pre-experiment scores were lower than the two control groups' scores. E1 is 13.33 compared with C1's 14.86; E2 is 13.38 compared with C2's 14.66. As I introduced in the previous chapter, the experimental groups were randomly chosen from the total of 12 classes. Although group E1 scores decreased the same as the average, the self-esteem score of E2 increased. However, the results are not significant enough to show strong evidence for experimental groups' self-esteem development; from graph 5.1.2.B, Circle Time seems not to have had a significant effect in raising Chinese students' self-esteem. However, the slight development of E2 compared with the whole of year 7 might suggest that if the experiment had lasted longer, in the long term, Circle Time might have made a difference.

Rogers (1982) points out that people's self-esteem is affected by their aspirations, their goal setting and how can they achieve those goals. If a student sets a goal of being

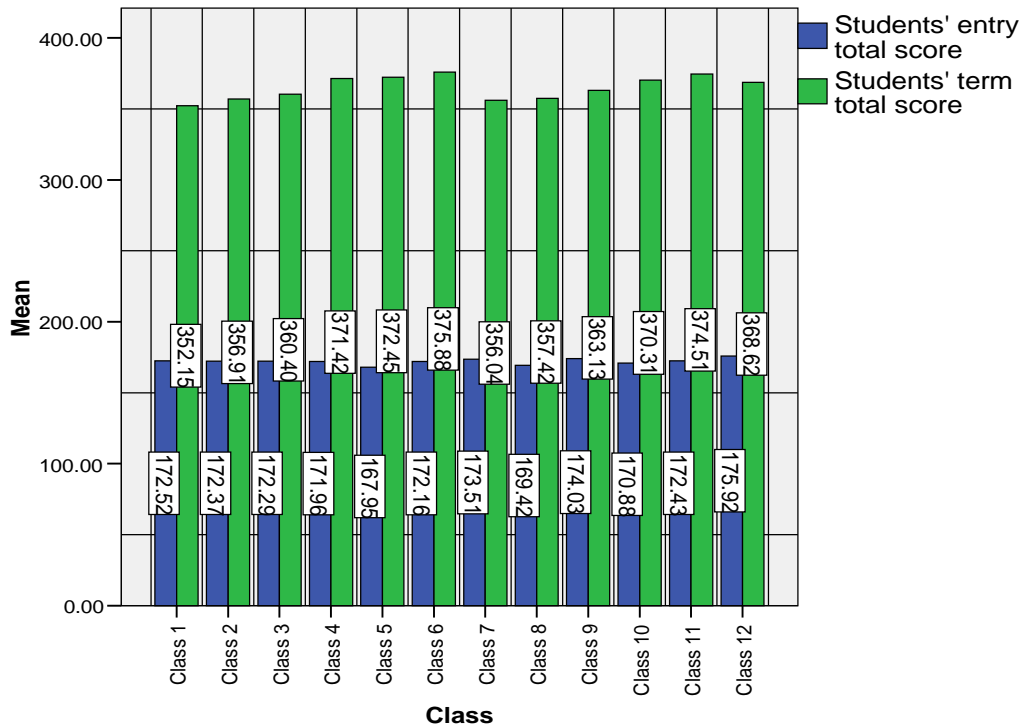
number one in the class, even if he keeps being number 2, he is experiencing failure most of the time and his self-esteem might be low. On the other hand, if a student just sets the goal to be 30<sup>th</sup> out of 50 in the class, once he has achieved 20<sup>th</sup>, he may feel more successful than the first person does. As a result his self-esteem may be high. Child psychologists (Bower, 1969; Ginsberg, Gottman, & Parker, 1986; Laucht, & Schmidt, 1987; Morrison & Masten, 1991; Putallaz & Gottman, 1981; cited in Bigelow *et al*, 1996) deem that children with good social skills are more likely to be accepted by their peers, and subsequently be successful in academic achievement, job and marital stability and mental health. By contrast, children who are least liked by their peers more often have problems with self-esteem (Duck, 1991b, cited in Bigelow, et al., 1996) and have trouble handling peer conflict (Asarnow, 1983; cited in Bigelow, et al., 1996). Data from this study support the theories from a previous study about students' self-esteem.

### **5.1.2 Experiment results 2: Academic achievement**

Although Chinese students' self-esteem test shows no significant development by adopting Circle Time, there are some interesting figures which appear in the data of their academic achievement.

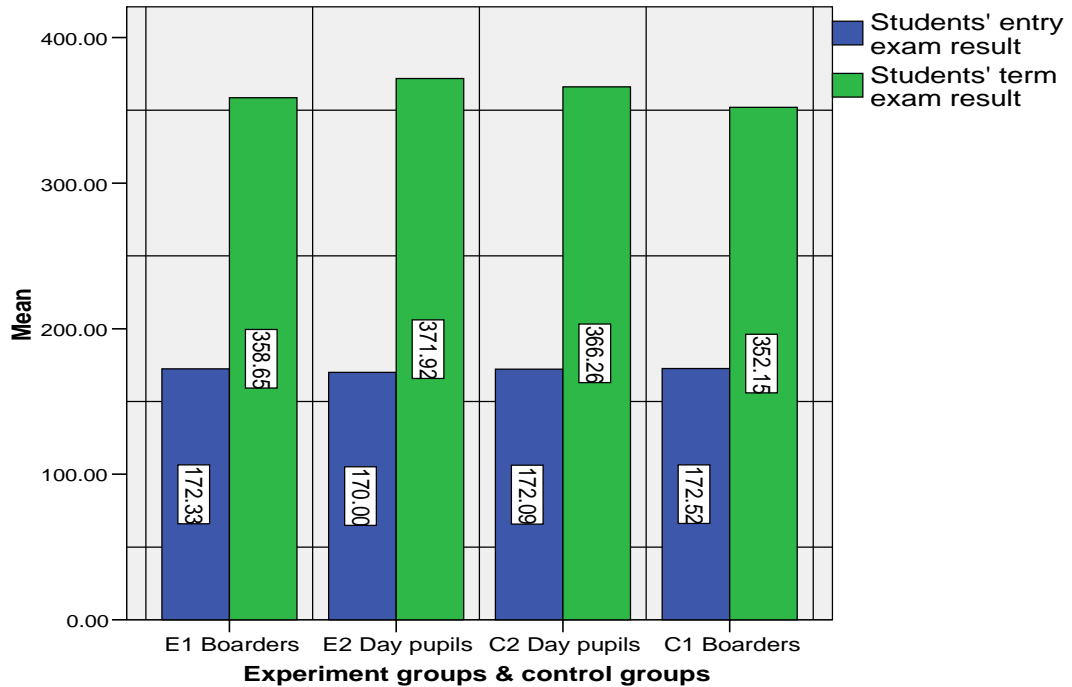
Year 7 students in X school were selected from more than 2000 candidates based on their entrance examination result. Only the 624 with the highest academic results could be chosen for this school. Once they came to the school, they were placed in different classes to make 12 classes with the same average of academic results (see graph 5.1.3.A).

**Graph 5.1.2.A Chinese students' pre & post experiment academic results**



Graph 5.1.2.A shows that at the beginning of the term, the 12 classes' entrance total scores (Chinese literature and Maths) were around the average of 172. The highest was the special language group scores of 175.95. The lowest was one of the experiment classes, class 5 with scores of 167.5. However, half a year later, the differences between the classes increased. The highest was class 6 who scored 375.88, while the lowest, class 1 had just 352.15. There was a 25.73 difference between the lower and the higher scores. If we examine the scores of the experimental groups and control groups (see Graph 5.1.3.B), some surprising results appear.

**Graph 5.1.2.B Chinese students' pre & post experiment academic results between groups**



From graph 5.1.3.B, the result is significant. Both experimental groups had better academic results than their peers. Comparing E1 and C1, their average entry examination result was almost the same score (E1 = 172.33, C1 = 172.52). However, when comparing their term examination result half a year later, E1 students had an average score of 358.65 and were 6.5 points higher than the other boarders' average, 352.15. E2 students had an average score of 371.92, 5.68 points higher than their peers. The results show that both experimental groups had developed better academic scores.

At the beginning of the term, the experimental groups had lower self-esteem than the other groups. After half a year, although E1's self-esteem score did not rise and remained the same as the average, their academic performance had improved. E1 students' average score were 6.5 higher than their C1 counterparts. E2, especially showed great

development. Not only was their self-esteem score raised compared with other groups' that dropped, but also their academic performance rose from 2.09 points lower previously, to 5.68 points higher. The finding from students' academic scores could suggest that Circle Time brings Chinese students a better standard of academic achievement. And also we can surmise that the experimental groups of students had developed more than just academic results. As I mentioned before (refer to §3.4), children with good social skills are more likely to be accepted by their peers, and subsequently be successful in academic achievement, job and marital stability and mental health. Circle Time gives students a chance to develop their listening, speaking and therefore interpersonal and social skills. Those skills could help them to achieve more in their life.

Although the finding did not show significant improvement in students' self-esteem, it still suggests that students in the two experimental groups have improved their academic performance after experiencing half a year of Circle Time activities. But the quantitative self-esteem tests and students' academic achievements are not the ultimate goal of the Circle Time experiment. Circle Time aims to develop students' emotional awareness, personal understanding and interpersonal skills. They are expected to retain these emotional-competence and social skills to apply them to their daily lives; to help them make richer patterns of understanding and implications in their life rather than just basic academic study. These skills or their experiences and opinions of Circle Time cannot be evaluated through quantitative data. Then in-depth data about students' perspectives of Circle Time could answer further questions. The next section aims to explore how Circle Time can bring benefits to students from their perspective and is based on questionnaires about Circle Time that investigated students' opinions.

## 5.2 The students' experience of Circle Time

Questionnaires (see appendix 2.1 & 2.2) were adopted in order to gain Chinese students' perspectives of experiencing Circle Time, a western pedagogy. After a half-year experiment, students were given a questionnaire with both closed and open-ended questions seeking their point of view. At UK W school year 7 students' opinions of Circle Time were also obtained from a preliminary study to compare with Chinese students' views. 92 questionnaires from English students and 207 questionnaires from Chinese students were collected. Unfortunately, as UK questionnaires were collected and returned by students on their own, most students did not leave their group code, and the questionnaires had to be put into one group. Chinese questionnaires were collected based on their class. Even for English students who did not fill in their group code, the class to which the respondent belonged was still identifiable. Data was analyzed with the support of SPSS and NVIVO. In the following sections, findings will be presented, analyzed and explored. Firstly, the study will be introduced by presenting data; and then the data will be interpreted and issues will be explored and explained.

Before comparing Chinese students and UK students' perceptions of Circle Time, the two schools are briefly introduced.

In W school, students are from various social backgrounds. As the teacher in W school introduced it:

‘22% students have free meals. This is quite high – and quite high for any school.

It means that we have a lot of children in the school whose families are unemployed

– and deprived – in terms of expectation – this is very low.’ (IETF-01)

‘We also have some children who are well off – so we need to meet the needs of all the children. Some children come to school from very challenging circumstances. Lots of single parents – who try to support their children on their own – and meet their children’s needs. The children here can get very anxious when they’re in the company of people who are from different backgrounds – more privileged backgrounds. Some of the children come from privileged backgrounds – and find it hard to empathize with the deprived children – who may not have furniture at home – or warmth – so cannot do their homework...it’s unbelievable in this day and age – but it’s true.’

(IETF-01)

‘Some parents don’t get their children prepared for school – and don’t give them the attention and support the children need – the parents may be using the money they have for drugs and then there isn’t any thing left for the children.’

(IETF-01)

In such a school, Fiona, who is doing Circle Time in W school, with some help from teaching assistants, runs Circle Time sessions for year 7 students. Because of the time limitation, some students started from the autumn term, some from the spring term. I participated with the group who started in the spring term. There were obvious issues: firstly, there was just one teacher using Circle Time for students’ personal development; secondly, students just had 10 weeks of Circle Time sessions in one year.

Fiona thinks her ‘teaching style’, or her way to communicate with students is different compared with other colleagues:

With myself I have my own style of teaching – which is ‘stand back’ and wait and see what the children will bring to the lesson – so my style is ‘less authoritarian’ – otherwise – I don’t really know how I teach differently. (IETF-01)

Because she has been adopting Circle Time in her teaching, the way people communicate in Circle Time influences her style. Her personality is less ‘authoritarian’, which is more suited to Circle Time. However, she also states that teachers or adults still need some way to keep Circle Time in control:

I strive to be a ‘facilitator’ in teaching – but I still need to be ‘in control’ – I’ll say – ‘Can I suggest another way that you could have done that?’ – I hope then that the children can see that adults are open to suggestion – and are not just ‘critical’.

(IETF-01)

From Fiona’s point of view, it is also important in adopting Circle Time to develop equal teacher-pupil relationships in an English school. Although from the literature review, China and UK are catalogued as having a different power distance; in school, both Chinese and UK students are still under ‘authority’. Therefore, students’ voices, the trends and reality of teacher-pupil relationships in schools still need attention.

X school is located in a city which is one of the four special economic zones that are the earliest to practise open-door policies in China. It is one of 17 foreign language schools in China. Students were selected based on their academic performance. It not only benefits from the best teaching facilities and best teachers, but also has the government’s recognition in recommending the top 20% of their students to go to universities without taking the National University Entrance Examination. Students have more opportunities to meet western teachers as the school employs native teachers to teach spoken English



and French. The teachers in such a school are considered more open than average Chinese teachers. How students in such a school reflect on Circle Time will be introduced in the following sections.

### **5.2.1 Circle Time is an opportunity for me to express myself**

Circle Time involves students sitting in a circle in order to play games together, talk about feelings and discuss issues. Students can improve their listening, speaking and social skills, and may increase their ability to solve problems through negotiating and cooperating.

The approach of Circle Time creates the environment for children to relax and encourages them to talk. By sitting in a Circle, they can all see each other and have eye contact; by passing the ‘talking piece’<sup>7</sup>, children are helped to be focused, and to talk freely in turn; the golden rules<sup>8</sup>; these regulate the behaviour of children and help them to show positive approaches to each other. In addition, by talking over issues that are relevant to the children’s daily life, and emotional developmental needs, it is expected that there will be a developing of children’s understanding of life.

When students have experienced Circle Time, both UK and Chinese students agree that Circle time is an opportunity for them to express themselves (see Figure 5.2.1).

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<sup>7</sup> Talking piece: People normally have a talking piece in Circle Time. It is often a soft toy. Only the person who holds the talking piece can talk, while others listen.

<sup>8</sup> Golden rules: There are certain rules in Circle Time, which are called Golden rules, e.g., only one person can talk at a time, no disturbing, no name calling and raising your hand when you want to talk. These aim to create a positive atmosphere and behaviour within the circle. (refer to § 3. 5. 3)

**Figure 5.2.1 Circle Time is an opportunity for me to express myself**

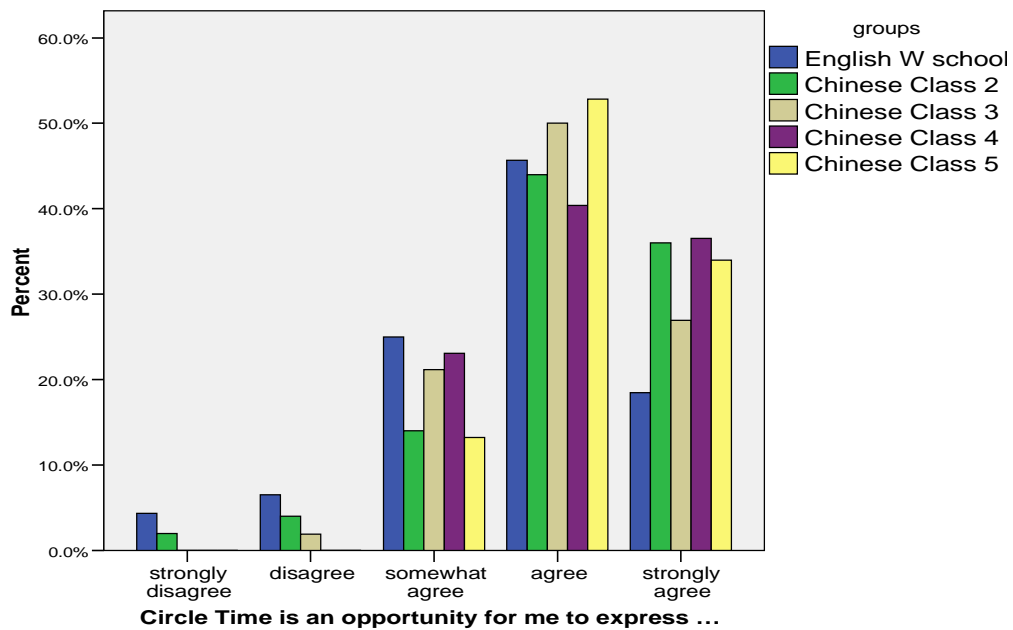


Figure 5.2.1 clearly shows that both UK and Chinese students have positive feelings about expressing themselves during Circle Time. Of the Chinese students, E2 pupils (class 4 and class 5) were particularly positive. They showed no negative attitudes to this question.

In general, most UK and Chinese students agree that Circle Time is a chance for them to express themselves. Chinese students are more positive than their UK peers. Day students from E2 have even stronger positive opinions than the boarders from E1. No E2 students disagree or strongly disagree about it. From the data, students within each experimental group share the same characteristics. In this way, it can be understood that the data are reliable.

If we compare the results between Chinese students and English students (see table 5.2.1), we can see from the data that in E2, more Class 5 students than Class 4 students choose

agree and strongly agree, and Class 5 students' self-esteem scores are higher than their Class 4 counterparts (see Graph 5.1.1.A & Graph 5.1.1.B). In turn, E2 students' self-esteem average scores are greater than the boarders in E1. We can then draw the conclusion that the more they express themselves in Circle Time, the more self-esteem they achieve.

**Table 5.2.1 “Circle Time is an opportunity for me to express myself” \* English and Chinese Cross tabulations**

			English and Chinese			Total	
			English	Chinese E1	Chinese E2		
Circle Time is an opportunity for me to express myself	strongly disagree	Count	4	1	0	5	
		% within English and Chinese	4.3%	1.0%	.0%	1.7%	
	disagree	Count	6	3	0	9	
		% within English and Chinese	6.5%	2.9%	.0%	3.0%	
	somewhat agree	Count	23	18	19	60	
		% within English and Chinese	25.0%	17.6%	18.1%	20.1%	
	agree	Count	42	48	49	139	
		% within English and Chinese	45.7%	47.1%	46.7%	46.5%	
	strongly agree	Count	17	32	37	86	
		% within English and Chinese	18.5%	31.4%	35.2%	28.8%	
	Total		Count	92	102	105	299
			% within English and Chinese	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

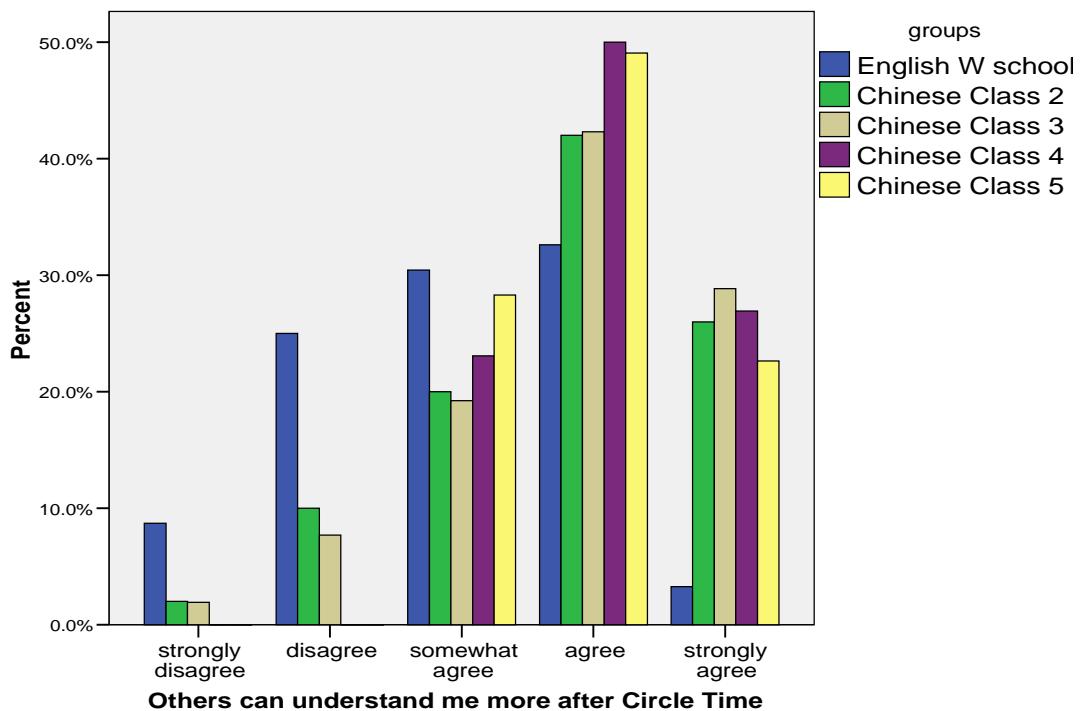
It is shown in tables 5.2.1 that both English and Chinese students show positive attitudes towards Circle Time as it is an opportunity for them to express themselves. Slight differences are shown between different groups. Chinese students are more positive than English students. Within the Chinese experimental groups, students from the central city (see E2 class 4 and class 5) are even more likely to take advantage of this opportunity, while more students from the city suburbs and other cities (see E1 class 2 and class 3), show that they are less keen on taking advantage of this opportunity. This result is

significant. We can also find this interesting particularly in its relevance to the other questions (see also self-esteem results Graph5.1.2.A & Graph 5.1.2.B).

### 5.2.2 Others can understand me more after Circle Time

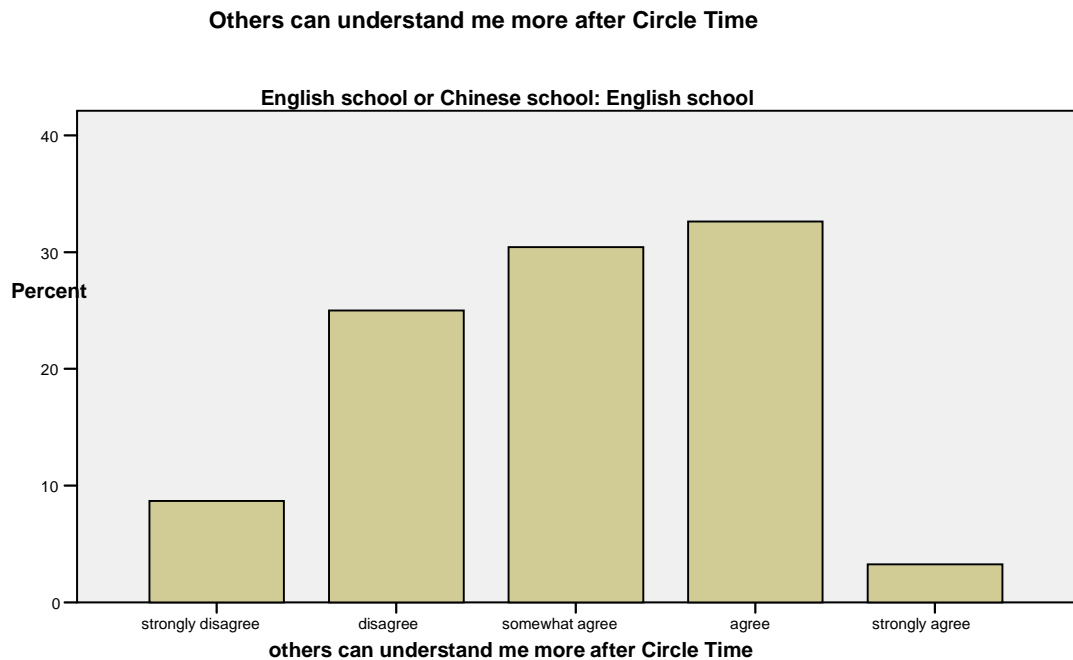
The second question “Others can understand me more after Circle Time”, shows the same result as the first one. English students have more negative attitudes than Chinese students, and Chinese E1 boarding students have a less positive attitude than E2 day students. Figure 5.2.2 A shows the result about students’ perspectives from both countries and the difference between the experimental groups.

**Graph 5.2.2.A Others can understand me more after Circle Time**

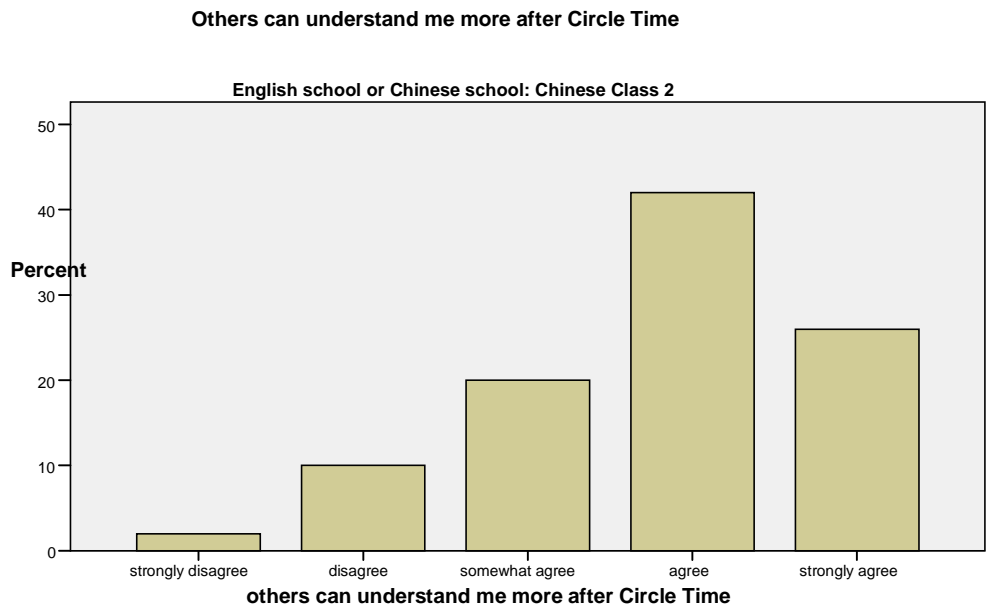


It is clearer if we look in depth about each group’s reaction to this question. Graph 5.2.2.B presents English students’ perspectives of whether they are understood more by others because of Circle Time. Graph 5.2.2.C and graph 5.2.2.D show Chinese boarding students have similar feelings of being understood because of Circle Time activities. Graph 5.2.2.E. and Graph 5.2.2.F show that the two classes’ day pupils share the same idea of being understood more by others because of Circle Time activities. Different groups have their own characteristics in answering questions. Chinese students are more positive than UK students about Circle Time. Chinese day pupils are even optimistic than the boarders in believing Circle Time can help them in expressing themselves and understanding others.

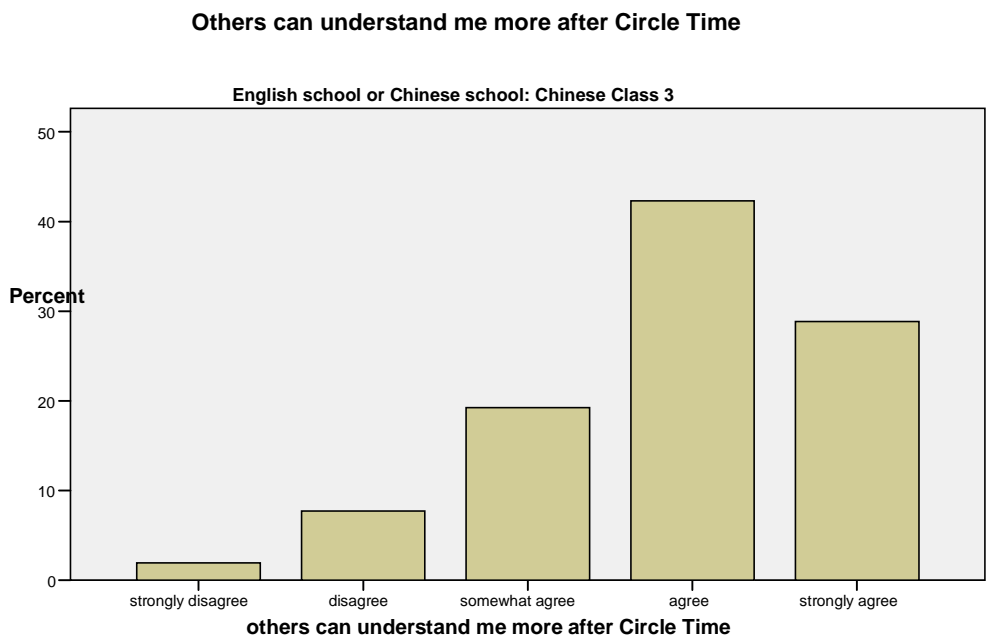
**Graph 5.2.2.B Others can understand me more after Circle Time (English students)**



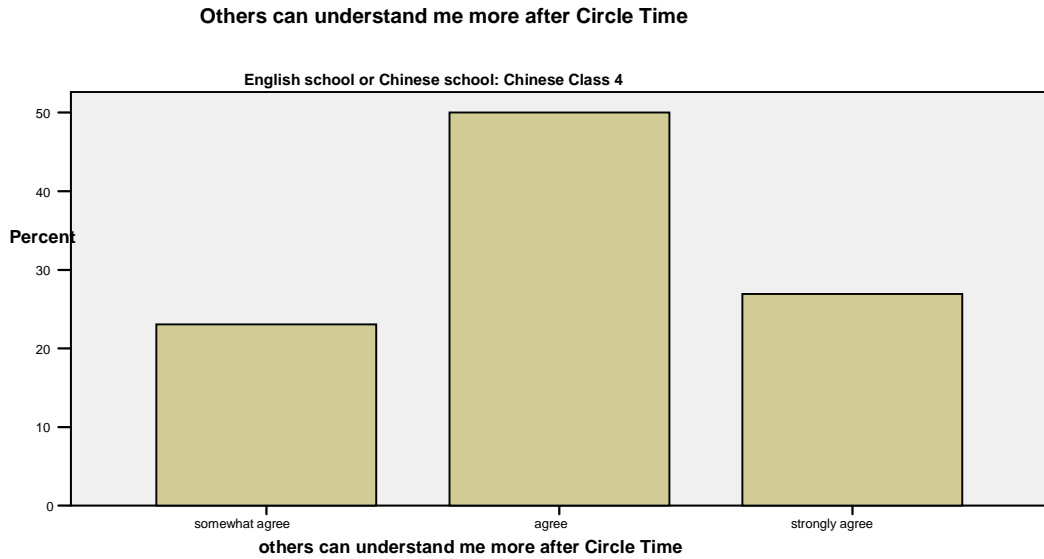
**Graph 5.2.2.C Others can understand me more after Circle Time (Chinese Class2 Borders)**



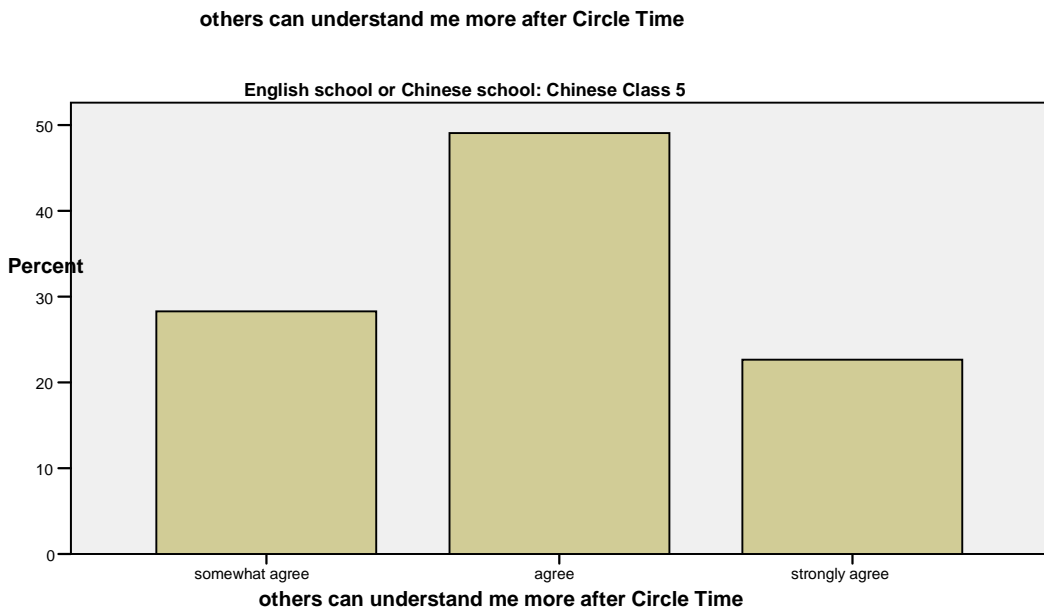
**Graph 5.2.2.D Others can understand me more after Circle Time (Chinese Class 3 Borders)**



**Graph 5.2.2.E Others can understand me more after Circle Time  
(Chinese Class 4 Day pupils)**



**Graph 5.2.2.F Others can understand me more after Circle Time  
(Chinese Class 5 Day pupils)**



There is less difference between students' opinions of personal understanding. However, 33.7% of UK students disagree or strongly disagree about the statement 'others can understand me more after Circle Time', while just 5.4% Chinese student hold this view (table 5.2.2). There is a concern about UK students' peer relationships for further study.

**Table 5.2.2 Others can understand me more after Circle Time \* groups Cross tabulation**

			groups					Total	
			English school	Chinese Class 2	Chinese Class 3	Chinese Class 4	Chinese Class 5		
Others can understand me more after Circle Time	strongly disagree	Count	8	1	1	0	0	10	
		% within groups	8.7%	2.0%	1.9%	.0%	.0%	3.3%	
	disagree	Count	23	5	4	0	0	32	
		% within groups	25.0%	10.0%	7.7%	.0%	.0%	10.7%	
	somewhat agree	Count	28	10	10	12	15	75	
		% within groups	30.4%	20.0%	19.2%	23.1%	28.3%	25.1%	
	agree	Count	30	21	22	26	26	125	
		% within groups	32.6%	42.0%	42.3%	50.0%	49.1%	41.8%	
	strongly agree	Count	3	13	15	14	12	57	
		% within groups	3.3%	26.0%	28.8%	26.9%	22.6%	19.1%	
	Total		Count	92	50	52	52	53	299
			% within groups	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Data from interviewing English students may explain this issue in detail. A UK student mentioned about his behaviour in Circle Time:

I think I have pressure in Circle Time – don't know why. Others understand me a bit more after Circle Time – I agree that that happens in Circle Time because – don't know – I'll pass



on that one. Maybe because we have the chance to talk to each other – talking about issues. Then I could think – other people have different ideas – and some of them are good.

(IEB03)

He thinks that others can understand him more after Circle Time; and also he found out that others have good ideas. Circle Time is a way for students to get to know each other more. They can find not only ideas from other classmates but also advice sometimes:

People give me advice – I find it really helpful – it’s a good opportunity for other people to give their opinions and advice. Sometimes people might feel that if you give them the wrong advice – they might feel they don’t want to do Circle Time...When I’m in the Circle there should be serious communication between us all – and what we talk about is really serious – and I’ll listen to the others – and compare...between advice that is given. You have to make decisions – life is always about making/taking decisions – and thinking what the advice is about. It’s really easy to talk in a Circle – but to take a decision is really difficult – because if it’s the wrong decision – it’s hard to get back to the right decision. (IEG01)

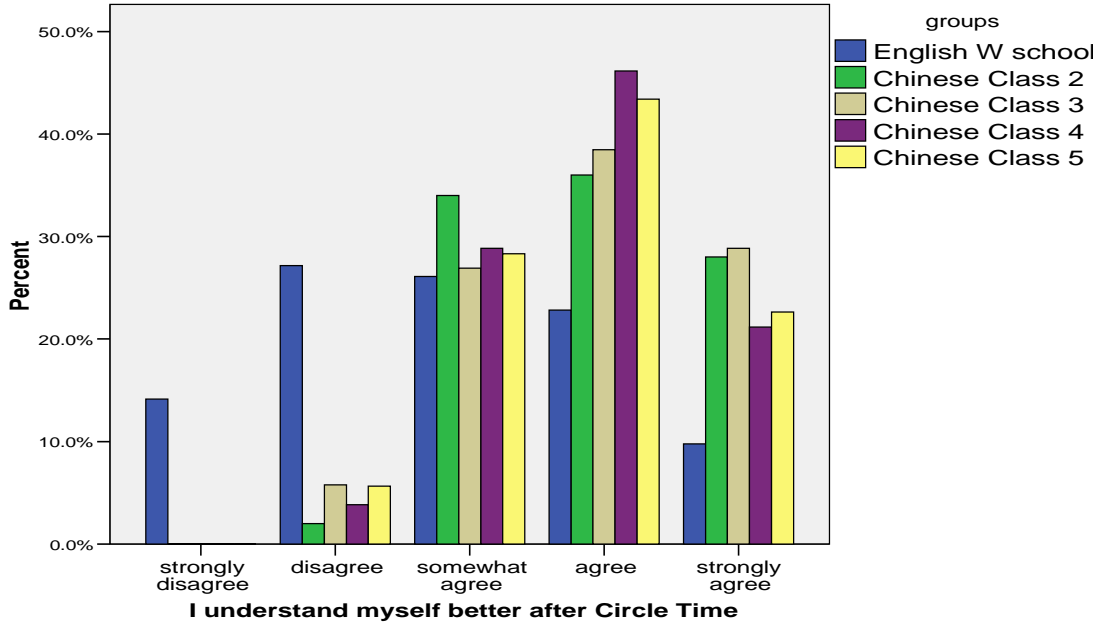
From the English students’ views, Circle Time is about communication, exchanging ideas. In a way it can help students to understand more about each other.

### **5.2.3 Can Circle Time improve students’ self-awareness?**

Question 3 was “I understand myself better after Circle Time”. As with question 2, Graph 5.2.3 clearly shows that Chinese students are more positive than UK students about this Circle Time helping them to know more about themselves. E2 pupils are still more likely to have positive attitudes than E1 students. Within E1 and E2, each pair of classes also shares the same characteristics in general attitudes to the question (see graph 5.2.3, graph

5.1.2.A; Graph 5.1.2.B; Graph 5.1.3.B) and the group of graphs can be put together more easily for a comparison of the results.

**Graph 5.2.3.A I understand myself better after Circle Time**



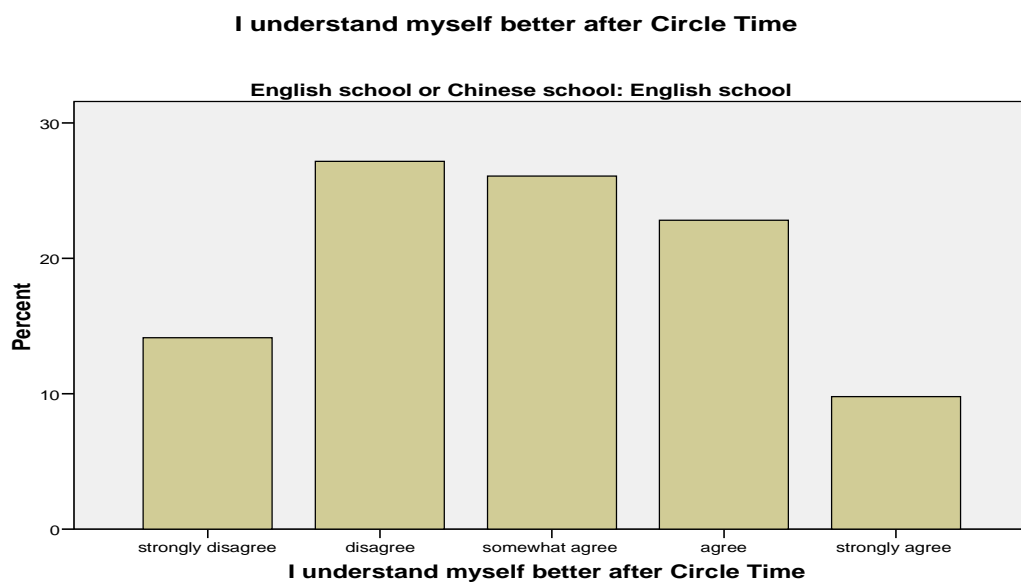
**Table 5.2.3 I understand myself better after Circle Time \* groups**  
Cross tabulation

			groups					Total
			English school	Chinese Class 2	Chinese Class 3	Chinese Class 4	Chinese Class 5	
I understand myself better after Circle Time	strongly disagree	Count	13	0	0	0	0	13
		% within groups	14.1%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	4.3%
	disagree	Count	25	1	3	2	3	34
		% within groups	27.2%	2.0%	5.8%	3.8%	5.7%	11.4%
	somewhat agree	Count	24	17	14	15	15	85
		% within groups	26.1%	34.0%	26.9%	28.8%	28.3%	28.4%
	agree	Count	21	18	20	24	23	106
		% within groups	22.8%	36.0%	38.5%	46.2%	43.4%	35.5%
	strongly agree	Count	9	14	15	11	12	61
		% within groups	9.8%	28.0%	28.8%	21.2%	22.6%	20.4%
Total		Count	92	50	52	52	53	299
		% within groups	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

As the figures show in table 5.2.3, more than 40% of the English students do not think they are understood better after Circle Time, and there are also 26.1% of UK students who somewhat agree with this question, only 32.6% hold positive attitudes to this question. Comparing this with their Chinese peers, more than 60% of Chinese students hold a positive view which is twice as great as the UK students (Table 5.2.3).

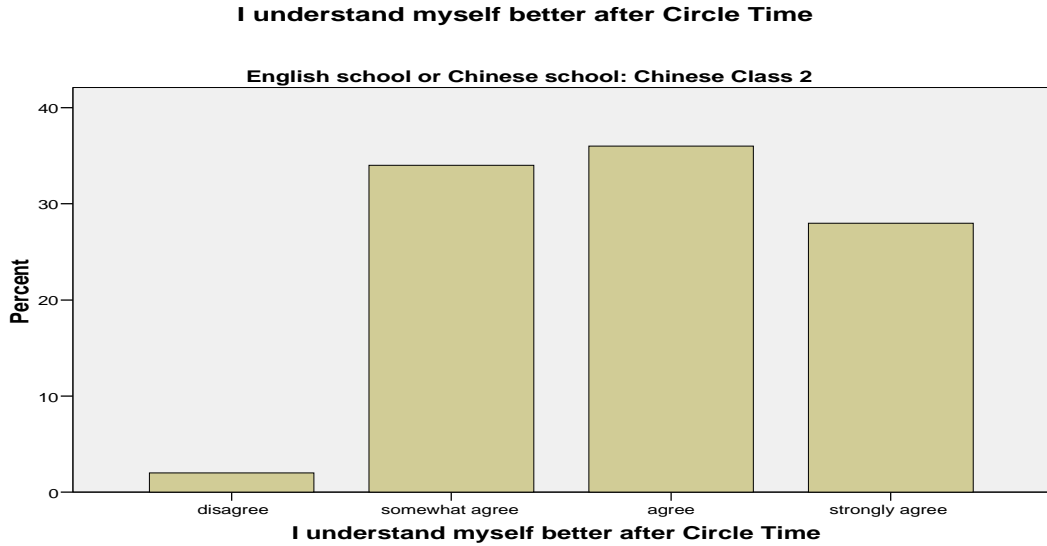
The English students (see graph 5.2.3.B) do not seem to know more about themselves after Circle Time. Their Chinese counterparts, however, still feel that they benefit from Circle Time in understanding themselves better.

**Graph 5.2.3.B I understand myself better after Circle Time (English students)**

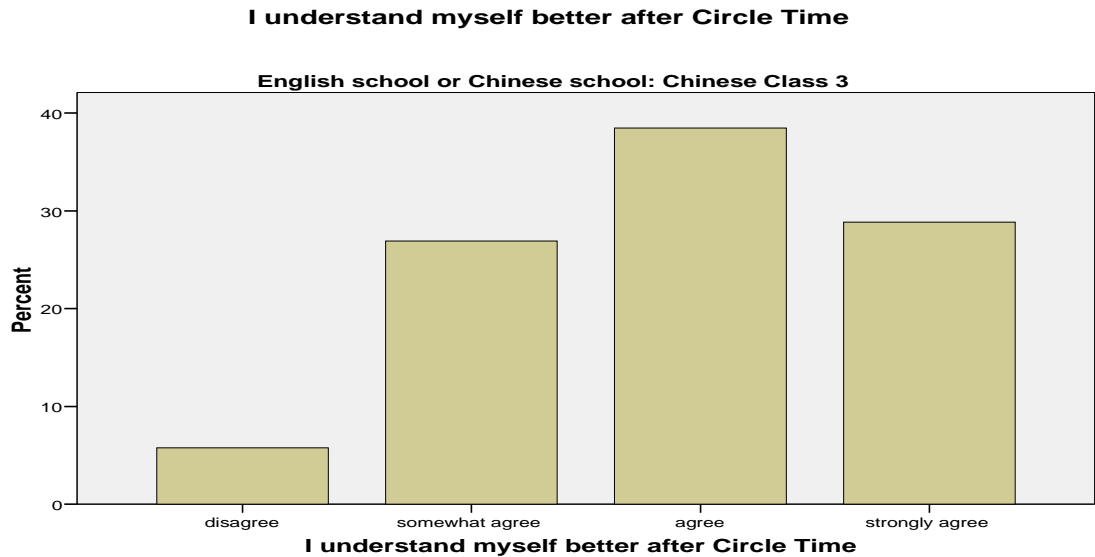


E2 day pupils are still more optimistic than E1 boarders. In response to question 3, class 2 and class 3 (see graph 5.2.3.C and graph 5.2.3.D) boarders and class 4 and class 5 day pupils (see graph 5.2.3.E and graph 5.2.3.F) still share the similarities because of their background as boarders and day pupils.

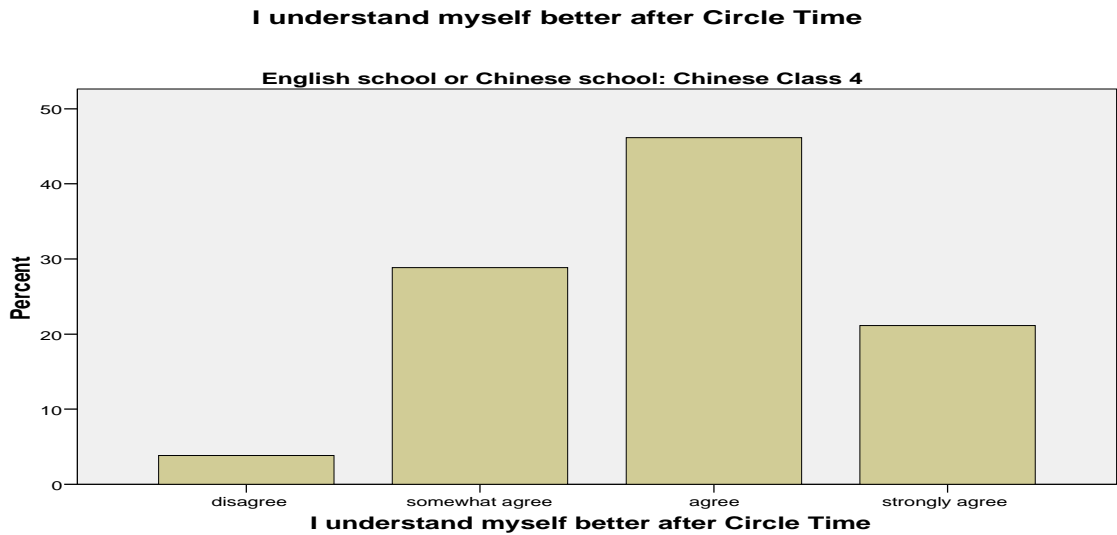
**Graph 5.2.3.C I understand myself better after Circle Time (Chinese Class 2 Borders)**



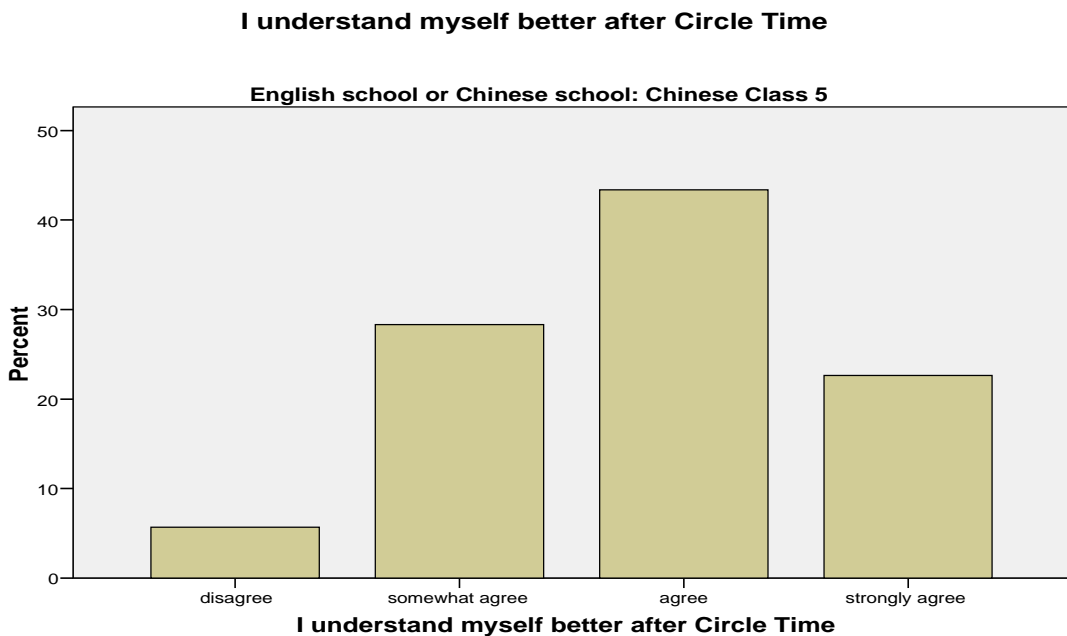
**Graph 5.2.3.D I understand myself better after Circle Time (Chinese Class 3 Borders)**



**Graph 5.2.3.E I understand myself better after Circle Time (Chinese Class 4 Day pupils)**



**Graph 5.2.3.F I understand myself better after Circle Time (Chinese Class 5 Day Pupils)**



In looking at this question in more depth, a UK student states during interview:

I think I get to understand myself better – because I can say how I feel...and I think I can understand the others more because if I don't like them – then I can find out the other side to them – and they could be friendly. (IEB05)

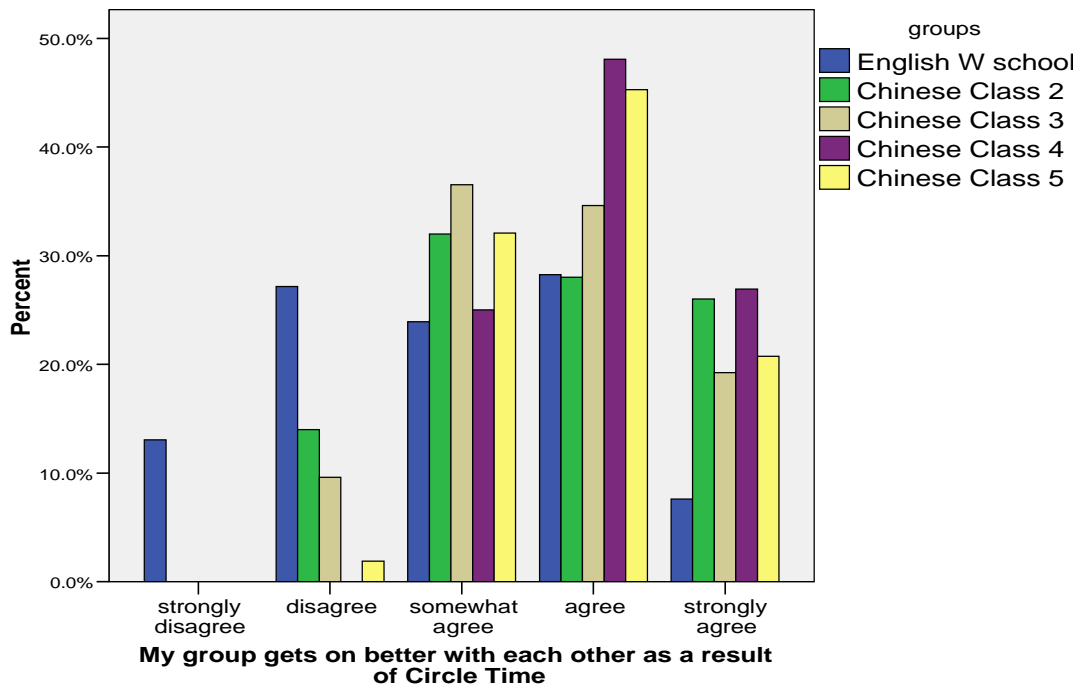
Students raise their self-awareness by expressing 'how I feel,' understand others more by listening to them to 'find out the other side to them', understand themselves by listening to how others think about them and reflecting about how they understand themselves. The data from Figure 3.3 show that effective communication can develop one's open area for personal improvements and raise self-esteem.

From the graph 5.1.2.B, we can see that E2 students' self-esteem results are greater than that of E1 students. The data can suggest that students with higher self-esteem results are more likely to have positive views towards Circle Time. Because UK students did not take the self-esteem test, it may be that the UK students in this study have lower self-esteem than their Chinese counterparts. This needs further research.

#### **5.2.4 My group gets on better with each other as a result of Circle Time**

The 4<sup>th</sup> question is that 'my group gets on better with each other as a result of Circle Time'. There is no surprise in discovering the same routine in the answers from the English group, and from E1 and E2. They hold more positive views than the others (see Graph 5.2.4.A & Table 5.2.4)

**Graph 5.2.4.A My group gets on better with each other as a result of Circle Time**



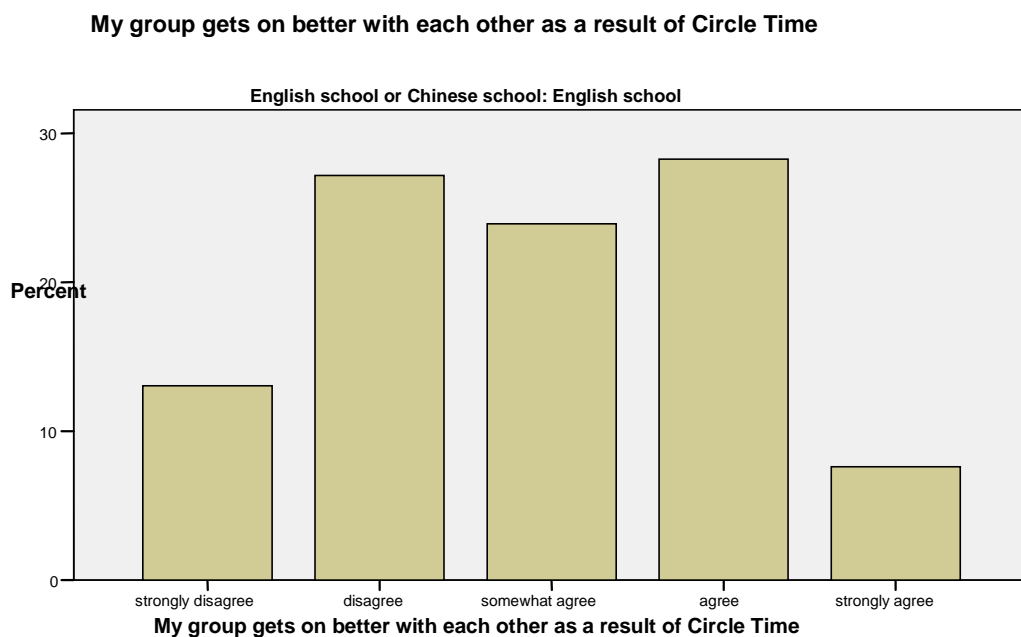
**Table 5.2.4 My group gets on better with each other as a result of Circle Time \* groups Cross tabulation**

			groups					Total
			English school	Chinese Class 2	Chinese Class 3	Chinese Class 4	Chinese Class 5	
My group gets on better with each other as a result of Circle Time	strongly disagree	Count	12	0	0	0	0	12
		% within groups	13.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	4.0%
	disagree	Count	25	7	5	0	1	38
		% within groups	27.2%	14.0%	9.6%	.0%	1.9%	12.7%
	somewhat agree	Count	22	16	19	13	17	87
		% within groups	23.9%	32.0%	36.5%	25.0%	32.1%	29.1%
	agree	Count	26	14	18	25	24	107
		% within groups	28.3%	28.0%	34.6%	48.1%	45.3%	35.8%
	strongly agree	Count	7	13	10	14	11	55
		% within groups	7.6%	26.0%	19.2%	26.9%	20.8%	18.4%
Total		Count	92	50	52	52	53	299
		% within groups	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

83.3% of both UK and Chinese students agree that Circle Time can help them to build up better relationships, 54.4% agree or strongly agree with that. However, 40.2% of English children disagree that their group gets on better after Circle Time. 23.9% somewhat agree with that. Just 35.9% of English students agree that their group gets on better after Circle Time (Table 5.2.4).

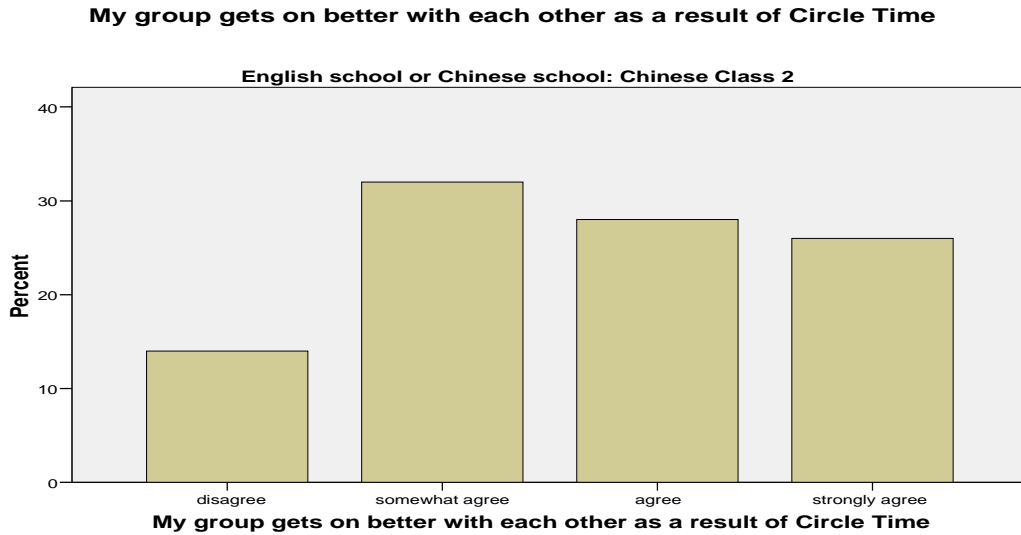
Chinese E2 day pupils have a better relationship than their boarder peers; Chinese students get on better with each other than their UK counterparts as is shown from findings (Graph 5.2.4).

**Graph 5.2.4.B My group gets on better with each other as a result of Circle Time (English students)**

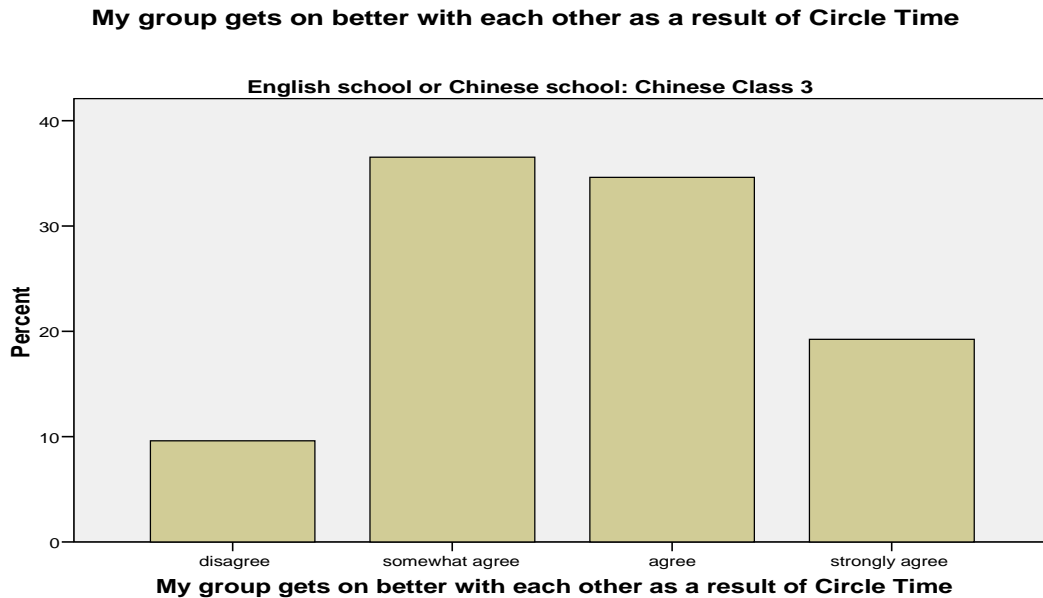




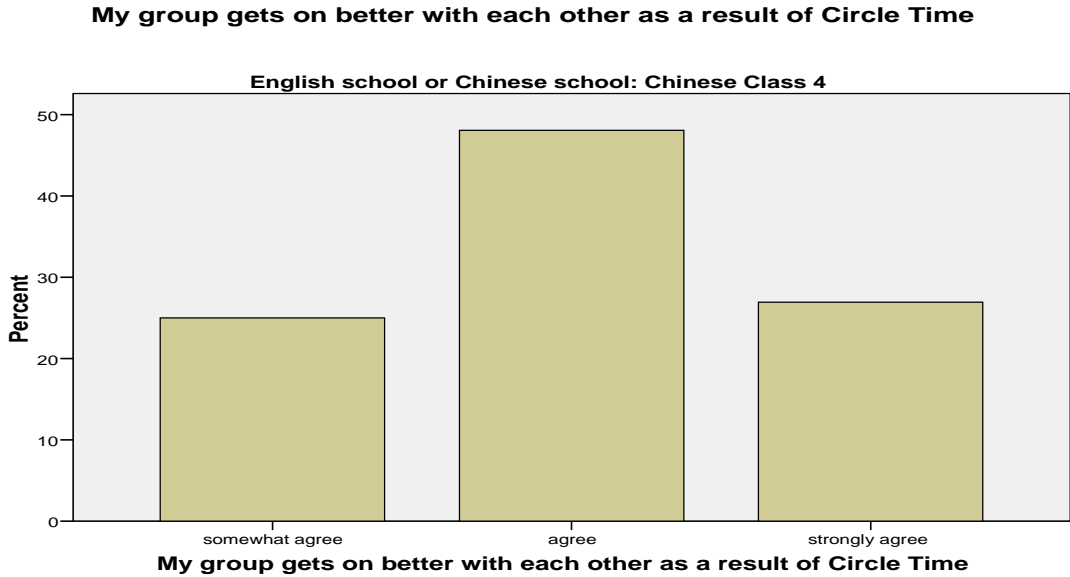
**Graph 5.2.4.C My group gets on better with each other as a result of Circle Time (Chinese Class 2 Boarders)**



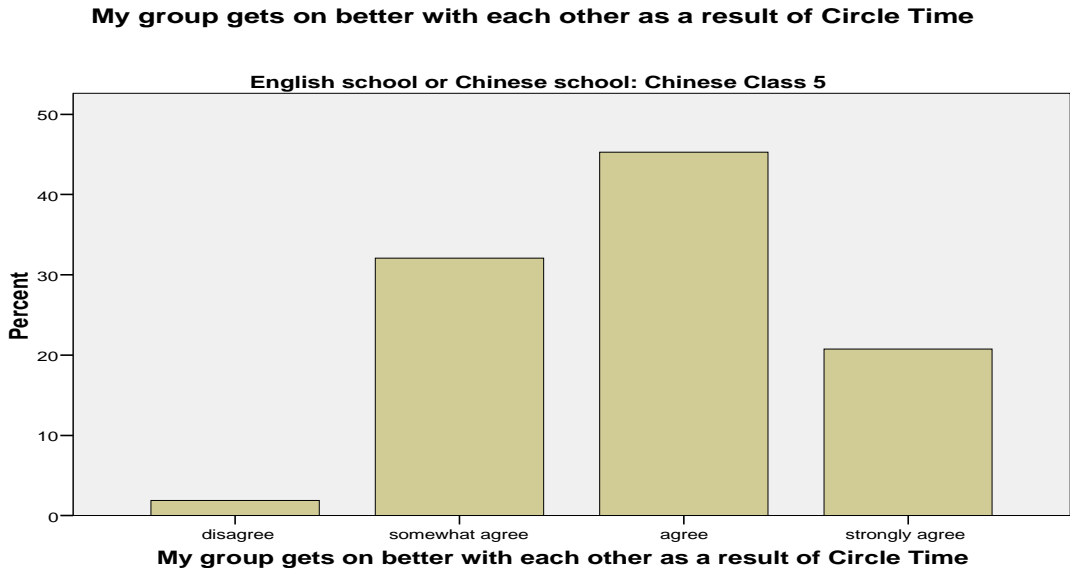
**Graph 5.2.4.D My group gets on better with each other as a result of Circle Time (Chinese Class 3 Boarders)**



**Graph 5.2.4.E My group gets on better with each other as a result of Circle Time (Chinese Class 4 Day pupils)**



**Graph 5.2.4.F My group gets on better with each other as a result of Circle Time (Chinese Class 5 Day pupils)**



In order to understand the difference among different English, E1 and E2 students in this study, there are several issues here that need to be considered. Firstly, the class settings in China are different from those in UK. Chinese students are fixed in each class; they spend most of their time studying with their classmates in the same room with the same teachers. This kind of setting will help students to form a kind of feeling of 'group'. However, English year 7 students have their lessons with different people in different classrooms; they just meet the whole group in the morning when they are registered with their tutor. It is not possible for them to feel that they belong to a firm group. Secondly, Chinese students in this study are selected from their city to study in the most popular school, while the English students are from a local school with '22% of the children having free meals (IET01)'. It means that many of the English children in the school have parents unemployed; most of the unemployed parents have a lower educational background. The children may be deprived and have low expectations. This is not a true comparative study, as I stated. The features of the English school just assist with an understanding of Circle Time in Chinese schools as no such research has been done before mine in China. However, the comparative elements in this study showed the power of Circle Time in a cross-cultural setting.

Although English students were less positive about Circle Time, still more than half of them agree that their group got on better with each other and they still found that Circle time could 'stop bad behaviour' and help to understand each other more; this could help them to develop better relationships.

Circle Time is a good way to stop bad behaviour...loads of people fell out (argued) then in Circle Time they can come together and not be left out – they have to get

together – and it can help them as well as you...because you're all together and listening to each other. (IEG02)

In the Circle Time we use – not everyone gets along – but you have a better chance in Circle Time because you get to talk more – you understand each other more because you share issues. (IEG04)

There is one reason for this – talking – talking together. Communication could bring people 'together', 'to listen to each other' and 'share issues'.

Chinese students share the same view with their UK counterparts:

Now I have more ideas on different things, talking with people with a decent manner. I don't know why, it might be because people understand each other more. It draws together our relationships. (ICG09)

Days ago, when I told somebody that there was a boy who looked like my previous classmate; the rumour started that, he was my boyfriend. You can't explain to everyone. It's really annoying. But talking about thing in Circle Time, everyone will share their secrets, then there is no secret at all. I feel free to talk here. The topics are suitable for our age and our middle school life. I think it's good, and it will be better for our mental health. (ICG01)

In all, Circle Time can help students to be aware of themselves and others, to develop their emotional wellbeing and build up better relationships. From the positive attitudes of both UK and Chinese students to Circle Time, Circle Time can develop these skills in a more joyful way. What do students like about Circle Time – and why do they like it? How can Circle Time be improved? The following section tries to answer these questions.

### **5.2.5 What do you like about Circle Time? Why?**

NVIVO was adopted in analyzing the qualitative data. The data were firstly coded and catalogued based on Word frequency query in Nvivo, and then contents were coded to generate students' views from the questionnaires.

Generally, both UK and Chinese students share similar 'favourite' aspects of Circle Time. Most of them like the games, talking and expressing themselves and knowing about others; and also it is fun. 41.95% of students, numbering 125, like the games. 22.82% like Circle Time because they can talk, express themselves and speak out. 18.12% of the students like Circle Time because they can know (30) and understand (24) others. 13.42% of students think Circle Time is fun.

Apart from the general similarity, there are slight differences between the English and Chinese students. English pupils stress personal feelings more; while Chinese students stress communicating, discussion and the exchanging of ideas. This shows that Chinese pupils appear more willing to learn about other people, while English children wish to show their personal feelings more and to be known by others. The main things students like in Circle Time are the games; they do not even have a reason for liking games, but state they 'just like it' or say, 'because it is fun'. Apart from the games, students like to talk, speak and express themselves in Circle Time. Some like to listen to others. But, by talking and listening, they can 'understand others' and their 'opinions', feelings and ideas. It is not possible to display all the quotations from Chinese students about their favourite parts of Circle Time, although these data represent their point of view:

- I like to talk about the topics apart from entertainment. It can enhance our understanding of each other (QC2-Q5-205)
- I like to talk with the others, because I can know more about other class mates (QC2-Q5-210)
- I like to talk about some interesting topics, because it can help us to reduce unfriendly things within us. (QC2-Q5-211)
- I can express my thoughts and opinions and can talk about everything. It makes me feel easy and relaxed. (QC2-Q5-216)
- I like mostly to talk together. We can relax and speak out our thoughts from the heart. (QC2-Q5-235)
- Talk about the topics which everybody likes. (Speak out personal ideas, understand myself and others). (QC2-Q5-238)
- I like to express my ideas with the others around a topic, because everyone can talk freely. We can communicate, understand, and boost friendship. (QC2-Q5-250)
- I like to talk over issues with the others. I can not only express myself, but also listen to the others, and know more about others (QC3-Q5-309)
- I like to communicate with others and speak out from the heart. Normally, we don't have time and/or a chance to talk about secrets. I like this way. (QC3-Q5-340)
- I like to talk about idols. It helps me to understand whether I should adore the idols or not. I won't be blindfolded in adoring, heihei (laugh) (QC3-Q5-345)
- I like to talk about issues together, which can enhance our friendship, and we learn something from that. (QC4-Q5-417)

- We talk about some issues which we are all interested in, because it can help us to understand each other (QC4-Q5-427)
- What I like most is that it makes everybody talk, listen and communicate in a serious and respectful way (QC4-Q5-429)
- I like mostly to exchange ideas with the others, because, we can communicate with our mates when we talk. I also knew more friends via Circle time at the beginning of the term. (QC4-Q5-431)
- I like to talk about some deep questions (QC4-Q5-436)
- I like to talk about our issues with the others, because I can understand myself more (QC4-Q5-437)
- I like to talk about the topics about growth together. We can share different ideas (QC4-Q5-438)
- We can talk freely, because we do not feel constrained (QC4-Q5-439)
- I like to talk about some topics about our school lives. I feel it develops our friendships. (QC5-Q5-516)
- I like to hear the others talk about me. I am happy to know how the others think of me. (QC4-Q5-526)

Above all, most Chinese students appreciate that Circle Time is an opportunity for them to ‘express’ themselves and ‘talk’ about issues or some deep questions with others. Therefore, Circle Time helps them to understand themselves and others better.

English students share the opinions of their Chinese counterparts, although they put this in a rather different way. Chinese students like to know others more and relax by

talking. English students, however, like the atmosphere in Circle Time more and feel ‘free to talk, trusting in the circle.’

- We can listen and talk to each other. (QE-Q5-1003)
- The way you can talk about staff and people and don’t spread it (QE-Q5-1012)
- You can talk about anything and people can say anything. (QE-Q5-1044)
- It is fun and we can sit and talk as a group, and we are not forced to talk about anything. (QE-Q5-1054)

Both English and Chinese students mentioned about ‘expressing’, when talking about issues. ‘Expressing’ is more about personal feelings.

- I can express my thoughts and opinions, can talk about everything. It makes me feel easy and relaxed. (QC2-Q5-216)
- You can express yourself and communicate with others on your own initiative; you can exchange your ideas with the others. It helps us to build Friendship Bridges because we can have better communications. (QC2-Q5-228)
- (I like) everything. Circle time gives me the chance to express myself and to learn about others. It can improve the relationships between teachers and pupils. (QC2-Q5-236)
- Everyone expresses one’s own opinions, because I feel the others all talk brilliantly. Of course games. It makes us relax from tense study. (QC2-Q5-240)
- I like to express my ideas with the others around a topic, because everyone can talk freely. We can communicate, understand, and boost friendship. (QC2-Q5-250)
- (I) like to express myself. I can speak out my new ideas (QC3-Q5-352)



- Express my views - then more people can know about my opinions and I can release my unhappiness and forget it (QC5-Q5-515)
- I like that you can express feelings (QE-Q5-1014)
- That you have the chance to express yourself if you want to (QE-Q5-1037)
- Everyone has a chance to express their feelings (QE-Q5-1059)
- That you can express your feelings (QE-Q5-1062)
- It's fun - you get to express yourself (QE-Q5-1085)

Chinese students were more interested that Circle Time could help them to communicate, discuss issues and exchange ideas or opinions.

- I like to discuss issues. I can raise my view, and also can listen to the others. I can learn things from hearing about different angles QC3-Q5-334
- I like the moment when we discuss a certain topic together. I can learn others' opinions and share with them QC3-Q5-351

To conclude, students like the games because they are fun, or for no reason they can define. They also like Circle Time giving them a chance to talk with each other, to express feelings, to listen to others, and exchange ideas. Chinese students also feel that they have a chance to relax in Circle Time by playing games and releasing feelings.

### **5.2.6 The problems of Circle Time - What do you dislike about Circle Time? Why?**

Most students like Circle Time, 36.6% of students (19.78 % of English students and 43.96% of Chinese students) state clearly that they dislike nothing about Circle Time.

Chinese students continue to have more positive attitudes to Circle time. Yet sometimes they specify a situation they dislike in Circle Time:

- I dislike somebody who does not talk about the topic but talks about something else. It ruins the atmosphere of circle time. (QC2-Q6-250)
- When there's talk about some serious topics. (QC2-Q6-203)
- Some people don't listen but speak privately when someone is talking with the bear. (QC2-Q6-210)
- Some people does not want to share when we are talking. It's embarrassing and useless (QC2-Q6-213)
- When talking about sad topics, it makes me cry. I am just so sensitive.  
(QC2-Q6-221)
- I have to say what I don't want to say. (I cannot speak when the others are talking), I have to listen to somebody talking rubbish. (QC2-Q6-223)
- When the class is dismissed (QC2-Q6-226)
- When the others say I don't know or shy away from some topic (QC2-Q6-243)
- I don't like it when the teacher asks strange questions I don't understand. (QC3-Q6-312)
- Still that game. When it goes to the end, it's every difficult (QC3-Q6-320)
- I don't like to have the bear, because you have to speak when you have it. (QC3-Q6-322)
- Nothing, just sometimes, when it's my turn to speak, I lose my head (QC3-Q6-350)
- To be caught when playing games. (QC4-Q6-428)

- No, but when I express my own ideas, I am not allowed to criticize others' opinions, I don't understand (QC5-Q6-503)
- When other classmates suddenly throw the bear to me, I am not ready yet. (QC5-Q6-525)
- I don't like that some classmate don't say anything when they've got the bear. I don't like it (QC5-Q6-537)
- it's embarrassing to show in front of others when you've failed in the game (QC5-Q6-538)
- When we all disagree with each other (QE-Q6-1008)
- When they ask you questions (QE-Q6-1014)
- When people argue (QE-Q6-1020)
- When people mess about and you get nothing done (QE-Q6-1033)
- When people call each other names and when we just sit there and talk (QE-Q6-1048)
- When people talk it's annoying (QE-Q6-1065)
- When people sometimes don't want to take part. (QE-Q6-1067)
- When people laugh at someone. (QE-Q6-1068)
- People talking when you're saying something (QE-Q6-1076)

From the quotations above of students' opinions about the situations they dislike about Circle Time, we can draw a conclusion that Circle Time is favoured by most students. However, students don't like misbehaviour that disturbs others or could ruin Circle Time, There is frustration about those that do not take part, or do not stay on the topic. There are still 15.22% of 14 English pupils and 5.8% of 12 Chinese students who think Circle time is boring sometimes. The reason for defining the activity as "boring" varies as follows:

because of somebody's talking, or some topics not being of interest to them. Some Chinese students did not like the topics which make them feel bored. It is important to have topics that attract students' interests. Generally, most students are in favour of Circle Time, the games and topics attract them. Although some students feel bored, the percentage is not high.

UK students still show more negativity than Chinese students towards Circle time. There may be various reasons for this. Firstly, as I mentioned before, the Chinese students are in a school with high standards and they are selected. The students in the English school have not been selected and it serves a relatively disadvantaged catchment area. Another reason is that there are different cultural issues. Thirdly, this was the first time that Chinese students experienced this kind of pedagogy. Therefore there may be a novelty factor operating. In contrast, some English students have known Circle Time since they were in primary school. These issues can make for differences in reaction.

### **5.2.7 The ideal teacher-pupil relationship and Circle Time**

Question 7 asks students to state their ideal teacher-pupil relationship. Data show that friends (82), friend (43) and friendly (12) have been mentioned 137 times in students' questionnaires. Both English and Chinese students wish to have an equal teacher-pupil relationship. The most popular answers to the question are that teachers and students 'should be like friends or on friendly terms' and 'They should respect (28) each other':

Most Chinese students express the demand of respect from their teachers, just like friends:

- Can talk openly, respect each other, like a friend. (QC2-Q7-229)
- The teacher will be considerate of pupils, and pupils will respect teachers. There are no secrets between teachers and pupils. Having a frank relationship.  
(QC2-Q7-249)
- I wish: being equal, respect each other, justice, don't turn us into book worms  
(QC5-Q7-502)
- Respect, communicate and support (QC3-Q7-313)
- Respect and trust should exist. Not just a material exchange, but the sharing of ideas, and the encouragement of each other. (QC3-Q7-345)
- No gaps, can be friends, students respect and understand teachers, while teachers also need to show understanding and sympathy to students. (QC5-Q7-515)
- Teachers do not punish students, less homework; students respect teachers, communicate freely with teachers. (QC5-Q7-541)

Equality is one of the aspects which Chinese students think important in making ideal teacher-pupil relationships. When Chinese students mention equality, it has two meanings. One is that teachers and students should be equal; the other is that teachers should treat all students equally. One student particularly emphasized that the teacher should be considerate of pupils even if the pupils are not good.

:

- If students have questions to ask teachers, teachers can explain with great patience, be fair to everyone, and care about students. Students should respect teachers.  
(QC3-Q7-334)
- Respect each other, (teachers) are not much different (QC5-Q7-533)

- Teachers can be considerate of pupils even if pupils are not good, the teacher should think for them. Pupils should respect and love teachers. (QC2-Q7-248)
- Teachers should treat students equally. Students should respect teachers. Teachers and pupils can be friends in classroom and be friends after class. (QC5-Q7-516)
- Teachers can treat pupils equally and with kindness. Pupils respect teachers, take teachers as friends. (QC2-Q7-239)
- Teacher should understand pupils, teach and guide patiently, and should not show partiality. The pupils should respect teachers and obey the regulations.

(QC2-Q7-246)

Some Chinese students favoured two dimensions of teacher-pupil relationship in public and in private.

- Teachers can joke like friends. teachers should respect students (QC3-Q7-322)
- Like friends privately and showing respect to each other in public. (QC3-Q7-325)
- I think teachers and pupil should keep a certain distance and respect each other. But privately, we can be good friends, to talk freely, make jokes, and still respect each other (QC3-Q7-351)
- My view about the ideal teacher-pupil relationship is that we can keep the normal teacher-pupil relationship at the class, respect each other; while after class, we become friends for life and study and trust each other (QC4-Q7-448)
- The teacher will give answers when the pupils ask. The pupils respect teachers (QC4-Q7-425)

This indicates that in terms of teaching and learning, Chinese students still consider teachers as the knowledge source; they respect teachers and knowledge as the same. In private, they wish to be friends, to be equal with their teachers and to be respected.

The English students' view of teacher-pupil relationship in this study shares some common thought with their Chinese counterparts: they wish teachers to listen to them, help with problems, respect and laugh:

- A teacher who is strict but not too strict and fair (QE-Q7-1007)
- Kind, open and respectful (QE-Q7-1008)
- Friendly, nice, have a laugh, play games, be kind (QE-Q7-1009)
- They help you with your problems (QE-Q7-1022)
- Treat each other with respect. Don't treat us as 4 year olds (QE-Q7-1024)
- That they stand their ground unless they think there is a problem (QE-Q7-1038)
- Listener, helpful friendly (QE-Q7-1055)
- They should be nice, friendly and the teacher should not be strict (QE-Q7-1066)

UK students wrote less than Chinese students in the open-ended questions in Questionnaires. However, during interview, when some students mentioned again about their ideal teacher-pupil relationship, they gave a more detailed description and showed deep and mature understanding.

I'd like to have a 'nice' teacher. One that doesn't shout...doesn't give detentions out. I like to have a male teacher, who's nice – and doesn't shout –

(IEB02)

UK students' positive views about Circle Time also show understanding and sympathy for teachers.

Circle Time makes it possible to have a better relationship with a teacher. In Circle Time you have a chance to practise respectfully speaking to a teacher. We need to have friendships with teachers and pupils - Teachers sometimes have bad days – like pupils – and it's really hard to be polite...sometimes just one pupil can spoil Circle Time or a Classroom for everyone – because they're rude and unkind.

(IEG01)

We can improve teacher-pupil relationships by getting the teacher to not be strict and not tell people off. Circle Time is really good – especially for the students. (IEG02)

A good pupil teacher relationship is when you can talk to them – which you can – and they're really kind and caring. If you had 'her' for your teacher she'd sort things out right away if you had an argument. She's really nice to you too – she never asks loads of questions – usual teachers would go on and on but she doesn't. (IEG03)

I expect a teacher to listen – and not to get hostile – and to get respect...then pupils pay attention. (IEG06)

The teacher-pupil relationships in Circle Time can be good – if the teacher listens to the pupils, especially if there are different teachers who do Circle Time.

(IEG08)



Students' view of the ideal teacher pupil relationship varies according to their personal experience (L. Wu, 2008). From the data, students from both countries from this study show positive opinions of teacher-pupil relationships. Possibly it is because they could talk freely and equally with teachers during Circle Time, they hold positive views of teacher-pupil relationships. Likewise, Circle Time may develop a better teacher-pupil relationship. The next section will interpret the data from the questionnaires and interviews about Circle Time creating the ideal teacher-pupil relationship.

### **5.2.8 Can Circle Time helps in creating the ideal teacher-pupil relationship?**

In the questionnaires, Chinese students are more positive than their UK counterparts for all the questions. They hold a strong view that Circle Time can make better teacher-pupil relationships, while their UK peers are less positive. From table 5.2.8, the data give clear evidence that Chinese students are positive about Circle Time helping in creating ideal teacher-pupil relationship. 40.2% of the 37 students in the English school do not think Circle Time could help in developing ideal teacher-pupil relationships.

**Table 5.2.8 Circle Time helps in creating ideal teacher-pupil relationship \* English and Chinese Cross tabulations**

		groups						Total
		English school	Chinese Class 2	Chinese Class 3	Chinese Class 4	Chinese Class 5	English school	
Do you think Circle Time Helps create ideal teacher-pupil relationship	Yes, sure, certainly	Count	39	34	37	37	36	183
		% within groups	42.39%	68%	71.15%	71.15%	67.92%	61.2%
	Sometimes, Maybe, somewhat agree	Count	9	13	11	9	13	55
		% within groups	9.78%	26%	21.15%	17.31%	24.53%	18.4%
	No	Count	37	3	4	3	4	51
		% within groups	40.2%	6%	7.7%	5.77%	7.55%	17.06%
	nothing	Count	3	0	0	0	0	3
		% within groups	3.26%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%
	Missing	Count	4	0	0	3	0	7
	% within groups	4.35%	0%	0%	5.77%	0%	2.34%	
<b>Total</b>		Count	92	50	52	52	53	299
		% within groups	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Compared with their Chinese counterparts, the UK students have far less positive attitudes about Circle Time developing ideal teacher pupil relationships. There are several possible reasons which need further investigation. However, one point can be considered first from the data collected in this study. In the W School, there was only one teacher who was doing Circle Time, the other teachers, ‘although they know about it, it’s not their responsibility to do it (IETF-01)’. One of the reasons is because few UK secondary schools use Circle Time for students’ personal and social development; there are fewer opportunities for secondary school students to talk and express their feelings. Even in the UK secondary schools, ‘The relationship between the teacher and the children may be

very ‘authoritarian’ – and if that’s the case – the children may not feel free to talk. It’s changing that dynamic – that’s so important (IETF-01).’

In X school, for the first time Chinese students adopted Circle Time to express feelings and talk about issues freely in front of their classmates. They enjoyed this opportunity, even though their teachers did not participate as often as planned. The issue of teachers’ absence will be discussed in the next chapter; however, students can talk more freely without teachers’ presence.

In the next section, attention will be paid to students’ voices, their perspectives from interviews, to examine Chinese students’ perceptions of personal and social education and the application of Circle Time.

### **5.3 In-depth understanding of students’ perspectives – the interview and document analyses**

This section interprets interview data about students’ perceptions of circle Time.

Experimental students had one session of Circle Time each week. From September 2005 to January 2006, each group has done 12 sessions (table 4.2.4). After half a years’ Circle Time sessions, students enjoyed the fun of games, expressing feelings, releasing burdens, discussing issues, learning more about others and also they have built up their personal and interpersonal skills. The Chinese students’ experience of Circle Time is extremely positive. Because they are given a chance to express themselves, they think they are understood. That is the power of ‘listening’(Smith, 2006a). Data collected from students’ personal diaries (CD), interviews (ICB or ICG), summaries of Circle Time (SG or SB)

and composition (CC) gave voice to students' experience and opinions of Circle Time (refer table 4.4). Students' voices in this section express this in their own language.

Summaries of some students' descriptions of Circle Time:

The way she (the researcher) is delivering the lesson is special, a group of students and a teacher sit together to talk about one topic each time. She has a little bear, only the person with the bear can talk. We talk one by one and during this time, we speak out our mind. Once you speak your mind, it's a release. The topics are more interesting to us, for example, the generation gap, my icons, boys and girls, the good points of each one, etc... We can talk about things we normally are afraid to talk about or don't have the opportunity to talk about.

(SG 01)

One session per week, the circle time focuses on studying people and things around us and also the personal ideas. I like this lesson because I think it is not only interesting but also cultivates our way of thinking. I start to pay more attention to things around me... Teacher Wu always knows what we want and like. It seems she can read our minds. I so admire her in this sense. We normally have gaps with other teachers, but don't have with her. Every topic was fresh and sometimes, we had good games to play. I like this subject.

(SG31)

During this lesson, I felt relaxed and happy. It was delivered in an active way. We can play games and have no distance with the teacher. We talk whenever we want to talk, with no restriction. During the session, the teacher always played games with us. Every time I went through, I felt so proud of myself. We had some questions which help heal the wounds in our mind. On the whole, I like this subject and can't live without it.

(SG 21)

At first we misunderstood what we were going to do, as we were using the time table of 'research study' from the first term of my junior high school. It's better to call what we do 'research communication' not 'research study'. It's more about students' talking than about teacher's lecturing...It's more about equity. The teacher is sitting with us at the same level rather than coming on heavily. The lesson focused on discussing a certain topic. Every student has the opportunity to talk about their ideas; there is no boundary. It seems like we have zero distance from the teacher. The discussion stimulates our ways of thinking. In the mean time, it is a platform where students can exchange ideas, emotions and feelings. Different ideas come together, that brings about an acceptance of the right ideas and changes the wrong ones. (SB 30)

Some students describe their impression and understanding of Circle Time in their diary:

We don't have homework for this subject. We like the way of learning, it's relaxing and happy. We have a good relationship with the teacher. The teacher knows more about what we are thinking and knows how to help us. (CD 06)

I don't like any lesson except the circle time. I feel unspeakable comfort and am hoping I can retain my joy in this session. It never fails to provide a feeling of comfort and relaxation. In this session, I can give up my burden and go to the session very relaxed. No, it's not a lesson; it is play, the natural gift of a kid. I have, at least an expectation for a certain thing (in this school). I am so afraid if I won't have it anymore, what am I going to be or do? Hate the school? I don't know, maybe it won't be that serious. I like it, no burdens, not feeling tired, never dislike it and never..... as kids, does anyone dislike a subject without worries and burden? (SG 26)

Some students adopted interesting terms in describing Circle Time:

Two sessions are our favourites each week, one is sport, the other one is Circle Time. I can stretch and be active at PE, and I can express myself and release pressure during Circle Time. *If the PE is the class for body exercise, then circle time is the time for opening your hearts*...Each time when we have Circle Time, I am excited and agitated. Everyone sits in a quiet classroom, to express our ideas, share our happiness, and open our hearts to each other. It is so wonderful to know about other classmates who are going to be with you in the next three years...When I have something sad, I can speak out here, and then the sadness will go away. I can concentrate on my studies after releasing these kinds of burdens...Each Circle Time session is a time to discover something. There is always something I can remember for ever. (CD07)

It *relaxes my mind and body*, and gives me freedom to talk. I really think it is good in this way. (SG12)

It's not only *a session to balance the body and mind*, but also to release the pressures from study. Normally, we have high pressures from study and I can't breathe. I never have time to think about life outside study. There used to be no time to communicate with other classmates. Because I was having a bad time before this term, I dealt with something very badly. The chance to communicate with my classmates was so rare. After this subject, I'm getting to know my classmates and have more interaction with them. Through this subject, I also start knowing myself, about death, the generation gap and friendship. (SG 05)

Circle Time is considered to be a session to 'open heart', 'balance body and mind', relax mind and release pressure. It is a time for them to relax. The expression that sport is 'body stretching' while Circle Time is 'mind stretching' is very interesting to see that children understand their developmental needs to have physical growth to be strong for their body and also the needs for mental growth to be mature in their thought. However, examination-orientated education reduces the chance for children's basic and natural

needs (refers to § 3.2). The evidence from this point also indicates that this study and study about Affective Education in China are greatly needed.

Through questionnaires, interviews and students' dairies or notes, the information always shows the pleasure they had because of Circle Time. There is not enough space to display their enthusiasm, however, from their own voice, the power of Circle Time or the idea that giving children a chance to speak and listen to each other can be seen.

Some of them simply state their happiness and enjoyment:

- I feel happy, relaxed and get on well with others. (ICB 07)
- I really like this subject. It provides us with an opportunity to relax and to talk about whatever we feel like. (SB 02)
- As for me, the subject is special. We don't need to prepare before lessons. And it's always relaxed during the sessions. (SB 06)
- The most important thing is that circle time has no burdens and we can relax. (SG 04)
- Growing-up through games and communication; strengthening the friendship of classmates and stimulating the fun of study. (SB 14)

Some students specify their feelings:

I always like Teacher Wu's sessions. The teacher and students sit together and even get to call her name. I've never had such an experience. We all have opportunities to talk. You say one thing, and I say one thing; we are getting to know each other. The distance between us is getting smaller unconsciously...Tuesdays and Wednesdays (the time they will have Circle Time) become the date we are counting on. We sit together and speak our minds and

play games and relax our minds. It's so comfortable. I like the subject and so does teacher Wu. (CD 09)

It's nice. Mainly I think my mind is more open than before and more tolerant. It helped us to know each other more and to increase kinds of amiable feelings... I feel relaxed. I know there is a place I can release myself. (ICB02)

Since we came here, we left our friends from primary school, I felt very lonely. Fortunately, we have Circle Time, and we can talk freely here with the same topics. It made us have a good relationship. (ICG 01)

Every Wednesday afternoon, we run to the classroom in Level 3. How should I put it? We all feel happy when we go to the circle time lesson. At every lesson, we can talk about the topics we are interested in...I can always hear classmates talk about what's on their mind. I, then, understand better about the students in Class A. The more I know about the classmate, the more I understand them. I also share my thoughts. It's always very relaxed in circle time, I don't feel like studying, it's more about talking with my best friends. All in all, the circle time is a very relaxed lesson, I feel happy in the lesson. (SB 08)

Every Tuesday, students from A&B classes always argued about who went to the session. Every time, I was amused by the language they used. I had real fun. (SG 07)

Some students talked about particular sessions they were in favour of:

I mostly like the topics about 'the best' and about 'death'. Talking about 'You are the best', everyone was wearing the crown when talking about ourselves. When it was my turn, I was so shy and my face turned red, I don't understand why, I have a kind of a 'thick skin' normally, I thought.



(SB 26)

Firstly, I feel lucky to be one of the students in this subject because only 4 classes are having this subject...It's fun, relaxing and happy. We talk about things freely and speak our minds and thoughts. We get to know each other better and exchange feelings. On the whole I think this subject is very good. (SG 02)

I have many benefits after having this subject. For example, before we always had barriers between boys and girls. But now, we are best friends to each other. But there are still new things to explore. (SG 09)

It helps release our thoughts and deal with some difficult problems with other students. It also helps us in relaxing. I feel that in the circle time we can talk about some easy topics, not just issues with parents or examinations. (SG 11)

Firstly, I like it that we can express our ideas freely during the lesson. Secondly, I found I am very relaxed during the circle time. Normally, we are always uptight at school. That's why I like Teacher Wu's lesson and talking like friends with Teacher Wu. I like her way of teaching too. (SG 12)

I like the topic about boys and girls. Everyone was interested. The atmosphere was really excited. But, we learnt how to deal with the relationship between boys and girls in an appropriate way. (ICG04)

Some students emphasized the importance of 'speaking skill' which students need to obtain:

At least there is a place for you to talk when you are low. I think speech is important. If I am a businessman, I need to state my business clearly, and then people can know what I am

selling. If I am a policeman, I need to tell people what they should do. Communication is important. (ICB08)

I think, between classmates, communication is the most important aspect. Circle time provides us with the best communication opportunities. Some topics in the circle time are the ones we normally don't talk about. From circle time, I learnt how to solve problems from my classmates. Sometimes, different classmates have different views towards some question. It is good to have different views because we can have a more complete view towards things and also we can know all the classmates better.

(SG 15)

Yet, students understood that communication was important, what they needed, was a chance, a place, a time to talk openly, freely and equally. They could learn more from communication.

It's not so easy to have a quiet place and talk about things we've never got time to talk or think about...This time at this place with some or many familiar faces that know each other we get to know what is deeply inside their mind and so this is called happiness.

(SG16)

Through the lesson, I feel relaxed and also I can communicate with my classmates. The most important thing is, it will balance the tensions of study. It brings happiness. (SG 17)

I like this subject. It's part of my life. I learnt a lot from it. I get to know about life and families. I have life tips one by one. I can discuss everything easily, with nothing to worry about; we even have space to play. (SG 19)

Even students who just kept quite still had a chance to listen to others, to know more about others. Sharing a problem is also helpful.

...sometimes, we will avoid giving opinions about some topics. I anticipated it (they will avoid it) already. When I heard others talking about issues, then I know that everyone has the same problem as me. Even if we can't reach a solution at the end, I still feel better as we share the same problems. (ICG01)

I think we have many benefits from this subject. Through the session, I felt it helps us to relax and release pressures and burdens. With stories, we can also solve the problems in our mind. So I think it's good. (SG 22)

Most students like Circle Time, because they mainly feel that they can relax during Circle Time. It is fun. They can open their hearts. It is not necessary to have learnt anything or to improve anything. It is an opportunity for them to speak.

It's an interesting subject, we talk about the topics we are interested in, open our minds and talk freely. I think it's just for the deep areas inside our minds. Through conversation, it relaxes us from the tension of study. Through playing games, we get rid of all worries. I want this subject to continue as the monitor of our mind. (SG 24)

I think it's more than playing games, it's a connection between hearts. (SG 25)

I love it. Relaxing without pressure, it's not dull, it's alive. Cool! (SG28)

This subject really goes into my heart. It gives us so much happiness and laughter. It also provides some questions for us to think about. (SG32)

I pretty much like the Circle Time. The teacher always makes us feel relaxed and able to forget about our worries and we talk about what we want to talk about and open our minds. (SG33)

The Chinese students' perception of Circle Time above brings powerful evidence and in-depth understanding to triangulate with the questionnaire data. It is fun, because students can play games during Circle Time; it is relaxing, because there is no competition; it is interesting, because they can discuss issues around them and learn from others; it also starts them thinking, as it provides questions and information from other people.

The findings through Chinese students' perception of Circle Time suggests that Circle Time brings a chance for students to develop their listening, speaking and communication skills; it also gives a chance for students to open their minds to think about things from other people's points of view. It also brings evidence that western pedagogy – Circle Time works well in a Chinese secondary school. Although it did not prove that Circle Time can raise students' self-esteem, however, I would like to present a Circle Time session to introduce how Chinese students react to, reflect on and consider Circle Time.

## **5.4 A little praise makes a huge difference - A special Circle Time session**

12 sessions have been introduced in this study. This section, a special session of Circle Time will be introduced to indicate the power of Circle Time and positive communication. Firstly, the session design will be introduced. Secondly, students' feedback about this session will be shown to indicate the change which Circle Time has made to students. The researcher's observation from the research diary and notes will also be displayed together to indicate the results.

### 5.4.1 The design

It was in week 7, before the mid-term examination, when students were preparing for their first important examination since they started their secondary life. Normally, just a talking piece is used during Circle Time, aiming to help students to pay attention to the speaker, and also help speech to carry on. This time a garland was introduced into the Circle. One student put the garland on her/his head, then another student next to her/him had the bear (the talking piece) and started talking about the merits of the student who was wearing the garland, and passed the bear to the next students. The round finished when everyone had worn the garland and been praised

The design from my research note:

#### Process

Tools: a bear and a garland.

Policy: Apply golden rule, just positive words can be used to praise people, speak about one or more merits of the person who is wearing the garland. You can pass if you wish.

Process: each student wears the garland in turn, and the bear is passed around the circle.

Each in turn says one or more virtues or strong points of the person who is wearing the garland. You can pass if you want to.

Game: To warm up with the game *Name calling*: calling one's name and trying to catch the person called before she/he calls another name.

(RN23/10/05)

### **5.4.2 Year 7 students with *you are the best* Circle Time session**

The session *you are the best* was welcomed by year 7 pupils. However, at the time I did not know how much students liked it. I thought it was just one of the sessions like the others. The students thought it was fun. I was happy to hear that students told me they liked it. The session 'you are the best' alerted me because of a girl's word:

A girl came to me today before our Circle Time session and asked: "Miss Wu, what will we do today, will we wear the garland? My friend told me that they did that yesterday, it's really fun." I did not even have a chance to reply to her as she continued with her talking, while I just smiled and nodded my head, I did not want to stop her, "we live in the same dorm, she is from class 2. She stood in front of the mirror last night and happily told us that most boys from their class thought she was lovely." "Will we do that as well? I want to know what others think about me", another girl said quickly. It was a surprise for me to know their reaction to the garland or to the praise. Yesterday, the session was not too different from before, students were bit shy as usual; some boys seemed not to want to wear the garland, but when other students next to them put the garland on their heads, they then accepted it, but still covered their faces with their hands, or inclined their heads. Although I stressed that they should just say the strongpoint or merits of others, there were still students who said something which for me was not very polite. I had to stress that just the merits were allowed. The girls reminded me that they liked this session. I started to observe students' feelings.

Although students are shy of being praised in public in a way like that, as they are in a new school, they really want to know how others view them, especially more praise means that they are accepted by most people. The session became them more than just a session.

(FN 26/10/05)

Because of the information from the girl, I started to pay attention to this session. The researchers' knowledge and understanding of the research project will engender a response and result in a different understanding, interpretation and development of the field study. Under the influence of the participants' responses, reactions and influences, the researcher needs to develop her knowledge and also adapt to various changes in the field and adopt suitable strategies. I developed this session during fieldwork. I also learnt from the students' reaction and feedback.

I have tape recorded some sessions for reference. When I read the transcripts later, I found that students were talented in the use of their language.

Although a few students used some unkind words, most of the words used to describe a person were kind and beautiful. The content below is not just for a particular person; as they just passed the bear and were talking in turn, I could not distinguish which person they were talking about. It is not important to know who they are talking about, but how they describe a person. My intention here is to state that beautiful language used to praise people will make an effect on people's emotions even when you just read through the praise. Students have developed their language in eulogizing people and also their interpersonal skills to communicate with others.

- ....
- Care about others
- Like your smile
- Lovely
- Your English is great
- Your English is terribly good
- Like a baby
- Generous
- Good at management
- Mature
- Kind
- Very considerate

- Good at drawing
- Humorous
- Excellent
- Good at maths
- I don't like him calling me a frog
- He's snoring at night
- Kind
- Handsome
- Tallest in our class
- Laborious
- Like a big brother
- Aspirant
- Good at acting
- Talented in acting
- Good at sports
- Future star
- Shy
- Gentlewomanly
- Kind
- Elegant
- Graceful
- Gentility
- Civility
- Talent
- Good at studying
- Clever
- Salty
- Zestful
- Wonderful
- She is good at everything
- Perfect
- Her singing's beautiful
- Humorous and beautiful
- Got half the merits I have
- Lively
- Likes to help others
- Loyal to friends
- I don't know
- I don't know her
- He is the first person I've known to read the same book as I do
- Like to ask
- Not sure
- Lovely
- Humble
- She is good at playing the piano
- I don't know him



- I like him
  - Warm-hearted
  - Enthusiastic
  - Has big beautiful eyes
  - Kind and lovely
  - Her study is so good
  - She is never angry with me, I have known her 4 years
  - I heard that she has management skills
  - Her voice is so beautiful,
  - She's got beautiful eyelashes
  - Special characteristics
  - She is brave enough to go against teacher X
  - She is violent, she hit me
  - Easy-going
  - Kind
  - With profound knowledge, sometimes, the teacher likes his following
  - Lovely, but she likes to say she's sick
  - Like the smile
  - I don't know him very much
  - Introverted
  - Explicit
  - Easy-going
  - Friendly
  - Earnest
  - Kind
  - Brave
  - Excellent character
  - Likes to make jokes
  - Good to us, help us to do the cleaning duty
  - Responsible
  - Like star
  - Not sure
  - I wish I could be her
  - Introverted
  - Not bad
  - Tolerant
  - Interesting
  - Nothing to say (because it is too good or..., this has two meanings)
  - Violent (laugh)
  - Craven
  - Live treasure
  - Everybody loves him
  - Ingenuous
  - Childish
  - Naïve
  - ...
- (SR25D-4b)

During the session, some students were not kind to others; they seemed to speak without thinking whether it would hurt people. I had to stress the golden rules and tell them just positive words were allowed. It is still pleasant to see that they used beautiful words to praise, judge or comment on their peers. The 'peer acceptance' (Bierman, 2004) was developed by Circle Time's 'social opportunity' to improve their interpersonal skills.

At the end of the field work, when I started to interview students, quite a number of students recalled that session, they stated about their impressions of being praised by their peers:

I remember the session when we wore a crown and to be praised by people. I like that very much. I was not confident before. I thought that I was not capable, and was really self-contemptuous. However, that makes me find out that I have lots of merits. It's something people found out about me. I was happy and confident. (ICG08)

When we wear a crown, it's really interesting. Everyone talked about the others' advantages. Everyone got opinions; we can learn lots of things from each other. (ICB10)

I most impressed about the session called 'you are the best'. We tell people what we think their merits are, it improves our relationships. At the same time, we also know about our own image in other people's eyes. (ICB08)

Everyone get different things. Take the session "praising others" for example, we can understand others, and also learn how others think of us. But I think that, when people are talking about others' merits, they might not think the same in their mind. Knowing about a person takes time, to make comments about a person too. (ICB07)

Year 7 students' perception of the significance of positive communication was not just being happy about being accepted and approved by their peers, but also they understand that everyone is different and special, everyone has advantages, and positive communication can help people to open their heart and to know more about each other.

Following the success of *you are the best* session in year 7, I started introducing this session to year 10 and other levels of classes if the chance was offered, in order to test this design and investigate students' reaction and feedback. As I have mentioned in § 4.2.5, two groups of students and teachers joined Circle Time on their own initiative. In the next section, I will introduce how to use Circle Time with year 10 and a big group of 40 and 52 students.

### **5.4.3 Circle Time session – you are the best with year 10 students**

At the beginning of the term, year 10 students (the first year senior high school students) come from different schools, they do not know each other at the beginning of the term. They do not have much chance to talk. They start studying from early morning, even at lunch time. After 3 hours of study in the evening, they have about one hour at about 9 o'clock to prepare to go to bed. In their accommodation, they share a room with another 5 or 6 students. They have time there to talk with each other, and to know more about one another in the shared dorm. However, as most of them are the only child of the family, away from home and living with other students for the first time, they have no experience of sharing a room with peers or of living without the care of their parents and being independent. Problems occur in their accommodation, such as cleaning the room, keeping

privacy, not being too noisy when others are sleeping or having a break and especially, the building up of proper relationships with others. In their class, the main purpose of the 54 teenagers is to study hard to get good academic results every year and finally to get the best results for entrance to a national university through examination. Then they can enter a good university 3 years later. Although everyone was selected from their previous junior high school, (that means they were the top students there), they have to put themselves into a new situation, as the challenge of the new school is particularly high. The challenge causes them to be under the great pressure of academic study. They were the best ones in their previous schools; they want to be the best at the new school, they want to be accepted and to be approved by others, who are their teachers and classmates. However, it is difficult to be outstanding among all the best. Normally, affective issues face them; firstly, to adapt to the new school, new life and new people; secondly, to adjust their understanding and self-awareness of their position in the new group; thirdly, to work hard to be the best among the others. They have really high pressure when they start their new school lives.

In my research diary, I have put some notes after the session:

We had the session in the evening. That evening, they were to study maths for three hours. I asked everyone to move their tables and chairs out of their room to give space for them to act. When I asked them to sit in a circle, the girls sat at one side the boys sat on the other. To start, I brought a garland which was made of leaves, and a bear. I put the garland on one student's head. Then I put the bear in the hands of the student next to her and asked her to say one thing which she thinks the one with the garland was best about.

Some students felt interested, some looked bored. Some might have thought it was stupid. Anyway, they kept it going. They are more mature and kind than the pupils from the junior

high school, as they use nice words and are more polite. Although some of them didn't even know the others' names, they still said something nice about the person with the garland on. I found that at the beginning, this didn't attract them, because to start with, the warm up game wasn't warming them up enough. It is difficult to manage a game with a crowd of 54 growing up teenagers. (If I had given them a better game to warm up, it might have been better)

Most students were shy at the beginning once the garland was put on their head. They lowered their head and didn't look at the others. But, they wanted to know how the others viewed them, and raised their head on several occasions when they heard something interesting. About half a round later, they raised their head, and looked at the others with a smile on their face. They wanted to know how the others viewed them. Also they were happy to be praised by the others. It created an atmosphere of being in a group and accepted by the others.

(Note of year 10 students, class 2)

My research diary did not describe the students' reactions I saw during Circle Time. In the next section, some pictures will be displayed to show students' reactions during the session.

#### **5.4.4 Students' reactions from pictures and observation**

When another year 10 teacher asked me to help organize a whole class activity for his class, I introduced the session "you are the best".

It was in the evening that we arranged to sit in the Circle. After introducing the golden rules, everyone was encouraged to call out their own names loudly. At first, they were too shy to call out their own names, then I demonstrated loudly and they started to understand. When the session started, they were nervous and shy in the first place and it was interesting to see their faces. During the session, I took some pictures. The images are powerful as a means of exploring their feelings.

Pictures of 'Excited feelings' make their faces become red and hot and even affected the teacher.

**Picture 5.4.1 Girls during Circle Time session- You are the best**



**Picture 5.4.2 Girls in Circle Time session – you are the best**



**Picture 5.4.3 A girl in the middle still feeling her hot face after one round**



**Picture 5.4.4 A teacher is feeling his hot face after his turn**



From Pictures 5.4.1-5.4.4, both teacher and students had emotional feelings. They were nervous and excited about the praises from the other people in the Circle. Apart from these people in pictures, some other students have also shown the same reactions and feelings during Circle Time sessions. It is interesting to look at a series of pictures of one person's facial expression.



**Picture 5.4.5 A teacher's facial reactions during Circle Time (picture 1)**



**Picture 5.4.6 A teacher's facial reactions during Circle Time (picture 2)**



**Picture 5.4.7 A teacher's facial reactions during Circle Time (picture 3)**



**Picture 5.4.8 A teacher's facial reactions during Circle Time (picture 4)**





**Picture 5.4.9 A teacher's facial reactions during Circle Time (picture 5)**



**Picture 5.4.10 A teacher's facial reactions during Circle Time (picture 6)**



**Picture 5.4.11 A teacher's facial reactions during Circle Time (Picture 7)**



Pictures 5.4.5 -5.4.11 were about a teacher's facial and body language during the Circle Time when he was the focus and was being affirmed and praised. The teacher was in his 50s, he is a very experienced teacher from Xinjiang who accompanied these children. The Xinjiang students think he is like a father. In the pictures, he was calm at the beginning; a bit shy when hearing the students talk about him; then was smiling when the round was nearly finished; and was feeling his face at the end of his turn. His body language shown on the pictures also suggests that his emotional process also developed from being a bit nervous to being happy and then excited although he is trying to show no facial expressions at the beginning. He just tries to hide his nervousness.

The data show that the emotional processes of teachers and students were all the same during this Circle Time session. Picture 5.4.12-5.4.15 presents a boy's facial expression changing from when his turn started to the end of his turn. The girl at his left side just finished her round and is still happily thinking about it.

**Picture 5.4.12 A boy's facial expression during Circle Time (picture 1)**





**Picture 5.4.13 A boy's facial expression during Circle Time (picture 2)**



**Picture 5.4.14 A boy's facial expression during Circle Time (picture 3)**



Some people are more sensitive, and are more moved by others' praises and have tears in their eyes. (Picture 5.4.15 & 5.4.16)

**Picture 5.4.15 A girl is wiping tears during Circle Time**



**Picture 5.4.16 A teacher was in tears during Circle Time**



The pictures above clearly showed evidence of the emotional progress people experienced during the Circle Time session “*You are the best*”, and of the change praise can bring to people in a short time. In the next section, data from students’ interviews will provide feedback to triangulate their opinions.

#### **5.4.5 The feedback after the session – interview**

Data from interviews with students about the “*You are the best*” session indicate that the session has been impressive for students’ personal feelings and interpersonal relationships.

we talked in small groups (with my classmates) before; it was just some kind of chat. We did not say that kind of stuff normally. But last time during the activity, the atmosphere was very nice. There wasn’t any estrangement, but harmony. Especially in the game calling others’ names, everyone was excited; we kept talking about it a lot even after we went back to our dorm. (ICF1701)

Err .... It’s nice to tell each other their merits, as it increased our confidence. Everyone is to tell others’ their merits, then we get to know others and also know each other more. It taught me that I should pay attention to others usually. I should pay attention to others, pay attention to my own merit, pay attention to observe.

(ICF 1703)

At the beginning, we hold the bear to call our own names, I think it’s really good, as everyone is special; every name is special, with special meanings. But some students’ attitudes were not good. They didn’t respect the others. I think because the single



child is not used to respecting people. They do not think about others, I think people should consider others more and not be selfish. (ICM1706)

We were taking it in turn to wear the crown and to say others' virtues. .. I think it helped us to communicate. Normally, we don't have this kind of opportunity to know how the others think about us. I really want to know about that. (ICM 1707)

After this activity, I think I like to have more communication with others, pay more attention to other classmates and care about them. I know more about our class and mates now. (ICM 1708)

Because we have come to a new place, everybody is a stranger. We don't know the others. During that time, everyone will say some strengths about others. And others will praise you as well. Then you can find out how the others express themselves in a way which is different from yourself. Because we have come to a new place, I knew nobody here before. This activity makes us to have more solidarity. (ICF 1702)

It changed me in the way that I communicate with people. (ICB 04)

When we wear a crown, it's really interesting. Everyone talked about others' advantages. Everyone got opinions; we can learn lots of things from each other (ICB 09)

Students are happy to have such an experience, from teachers' observation and participation, they also show a positive impression.

#### **5.4.6 Teachers' reactions to the Circle Time session**

Teachers' reaction firstly was surprised, and then they discovered more about their students:

I was very surprised about that session. Some students cried, and teachers as well. Before that session, I had discovered some issues in our class. I was seeking a point of contact to solve the problems. That session gave me the chance to talk with them more openly. They (students) became more cheerful. It was really helpful to my work.

(ICT11-CY)

It brought a deep impression when we did Circle Time the second time. It released lots of things about my students which I didn't find before. These were things I had always wanted to discover. After that session, some quiet girls became active. They had smiles on their faces, and started communicating with others. This was something I wanted to do already which has now developed in our class. I can't tell what exactly it is, but there something has changed in our class, perhaps the atmosphere...I think since the term started, I kept too tight a control of the class. I didn't give them enough space; but that circle Time session brought them enough space to communicate themselves.

(ICT7-XM)

It makes teachers think and change their way of teaching and communicating with students:

...according to that session, I got some inspiration from Circle Time. I think we should minimize their disadvantages but stress their advantages. I stopped criticizing students in public; instead now talk privately. I just point out some of their

shortcomings in private talking, and also give suggestions for change. I am changing the way to communicate with students. (ICT11-CY)

In Circle Time, the expression is very warm. Normally, I didn't pay much attention to my way of speaking to students. I always criticize them straightaway. They don't accept it. I have learnt to express myself with some kinds of new skills. (ICT4-XH)

In that session, I told students' their merits. I thought about the best words I knew to praise them. When it was my turn, I also liked to know how they think about me.

(ICT4-XH)

Teachers start questioning why Circle Time can bring this impact.

From the first session of Circle Time, they started knowing about each other. then the second time, it developed a cohesion for the whole class. But, now, I just have only a little understanding about Circle Time. What kind of results will it achieve? I have no idea. But, I do feel it's quite good, and it is necessary to utilize this method in school. It brings students the opportunity to know others and to display to them their own characteristics. They also learn to listen. I think listening is important. It's the best communication skill. They also can develop their speaking skills. (ICT7-XM)

The teacher states that listening is important (Smith, 2006b) and communication skills can be developed in Circle Time.

As Glasser (1969) found from his experience, direct disciplinary meetings are often ineffective in getting children involved with each other in a warm, positive way. They

gain positive involvement more quickly through meetings in which they discuss ideas relevant to their lives. Circle Time is the kind of meeting which could provide a warm atmosphere and indirectly affect their behaviour changes.

## **Conclusion**

This Chapter reported the Circle Time experiment in a Chinese secondary school. The Quantitative data gave a frame work to the research in drawing a conclusion about the experiment's result. Although the finding was not significant, it still suggested that Circle Time may have potential in developing student's self-esteem and academic achievement in the Chinese context. The questionnaires also give clear evidence that students think Circle Time is a chance for them to express feelings and talk about issues. They understand those feelings more after Circle Time, and also understand others more, and their peer relationships are improved as a result of Circle Time. However, in this mixed design, Circle Time was also an intervention within the school, both for the students and teachers. Students' and teachers' reactions, perceptions of circle time and even issues about Circle Time also can help explain the western theory and this first time attempt in the Chinese cultural context. Based on the pictures of students, the next chapter will discuss in detail teachers' reactions to Circle Time.

# **Chapter 6 Western seed in Eastern field - Can western pedagogy (Circle Time) survive in a Chinese school?**

## **Introduction**

The previous chapter reported the results of the Circle Time experiment in a Chinese school. Although the result was not statistically significant in supporting the conclusion that Circle Time can develop Chinese students' self-esteem and academic achievement, the findings still suggested the potential of Circle Time in developing students' self-esteem and therefore their academic achievements as I have argued in Chapter 5. The students' perspectives in this study show that Circle Time is a chance for them to express their feelings, to speak out from their hearts, to talk about issues and to discuss problems. Therefore, they can release burdens, relax, share problems, exchange ideas, and learn from each other. Circle Time helps them to understand each other, to know that everyone is different and to respect each other. Their self-awareness was raised and their awareness of others, which led to having better relationships with one another. They also thought that Circle Time could facilitate the building up of better teacher-pupil relationships. This did not just work in the circle, but Circle Time skills could be transferred to their daily lives to create democratic and equal teacher-pupil relationships.

However, teachers play an essential role in establishing this relationship. Although Chinese students are enthusiastic and excited about the experience of Circle Time, how do teachers, in contrast, react to the methods or to the new ideas? This chapter will firstly give a brief picture of a Chinese school from western teachers' point of view, then data

from interviews with teachers will be analyzed and teachers' opinions of Circle Time and their perspectives of current educational development, change and reform will be interpreted and discussed.

## **6.1 Western teachers' views of Chinese schooling – the eastern field**

The experimental school is one of 17 foreign language schools in China, which are accredited to recommend their top students to go to Universities without taking the National University Entrance Examination. Each year, English teachers from the UK, USA, Australia and Canada and other English speaking countries, and French teachers from France are employed to teach the speaking of English and/or French in the school. There are about 5 foreign teachers each year. A questionnaire (appendix 5) was designed during fieldwork to gain western teachers' opinions of Chinese education. 4 teachers returned their questionnaires. Two of them were from UK, one was from USA and the other from Canada.

The foreign teachers' opinions draw a picture of the Chinese school from an outsider's point of view. In the next section, two UK teachers' perspectives of Chinese education will be reported to present the differences between Chinese and UK schools.

### **6.1.1 The difference between schools in China and the UK**

Two teachers from the UK offered, from their experience, their views about the UK and Chinese schools:

I think that the difference between education in Britain and China is that in Britain, schooling tends to teach children how to think in contrast to China where students are taught to learn through memorising. I think that Chinese students are more committed to their education than in Britain and it takes up most of their lives whereas British students are less committed and at times view going to school as just something they have to do until they are 16 years old. (ITBE-01)

The first thing that I was struck with was that students work very long hours in China. In my school students would start at 7am and would not finish until ten or eleven o'clock at night. This contrasts strongly with the 9am-3pm school day in England. Another difference is that in China it is common to have classes of over fifty students, something that is extremely rare in the UK. (ITBE-02)

Their impressions of the difference between China and the UK are the long hours of study experienced by Chinese students; the big class sizes; the teaching of how to think in the UK but the teaching of how to remember in China and the Chinese students being more likely to be committed to school and study. They drew a holistic picture of a Chinese school, although this is their first experience of working in a Chinese school. However, they are outsiders, and outsiders are more likely to pick up the strange things which insiders might consider as normal. Their perceptions help Chinese educationists to view Chinese education from a different angle.

### **6.1.2 Teaching and learning**

On the difference in teaching and learning between the two countries, the English teachers think:

The methods of teaching and learning seem very different. In England there is a strong emphasis on problem solving in class, whereas in China it appears that the main emphasis is on memorising information. (ITBE-02)

Students in China also seem to be examined more; having to do both mid-term exams and end of term ones. There seems to be far more pressure on them to perform in these exams than in England. (ITBE-01)

Firstly, in the teaching and learning method, as the English teacher described, English schools place more emphasis on problem solving in class. Circle Time can be seen as an example for students to solve their problems via listening and talking. These are life skills for students to possess. However, this kind of skill is obviously neglected in Chinese schools. In academic study, solving problems is considered important in learning. While in Chinese schools, with too many examinations, too much pressure, students have to learn to memorize things to cope with being examined, that is what is called examination-oriented education.

### **6.1.3 What is the difference in teacher-pupil relationships and the way of teaching between Chinese teachers and teachers in your country**

This category is about the difference in teacher-pupil relationships between China and western countries. English teachers also point out some problems from their experience:



I think the main difference is that to the best of my knowledge teachers in China are not required to complete a teaching qualification before taking up their posts. Lessons are also far less interactive, usually involving the teacher lecturing from the front of the class. (ITBE-02)

In China the students can see the benefit of education whereas to some British students it seems pointless. Having said this however I think I am teaching in a very good school in China with students whose abilities are very high. The students are very respectful of teachers here in China. The role of a teacher seems a lot more time consuming in China than Britain, for example students seem very happy to visit a teachers flat or take up their free time, in Britain once a teacher has finished teaching, apart from planning lessons and marking homework, their free time is their own unless they chose to do extra curricular activities for the students. I suppose in China it is still the teacher's choice but it seems more expected for them to use their free time. (ITBE-01)

From the two teachers' views we can see that Chinese teaching is less interactive than that in the UK. Although the current educational reform emphasises that students should be the centre of education (see 2.4 &2.5), the way of teaching in school is still that the teacher lectures rather than teaching students how to think and solve problems. The teacher-pupil relationship in a Chinese school is different from in a British school. Chinese teachers tend to have private relationships with students. Students also get used to this kind of relationship, that is 'to be teacher and pupil in classroom but to be friends; to talk in secret after lessons' (L. Wu, 2008). This kind of relationship is unique, as teachers change their role outside the classroom; teachers are considered knowledge

deliverers or operators in teaching. After class, teachers have to change their role into a close friend or family member to communicate with students in a way which can help them to solve their emotional or personal issues. However, the Chinese class size is a critical issue. It is not possible for a teacher to spare her/his private time with over 50 or even more students (as most of the time teachers teach more than one class). Just a few students have chance to talk with their teachers; those students mostly either are teachers' favourites, who are good at the teachers' subject; or they have extra questions they need to ask. Those who want to discuss academic issues with their teachers, are mainly the kind of children who are not shy to meet teachers.

#### **6.1.4 What do you think are the best aspects of a Chinese school?**

The best aspects of a Chinese school, as perceived by the English teachers:

I think the attitude of students towards their work is the best aspect of Chinese schools. The expectation that students should work and not mess around is important. The attitude of students in my school is completely different to the attitude of students in many schools in England. Students here seem far more positive and eager to learn than their counterparts in the UK. They also have a far more mature relationship with their teachers. There is none of the aggression that is prevalent in schools in the UK. (ITBE-02)

The best aspects in a Chinese school are that the students are very dedicated. As far as I can see there doesn't seem to be much bullying and students who are quiet or different in some way always seem to be included by the others. (ITBE-01)

From the English teachers' points of view, the best aspects of Chinese schools are the students' behaviour. Chinese students work hard, respect teachers and have an inclusive peer relationship. In the Chinese tradition, especially under the influence of Confucius, education is the heart of a person's development, and moral education is the core of Chinese Education (refer 2. 3 & 2.6). The single child in the family is pampered by everything apart from education. Children understand from an early age, that education can give the family "face" and can bring a bright future through the examination tradition (see 2.4). Students can see the benefit of education from cultural influences and also the fact that a better education can bring a chance for a better position and future in life. An experienced western teacher points out that:

"This school (X school) cannot be representative of Chinese schools, because students in this school are the elite and are relatively affluent". (ITDE-03)

However, although the students in X school are selected and elite, their behaviour in emphasising education can still be representative of Chinese students. As Alexander (1996) states, all the schools in a country are embedded audits of national culture, 'which all teachers and pupils in that country share, and is as powerful a determinant of its character as are the unique institutional dynamics and circumstances which make one school different from another; and, therefore, any one school says a great deal about the national system of education of which it is a part' (p. 6).

### **6.1.5 The change needed in Chinese schools**

What aspects need to be changed in Chinese schools from the western teachers' point of views?

I think the long hours worked by the students should be shortened. They would learn far more effectively if they were not all falling asleep all the time because they had not slept enough. I also think that a greater emphasis should be placed on extra-curricular activities like music, sport and drama. In the rush to get students through exams these activities are often overlooked. This is a great shame because participating in such activities can greatly help students to develop as individuals. I understand that it is felt that students should work so long because there is such fierce competition for places at university, but I think they would be able to absorb far more information if they could stay awake in class. (ITBE-02)

I think if something needs to be changed in Chinese schools it is the amount of pressure that the students are put under to do well. The amount of homework they get seems unreasonable considering they are growing children and barely get enough time to sleep, let alone develop interests in other areas. They have little free time for hobbies or relaxation which I feel helps to make the students happier and will in turn help their school work. Having said this I understand that there is a lot of competition to get to the best universities and into the workplace so students will put themselves under pressure. (ITBE-01)

The English teachers suggest that Chinese schools should reduce students' study hours and learning burdens, by increasing activities such as music, sports and drama.

From their perspective, the picture of Chinese schools' characteristics has been drawn. Table 6.1 summarizes the differences of schooling between the UK and China from the English teachers' point of views.

**Table 6.1 UK teachers' views of the differences of schooling between the UK and China**

<b>UK</b>	<b>China</b>
Small class size	Bigger class size
Less school hours (9am-3pm)	Longer school hours (7am-10pm)
Less exams	More exams
Students less committed to education	Students more committed to education
Teach how to think, problem solving	Learn by memorizing information
Students show less respect to teachers	Students show respect to teachers
Teachers' free time is their own	Teachers spend more free time with pupils
Students cannot see benefits of education, are less positive and eager to learn	Students can see benefits of education, are more positive and eager to learn
More bullying	More inclusive of individuals

The table can also support Table 2.4 of Hofstede's comparison of the differences between low and high-PDI societies. From the outsiders' point of view, Chinese students still seemed to learn by memorizing. With bigger class sizes, longer school hours, more examinations, Chinese students still show respect to teachers, see the benefits of education, and are committed to education and eager to learn. However, this is also because Chinese students have fewer opportunities and choices in their lives than their UK counterparts. Education, traditionally, was the only chance to change their fate and contribute their talent to the government; currently, it is also an important opportunity to find a job and to seek a better future.

Ornstein and Levine's (1997, p328) study in the Chinese education system, raises the issue of the big class size. They think that firstly, large classes reduce teacher-student interaction, limit one-on-one teaching, and play a role in silencing students. Students do not have opportunities to ask questions, and they are not encouraged to express their own ideas and perspectives. Secondly, classroom instruction becomes ineffective. Not only do students fail to develop critical thinking skills and creativity, but also students who may be struggling do not receive needed attention.

They also notice that Chinese students are short of critical thinking skills and creativity; however, they blamed the class size for this disadvantage. They suggested that when classes are too large for low-achieving students, it is difficult for teachers to provide sufficient help in overcoming learning problems. I agree that class size is one of the issues, but more educational and cultural issues need to be taken into account. Class-size is obviously to be considered. In Chinese education with its long history of selection, attention is always paid to the winners; children with low-achievement will be ignored and judged as failures. Apart from learning problems, I think that consequently those 'low-achieving' students have less confidence in speaking in front of teachers and other classmates, so they not only have learning problems but also low self-esteem and even emotional problems as well. With regard to these issues, this study of using Circle Time in developing students' self-esteem and an equal relationships among students is important.

The western teachers' view of Chinese schooling reveals significant issues of Chinese examination-oriented education. The next section will review another issue, that of how Chinese teachers think about a western pedagogy – Circle Time. Findings from the

interview data of Chinese teachers will not only provide Chinese teachers' views of Circle Time, but also will reveal Chinese teachers perspectives of their daily teaching and their understanding of adopting new teaching methods.

## **6.2 Chinese teachers' view of Circle Time – the western seed in the eastern field**

Circle Time aims to enable teachers and students to express feelings, listen to each other and to discuss issues together. Circle Time applies the same rules to teachers and pupils, in order to create a democratic climate and to develop equal teacher-pupil relationships. The teacher also acts as the facilitator during Circle Time; keeps discipline, guides the round, and leads the Circle Time session in the right direction. It is important to have at least one teacher as a leading person in Circle Time. My initial research design was to introduce teachers to conduct Circle Time, and then leave teachers to manage Circle Time sessions on their own. However, during my field work, few teachers attended Circle Time a sufficient number of times to make any judgment; none of them showed an interest in trying Circle Time. Although it was arranged that they be joined by the head of the year, and this programme was also supported by the head teacher, it seems that they were not serious about the school rules or the school did not really take this study seriously. For better or worse, some teachers attended Circle Time several times. They sat in the circle and discussed issues with students. What did these teachers perceive by watching Circle Time take place initiatively or passively? This section will examine teachers' perspectives from their interview data and investigate from their point of view

the conducting of Circle Time in a Chinese context, and issues of adopting this new pedagogy or method in Chinese schools.

### **6.2.1 Teachers' positive feedback of Circle Time**

Teachers who attended Circle Time several times, had a range of positive perceptions of Circle Time.

Mr. Chen, whose class attended the session – *you are the best*, found that he could talk with his students more openly after the Circle Time session. He also learnt from Circle Time to change his way of communicating with pupils. Circle Time really had a magic power for him and his pupils (see 5.4)

I was very surprised about that session. Lots of students cried, and so did teachers as well. Before that session, I had discovered some issues in our class. I was seeking a point of contact to solve the problems. That session, gave me the chance to talk with them more openly. They became more cheerful. It was really helpful to my work...Because of that session, I got some inspiration from Circle Time. I think we should not pay too much attention to the students' shortcomings but rather, stress their strengths. I stopped criticizing students in public and only did so privately. I just point out their shortcomings on a one to one basis, and also suggest changes at that time. I am changing the way of communicating with students.

(ITC11 – CY)

Another teacher, Miss Hua, who also attended several sessions of Circle Time, thought that Circle Time made her change her way of communicating and expressing herself with



students. As with Mr. Chen, her change also was influenced by her understanding of the power of the Circle, and the communication skills.

It's a shame that I didn't attend many sessions; however, I listened to their ideas when I joined, which made me think. Normally, we didn't have this kind of chance to communicate and express ourselves. This is a good chance for teachers to know more about students...In Circle Time, the expression is very warm. Normally, I didn't pay much attention to my way of speaking to students. I always criticized them straightaway. They don't accept it. I have learnt to express myself with some new kinds of skills.

(ITC4 – SH)

Miss Xue, a class teacher from a junior high school, twice arranged for her class to have Circle Time sessions and discovered more about her students through Circle Time. She also found out that some 'quiet girls' had changed their attitudes to other students. After two sessions, she also realized that students can develop their listening and speaking skills via Circle Time to communicate with others.

It made a deep impression when we did Circle Time the second time. It released lots of things about my students which I didn't know before. These were things I always wanted to discover. After that session, some quiet girls became active. They had smiles on their faces, and started communicating with others. Something I had wanted to do developed in our class. I can't tell what exactly it was, but something changed in our class, something about the atmosphere. In the first session of Circle Time, they started knowing about each other. The second time, it developed the coherence of the whole class. But, now, I just have a little understanding about Circle Time. What kind of results will it achieve? I have no idea. But, I do feel it's

quite good, and is extremely valuable for use in school. It brings students the opportunity to know others and to display themselves. They also learn to listen. I think listening is important. It's the best communication skill. They also can develop their speaking skills.

(ITC7 – XM)

Miss May, a novice teacher, was one of few a teachers committed to Circle Time, and who benefited from Circle Time for her teaching. She found that students could 'speak from their heart' during Circle Time. The group doing Circle Time performed better than the non-Circle Time group. She took students' points of views from Circle Time sessions and utilized them in her teaching. She was the one who got the most benefits from Circle Time in teaching and a professed a positive view for further development. She had the vision of furthering Circle Time in teaching, communicating with both students and her colleagues. She thought that the communication between teachers was essential.

Circle Time, I think, is good. Students like it. They have a chance to speak from their hearts. Therefore, they talk more and more in my lessons. I like to have exhibition lessons in their class, as they perform better than the other one (which is a non-experimental group). Students exchange ideas, it makes their minds active. For me, I can hear students talking about things which I normally could not hear. I will think and reflect on my teaching, how I can attract their interest in studying...If Circle Time carries on in school, I think we can change the way at some points. We can do it just between teachers. We need to communicate and exchange ideas as well. And also, when there are teachers who join Circle Time, students still have some misgivings to express. But, it will be good to have more people attend (she means other teachers). It might be nice to invite students to attend teachers' Circle Time.

(ITC6 – JM)

Miss Ying, a senior member of administration, stated simply that she enjoyed communicating with pupils in Circle time.

Circle Time is interesting; I enjoy communicating with pupils in Circle Time.

(ITC8 – YY)

This positive feedback is from the teachers who have attended Circle Time several times. They have experienced the power of Circle Time to change them in some ways; they have enjoyed the benefits of Circle Time. They attended Circle Time on their own initiative, because their attitudes towards adopting new methods are positive and active. Their feedback, firstly, brought evidence that Circle Time could develop students' listening, speaking and communicating skills. It also can help teachers to change their way of communicating with their pupils, so they are more equal and give positive comments to students. They also enjoy communication with students and exchanging ideas with students.

At the moment teachers are fully loaded, they have not only to teach, but also attend trainings.

(ITC5-XY)

With a full work load, they still manage to try and learn some new skills. They are the teachers who are willing to change and are ready to adopt new methods. If the supporting system can back up their reform action, they could be the pioneers of change.

I also interviewed some teachers with some negative attitudes of Circle Time. They had less understanding of Circle Time; however, their perspectives were also significant to this study. In the next section, the opinions of teachers who criticize Circle Time will be interpreted.

### **6.2.2 Perspectives from teachers who did not recognize Circle Time at the beginning**

Teachers' perspectives vary as they take different positions about Circle Time and their teaching.

Circle Time for students is a time to relax. It can develop their friendship. Students in class 5 have a very close relationship. I think because they have Circle Time while the other class I teach doesn't. It is good for children's development; however, it is not helpful to my teaching. They speak too much during lessons, I have to keep discipline all the time; it brings me difficulties in teaching. Students in class 5 communicate freely between girls and boys. There is no boundary between them. It is good for their personal development, but it really makes my teaching difficult.

(ITC1-6T)

This teacher's view, firstly, brings evidence that Circle Time is good for students to relax and develop positive relationships, even between boys and girls. She understands that this kind of development is 'good for children's development' and 'personal development'. However, she complains that students who attended Circle Time are more active and speak freely in her class, which brings difficulty to her teaching. There are more interruptions during her teaching. She couldn't just deliver her planned lesson because students raise more questions while listening to her teaching or say something which is not relevant to the subject knowledge. She has to 'keep discipline'. Her complaints are also evidence of students' development during Circle Time training. Students in Circle Time learn how to think rather than just receive information and memorize it as the teacher expected. Teachers are facing a challenge to change their teaching methods.

There are interesting opinions from some teachers:

The most difficult is that the talented students can shine at every chance; the ordinary students won't do anything special. (ITC8-EN)

Circle Time is not to change anybody; it is to provide opportunities for students to talk. There is the issue that some students do talk more. It is the same in an English school as in a Chinese school. Children have different characters. In my field note, I noticed:

A boy likes to talk; he always wants to share his opinions. He raises his hand to talk. The teacher has to suggest that in each topic he cannot contribute more than twice. Students cannot have equally ability and chances to practise their speaking.

(RN03/10/05)

However, the technique of Circle Time creates the climate for the 'quiet and shy' to be comfortable and free to talk. Evidence from students' questionnaires and interviews already shows that students think positively about Circle Time bringing them a chance to express themselves. Miss Xue also found that some quiet and shy girls started smiling and communicating with others after Circle Time.

Although these teachers had questions about Circle Time, their arguments were based on their limited observation and understanding of Circle Time. They did not really talk with students about their feelings. Their critique of Circle Time can be discounted. However, their perspectives show the strong influence of traditional teaching and learning. They are still using teacher-centred teaching methods, and students are not encouraged to talk during their teaching. They have less chance to discover the potential of less-talented children during their teaching.

### **6.2.3 Questions of conducting Circle Time – Can Circle Time be examined or evaluated?**

There are two questions about the examination and evaluation. One is from Mr. T, who is a novice teacher. He worried about his teaching and thought that “if Circle Time needs an exam, will students still like it?”

I just attended once in Circle time. I can just say that students like it. It brings an opportunity for them to communicate. They might think it is fun. When I first started teaching, I joked with them to make the lessons vivid. But liking it does not mean that they will learn it. Liking it does not help the exam results. Circle time does not have exams, so they like it. The school should adopt it, I think.

(ITC2-3T)

Perhaps, if students had to take an exam for Circle Time, they would not like it any more. Even if they still liked it; they might not do well in the examination. Chinese teachers have to worry about examination results all of the time. Students’ academic attainment also indicates teachers’ success and achievement. Examinations do not just test students but also teachers. That is the impact of an examination-oriented education. It enforces ideas of examination and evaluation in teachers.

Circle Time does not suit every student. In the current Chinese educational circumstances, how many schools can really implement it? A class teacher could learn to do Circle Time according to what you have taught. However, he/she does not have the ability to evaluate... Students need to develop their listening and

speaking skills; however, we stress the ability of speaking rather than listening. Currently, less people listen, but most people would like to express. We feed our students too many ideas of competition. They do not know how to cooperate.

(ICT13-LL)

Another newly qualified teacher, Miss Li, raised another question about the evaluation of Circle Time. She pointed out some problems Chinese education was facing. I am not going to argue about these issues. Circle Time is trying to solve these issues although Miss Li could not see it. The idea of evaluating Circle Time is to examine the students' listening, speaking and communication skills developed from Circle Time. She raised a good point for further study.

Another teacher, Mr. Ye also voiced his view that:

Circle time can help students in raising their self-esteem and developing their interpersonal skills. YOU give everyone a chance to talk and experience, however, other teachers will not be able to do the same thing. People do not have the same way of dealing with such situations.

(ICT10-XY)

From his experience of Circle Time, he also claims that Circle Time can raise students' self-esteem and develop their interpersonal skills. However, he worried that other teachers will not have the ability to do so. His point of view also indicates Chinese teachers' attitude to adopting new teaching methods. They seem to lack confidence in attempting new skills.

Mr. Ye also voiced concern about the pressure from parents; he thinks that getting parents' support and cooperation is important in successfully conducting Circle Time.

I think the main issues are parents, whether they can cooperate or not is important. What we have taught children will be easily destroyed by parents' influence. If we are going to spread Circle Time, we need to have proper teacher training, guaranteed time arrangement and continuity and of course parents' support. I am more concerned with moral education. If Circle Time can deliver moral education, then it will be great because moral education is the primary concern of education. (ICT10-XY)

It is true that to get parents' support is important. However, from the previous chapter, it can be seen that students show great interest and achievement with Circle Time. Parents would be happy for their children to benefit from this kind of teaching method. In terms of moral education, the experiment also proved that Circle Time could develop children's positive relationships, respect for others and self-esteem. However, the moral education which Mr. Ye mentioned is different from the 'moral education' students' could develop in Circle Time. The difference is between the traditional moral stance and individual's personal and social development as I discussed in Chapter 2. Mr. Ye's perspective is also representative of some teachers' attitudes in adopting new methods. They do not wish to risk experiment; they want to have guaranteed results before going for the new methods. There are difficulties for them in adopting new methods and ideas. The next sections will consider these points.

#### **6.2.4 Opinions from teachers who did not attend Circle Time**

Few teachers attended Circle Time, however, most students were not affected by the fact. They still thought Circle Time could help in developing a positive teacher-pupil



relationship. Some students observed the phenomenon and they questioned the issues. If the teachers did not join in, could Circle Time still help in developing a positive teacher-pupil relationship?

Some students voiced their views and stated:

- I don't think so, because not every teacher talked (QC2-Q8-240)
- Because the misunderstandings have been there already, the teacher won't forget even if the student understands. If you do anything wrong to make the teacher unhappy, you might be rejected by the teacher (QC3-Q8-336)
- Yes. If teachers and pupils all attend this game, and discuss (QC3-Q8-339)
- Because not just students need to study. Teachers also need to learn how to get on with students. (QC3-Q8-342)
- I didn't share with the teachers. We didn't really know each other (QC3-Q8-346)
- Most of our teachers didn't join us in Circle Time. They won't know what we think (QC3-Q8-351)
- But the other teachers didn't join us (QC4-Q8-440)
- No, I don't think so. We just had half the class in Circle Time together. I know less about the others who didn't join. (QC5-Q8-517)
- But as I remember, just two teachers joined our Circle Time, how about the other teachers? (QC5-Q8-532)
- Not sure, it depends on different persons. (QC5-Q8-534)

Although most students are positive about Circle Time in developing positive teacher pupil relationships, those who hold opposite views also indicate that students understand

that relationship could not develop without the teachers' engagement. What are the opinions of teachers who did not attend Circle Time?

The assistant head of our year did not attend our students' session, she just tried one teacher induction session, then she said that:

“When you introduced us to this method, I knew immediately, you just sit and talk. It is not necessary to go again. I don't think it could function dramatically. (ICT12-FD)

I agree that no educational method can alter things dramatically.

During the induction session, the head of the year voiced her views straight away: ‘I don't think this method will work’. Then when she knew that the experiment must start with her year group, she just told me to talk with the deputy head of year, a woman with 3 years working experience. In this school, the head of year mainly just takes more responsibility in work but hers is not a management position. I understand that the head of year does not like to have more things to do. At the very beginning, I foresaw difficulties, just as the Assistant Head mentioned:

At the beginning, I wasn't interested in it. I am sorry about that. I did not understand what the point was to talk again and again. I don't think problems can be solved just by talking. As a result, I did not cooperate with your research. I did not attend any sessions. However, later on, the students told me that they liked it, and they could relax by doing it. I started to change my ideas.

(ICT12-FD)

When the research was started, as assistant head of the year, Miss F was asked to assist me in arranging the timetable for each experimental class and to arrange for teachers to

join Circle Time. Unfortunately, she was not supportive at the beginning. The timetable was not arranged to use an English lesson, but used students' play time instead. Teachers who should attend Circle Time by arrangement were not informed properly. Just a few teachers appeared in the Circle Time lesson. Most of the time I was on my own in doing Circle Time. She was quite honest about her attitude. She attended the induction session, as she stated. She thought Circle Time was 'easy' just 'sit and talk' and 'problems could not be solved just by talking'. She thought that this research might be a waste of time. Later on, when she got feedback from students, she changed her opinions because she discovered that students liked Circle Time, and that they could relax during Circle Time. However, she still doubted the power of Circle Time. Circle Time is an easily operated method based on the golden rules; however, it is also easily ignored because of its simplicity. However, the powers of Circle Time will not be perceived if people do not join in Circle Time. I have tried to get the teachers to join in. The head of administration assigned teachers to each session, however, apart from the class teachers and some English teachers, the other teachers did not appear. I tried to ask the administration to enforce this, and also tried to use personal relationships to engage them and I tried to get them before the session started. However, either I could not find them or they refused to join for various reasons. The assistant head explained this to me from her point of view:

I think if more teachers are involved with Circle Time, it will help them to understand students. Guest teachers (teachers who just teach a subject but do not tutor) would feel the time is limited. It is not relevant to talk with the whole class, they want to talk with an individual rather than talk with everyone. Teachers also are busy in personal development. To be a good teacher is important, there are too many things to do.

(ICT12-FD)

She worried about guest teachers having limited time in talking with whole class rather than talking with an individual. Her idea of talking with an individual is a commonly employed method, personal-tutorial, which most Chinese teachers use in solving problems with individual students, in which teachers will talk to the individual who may have problems most of the time to solve their problems. She could not understand that Circle Time is not just for solving problems, but also for developing students' skills and building up positive relationships by encouraging students to talk. Because she did not attend any sessions of the experiment, although she knew from students that Circle Time was a good pedagogy, she did not understand how Circle Time functions.

The interview with the assistant head was very open. She frankly stated her reservations at the beginning and her change later on. She behaved just as most teachers did and took it for granted but did not really join Circle Time and have a try.

I changed my opinion at some point. I heard from students that they love it. However, I think students who like to talk and express themselves will have a chance to do it, those who are quiet and shy, will sit there and do nothing. It (Circle Time) won't change them. (ICT12-FD)

Although I discovered from Miss F's statement that this study faced difficulties such as doubts from teachers and head of years at the beginning, her frank speaking during the interview indicated that I have won trust from her and other teachers. Firstly, they believe in me and that I am doing a right thing for students; secondly, they started to trust that Circle Time is a good method for encouraging students' personal and social development; thirdly, they talked with me openly and frankly, which indicated that the interview data was reliable. Clearly, everywhere there are difficulties in adopting new methods;

however, from this study Chinese teachers seem not to want to take risks in trying new pedagogy or teaching methods. Why do Chinese teachers hesitate in adopting new methods? What kind of support do they need? What is the issue behind this? I would like to discuss this in the next Chapter.

### **6.2.5 Teachers perspectives of external difficulties in adopting new methods**

From the researchers' observation and teachers' interview data, most Chinese teachers show little interest in adopting Circle Time. There were various reasons. Chinese teachers state some external difficulties in adopting new methods:

The most difficult thing is that you are occupied with lots of unnecessary work. Some things you do are not because it should be done to improve teaching or learning, just because you have to do it because some people want you to do it. It annoys me. I have visited Canada; I found that in their community, parents and the schools cooperate together. But here in China, schools need to take all the responsibilities but get less support. Students in western counties study for their own interests. But Chinese students work hard to prepare for the national university entrance examinations. It's a huge difference. (ITC10-YE)

From Mr. Ye's statement, he thinks that Chinese teachers get less support, especially from parents. He also thinks that Chinese students had to prepare for examinations, while their counterparts in western countries could study for their own interests. Teachers, parents and students seem to have different interests in Chinese schools. The main reasons then are the examination and the pressures from parents. Teachers are suffering

with increasing pressures to keep their teaching going well; just as a teacher mentioned, the most important thing is to teach well. The other things are not taken into account. Chinese teachers have no access to educational associations to protect teachers' rights, no collective bargaining agreements, and little opportunity for professional development (Romanowski, 2006). They are also under pressure to keep their teaching position, as a decreasing population means a decreasing number of students, number of schools and teaching positions (chapter 3), which brings pressures for a teacher to work harder, and also they have to face increasing demands for professional development, and demands from parents to offer better care to their children than before.

Another senior member of staff also gave an opinion about the difficulties of adopting new methods:

We are always disturbed by external aspects, we cannot concentrate on doing things we really want to do. (ITC5-XY)

She indicates that in order to spread Circle Time, support from authority is important:

I think it (Circle Time) is a good method. But I think now we need evidence to show that it has great results. Then we can adopt it into the school curriculum. At the moment teachers are fully loaded, they have not only to teach, but also to attend training. (They have no time to test the new method) However, as you know, in China, if something has been decided by the head, it will be delivered very quickly. If the Central government gives a strict order, then things are easier to do. (ITC5 – XY)

Every teacher interviewed thought that it was a good method with pros and cons. However, they think there are difficulties in adopting this 'good' method. This study was firstly permitted by the head teacher. She was really keen to have this research done in

her school and to have more teachers involved; yet, at a practical level, teachers seemed not to cooperate with the research. At the very beginning, on the first day when I introduced this to teachers, the head of year clearly told me in front of other teachers:

I think it pointless to do this kind of activity. She spoke calmly. I think she means it.

(RN01/09/05)

The assistant head also mentioned that she did not cooperate with me at the beginning (see 6.2.4). Even though the head teacher has made a decision, teachers still needed to be motivated. In the following section, I would like to introduce a special case, the class 5 teacher, Miss Chao. She has made a significant difference during the experiment. Class 5 was the most successful class during this study. Students in class 5 have shown significant development in their self-esteem, academic attainment and also in teachers' feedback. In the next section, I will take her and her class as a special case to interpret Circle Time and Chinese education.

### **6.3 A special case – Class 5 and Miss Chao**

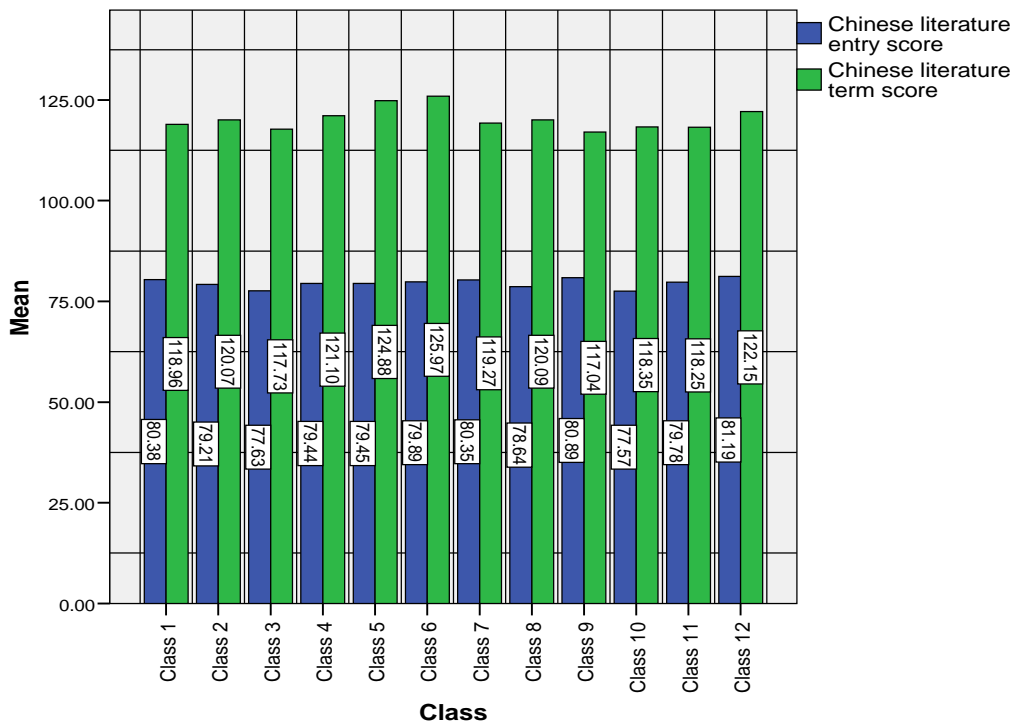
From the previous chapter, after half a year, there was a slight development in students' self esteem results from E2 students. In the E2 group, Class 5 improved the most of all the 12 classes in year 7. Also, their academic results were better than the other classes. Before drawing conclusions about Circle Time developing students' self-esteem and academic achievement, however, we need to look into the data carefully to discuss the special issues, to understand whether Circle Time or something else made this achievement happen. In this section, I will focus on one teacher and one class to explore

the achievement of Circle Time. If it just depends on one teacher and if they are lucky enough to have a nice teacher, then they will achieve more highly. Otherwise, they have to rely on their chances. Or, are there opportunities for them to choose their class teacher?

### 6.3.1 A veteran class teacher with vision – Miss Chao

Miss Chao is a Chinese literature teacher with 10 years working experience. Her teaching is distinguished among the other teachers. If we look at graph 6.1, we can see that among 12 classes, students' Chinese literature attainment in class 5 and class 6 increased most after one term, their scores were about 5 points higher than the other classes on average. Miss Chao taught the two classes Chinese literature and was the class teacher of class 5.

**Graph 6.3 Students' pre & post Experiment Chinese literature examination result**





If we look at graph 5.1 in the previous chapter, the data also shows clearly, that among the 12 classes, the self-esteem of students in class 5 increased dramatically in comparison with other classes. If the conclusion is simply that Circle Time has made progress in student's self-esteem and academic achievement, that is not taking into consideration Miss Chao's effort.

“As I was from a small town, what I have achieved today entirely depended on hard work and hard studying. I recall my youth; it was as simple and plain as a black and white picture. I did nothing apart from study. When my former classmates meet me now-a-days, they all think that I am a different person, especially because my character has changed a lot. I wish my students to have a colourful life. They can wear beautiful clothes, and also enjoy their youth.”

(ICT3-CQ)

Miss Chao's experience was like that of most people in their middle 30s. She was born during the Cultural Revolution, had a ordinary childhood and youth, growing up with China's economic development and social change. Being a teacher, she says

“I think I am an outgoing and optimistic teacher. My students might think I am a strict teacher. But in my deep heart, I wish to be a good, humanistic teacher. There is a gap between ideals and reality; however, I think there is still a distance between my ideal and aims, and my achievement”

(ICT3-CQ)

Chinese teachers are strict, teachers always show their 'strictness' to students although they think from their deep heart they are not that strict. Wishing to be a 'humanistic teacher', Miss Chao thought about the communication issue between only children.

The main issue of students in my class, I think, is the interpersonal communication problem. The only child does have this kind of problem. For example, the problem between boys and girls is that they are at the stage to realize the difference, and have a hard time dealing with that. I think we should lead them rather than stop them. However, the mundane opinion among people is still very strong; it is still taboo to talk about puppy love openly. As a teacher, I have to be conservative.

(ICT3-CQ)

Miss Chao's idea is to give guidance for students' interpersonal communication rather than just stop them experiencing emotions. Because she is open-minded, there was no communication barrier between boys and girls in her class from other teachers' observation. Miss Chao thinks that:

'In China, we are short of the climate for students to express themselves freely. It's sad to realize that.'

(ICT3-CQ)

The freedom to speak and express ideas is relative to political control:

As a Chinese literature teacher, I wish I could write something; however, there is too much bondage. I still have lots of scruples in my mind.

(ICT3-CQ)

In terms of using Circle Time, Miss Chao indicates that adopting affective education for people's emotional well-being, and the ability to express freely is often ignored:

I think this method (Circle Time) is not new, but for Chinese students, they are eager for this kind of activity. Although this method is so easy, to be honest, nobody will be willing to do it. Under our educational system, we discuss theory rather than doing this kind of practical thing. Technically, it is feasible, but, it is still not (feasible)

enough. People are deluded by advantages before our eyes. Just as air and water, although they are important, they are also ignored by most people. (ICT3-CQ)

Although her teaching was so excellent, she still holds negative opinions about educational reform and change. However, she still encourages me in changing people little by little.

If I were you, although I can't change everyone, it is still worth influencing 1, 2 or 3 people around you. (ICT3-CQ)

She herself has changed in some ways because of Circle Time:

It affected my ways of managing my class. Before we had Circle Time, if something happened, I was angry and then commented or blamed students for their mistakes. Now, I will think about it from a different point of view and make a different decision. (ICT3-CQ)

Miss Chao took an incident which happened in her class shortly after the term started seriously. The way she dealt with the issue is recalled in the next section.

### **6.3.2 An emergency class meeting**

Miss Chao is very careful to look after students' feelings. There was an incident when the term had just been started one month. Two students in her class had an argument, in which A attacked B with a pencil, while B got a boot to hit A's head. There was no police involvement, however, according to the school rule, the teacher must deal with the incident without any delay. Because it happened in the classroom in public, the two

students had broken the school rules. They should be criticized and punished for the other students to learn from them. But, how?

Miss Chao told me:

“I have asked them to write a self-criticism which they should read in front of the other students; and to apologize to others. But, I wished it would not to be an issue of just the two; the others should understand it is wrong. It nearly broke the law. Fortunately, no serious injury happened. If one of the two was seriously hurt, what would the parents do? I cannot think about it.” (ICT3-CQ)

Firstly, Miss Chao worried about the degree of harm. Most children are from only child families, and they are expected to be perfect. Even a small injury to a child could bring hurt to the parents. Secondly, if any child got seriously injured, then the parents will blame the teacher rather than behave in a reasonable way. As research by Romanowski (2006) discovered, parents were reserved in the past. Sometimes they even backed the teacher to keep their children in control. However, parents are more vocal and willing to pressurise and blame teachers.

We discussed the best way to deal with it. I suggested she could deal with the incident in a class meeting with Circle Time skills.

1. Firstly, bring the issue to students but don't mention the two students' names (although everyone knows who they are). Students are asked to discuss in small groups, how they would deal with this kind of situation if they met it?
2. Secondly, to generate students' opinions, each group should give their solutions after their discussion, which can be written on the board.

3. Thirdly, comparing the solutions students have suggested with the incident in which the two students were involved, suggest how they can resolve the after effects.
4. Finally, generate students' suggestions for problem solving, and wait and see how the two react. (They are expected to apologize to each other and to the class for their misbehaviour).

Miss Chao thought that because it happened at the beginning of the term, it was important to deal with it carefully. Although she took my idea, however, she thinks the case should be solved within her class as a secret in order to provide students with confidence within their class. Although it was not confidential for the individuals, the 'class' was considered as a whole. However, Miss Chao really showed great consideration for her students' privacy and 'face keeping'.

I did not witness what happened during their class meeting. Later on, Miss Chao told me what happened in their class meeting. We both agreed there had been progress. The two students were not named throughout the meeting. Miss Chao stressed the skills that just focused on the issue but not the people. As Glasser (1969) suggests, it is important, therefore, in a class meeting for the teacher, but not for the class, to be nonjudgmental. The class makes judgments and from these judgments works toward positive solutions. The teacher may reflect the class attitude, but she should give opinions sparingly and make sure the class understands that her opinions are not law. The skill here is that if at the beginning, the two students became the focuses, then the meeting would concern only the two, the others would not be involved and would not think about it carefully. If the meeting focuses on problem solving, then students could have more of a chance to learn

how others can solve problems, and have a chance to develop their skills to manage and solve conflict. Although it was not a proper Circle Time and students did not talk about issues in a Circle, however, the Circle Time skills used in this class meeting still played a significant role in settling the matter, and also the emergency became an educational opportunity. Students were encouraged to adopt these skills from Circle Time in dealing with issues in their daily life.

The result was that after students had discussions in a small group, they reached an almost unanimous decision that violence was not the best way to solve problems. They suggested the two boys should take responsibility for what they had done. The after effect was that the two boys stood up in front of their classmates and class teacher to apologize for their mistakes and for the predicament they brought to their classmates and their class teacher.

It seemed a successful class meeting which solved the problem not in Circle Time but with Circle Time skills. Circle Time encourages students to voice their views rather than that the teachers enforce their opinions on students. Students can learn the skills from Circle Time in solving problems and conflicts. During the process of solving the problem with Circle Time skills, children were respected; their needs and rights were considered carefully, even those of the ones who had made mistakes. Each could learn from the experience that he is important to every other child; that what he says is heard by everyone and that his ideas count. When children experience the satisfaction of thinking and listening to others, they are not afraid to have ideas, to enter into a discussion and to solve their own problems and the problems of their class by using their intelligence, both learned and intuitive (Glasser, 1969; p131).

The class meeting with Circle Time skills indicates that Circle Time helps students solve conflicts. The consideration from Miss Chao was also very sensitive. She is a person who can easily adopt new methods and can view the bigger picture. A teacher needs support, as she stresses:

As a class teacher, my problem arises when we encounter something, for which we don't have the answer and we don't know where to find the answer. The meeting for class teachers just assigns work from school and says the teacher's job is just to enforce the school's plan. (ICT3-CQ)

Her questions about my attempts:

There was a story, in a closed environment. One person woke up; he did all he could to smash the door, and tried his best to open it. But, is it a mercy or not for people who are still sleeping? And is it a mercy or not for those who are woken?

(ICT3-CQ)

Miss Chao is the kind of teacher who is an expert in teaching and is willing to change, however hesitatingly. Apart from the difficulties teacher participants have already stressed in this study, what are the implications for Chinese teachers' working conditions and the issues facing them? In the next chapter, the focus will turn to teachers in order to interpret Chinese teacher-pupil relationships.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter drew a picture of a Chinese school from the both western teachers' and Chinese teachers' perspectives. The western teachers' views provided a framework to picture the Chinese school from the outsiders' point of view; while Chinese teachers' perspectives of Circle Time brought an inside understanding of Chinese teachers' ways of thinking of western pedagogy, adopting new methods and issues for the current educational reform.

Chinese teachers have different understandings, motivations and reactions in educational reform. This chapter raises issues which Chinese teachers are facing in understanding affective education, changing teaching methods and adapting themselves to educational reform. The next chapter will discuss the historical background, Chinese teachers' current situation and the supporting of needs to frame future development.



# Chapter 7 Discussion

## Introduction

This chapter discusses some issues raised by the findings. Previous chapters have presented both quantitative and qualitative data to answer the research questions. The hypothesis has been investigated through a field experiment in a Chinese secondary school which suggested that Circle Time can develop students' listening, speaking and social skills, and raise their self-esteem. Although the findings were not statistically significant enough to claim that Circle Time can raise students' self-esteem, while year 7 students' self-esteem decreased after half a years' secondary school experience, one experimental group still showed positive development. Chinese students in this study had positive attitudes to Circle Time. Chinese teachers, although showing less interest in adopting Circle Time, provided evidence in their interviews supporting the contribution of Circle Time to students' emotional development. However, the evidence above shows only that Circle Time is a reliable pedagogy in students' intrapersonal and interpersonal skills development both in UK and in China. The pebble is a pebble. In this chapter, attention will be paid to the pond, namely, the Chinese school, within which the teachers and students and wider society influence the education system. Therefore, this chapter will discuss the questions raised during the research and significant further relevant concerns.

This research sought to introduce a western pedagogy, Circle Time, to a Chinese context, to introduce the methods and skills of Circle Time and gain acceptance for them. It is also

important to recognise that, this research uses the intervention of Circle Time to highlight the nature of the teacher-pupil relationship in current Chinese schools.

As a result, the focus of this study is the school, and therefore the school within which wider society, traditional culture and values should be considered when making decision.

The research methods, how to conduct the research and interpreting the findings based on western and eastern understanding, need careful consideration.

## **7.1 Review of individuals' needs in the current Chinese educational reform**

This section will discuss the findings that show that Chinese students are generally positive about Circle Time.

As discussed in chapter two, the Chinese government has adopted a market-economic policy and pragmatic approach in order to build a modern, market-oriented post-socialist nation since the opening up and reform in 1978 (Liu, 2004). Along with dramatic economic development and recent global influence, the Chinese have been experiencing profound changes. Materially, people have been lifted out of starvation, poverty and material shortage; and have been enjoying a certain degree of affluence and a wider range of choices. The last 30 years of economic growth have divided Chinese people into different socio-economic groups with various interests. The growing economic and material affluence also enables individuals to develop personal characteristics and spiritual pursuits. However, the Cultural Revolution which ended just before the opening up and reform, not only trampled on traditional culture but also broke people's socialist belief; it left China as a belief vacuum. On one hand, the Cultural Revolution destroyed

Chinese traditional values; on the other hand, the opening up and reform brought in western ideas and beliefs. Facing the conflicts between eastern and western culture, traditional and modern ideas and the sprouting of self-awareness and collective political tradition, there are increasing demands in Chinese society for a transfer from collectivism to individualism; from centralization to democracy. Although in 1989, Tiananmen Square's democratic voice was suppressed by gun shot, the CCP central government policy makers have to be aware of people's needs. The Chinese are now seeking a revival of traditional Confucian values and western ideas based on economic and social changes.

Chinese traditional culture advocates centralization rather than individualization; individualism and the development of personal character is not encouraged in Chinese society. However, the traditional small-scale peasant economy makes the family the basic unit of production, therefore, a centralized patriarchal system has a strong influence in Chinese society. The one-child policy has created a 4-2-1 family model (Tobin, et al., 1989; J. H. Yang, 2007), which has changed traditional family values and made the only child the focus of the family (Mullen, 2008) (refer to § 2.2).

Above all, the socio-economic development, family model change and western influence have enabled individualism and personal characteristics to become more important. The need to study and provide for children's needs is stronger than ever before. In terms of cultivating all-round children, emotional well-being is considered central to the current of educational reform.

However, changes cannot happen in a short time; thousands of years of tradition still influence Chinese society, politics and education. The current educational reform – Quality Education – has recognized the problems of examination-oriented education, and

is trying to shift the educational focus to children's all-round development, especially emotional well-being. However, the collectivistic traditional, centralized political structure and examination-oriented education still challenge the current education, especially moral education. As Huang (2008) indicates, the current moral education inhibits human nature by imposing single standards. Children in school are isolated from the real world; they have less chance to communicate with others apart from studying textbooks.

From Maslow (1987), Valett (cited in Moskowitz, 1978: 13-14) and Glasser (1986, cited in Cheung & Tsang, 2002) with their theory of people's basic needs (refer to § 3.2), the individual has different levels of need. The physical needs of survival and safety are the strongest and initial needs. However, this does not mean people must satisfy physical needs before seeking other needs. An all-round developed individual demands physical, social and emotional satisfaction.

Although Circle Time was considered 'easy', 'not new and special' pedagogy by Chinese teachers, Chinese student participants enjoyed the benefits of 'having a chance to express feelings', 'listening to others', 'relaxing', 'having fun', 'sharing problems and ideas' and 'understanding more about oneself and others'.

Chinese students gave positive feedback about Circle Time, as is shown in chapter 5. This suggests two things. Firstly, Circle Time brings them a chance to express their inner feelings, to communicate with their peers, and to develop their interpersonal skills. In so doing, students have the feeling of being accepted and approved by their peers; therefore, their self-esteem in the group is raised. Again, Chinese students show a more positive attitude to Circle Time than their English counterparts, probably because in Chinese

secondary school, there were few opportunities for them to express their feelings and voice their views. This indicates that there are strong needs in a Chinese school to increase the practical curriculum or methods for students' personal and social development.

## **7.2 The needs for Changing teacher-centred teaching tradition and classroom practice**

Students' interview data firstly show strong evidence that they appreciated circle Time; at the same time, they also indicate the fact that in Chinese schools teacher-centred teaching is still the main method of instruction. Even though Quality Educational reform was introduced nearly 20 years ago and the school where the research was conducted was one of the top key schools in Fujian province, students have limited chances to talk in the classroom and teachers play a central role in delivering knowledge. A Chinese student explains how she does not have difficulty in expressing herself in Circle Time, compared with her experience in other classes:

In a normal class, I will sometimes raise my hand to be ready to answer questions. If the teacher points to others, I become nervous then, I don't know what I should say next. And I would not raise my hand again. As a result, I have never spoken in a Chinese lesson. It is different in Circle Time. I can express myself freely. (ICG07)

Chinese students cannot express themselves freely in the classroom. They can only wait to be pointed to, then have a chance to talk. However, the big class size decreases their chance of talking in front of others, not only about their personal feelings, but also about

their opinions of the subject of study. They have less chance to practise speech, as a result, some students like the girl in this study, feel nervous talking in public.

Teachers' interviews also provide evidence for this kind of situation. Miss Huang teaches one experimental class and one control class. She complains of the difficulties in teaching the experimental class because Circle Time makes them more active.

It (Circle Time) is good for children's development; however, it is not helpful to my teaching. They speak too much during lessons, I have to keep discipline all the time; it brings me difficulties in teaching. Students in class 5 communicate freely between girls and boys. There is no boundary between them. It is good for their personal development, but it really makes my teaching difficult. (TC1-6T)

As Cortazzi & Jin (1996) find, the teaching approaches in Chinese and Western ELT (English Language Teaching) are clearly different: "the Chinese teachers often emphasize English language knowledge, content, teacher-centred classrooms and examination results"; while their western counterparts tend to pay attention to "the skills and realistic use of language, student-centred classrooms and the process of learning" (p.72). Boyle (2000) studies Chinese and western ELT teachers' classroom behaviour, he finds that western English teachers are in favour of 'interactive methodology' in language teaching. This gives students more chance to talk in class. However, Hong Kong teachers think that kind of method is noisy and 'disturbs adjacent classes'. He thinks that there are various reasons for this. Firstly, it might take too much time in preparing the teaching; secondly, those teachers, whose first language was not English, may have problems in coping with this kind of teaching. Thirdly, Boyle also mentioned the important Chinese concept of 'face'. In adopting the new communicative approach to classroom teaching, teachers are

risking losing of face if they fail in answering questions raised during unstructured teaching.

As a result, Chinese teachers tend to stick to the textbook, ‘which is often the same one throughout practically the whole country’. Boyle (2000; 153) draws attention to the fact that ‘stick to the same text book’, meant that over 80% of about 350,000 junior middle schools (ages 12–15) in China at one stage used the same textbook, *Junior English for China*, which was developed by the People’s Education Press in collaboration with Longman. Chinese teachers put much more effort into learning and teaching grammar and vocabulary lists, and into keeping an eye firmly fixed on the national examinations.

Examination is the focus of Chinese education. The teaching methodology Chinese teachers adopt is mainly based on concern for the examination. A teacher in this study expressed her worry about examinations:

I am mostly worried about exams. It is not just to test students, but teachers. We need to achieve our teaching targets. I do not have any ideas to reduce the pressure of exams; I cannot change the reality. The only thing I can do is just to give them more care. (ITC1-6T)

According to Yan & Chow (2002), Chinese teachers and students have figured out that ‘good answers are those that can be sure to get most marks rather than answers with carefully structured arguments (p.143). As shown in chapter 6, western teachers in X school (Table 6.1) illustrated that western schools taught students how to think and how to solve problems; Chinese schools, however, taught students how to memorise information.

An additional point which has not been mentioned by the above researchers is that teachers in traditional culture are considered in a high position as parents and authority; their power cannot be challenged by students in the classroom by raising unexpected questions. Teachers might lose face if failing to answer questions and being unable to deal with disciplinary issues. Western teachers, according to Boyle (2000), however, do not consider it shameful to admit that they do not know the answers to the questions students raise. Again, maintaining the practice of teachers being the only voice in classroom also indicates teachers' power as the unquestioned knowledge source.

A novice teacher in this study revealed her worry that being physically 'short' might make her look less authoritative. She was a short girl. At least more than 60% year 7 students in her class are taller than her. In order to guarantee more respect from her students, she was 'strict' to students.

I am so small, I was afraid that students wouldn't respect me, that I must be strict to them to keep the class in control. I know now I should not be too strict.

(ICT4-XH)

In her understanding, 'strict' means a ferocious facial expression and fewer smiles. Being strict, her orders must be enforced in her class. Her idea of being strict is also inherited from the tradition 'yanshi chu gaotu'. That means 'a strict teacher will produce high achieving students.' However, this tradition is against the democratic idea of equality and freedom, and also constrains students' needs and rights. The question is how current Chinese teachers understand the idea of students-centred teaching both theoretically and practically.



From the students' point of view, they think students and teachers can understand each other, especially with young teachers. However, they don't like the teacher being strict. A student in this study, made the point:

...our teachers are young; I don't see any problems (in understanding each other) at all. But, if the teacher is too strict, people will pass the bear and keep silent, round after round, but say nothing. At the end, I guess the teacher will hold the bear and cry. (ICG02)

She imagined a situation where Circle Time was conducted by a strict teacher, while students just passed the talking object but keep silent. It certainly will happen if a teacher who normally reacts strictly runs Circle Time, as students will not be free to talk. During field work, students talked less when their class teacher attended Circle Time sessions. They reacted in a more relaxed way while there was not any teacher present apart from the researcher.

This suggests that Chinese teachers need to change their teaching methods from teacher-centred pedagogy to student-centred education. However, training and supporting teachers in this transition is crucial if the current reform is to be effective.

### **7.3 Rethinking teachers' roles and teachers' needs**

Another issue arising from the teachers' interview data shows that most teachers have little interest in adopting the new methods, although they agree that Circle Time is a "good" method or activity, wherever they experienced it themselves or heard from students (§ 6.2). When classifying teachers' opinions according to their groups in this study (Table 7.3), their views are different according to their positions.

**Table 7.3 Chinese teachers' attitudes of adopting Circle Time**

group	Teachers from different groups being interviewed	Number	Attitudes to Circle Time
1	Teachers from the 2 experimental groups	8	OK
2	Management staff	3	Not sure
3	Year 10 teachers who joined Circle Time of their own initiative	3	Great interest
4	None-experiment teachers	4	In doubt

Table 7.3 has classified the interviewed teachers into 4 groups. Their attitude to using Circle Time is different.

8 teachers from the two experimental groups think that Circle Time is good for students. As they were appointed to take part in this study, their attitudes varied. 6 of them attended Circle Time sessions sometimes. They clearly appreciated the benefits Circle Time has brought to their pupils. They agreed that Circle Time provides an opportunity for students to express their feelings, and to have fun together. As already noted, the assistant head of year (6.2.2) did not cooperate at the beginning; however, she changed her attitude when she noticed students' achievements. Only one teacher never joined with his class for Circle Time sessions. However, he admitted that he heard from students about their positive reactions.

3 management staff did not give specific opinions on Circle Time. One thinks that if the head decided to adopt this new method, then it could be done. Another one thinks that if the parents could see the benefits of Circle Time to students' moral development, then the method could be delivered. The third one says he believes the educational future is brighter.

There were 3 year 10 teachers who joined of their own initiative who showed great interest in Circle Time (refer to 5.4 & 6.2.1). Comparing their attitudes to the experimental groups' teachers, clearly, the teachers' motivation in engaging with the project is important.

4 non-experiment teachers interviewed did not attend any sessions of Circle Time. They just got information from the researcher about what Circle Time is, how the research has been conducted and what the results show. However, most of them doubt whether western pedagogy can fit into the Chinese education system.

The assistant head of year's opinion points out the issue of teachers' hesitation in adopting Circle Time straightaway:

As this activity is designed for students, teachers just act as sitters-in. It is not necessary for teachers to join in; and it is just talking. (ICT12-FD)

She was frank about her attitude changing during the process of this study. Her opinion can represent some teachers' point of view, and also indicates the current teacher-pupil relationship in Chinese schools:

Most teachers are concerned whether students like their teaching or not. What's the reason you like or dislike my teaching? Nowadays, students are different compared with when I was a student. They do not show respect to teachers. Teachers will be interested in this kind of topic. Maybe you can do some survey on this kind of topic.

(ICT12-FD)

Firstly, as shown by above the interview, the communications between teachers and pupils are not interactive. Teachers know less about pupils' opinions because they do not

know ‘whether students like their teaching or not’. Secondly, teachers do not wish to know more about their pupils’ feelings, as if ‘Circle Time is designed for students, there is no point for teachers to participate’. Thirdly, the communications between the assistant head or year head and teachers are limited as well, because the teachers who attended Circle Time sessions did give positive feedback according to their knowledge. However, the assistant-head did not know about the participating teachers opinions of Circle Time.

This raises the questions:

- Why do Chinese teachers show so little interest in adopting new knowledge?
- What is their current situation in school?
- What support do they need?

These questions are not the research questions, but questions arising in the field. They are issues highlighted by the intervention – the Circle Time experiment. Therefore, it is crucial to reconceptualise Chinese teachers’ role in the current educational reform.

Traditionally, ‘silkworm’ and ‘candle’ symbolises Chinese teachers; it means that teachers are expected to contribute and sacrifice themselves just like ‘silkworms’, who diligently spin silk thread till death; and ‘candles’, who selflessly burn themselves to light others (He, 2002). Another metaphor for the traditional teachers’ role is that of ‘soul engineers’’, who are responsible for cultivating moral qualities among students (Boyle, 2000; G. Hu, 2002; Ouyang, 2003), and are also role models (X. Gao, 2008). Therefore, teaching is considered the most beautiful profession under the sun. These metaphors illustrate the traditional perception of teachers and the teaching profession as altruistic and self-sacrificing (Gordon, 2000). Another image which symbolizes teachers is ‘gardener’, who works to foster the national flowers – children. This image is close to

western symbol of teachers (Ben-Peretz et al., 2003). Teachers are all considered as exercising caring roles in their professions.

However, recently, the way teachers' professional images have changed can be seen from the mass media. A study (Y. L. Li, 2005) about teachers' images on the website shows that few articles relating to teachers' positive images still stick to the traditional descriptions, which are mainly from the educational media. However, a great proportion of negative images and labels about teachers reveal that the mass media demonize them as "incompetent pedagogues", "wealth-collectors", "abusers", "demons" or "beasts". Research by Wang and Guo (2007) also shows that Chinese teachers have a very poor level of emotional health, which is caused by professional pressure and weariness. A Survey by Xu (2003) indicates that various pressures on teachers include their family background, work load, role responsibility, employment, professional development and relationships. The pressures are in direct proportion to teachers' emotional issues and professional weariness.

Zhao *et al.* (2008) explore the self-identity of Chinese teachers of English from teachers' perceptions of their role, work. They find that teachers in the study have defined themselves as being a "robot"; "skilled worker"; "ferryman" etc. These kind of metaphoric descriptions of teachers' self images are different from either the traditional ones or the demonized images of the mass media. These kinds of images reflect teachers' current situation in schools and in society.

Students' examination results and other outcomes, various teaching competitions within school and among schools, teachers' educational qualifications and professional

development have been taken into account as factors which influenced teachers' income and promotions (J. Wang & Paine, 2003; J. L. N. Wong & Tsui, 2007; H. Zhao, 2008).

As Gao (2008) has pointed out, teachers have become 'service providers' in school. They have little professional authority in teaching and their main task is to serve students, parents and principals.

It is perceived that teachers' perceptions of their professional roles are closely linked to their self images and their impact on the ways in which students are taught and their subsequent achievement. Teachers' images about teaching are important because their self-definition has a potential impact on their influence on students, and dynamic interactions with others, students, parents and principals (Ben-Peretz, et al., 2003).

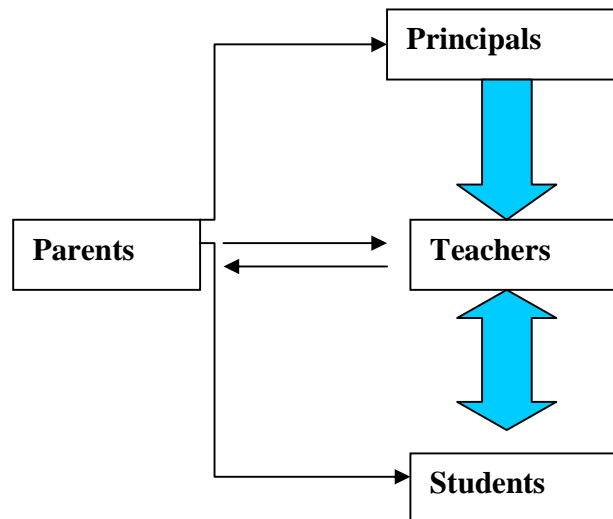
A few younger participant teachers used "sister" to refer to their roles as teachers in relation to their students, as described in this account:

They all regard me as their sister, I think. But also because of that, no one is afraid of me. Sometimes they don't listen to me, or don't take what I say seriously. (ITC6-JM)

Yet, teachers may still consider themselves as having a caring role. This metaphorical expression may also show the caring role some teachers have and their relationship of rapport with their students. This disposition or attitude towards the role of the teacher may impact on teaching and student learning in other ways.

Teachers are in the centre of relationships with students, parents, and principals, (Figure 7.3.1).

**Figure 7.3.1 Teachers role in relationships**



In the hierarchical school arrangement, teachers are at the frontline facing students and parents; they get pressures from every aspect in the relationships. Teachers can put some pressure on students and parents, however, they also facing great pressure from the others. If the principal cannot offer support but just pressure, this will result in teachers' professional weariness.

A student comments on teachers' relationships with students and parents:

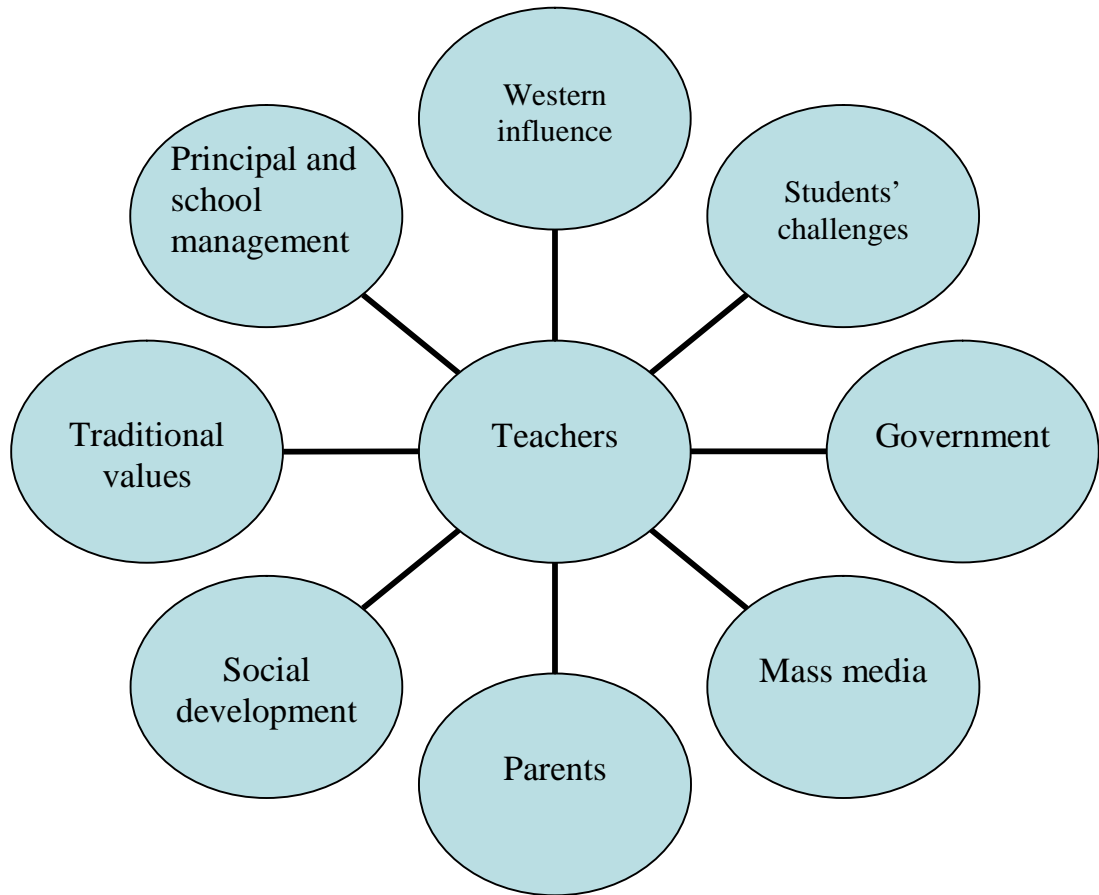
Young teachers have more in common with us, in their mental age as well. However, they are short of experience. Thus, our parents will be worried about that; it also will affect our feelings. We will be worried about young teachers' experience as well. With the experienced teachers, on the contrary, there are always gaps between us even though they keep a child's heart. We wish we could have teachers who are young and experienced. (ICG02)

Chinese parents have a strong tradition of valuing education and academic achievement (Ho, 1986; K. C. Wong, 2001). Since the only-child policy was introduced, parents place increasing attention and expectation on their child to be a success. Therefore, the wider society on behalf of all parents demands that schools produce high quality education and care for their children. Parents wish school education to facilitate a bright future for their children. They put pressure on their only child to study hard, as they think academic achievement is a question of effort rather than ability (G. Hu, 2002).

The government, according to Gao (2008), often seeing education as a social engineering tool, urges teachers to take a quality education approach and foster students' all-round development instead of putting much emphasis on examination results in the learning process. On the other hand, however, they are also pressed to produce examination results as it is crucial for pupils to succeed in their examinations in order to maintain a school's public reputation. Based on Gao's discussion about the Chinese government's paradoxical policy, the fact is that the official curriculum and hidden curriculum both exist in school. Currently, educational reform is advocated by the Government (refer to § 3.1). The official curriculum is developing and reforming in response to globalization. However, apart from the official curriculum producing new textbooks, the permanent examination system continues to exist in schools. Teachers teach according to what the examination will cover rather than what the text book includes. It is easy to change the curriculum by changing the text book, however, it is not easy to provide teachers with in-service training to adopt up-dated pedagogy and teaching methods. Short of effective support, teachers are facing various pressures and challenges inside and outside schools.



**Figure 7.3.2 Teachers facing challenges**



The influence of traditional values locates teachers with a high position; they are expected to sacrifice for students' achievement. Socio-economic change also adds new responsibilities to be professionally able to encourage students' all-round development. School management demands that teachers achieve the targets. Teachers' professional morale also challenges them to personal development. As a result, many teachers in the community felt that they were not only constantly being questioned by various stakeholders in the educational process but also were questioning themselves about whether they were doing the job properly or perfectly. They wondered whether they had

cultivated students' moral and intellectual development as expected in the traditional concept of education as well as in the educational discourse promoted by the government (G. Hu, 2002).

Under great pressure from various sources, although teachers can transmit their pressure only to students, at the same time, they have to face students' challenges as well. In the current new wave of educational reform in China, the success of delivery and sustainability of this rapid change rests in a complex combination of social influences from the external (top-down) government agencies, internal school management systems and the continuing professional development of teachers (H. Zhao, et al., 2008).

I think the pressures are mainly from parents. They care about their child's performance, especially the test results. I suggested to parents to pay attention to students' emotions. However, they (parents) seem have no such consideration. They come here only wanting to know the child's scores. (ITC2-3T)

Parents overprotected them. They do not have aims. They don't know what they want and what they should do. Being a teacher, I cannot change the reality. I cannot even complain, because my teaching is not good. I am trying my best. (ITC13-LL)

When teachers in this study talked about parents, they provided evidence from their experience that parents did have the influence on the school and teachers.

Gao (2008) studies Chinese teachers professional vulnerability based on a teachers' online community. One participant in his study discussing in the online community reflected on his last lesson:

I finished my last lesson and all the teaching assignments for the term. But the dull and dreary look in the children's eyes chills me. I have been always wondering whether I should be responsible for their falling academic grades and improper moral behaviour. I was told that there is no student who cannot be taught well but there are teachers who cannot teach well. I just happen to be one of those who cannot teach well. Poor kids, they are receiving quality oriented education in name and experiencing waves of changes in the curriculum. Yet, they are living in an era where the exam results are much more important than ever. (Qianlima. 7th Jan. 2006)

(X. Gao, 2008; p.161)

Hence, Gao (2008) indicates that the cultural tradition, instead of giving teachers power and authority, undermines teachers' feelings of professional authority and becomes an unexpected source of their professional vulnerability.

The teachers have sympathy for their students but at the same time want their respect:

I am trying my best to give them less pressure. I know they have to study all the time as I did. Because I had enough of it in my secondary school, when I started my university, I didn't want to study any more. I did everything I wanted in my first year in university, apart from studying. (ITC2-3T)

I think my students are very lonely. Being a single child, they feel they are understood by few people. Parents ask only for examination results...Parents are busy; they do not have time to talk together. Children do not want to talk with their parents.

(ITC12-FD)

I don't think I am an older generation to them, but I think I should be the same generation with higher status. (ITC8-YY)

I wish to be a mentor, a big friend of students. I think we also need to keep a certain distance because students should show respect to teachers. Reverence is important. Recently I needed to do something to discipline them. If they don't finish their homework, they have to run around the playground 30 times. (ITC9-QS)

A study by Fan *et al.* (2007) categorises students' perceptions of teachers' leadership models into three types: democratic, authoritative and indulgent. They illustrate that students, who perceive democratic teachers' leadership, demonstrate a better emotional health level than their peers, who meet either authoritative or indulgent types of teachers. Teachers with different types of leadership models will also pass their value and the communication strategies to their pupils.

## **7.4 Teachers need support**

As mentioned earlier, 8 teachers from the experimental groups were interviewed. Of these, 5 were novice teachers. The teachers in this study shared similar experiences when they were students and became teachers. As students, they were working hard to achieve academic success, were mostly quiet students, and were good at studying.

I was a quiet girl, well behaved even afraid of the teacher. At secondary school, a teacher found me at an essential time and gave me important responsibility. It was really important at that stage in my life. (ITC1-3T)

I was a good student, I did what teachers asked. I was little afraid of teachers, and would run away from teachers if I saw them walking by. I would like to help teachers to do things. The most important thing was that my academic performance was quite good. (ITC12- FD)

Being a good student, I liked to communicate with the teachers; and enjoyed doing things for teachers. I wished to be a teacher one day. Now I am a teacher, my teacher's (the teacher who paid attention to him) way of teaching and managing the class influence me a lot. (ITC9-QS)

When I was in year 10, our class teacher recognised me and trusted me; he appointed me to be in charge of learning in our classroom. I did very well. I showed my management ability. Our classroom was the clearest one in our school. It is important for a student to be approved by her/his teachers. I have changed myself since then. (ITC9-QS)

Good students share the same characteristics: first of all, they are good at academic study; they have to be excellent at least in some subjects. Secondly, they are well behaved, have a good relationship with their teachers, enjoy doing things for teachers. Thirdly, it is also important that their being good is recognized by one or more teachers. It will boost confidence in the students to be better. These teachers' experience of being good students indicated the traditional teacher-pupil relationship in a Chinese school. Teachers' care is from top-down, if teachers' care does not come to students, students then lose the chance to be approved and to be a success.

Another teacher felt a little independence and rebellion:

I was the typical kind of student with excellent academic performance, best behaved and never brought troubles. But in my deep heart, I think, I was rebellious. I mean, I did not want to defer to adults or teachers all the time. I had my own opinions, but I would not argue with them. I didn't say anything, but it didn't mean that I did not think. (ITC10-YE)

Being rebellious does not mean acting against. In the hierarchical tradition, rebelliousness sometimes just means in ideas.

Once they become teachers, most of them also consider themselves as ‘good teachers’.

I think I am a good teacher. The ‘good’ has various aspects. Good teaching performance, good at class design. Students like me, just because I am not that strict. I wish to be a teacher in the classroom, while a friend with them after teaching. Students are in favour of good teachers who do not criticise them. I do not agree with them. (ITC6-JM)

It is interesting to look at their way of becoming a teacher. When they first started teaching, they always had ambitious aims:

When I first started teaching, I wished I could teach students with advanced pedagogy. But, it was too perfective and theoretical. When it came to practice, I found it is different. (ITC2-3T)

When I first started teaching, I was full of enthusiasm. I wished each of my students to achieve his best. But now, I realize that a teacher is not the Saviour. They really need to work hard themselves. My basic principle is that, you do not have to listen to my teaching, but you cannot disturb the class. (ITC15-XJ)

Novice teachers have the vision of education; however, they do not have enough experience. The current Chinese normal universities<sup>9</sup> students just have one month’s or even less practical training. In-service training is provided by the schools, however, and

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<sup>9</sup> In China, there are universities which recruit and train people to become teachers. These universities are called normal universities. E.g., Beijing Normal University, Shandong Normal University.

they have to attend in-service training after finishing their teaching. Normally they are fully loaded or even over-loaded because they are new comers. A veteran teacher who had worked for 10 years honestly shared his experience about new teachers:

A novice teacher will treat his head when he/she has a headache, and feet when he/she has sore feet. My teaching experience is a treasure. I can handle things more easily. (ITC9-QS)

The deputy headmistress thinks that

Novice teachers' subject knowledge is good enough to teach, however, their teaching skills are too limited. The training in university is too limited for them to teach. Teaching secondary students and university students is different. A professor may be knowledgeable enough to teach undergraduate students and even PhD, but he/she may not be good enough to teach secondary students. So, the main issue for us is to provide one-to-one training for them. (ICT5-XY)

Novice teachers, although facing difficulties in teaching, foresee the positive side of educational reform and development. However, veteran teachers spot more negative issues in Educational reform:

Everyone knows that economic reform is successful, but education and health reform have failed although the government doesn't admit it. (ICT3-CQ)

It is the sorrow of Chinese education. To be honest, I feel very constrained sometimes. You cannot do what we really want, and you have to escape from reality. (ITC9-QS)

The happiest time to be a teacher is when reading students' weekly dairy, to share their happiness and worries. Some students' writing is beautiful. I am proud of them.

(ICT3-CQ)

Teachers' achievements always relate to students' achievements. Teachers in this study mainly think that they are happy to see students' achievements.

I will be happy if my class can be the best in the year group. However, my teaching is the worst at the moment.

(ITC13-LL)

This novice teacher also considered herself as a 'good teacher', however, her students' academic performance was not as good as the other classes, even a little bit less than the average, so she would reflect on her teaching. This is the current reality in a Chinese school, in judging a teacher 'good' or 'not' just depending on students' examination results.

It's difficult to tell what the best thing is until you have worked 10 years. There are a lot of rewards, especially when you find that your students have improved a lot, learnt what they wanted, to watch their growing physically and mentally. It's really satisfying. In this job, you are facing active learners, they are full of energy. I am pleased to see that.

(ITC10-YE)

Teachers need in-service training for their professional development. Wong & Tsui (2007) study school in-service activities in China, they find that teachers hold positive views about training activities. Also, teachers in this study expressed their worries about the pressures from serious competition in schools, and between schools. The schools have to keep their rank to be top among the others. The teachers also have to face internal



competition for pay and promotion. In-service training is important, according to Wong & Tsui. However, it cannot reduce the pressure on teachers.

From this study and other studies, the various increasing pressures are crucial, and need further study, especially, support for teachers' needs.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter sought to discuss the issues arising from the findings. The initial aim of this study was to introduce Circle Time in a Chinese secondary school to develop positive teacher-pupil relationships. Chapter 5 presented the result that Circle Time could develop students' personal and social skills, creating positive peer relationships and raising students' self-esteem. As teachers were less involved, the second goal, developing positive teacher-pupil relationships, could not be assessed. However, it reflected Chinese teachers' challenging role in school.

Firstly, the fact needs to be noticed that teachers are fully loaded with work; they have little time to learn new methods. However, the main reason was that teachers cannot do what they really want to do. That means that they have to deal with their job rather than enjoy working.

Secondly, the competition in Chinese schools caused tension and pressures for teachers. Parents want their children to be offered the best education possible, not just to be good, but the best (Yan & Chow, 2002).

Thirdly, Chinese teachers' traditional role is transforming as a result of socio-economic development and cultural change. Teachers are facing increasing pressure to adjust their role in the changing society. As Boyle (2000) points out, despite China's impressive economic growth over the last 3 decades, China is still, especially in regions of the interior, a poor country, and with its vast population, there are potential problems of serious and widespread poverty if things go politically or economically wrong.

This chapter suggests that teachers and students are at the heart of the current educational reform, especially in affective concerns. Great attention needs to be paid to teachers and students to study their emotional issues and provide support.

# Chapter 8 Conclusion

## Introduction

This study focused on secondary teacher-pupil relationships in current Chinese Affective Educational reform. It introduced the western pedagogy, Circle Time, to a Chinese secondary school, examined the function of Circle Time in developing students' personal and interpersonal skills; raising students' self-esteem; and investigated the potential of Circle Time in establishing an equal teacher-pupil relationship in a Chinese secondary school. By looking at a Circle Time experiment in a Chinese secondary school, this study attempted to look at affective education from a practical perspective and a bottom-up approach. It offered the opportunity for Chinese students and teachers to experience the ways of developing personal and interpersonal skills through Circle Time sessions. Students' experience and perspectives of their personal and social development via Circle Time reflected the basic needs and changes Chinese students need in the current educational reform. This bottom-up approach tried to raise teachers', schools' and educationists' awareness of this. It investigated the trend in Chinese teacher-pupil relationships and educational reform in the current profoundly changing Chinese society. It tried to redefine the concept of Chinese Affective Education towards one with student-centred characteristics and equal teacher-pupil relationships.

In order to understand Chinese affective education from the micro and macro levels, historical Chinese moral educational, the examination-oriented education system, the influences in politics and society, the current pragmatic social philosophy and the trends

of economic, social and political development were firstly reviewed. Chapter 2 argued in detail that Confucianism has been influencing Chinese education and the social, political and economic environment of education for 2000 years. Its influence in contemporary China is still fundamental. Confucianism centres on political and social needs, therefore, education in these political and social circumstances and environment, aims at cultivating people to serve in the political and social sphere. It consequentially forces students to fulfill a limited goal of education, where an individual's need is neglected and inhibited. This kind of educational system limits personal creativity and competence in economic and social development in the long term.

Although China has been successfully experiencing profound economic growth and social change in last 30 years, this has not happened in education. There is still a strong examination-oriented tradition, where teacher-centred and cognitive knowledge based teaching still plays an important role in school. Teacher-centred teaching and the examination-oriented education system can deliver cognitive knowledge and skills by rote learning, however, children's perceptive and emotional development is being limited and suppressed within the collective culture. Along with economic growth and social change, pluralism is developing among Chinese centralized tradition and the political realities; inherent individualism and the personal needs of human beings demand attention and should sway social change and educational reform. Current Chinese educational reform is trying to change from an examination-oriented education system and teacher-centred teaching to student-centred teaching and learning. However, as there is limited knowledge and experience of this in Chinese tradition, it is only debated at a theoretical level, but lacks implementation and execution at the practical level of research and study.

From the background literature review, three principal conclusions have been drawn. Firstly, the Chinese tradition has conditioned personal, social and economic development in China and will still play an important role in Chinese education; secondly, current Chinese educational reform trends in student-centred teaching and learning lacks research and practice and is limited by traditional values, political facts and theoretical understanding; finally, research on affective education at a practical level is essential but faces great difficulties.

Circle Time was considered in chapter 3 as a way of promoting emotional literacy for personal development. It is suggested that Circle Time, a western pedagogy, should be adopted in Chinese current educational reform because of its practical nature.

The mixed research design was described, explained and interpreted in Chapter 4 from a pragmatic philosophical stance, to its methodological interpretation. This study is the first introduction of Circle Time to a Chinese school, and starts at secondary level. An experimental design is basic for this study. However, in order to understand Circle Time practice in a Chinese context, a preliminary study in an English school was necessary to obtain some comparative data from Chinese and UK students' perspectives and experience of Circle Time. In addition, in-depth interviews and documentary analysis were also important in the study of Chinese students' and teachers' reaction to the Circle Time intervention.

The findings in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 can be analysed at 4 levels. Firstly, the experimental result supports the hypothesis that Circle Time can improve students' self-esteem. Secondly, the questionnaires which compare Chinese and UK students' perspectives of Circle Time suggest that Circle Time offers opportunities for students to

express feelings, discuss issues, and therefore, to help students to understand others and themselves by building up better peer relationships and teacher-pupil relationships. Thirdly, the comparative data also suggest that Chinese students are more positive than UK students about their experience of Circle Time. The reasons argued in this study are that the Chinese participants were from a key school in China, and the students were selected. Chinese students have fewer opportunities to express their feelings as happened in Circle Time. It is more novel for them to have this experience. Therefore they show more interest in Circle Time than UK students. Finally however, the interviews with Chinese teachers highlight the difficulties of introducing new educational ideas into Chinese schools.

The current chapter aims to share thoughts relating to the research together with my personal development and understanding of the implications, limitations and further potential and ideas.

## **8.1 Conceptualizing affective education in China**

The findings of this research show that the affective dimension of education is still underdeveloped in Chinese schools. Although the literature review showed some (Bell, 2008; Qi & Tang, 2004; Wang, 2004; W. Zhu, 1992) attempts to reinterpret Confucianism in seeking affective theory from tradition, they still focused on discussing the theoretical importance of affective education, thus the shortage of practical suggestions and research limited students' personal and social development in schools. In fact the current Chinese education system is still teacher-centred, which is inappropriate

for an effective approach to Affective Education and students are generally over controlled and regimented.

Along with profound economic, social and political development, western cultures influence Chinese society and are openly accepted in the public sphere, the diverse needs of individuals are replacing the single standard, collective considerations in society and in school. The demands for individuals to develop understanding of varying personalities are increasing and changing. The one-child policy reduced the birth rate and also put the individual into focus. Although this kind of focus is abnormal in some ways, it brings strong pressure for social and educational change. Therefore, the affective education element is increasing in current Chinese moral education. Although the terminology is still “moral education”, the scope of current moral education differs from the previous stress on political influence and social norms; it now considers human nature and personal needs. There is the need to conceptualize affective education appropriate for a Chinese context.

This study used Circle Time as an intervention to examine teacher-pupil relationships in a Chinese secondary school. By investigating Chinese secondary students’ and teachers’ reactions to Circle Time, this study explored Chinese Affective Education through a western pedagogical stance. Under the hierarchical educational system, Chinese teachers’ affective educational practices are influenced not only by policy makers and school management, but also by parents, students, socio-economic development and teachers’ personal and professional development.

## 8.2 The contributions of this research

This section will consider the contributions of this research to the literature of children's development and teacher-pupil relationships, and to the comparative studies between east and west.

The introduction of Circle Time to a Chinese secondary school was the first example. By using a western pedagogy in developing positive teacher-pupil relationships in a Chinese secondary school, I sowed democratic seeds into the Chinese secondary students situation, introducing the idea of tolerating differences, listening to others and communicating with others with respect.

By examining Circle Time in a Chinese context, this study also contributes to the development of the literature of Circle Time in eastern countries and using Circle Time with bigger groups of students.

Circle Time is not a difficult practice; however, to adopt it appropriately in school is not that easy for teachers and practitioners. The findings in this study also suggest that training for teachers and Circle Time facilitators should be the initial consideration of developing Circle Time in a Chinese secondary school.

Secondly, the findings reported in this study also present a picture of the current Chinese Affective education system, including Chinese students' and teachers' perceptions, their life reality, and the paradox of theory and reality, official curriculum and real examination curriculum and the role of parents and teachers.



Thirdly, although this is not a comparative study, it highlights several comparative factors. One is a comparison of Circle Time from both Chinese and English students' perceptions of experience and feeling about using Circle Time. Another one is comparing the Chinese and UK educational systems from English teachers' observations and opinions. These comparisons presented a vivid and multi-faceted picture of aspects of the Chinese educational system, especially Chinese Affective education in secondary schools.

Fourthly, this study also suggested the extension in use of the Johari Window in self development understanding. Self-esteem can be developed by successful communication. One can know more about oneself through personal understanding and reflection coming from others' feedback, the unknown self is thus revealed. This developed explanation specifies the importance of listening, speaking and social skills for an individual's emotional development and well-being to occur.

### **8.3 The limitations of this study**

Firstly, the time limitation is a weakness of the experimental data. The experiment took place for just 5 month in X school which is not enough to see the fuller significance of the development of self-esteem. If the research had lasted for a year or more, the result might have been different. This also suggests the need for further study. The same problem existed in the preliminary pilot study in English W School, it was just one term, and it did not start at the beginning of the academic year. The students did not have the same feeling as they might have had they been doing Circle Time at the beginning of academic year. Year 7 students, particularly would have benefited if they could have had Circle Time from the beginning of their entry into secondary school, from participating in

Circle Time three terms rather than just one, they would have had a more impacting experience.

Secondly, there are limitations in the research design. The field experiment in the Chinese school was the first time that Circle Time was conducted in a Chinese school. Unexpected issues, such as teachers not cooperating as planned, challenged the original design, and I had to make up questionnaires to deal with the new issues. Part of the design was not theoretically discussed and argued. Although this did not affect the research findings, they might have been more significant if the preliminary study had been able to provide all the information needed. This study can contribute to the literature for further Circle Time studies in Chinese schools and other organisations.

Thirdly, there is a degree of limitation in terms of literature. Affective education is new to the Chinese educational system; there is not much discussion and research in China. It was difficult to find appropriate literature, some of the literature was drawn mainly from the website; this is less authoritative than academic literature. Chinese educational research is less developed and well organized than western educational research, even the literature from Chinese research journals is mostly literature review rather than research. It is also less powerful. However, this also indicates the need for and significance of this study.

## **8.4 recommendations for further study**

This research was an experimental investigation into the adoption of a western pedagogy, Circle Time to Chinese secondary school to develop more equal teacher-pupil

relationships. It is not the first time western theory which has been used in eastern culture; however, this research is at a practical level, actively transferring ideas and considering theoretical development.

Firstly, I would like to suggest an experimental study in an English secondary school, to investigate English year 7 students' experience of using Circle Time in developing their personal, and social skills and in raising their self-esteem; starting from their first term at the secondary school.

Secondly, Chinese teachers' voices need to be heard. What are their views of the current educational reform, their role in the change, the support they need, and their relationship with students and school management?

Thirdly, a study of Chinese headteachers would be valuable. What is their vision of future education and the difficulties they are facing in balancing school management and their official role.

Fourthly, attention needs to be paid to the Xinjiang students who are being educated in eastern cities. How does their educational experience in eastern cities with Han students affect them?

Finally, a real comparative study between Chinese and English affective education is also worth undertaking. As I have mentioned in this study, affective education is understood differently in China and the UK. A comparative study of Chinese and English affective education regarding their historical development, current situation and future trends would contribute to a holistic picture of Chinese affective education and also to the further development of British Affective education.

## **8.5 The journey of being a researcher – a reflection on my personal development**

This research journey started before I had decided to do a PhD. When I worked in a Chinese secondary school, the educational issue, especially the tense teacher-pupil relationships disturbed me all of the time. Teachers worked hard to push students to study, while students were suffering to survive examinations. As a Chinese secondary teacher, I pursued answers without even knowing what the question was.

When I decided to go abroad to explore a different educational system, I became an international student, experiencing culture shock, a language barrier and learning and teaching differences, while experiencing the English education system.

Then I began to ask questions:

- What are the differences between UK and Chinese education?
- Why are there such differences?
- What can I do about the differences?
- What western experience can I introduce into China?

When I decided to study Circle Time and teacher-pupil relationships, I not only became a researcher, but also the 'human instrument' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985: 327) in conducting the research.

Doing this cross-cultural research, I kept shifting myself from an outsider to an insider, from being an insider-out to an outsider-in. Firstly, as I carried the Chinese tradition; I

was exploring western pedagogy from an outside stance. Once I adopted western methods to re-examine Chinese practice, I was using an outsider's stance to reflect on an insider's history. The process was an arduous journey to deconstruct and reconstruct my knowledge and my understanding of the Chinese education system and the Chinese tradition in a centralized society.

Being outside the country enabled me to reconsider Chinese traditional values and current the socio-economic changes from the angles which I was not able to gain inside China. During the practice of conducting Circle Time in a Chinese secondary school, I forced myself to give up hierarchical habits in thinking and doing things, thus enabling an understanding of western pedagogy from practice to theory.

The journey also led me to be a researcher by doing real research, experiencing real difficulties and resolving real problems. In the process of overcoming challenges, I equipped myself with an ontological and epistemological understanding of knowledge; I adopted research skills and developed my language ability.

Finally, the processes of writing up not only developed my academic awareness, but also established a critical viewpoint to question and reflect on my knowledge and statements. Now, at the end of the journey, I have gained and developed more than I expected at the departure.

## **8.6 Final points**

I am ambitious to bring wider change to China beyond the scope of this thesis. This study first introduced western pedagogy, Circle Time to a Chinese secondary school, and attempted to sow seeds of humanism in secondary students, to help them to develop an awareness of their own emotions, to understand others' feelings, to develop their listening and speaking skills, to raise their self-esteem and to colour their examination-oriented school lives with a little fun, and some deep thinking. For the experimental students, I have achieved my initial goal. I wish that these seeds may grow, flourish and spread from these students to more people.

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# Appendence

## Appendix 1.1 Self-esteem test questionnaires (Chinese)

### 初一新生心理调查问卷

亲爱的同学，你好！

为了更好的了解你，帮助你更好的适应中学的生活，我们对初一新生进行一个心理调查。如果你愿意进一步的自我探索，了解更多的情况，可以在后面写下你的名字和班级。这样，如果你要找心理老师的话，我们可以帮你分析更多的情况。请认真阅读，选择你认为适合你的选项。

- 1, 有时我会无缘无故地感到沮丧，痛苦 -  
A.非常同意 B.同意 C.有点同意 D.不同意 E.非常不同意 ( )
- 2, 在困难的环境中，我一般总能保持乐观 -  
A.非常同意 B.同意 C.有点同意 D.不同意 E.非常不同意 ( )
- 3, 不论是在极高的楼顶还是在很深的隧道中，我很少感到胆怯不安 -  
A.非常同意 B.同意 C.有点同意 D.不同意 E.非常不同意 ( )
- 4, 只要自己没有过错，不管别人怎么说，我总能心安理得 -  
A.非常同意 B.同意 C.有点同意 D.不同意 E.非常不同意 ( )
- 5, 如果我从地球上消失，没有人会注意到 -  
A.非常同意 B.同意 C.有点同意 D.不同意 E.非常不同意 ( )
- 6, 当老师召见我时，我觉得可以趁机提出早就想说的建议 -  
A.非常同意 B.同意 C.有点同意 D.不同意 E.非常不同意 ( )
- 7, 如果我不能做得像别人那样好，说明我不如他们 -  
A.非常同意 B.同意 C.有点同意 D.不同意 E.非常不同意 ( )
- 8, 我总是能够给别人提出一些很好的建议 -  
A.非常同意 B.同意 C.有点同意 D.不同意 E.非常不同意 ( )
- 9, 我总会成为我们一群人之间的中心 -  
A.非常同意 B.同意 C.有点同意 D.不同意 E.非常不同意 ( )
- 10, 我有能力和别人交往 -  
A.非常同意 B.同意 C.有点同意 D.不同意 E.非常不同意 ( )
- 11, 我经常让关心我的人失望了 -  
A.非常同意 B.同意 C.有点同意 D.不同意 E.非常不同意 ( )
- 12, 即便是反对我的人，也会喜欢我，尊重我 -  
A.非常同意 B.同意 C.有点同意 D.不同意 E.非常不同意 ( )
- 13, 我可以像朋友一样跟老师交流 -  
A.非常同意 B.同意 C.有点同意 D.不同意 E.非常不同意 ( )
- 14, 有同学欺负我，但是我不知道该怎么办 -  
A.非常同意 B.同意 C.有点同意 D.不同意 E.非常不同意 ( )
- 15, 我愿意和任何一个同学同桌 -  
A.非常同意 B.同意 C.有点同意 D.不同意 E.非常不同意 ( )

姓名 ----- (自愿) 班级 ----- (必写)

## Appendix 1.2 Self-esteem test questionnaires (English)

Dear students,

I am conducting a research about students' emotional development. In order to know you more, help you adapting your new lives in secondary school, we are conducting a survey about new students' self-esteem. If you like to know more about this research, and explore more about yourself, please leave your name and class number at the end of the questionnaire. Then the psychology teacher can meet you and help you with more information. Thanks for your cooperation.

**Please read the questions carefully to choose the appropriate one.**

1. Sometimes I feel distress and depressed without any reason. (    )
  - A. Strongly disagree
  - B. Disagree
  - C. Somewhat agree
  - D. Agree
  - E. Strongly agree
  
2. I can keep optimistic all the time even in difficult situation. (    )
  - A. Strongly disagree
  - B. Disagree
  - C. Somewhat agree
  - D. Agree
  - E. Strongly agree
  
3. I seldom feel nervous whether at the top of a building or in the deep of the tube. (    )
  - A. Strongly disagree
  - B. Disagree
  - C. Somewhat agree
  - D. Agree
  - E. Strongly agree
  
4. If I have done nothing wrong, I don't care whatever the others say. (    )
  - A. Strongly disagree
  - B. Disagree
  - C. Somewhat agree
  - D. Agree
  - E. Strongly agree
  
5. I could disappear from the surface of the earth and nobody would notice (    )
  - A. Strongly disagree
  - B. Disagree
  - C. Somewhat agree
  - D. Agree



- E. Strongly agree
6. When the teacher wants to see me, I think I can give him (her) my suggestions which I want to say already by this chance. (     )
- A. Strongly disagree
  - B. Disagree
  - C. Somewhat agree
  - D. Agree
  - E. Strongly agree
7. If I do not do as well as others, it means that I am an inferior person. (     )
- A. Strongly disagree
  - B. Disagree
  - C. Somewhat agree
  - D. Agree
  - E. Strongly agree
8. I can always give others some good advice. (     )
- A. Strongly disagree
  - B. Disagree
  - C. Somewhat agree
  - D. Agree
  - E. Strongly agree
9. I am always the soul of the group. (     )
- A. Strongly disagree
  - B. Disagree
  - C. Somewhat agree
  - D. Agree
  - E. Strongly agree
10. I have what it takes to socialize with other people. (     )
- A. Strongly disagree
  - B. Disagree
  - C. Somewhat agree
  - D. Agree
  - E. Strongly agree
11. Someone that stands up to me or disagrees with me may still very well like and respect me. (     )
- A. Strongly disagree
  - B. Disagree
  - C. Somewhat agree
  - D. Agree
  - E. Strongly agree
12. Someone that stands up to me or disagrees with me may still very well like and respect me. (     )
- A. Strongly disagree

- B. Disagree
- C. Somewhat agree
- D. Agree
- E. Strongly agree

13. I can talk with my teacher in a way like friends. (      )

- A. Strongly disagree
- B. Disagree
- C. Somewhat agree
- D. Agree
- E. Strongly agree

14. Some pupils bully me and I can't find help. (      )

- A. Strongly disagree
- B. Disagree
- C. Somewhat agree
- D. Agree
- E. Strongly agree

15. I'd like to be deskmate with everyone in the class. (      )

- A Strongly disagree
- B Disagree
- C Somewhat agree
- D Agree
- E Strongly agree

## Appendix 2.1 Students Questionnaires about Circle Time (English)



### Questionnaires about Pupils opinions of Circle Time

THE UNIVERSITY OF  
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Dear friend:

I am a PhD student from the University of Warwick. I am doing research about Circle Time. Knowing that you have experience in using Circle Time in your school, I want to ask you some questions about your opinions of Circle Time.

It will be very helpful if you can answer the questions. All the information will be kept confidential; it can be used only with your permission.

Thanks very much for your support.

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**Section one: Please Circle the appropriate answer.**

1. Circle Time is an opportunity for me to express myself.

- A. Strongly disagree
- B. Disagree
- C. Somewhat agree
- D. Agree
- E. Strongly agree

2. Others understand me more after Circle Time.

- A. Strongly disagree
- B. Disagree
- C. Somewhat agree
- D. Agree
- E. Strongly agree

3. I understand myself better after Circle Time.

- A. Strongly disagree
- B. Disagree
- C. Somewhat agree
- D. Agree
- E. Strongly agree

4. My group gets on better with each other as a result of Circle Time.

- A. Strongly disagree
- B. Disagree
- C. Somewhat agree
- D. Agree
- E. Strongly agree

**Section Two: Please read the questions and give your opinions.**

5. What do you like about Circle Time?

6. What do you dislike about Circle Time?

7. Can you give me your view about the ideal teacher-pupils relationship in school?

8. Do you think circle time helps create this?

**Section Three: personal information**

Your Age:

Your gender:

Do you like to attend an interview later? If Yes, Please give me your contact detail.

***Thanks for you cooperation! ^\_^***



## **Appendix 3 English teachers' interview schedule**

Dear Colleague,

I am a PhD student from the University of Warwick. I am doing research about Circle Time. Knowing that you have experience in using Circle Time in your school, I want to ask you some questions about your opinions of Circle Time.

It will be very nice if you can suggest a time to meet and discuss the issues. All the information will be kept confidential; it can be used only with your permission.

As my first language is not English, please allow me to use recording during our conversation to help me keep notes.

Thanks very much for your support.

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## Interview questions with English teachers about Circle Time

### ***A. Information about the school***

1. School type.
2. Number of pupils
3. Number of teaching staff
4. Number of children with free meals
5. How would you describe the catchment area?
6. How does the school compare with the other schools?

### ***B. Information about your profession***

1. How long have you been teaching?
2. How long have you taught in this school?
3. How good do you feel is the behaviours of pupils in this school?
4. What are the strengths of the staff and administration of the school?

### ***C. Information about Circle Time***

1. How did you first hear about Circle Time?
2. What kind of training did you have for Circle Time? Do you know what training other teachers in the school have had for Circle Time?
3. What do you see as the problems of starting Circle Time with a class?
4. In which years is Circle Time employed? How frequent is it?
5. What topics and activities do you do in Circle Time?

6. How many teachers or teaching assistants use Circle Time? Do you share your experience together?

7. What are the most difficult things about running Circle Time?

8. Does what you do in Circle Time relate to other aspects of the Curriculum?

9. Are there any ways you have developed the way you do Circle time since you first started?

Have you improved it? Can you envisage further improvements?

#### ***D. Information about the pupils***

1. Do they enjoy Circle Time?

2. Do they normally behave sensibly in Circle Time?

3. How much do you feel pupils gain from doing Circle Time?

## Appendix 4.1 Chinese teachers' interview schedule (Chinese)

### 第一部分：个人信息

1. 工作年限，
2. 毕业学校，
3. 专业，是否是师范专业？

### 第二部分：工作

4. 你觉得自己在学校的时候是一个什么样的学生呢？怎样来形容你当时跟老师的关系呢？
5. 你怎样来描述自己刚做老师时候的样子。
6. 你觉得自己是一个什么类型的老师？
7. 你觉得在学生的心目中，你是一个什么样的老师？是否符合您对自己的定位？如果不是，是什么原因造成了这种差异？
8. 你工作中最开心的事情是什么？
9. 工作中比较烦恼的事情是什么？
10. 你觉得现在的学生面对的最大的问题是什么？有什么办法可以解决？
11. 你怎样看你跟学生的关系？
12. 你觉得将来的教育走向会是什么样子的？

13. 能否谈一谈你对自己的职业规划？

**第三部分：对圆圈分享的看法：**

14. 请问你参加过几次圆圈分享？有什么印象？对您的教学工作有没有什么启发？

15. 请问您对圆圈分享的看法。如果不是很认可，能否说一下你的看法？

16. 有什么意见和建议？

17. 请问你是否有问题来问我？

## **Appendix 4.2 Chinese teachers' interview schedule (English translation)**

### **Section one: Personal information**

1. How long have you been a teacher?
2. Which university did you graduated? Is it a normal university?
3. What is your major? Were you trained to be a teacher?

### **Section two: professional information**

4. What kind of student were you when you at school and university? How can you describe your relationship with your teachers when you were a student?
5. How can you describe yourself when you first started teaching?
6. What kind you teacher are you?
7. Do you know how your students think about you? Is it the same as what you think about yourself as a teacher? If it is not the same, what caused the difference?
8. What is the happiest thing in your work?
9. What is the unhappiest thing in your work?
10. What is the major issue your pupils facing at the moment? How can you deal with it?
11. How can you describe the relationship between you and your students?

12. What do you view Chinese education trend?

13. What is your personal and professional development plan?

### **Section three: Circle Time**

14. What is your opinion of Circle Time? Does it have any help to your teaching?

15. Can you tell me any comments and suggestions about Circle Time?

16. Do you have any questions?

## **Appendix 5 Questionnaire of Foreign teachers' opinions of Chinese education**

- 1. Nationality:**
- 2. How long have you been living in China?**
- 3. How long have you been teaching in a Chinese school?**
- 4. Through you experience of teaching in a Chinese school, what do you think is most different compared with the teaching in your country?**
- 5. What is the difference between Chinese teachers and teachers (or student teacher relationships and the way of teaching) in your country?**
- 6. What do you think are the best aspects of a Chinese school?**

**7. If you teach in your country do you think you behave differently in teaching?**

**8. If something needs to be changed in Chinese schools, what do you think needs to be changed first?**



## Appendix 6 Time table of Circle Time experiment

### 圆圈分享 ( Circle Time ) 第一周活动安排

#### 人员安排:

根据实验的要求，我们把每一个班级分成了两个小班。每一个小班是在原有英语教学班的基础上自动形成。班主任和任课教师分别参与到其中一个小班。

#### 时间安排:

#### 圆圈分享 Circle Time 时间安排

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
第一节					
第二节					
第三节			Class5B		
第四节					
第五节		Class 3A			
第六节		Class 2A			
第七节		Class 4B	Class3B		Class 2B
第八节		Class 5A		Class 4A	

#### 本周内容

第一周，首先让学生和老师知道我们在做什么，回答老师和同学们的疑问，充分解释圆圈分享的原则和规则，重要的是让每个人理解和掌握规则，养成习惯。本周讨论话题：**来到了一个新的环境**。鼓励学生表达在新学期新学校遇到的新问题。学生互相讨论，用什么办法克服和解决，让学生能够互相体谅和互相支持。老师们注意引导学生和活动的流畅。

## 准备工作

- 1, 场地。老师和同学们到位以后, 把桌子移走, 只留椅子。围成圆圈坐在一起。
- 2, 人员。老师和同学们。
- 3, 设备: 小熊一只。
- 4, 其他: 放松的心态。

## 圆圈分享 Circle Time 时间安排

	星期一	星期二	星期三	星期四	星期五
第一节					
第二节					
第三节			初一 5B 文超群 邵弥洁		
第四节					
第五节		初一 3A 林贵福 江彦靓			
第六节		初一 2A 蒋小华 林婧			
第七节		初一 4B 卢仟山 黄怡婷	初一 3B 林贵福 方美君		初一 2B 蒋小华 党琛
第八节		初一 5A 文超群 傅佳佳 黄怡婷		初一 4 A 卢仟山 傅佳佳	

### 人员安排:

根据实验的要求, 我们把每一个班级分成了两个小班。每一个小班是在原有英语教学班的基础上自动形成。班主任和任课教师分别参与到其中一个小班。

### 准备工作:

- 5, 场地: 老师和同学们到位以后, 把桌子移走, 只留椅子。围成圆圈坐在一起。
- 6, 人员: 老师和同学们。
- 7, 设备: 小熊一只。
- 8, 其他: 放松的心态。
- 9, 注意对学生的观察。记录感想, 准备论文的素材。

### 本周内容:

第一周, 首先让学生和老师知道我们在做什么, 回答老师和同学们的疑问, 充分解释圆圈分享的原则和规则, 重要的是让每个人理解和掌握规则, 养成习惯。

本周讨论话题：**来到了一个新的环境**。鼓励学生表达在新学期新学校遇到的新问题。学生互相讨论，用什么办法克服和解决，让学生能够互相体谅和互相支持。老师们注意引导学生和保持整个活动的流畅。

**下周计划：**

在本周总结之后商定. 可以根据各个班级的实际情况及学校德育目标, 及初一学生的特点来安排和设计.

## Appendix 7: Introduction of Circle Time experiment

### 圆圈分享（Circle Time）实验说明

吴伶

#### 什么是圆圈分享（Circle Time）

圆圈分享（Circle Time）是一个帮助和支持孩子们提高自信心的方法。这个方法通过创造一个安全的心理和物理环境，让孩子们在一种没有责备，惩罚的环境中勇于发现和表达感情，讨论解决冲突。鼓励孩子们相信自己是一个有价值的值得尊重的个人。

圆圈分享（Circle Time）是一个群体的活动方法，是老师和同学共同参与的一个圆圈会议。这个会议最少一个星期举行一次，去考虑有关于个人成长，人与人之间关系，道德，健康和公民教育方面的问题。圆圈分享鼓励学生发展良性的友情；自律；自我调节和管理个人行为。通过自信的交流 and 民主的群体方式来培养学生聆听，表达，观察，思考和注意力的集中。最为重要的一点是，在圆圈分享（Circle Time）过程中要形成一种情感安全的氛围。所以要制定清楚地基本规则，并且肯定每个人的思想和贡献。这个活动的游戏设计充分考虑到了培养学生对自己的认识，对他人的了解，对自己和他们的尊重，以及如何建立良性的友情，培养学生的团队精神，合作能力。重要的是在学生的个人成长中，培养学生管理和表达自己的情感。

我们经常听到家长们说这样的话。我不要孩子做任何事情，让他的一切精力都用在在学习上，为什么他的成绩没有提高？我给他买他要的一切东西，为什么他还有这样那样的不满？

事实上，在这里家长忽略了一个重要的问题，那就是孩子的情感需求。孩子不是生活在一个真空的环境，孩子也不是一个没有思考能力和情感需要的个体。我们经常把学校称为象牙塔，然而，象牙塔只是一个脱离现实的理想生活。尽管家长们在努力给孩子们创造一个安全的，没有忧伤的，资源充足的物质空间。但是家长们所忽略的却恰恰是一个人的成长过程中最为重要的内容。每个人除了物质上的需要以外，更需要精神上的满足。精神上的满足需要交流，沟通；需要表达自己，被别人听到，这就需要学会去聆听别人。更需要去建立一种和谐的人际关系。作为教育工作者，如果把教学工作单纯的看作在知识的传授，则是一种教育的短视。教师更应该承担一种培养学生未来生活的能力的责任，在学校生活中培养其情感的，知识的全面发展。因为学生们主要的生活环境是家和学校，主要的社会关系是家长和老师同学，所以，在师生间培养一种平等的分享的情感环境和关系至为重要。这种情感

氛围的形成，老师需要做出更大的努力。不仅仅要转变自己的一些传统的观念和行为习惯。更要勇为人先。勇于尝试和革新。

## 组织形式和活动结构

圆圈分享（Circle Time）需要很简单的准备，只要有一个空间，椅子，或者大家一起坐在干净的地板或者地毯上围成一个圆圈。所有的活动都发生在这个圆圈中。无论是坐在椅子上还是坐在地板上，老师和学生们一定要坐在同样的地方，共同遵守同样的规则，我们把这些规则称为黄金法则。这主要是为了体现师生之间的一种平等和互相尊重。大家团坐在一起的最大的优点，就是目光的交流。每个人都可以看到彼此。在交流的过程中目光的直接交流更能够拉近彼此的距离。增进了解，加深感情。

活动的过程主要可以分成几个部分。

**开始游戏。**用游戏的方式开始，使大家注意力集中，同时通过游戏，缓解大家的紧张情绪，放松思维，形成温暖的气氛。为下面的活动做好准备。

**个人表述。**每个人对自己的心情进行表述，并且可以解释原因。发现问题以后，向同学们征集解决类似问题的办法。需要强调的是，避免使这个同学成为问题中心，而是使用，“我”是怎么做的。

**对问题的讨论。**老师提出一定的问题，让学生讨论。例如：近期学校或者班级里发生的一些事情，或者一些与学生们成长过程相关的一些问题。

**总结。**每个人来表达自己的心情和感受。

**结束游戏。**用游戏的方法来放松。尤其是一些沉重的话题。不要给学生形成思想顾虑。这一点在整个活动中是我们要充分考虑的因素

圆圈分享（Circle Time）最少一个星期一次，每次一节课的时间。人数上一个小班的人数大约 20 多人。参加人员，除了学生，班主任和任课老师外，也可以邀请家长，生活老师，学校里的其他员工一起参加。

## 教育目的

圆圈分享的教育目的是为了个人的全面发展. 注重于创造一个关怀的群体环境以利于学生们社交和情感的成长和教育, 圆圈分享是一个以人为本的设计, 通过发展人与人之间一种畅通的交流体系, 去建立一种以人与人之间以尊重为根本的健康, 积极的人际关系. 在这一点上, 因为老师在教育中的主导作用。老师首先要确立尊重学生的态度。

### 1 发展学生交流的技巧

聆听，表达，讨论和分享思想，感情和观点。聆听是交流的起点和交流成功的最重要的技巧。聆听的过程中，首先是尊重，然后是接受信息，思考，认同或者反对。在大脑对信息进行了处理之后，表达听者自己的意见。然后彼此进行交流和讨

论，分享思想，感情和不同的观点。聆听需要注意力的集中，需要尊重讲话者，不要打断别人的发言。这些细微的行为可以帮助学生养成良好的习惯，形成高尚的道德品质。

## 2 学生个人的发展

增强自信心。给安静的学生提供表达的机会。讨论他们自己的问题，发展学生的自我意识。课堂上积极发言的学生往往是自信心强，表现欲高的个体。而在课堂上的发言，往往是对学科领域知识掌握比较好的学生一种强化鼓励，一种进一步的提高。对于那一部分某一学科掌握不太好的学生来讲，他们则失去了这种锻炼的机会，不仅仅的讲话，更重要的是对自己的认可和最自信心的培养。反之，他们在一次次的失败中品味着无奈和对自己能力的怀疑，而最终失去信心。

在我们的活动中，我们所要讨论的话题是脱离学科学习的生活话题，每一个人都有机会参与和贡献。我们在活动中使用规则去创造一个安全，轻松的精神环境，让学生能够在实践中树立起自信心。

## 3 发展学生社交的能力和技巧

鼓励彼此间的尊重和宽容，建立友谊和信任（诚信），创造一种群体的归属感。教会学生移情。在活动的过程中，教会学生认识自己，了解他人，认同他人。在尊重的基础上，建立一种和谐的关系。

重要的一点是，通过移情，把在活动中形成的这种情感转移到生活中的其他方面。形成良好的礼节礼貌和生活品质。

## 4 提高学生的行为表现能力

创造分享的规则，提高解决冲突的能力。用游戏和活动，让学生学会为自己的行为负责。协商解决各种问题。**培养学生的情感品质**

### 1. 友情

友情是人生中至为重要的情感需求和表现之一。我们在这里提倡的友情包括了师生间如朋友般的感情，以及同学之间互相关怀的友谊。建立良好的平等的师生关系，老师要主动搭建起沟通的桥梁，走近学生的心灵，进行情感的对话和交流。对学生的尊重和理解，则是建起这一桥梁的关键。我们的实验旨在通过练习一种师生交流的方式和渠道，使师生养成彼此尊重的，平等的交流习惯。在学校里，形成一种民主的氛围。

互相尊重的生生关系是学生时代感情的主要构成。通过互相配合的游戏，同学们在轻松的气氛中交流各自的观点，讨论对问题的不公看法，以达到学生之间互相的理解和支持。形成铭记终生的友情。

### 2. 交流

聆听。聆听是交流的起点。

表达。表达自己是交流继续和发展关键。

思考。对别人的意见，对自己的观点的碰撞，可以使交流升华。

分享。交流的目的，就是为了分享。

成长。有了前面的四点，学生才能在交流中成长，成熟。

### 3. 信任

信任是互相的。对规则的遵守是对信任的一种保障。为了形成师生之间，生生之间的信任。需要大家共同遵守这样几点。一，不中断别人的讲话。这是对别人表达的尊重和信任。二，不加以评论。尤其不能对一些问题进行攻击性的批判。三，表达中使用“我”的语言，避免使用你的句子。

### 4. 自信

自信的孩子学习成绩都会很好。(美。罗杰斯)

我们要培养孩子的自信心，这样他们就会用一种积极的态度去学习，以取得更好的成绩。培养孩子自信新的方法就是让他们敢于尝试，不怕失败。

除此以外，一个自信的人在人际交往中，会更容易找到自己的位置，也更容易在今后的生活中取得成功。

### 5. 合作

合作是一个重要的能力。我们可以通过合作的游戏和活动来创造一个安全，关怀的环境让孩子们去学会合作。具有团队精神。

平时的学习和生活中，往往充满了竞争。成功或者失败。在我们的游戏中，只有合作，没有胜负。

### 6. 团队精神

这是在合作基础上形成的一种集体的凝聚力。

### 7. 解决冲突的能力

解决冲突的能力包含了几个反面的内容。讨论，分享，妥协，达成一致。而所有的一切都需要孩子们在一个互相尊重的积极的环境中解决。我们需要培养的孩子们聆听别人，反思，表达自己的意见。接受不同的意见。达成解决方案。这个能力对于孩子们在以后的生活中，与别人交流与合作，解决突发问题和冲突，都有极大的帮助。

## 黄金规则 Golden Rules

每一次，只能有一个人说话

认真听别人说话。

尊重别人的观点

对自己的行为负责

可以不说

犯错误是最好的学习方法

遵守大家制定的规则

不要伤害别人  
使用我的语言. 避免使用你的句子。

### 具体实验安排

本试验选择初一和高一的班级。因为初一有岛内班和岛外班的区别，高一有直升班，和普班的存在。我们分别选取各种班机各 2 个班，作为实验班。非实验班不采用我们的方法。

实验周期一个学期。

在学期开始的时候，给全部初一和高一的学生进行自信心的测评。到学期末，在进行二次测评。看最终的结果。同时，学校里的各种其他常规评估也作为测评因素考虑在内。

因为我们学校的课程安排中英语课采用小班制上课，所以，我们最好每星期一节英语课的时间，班主任和任课老师一起参与。班会时间，因为班型太大。考虑所有任课老师参与，分组进行。

高中部，因为学生都住校，时间机动性更大。

2005年8月31号