5-18-2013

TEACHING BUSINESS SCHOOL COURSES IN CHINA

George Schell
University of North Carolina Wilmington, SCHELLG@UNCW.EDU

TEACHING BUSINESS SCHOOL COURSES IN CHINA

George Schell
University of North Carolina Wilmington
SCHELLG@UNCW.EDU

ABSTRACT

There are many reasons for faculty to seek teaching experience in a country outside of their home institution. Education is just one more industry in a global economy. Foreign nationals are increasingly enrolling in our universities. Textbooks enjoy a multinational audience. Many of the experiences and examples used in classrooms are grounded in multinational organizations. Business students today must understand how business is conducted on the world stage.

Two issues show up as learning objectives in many U.S. schools: critical thinking and communication. A casual conversation among U.S. faculty often shows they believe Chinese students may be proficient in memorization but lack critical thinking skills. Another perception is that Chinese students do not actively share ideas and debate positions as they meet in teams but simply copy the solution. The purpose of this research is to test those assumptions by surveying U.S. faculty who have taught in China. Questions will address student critical thinking skills, participation, as well as instructor effort required to teach these skills in China.

Keywords

Globalized teaching, teaching in China, critical thinking, team interaction, China.

INTRODUCTION

The motivations for teaching in China come from several directions. First, it provides a great challenge because of the difference in food, culture, and infrastructure. Second, the financial resources of Chinese students and Chinese universities are substantially less than most western counterparts which affect the ability of students to access learning infrastructure (information technology, textbooks, and others). Third, as China's economy grows more Chinese gain the financial resources to send their children to colleges; sending their children to foreign universities is seen as a prestigious achievement. Universities in the United States are perceived as among the best if not the best universities in the world (www.usnews.com/education). Fourth, universities in China PRC, Taiwan, and Hong Kong are rapidly rising in stature on the world stage (www.4icu.org/cn/).

This is a preliminary study to evaluate how U.S. instructors change their pedagogy when teaching in a foreign country. Based on the experiences gained from teaching in China for the Fall 2012 semester a survey has been designed for U.S. faculty that have taught in China. The purpose of the survey is to measure how pedagogy changed when an instructor from a U.S. institution teaches in China. Also, if pedagogy changes were made, did the changes persist once the U.S. faculty member returned to his/her home institution?

The preliminary work will look at two issues that have come up in literature about teaching in China. First, can Chinese students effectively use critical thinking methodology to solve problems they have not encountered – i.e. can they be taught a set of skills to solve problems as opposed to the traditional teaching of answers to known problem? Second, can Chinese students gain participatory skills with the instructor and classmates? This preliminary work will provide the basis for the later design of a broader survey of U.S. faculty who taught in China. While some may argue that critical thinking and participation are U.S.-centric goals for education that may not be seen as important in other countries, the fact remains that as faculty from the U.S. teach in China these goals will follow.

WHY TEACH IN CHINA

There is a difference between (a) teaching for a global student body while customizing to specific characteristics of a certain student market and (b) teaching a course which includes a few foreign nationals. In the latter case we can identify the few students and make specific addendums to our pedagogy without making a change to the structure of our teaching. Preparing teaching materials for a global student body forces us to confront the assumptions we make about students that will consume our materials. China was chosen because it challenges most of the comfortable assumptions we in the U.S. make about the preparation of our students and the support resources that help us teach our courses.

Learning takes place in different ways but college courses in the U.S. encourage participatory learning (Lounamaa and March, 1987; Kolb and Kolb, 2005). Chinese students who have attained admittance to universities generally do not speak in class; it might be seen as disruptive or the student may feel it would be publicly embarrassing to give an incorrect answer. Many Chinese students believe that the professor will provide all the knowledge needed about the course. In this scenario, the student's job is to absorb as much of the expert knowledge as possible and be able to repeat it back on an exam. Faculty from the U.S. teaching Chinese students may need to stretch their assumptions about student participation during class.

The U.S. is destined to teach an increasing number of Chinese students, either in the buildings of our home institution or via online courses. In the 2006-07 academic year less than 10,000 Chinese undergraduates enrolled in U.S. schools but by 2010-11 it was almost 57,000 (Bennett, 2012). While 57,000 is a large number it represents a small fraction of the almost 120 million Chinese with college experience (www.ststs.gov.cn\english). In this paper the term "Chinese student" will refer to the large majority and not the lower percentage of Chinese students who have had the opportunity of international travel to the U.S.

CHINESE STUDENTS AND COLLEAGUES

Chinese students are eager and honored to have foreign nationals as their teachers. From communications with students I find they generally welcome the expansion of ideas and they want to practice their English with a native speaker. While they are very interested in U.S. culture they are equally interested in how people in the U.S. view Chinese culture.

Many Chinese college courses will have a student who is the monitor for the course as well as a student who serves as the study secretary. Their purpose is to judge if students in the course adequately understand the material/instructor and to make sure each student has access to the course materials. This is not meant to be an intrusion on the instructor's authority but to provide feedback to insure the quality of the class. Adjustments can be made during the semester by performing these tasks as the class progresses. If the feedback were provided after the course ended the instructor would lose the chance to make a mid-course correction for the benefit of the current class.

There has been much debate about the academic characteristics of Chinese students and their learning styles (Hefferman et al, 2010). While Chinese students seem to have access to mobile technology on a par with U.S. students, computers and software specific to academia are more limited in China. Chinese students enrolling in college classes in the U.S. are not likely to have much exposure to computer-based education resources during their high school years. As a result they may start at a disadvantage to U.S. students who have been using personal productivity software (e.g. Microsoft Word, Excel, and PowerPoint) and other software during their middle school and high school experience.

Chinese students are expected to view their education as a cultural imperative (Biggs, 1996; Hefferman et al, 2010). This brings a high motivation to them to learn as much as possible in their course studies. Students tend to work in small study groups when a problem is assigned to a class by the instructor. There is give and take and exchanges of ideas as Chinese students work in small groups. However, once a "solution" is agreed upon by the team all members adopt the group solution as their own. For the instructor who does not observe the dynamics of the group interaction, he or she may assume the rest of the group members were passive observers in the discovery of the solution but that is not true. Their cultural imperative requires the Chinese students to actively participate with peers.

Chinese colleagues also provide guidance to a foreign instructor. A textbook chosen for a U.S. class may be too expensive for Chinese students to purchase individually – a copy may be placed in the library and the shared copy may require several days for all students to have a chance to read the material. Course prerequisites that would be common in the U.S. may not be required for a comparable course in China. A Chinese colleague may be the instructor of record for the class even though the U.S. instructor may be the "foreign expert" providing the lectures, course materials, and exams

The Chinese colleague is an important bridge between the U.S. instructor and the students in class. Like the student monitor, Chinese colleagues can provide insights as to how well materials will be being consumed by students. Chinese colleagues can provide a different perspective from the class monitor and can provide feedback on your pedagogy based upon his or her teaching experience.

TECHNOLOGY

The delivery of instruction and instructional materials in the U.S. is often closely related to technology. The same information technology and networking technology available in the U.S. is available in China. The difference is that they are ubiquitous in the U.S. and less prevalent in China. One area where information technology is comparable is the use of intelligent phones by students. The more course materials made available via an intelligent phone the fewer hurdles students will have in accessing those materials.

The lack of network ubiquity and the higher cost for high-speed networks generally means it requires substantially more time for Chinese students to access network (e.g. web based) course materials than for students in the U.S. This is especially true if course materials are hosted on servers in the U.S. The Chinese student's network connection is almost certainly much slower; uploading materials can be very slow, the U.S. server may time out because the Chinese student's connection is too slow. The effect is that foreign students may spend much more time getting the materials necessary to prepare for class.

Content used in the course while teaching in China may be based at various sites around the world. A video on YouTube of a presentation may be part of course materials. The U.S. instructor may use Facebook as a way of communicating with U.S. students. Both sites are blocked by the Chinese government. A surprising amount of content and server sites in the U.S. block access to users in China. Before relying on network accessed course content, make sure a colleague in China can test that the content is accessible from within China.

COMMUNICATION AND PRESENTATION

Simply teaching a foreign national as if he or she is a "local" student will not meet the full needs of that student. For foreign national students in our physical classrooms we can choose to assume (whether correct or not) that the foreign national student has sufficient skills in the host institution language to understand the concepts. However, we often use idioms and jargon that are not likely to be taught when a foreign student learns English.

Communication is an important piece of pedagogy and lectures are a primary method used to disseminate course materials to students. Chinese students may have learned English from a native Chinese speaker who had limited contact if any with native English speakers. Different versions/dialects of English may use different expressions to mean similar things. Britain, the U.S., Australia, New Zealand, and other English speaking countries frequently use different phrases to mean the same concept.

The issue is not that Chinese students cannot learn what the different expressions mean; the issue is that it causes a distraction from learning course materials. The student hearing "and Bob's your uncle" from a British teacher for the first time cannot discern if it is a passing remark or if it is germane to understanding the concept presented in the lecture. The student will spend time researching the meaning of "and Bob's your uncle" at the expense of time that could be spent on understanding concepts presented in the lecture.

A more complicated issue arises when a phrase in English does not map into a phrase in Chinese or vice versa. In English we may say "hello" but in Chinese the expression is "ni hao" – pronounced "knee how". It literally means "you good." Slang, idioms, and non-mapping phrases can be especially hard to translate into a similar concept. These present obstacles to learning course material not because the Chinese students cannot research a similar concept in the Chinese language but because the time spent on translating idioms and slang from English to Chinese reduces the amount of time pent on understanding the course materials.

PRELIMINARY SURVEY DESIGN

The initial draft of the anticipated survey is presented in Appendix 1. It is designed to capture demographic information about the responder as well as the school and subject where he/she taught in China. It has three sections devoted to how pedagogy may have changed in the areas of (1) communication from faculty to student, (2) participation between the faculty and student as well as among students, and (3) teaching of critical thinking skills. From the initial draft and testing the survey on several colleagues currently teaching in China the survey will be modified.

Survey results are not meant to be normative but to be descriptive. While research has been performed and continues to be performed on how Chinese students learn, there has not been a similar body of research concerning how U.S. faculty teach in Chinese institutions. A descriptive survey can lead to future researchers making hypotheses about how pedagogy should be changed to best meet the needs of Chinese students in Chinese colleges and universities. That further research should guide U.S. faculty in pedagogical choices as they teach in the emerging and significant Chinese market.

There are more open-ended on this preliminary survey than will be in successive surveys. This is an attempt to capture possible additional survey questions based on information from colleagues with experience teaching in China. The target survey response number for this preliminary survey is 30. Responses will be tabulated and a revised survey should be ready to be deployed within three months of completing analysis of this preliminary survey. Survey responders who request summary data from the initial survey will be asked to participate in one-on-one interviews to see how the instrument can be improved.

CONCLUSION

The Chinese market for college education is rapidly growing and many U.S. universities are seeking ways to capitalize on this new source of students. One simple way is to have U.S. faculty teach in partner schools in China. A problem is that many business schools list communication and critical thinking as learning goals. Many U.S. faculty perceive Chinese students fail to possess these skills. However, there is almost no literature in academic business journals that relates to teaching these skills to Chinese student. The initial survey followed by a more rigorous survey should provide insight into how U.S. faculty who have taught in China perceive the skill levels and what pedagogy should be used.

REFERENCES

1. Bennett, W. (2012) Why the Chinese are flocking to U.S. colleges, *CNN International Edition*, May 31, 2012, http://edition.cnn.com/2012/05/31/opinion/bennett-china-us-schools/index.html.
2. Biggs, J. (1996) Western misconceptions of the Confucian-heritage learning Culture, *The Chinese Learner: Cultural, Psychological and Contextual,* Eds. Watkins, D. and Briggs, J., 45-67.
3. Hefferman, T., Morrison, M. Basu, P. and Sweeney, A. (2010) Cultural differences, learning styles and transnational education, *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 32, 1, 27-39.
4. Lounamaa, P. and March, J. (1987) Adaptive coordination of a learning team, *Management Science*, 33, 1, 107-123.
5. Kolb, A. and Kolb, D. (2005) Learning styles and learning spaces: Enhancing experiential learning in higher education, *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, 4, 2, 193-212.

APPENDIX 1

Teaching in China

Introduction:

The purpose of the survey is to establish how U.S. instructors change their delivery of teaching materials and their style of teaching when they teach a class in China. It focuses on two areas of teaching; critical thinking and communication. Another issue is whether or not those changes persist when the instructor returns to the U.S. and teaches students in his or her "home" institution. This survey is for faculty who are currently employed at a U.S. college or university. Also, faculty responding will have at least one teaching experience in China (mainland), Hong Kong, or Taiwan.

All responses will be kept confidential.

The provided responses in the survey are general in nature. That is because this is exploratory research seeking to establish a baseline of responses. Future research may pose normative research questions. If there is not an exact match between the provided responses and your experience, please choose the response that is the closest match.

If you would like a summary of responses to the survey once they have been tabulated, please make the request by sending an e-mail to Dr. George Schell at *schellg@uncw.edu*.

Teaching Pedagogy (please answer these questions relating to your ***last*** experience teaching in China):

Communication From Instructor To Student

1. Concerning lectures, did you cover more or less material than the same course in the U.S.?

__ 50% or less than covered in the U.S. __ 25% less than covered in the U.S. __ Same amount as covered in the U.S.

__ 25% more than covered in the U.S. __ 50% more than covered in the U.S.

2. Concerning lectures, how much extra effort (compared to your U.S. classes) did you make so that the lectures were more easily understood by a non-native English speaker?

__ None or almost no extra effort __ 25% more effort __ 50% more effort __ 75% more effort __ 100% more effort

3. Concerning non-lecture materials for students to use outside of class (such as examples, study questions, illustrations, etc.), did you provide more or less material than the same class in the U.S.?

__ 50% or less than covered in the U.S. __ 25% less than covered in the U.S. __ Same amount as covered in the U.S.

__ 25% more than covered in the U.S. __ 50% more than covered in the U.S.

4. Concerning non-lecture materials for students to use outside of class (such as examples, study questions, illustrations, etc.), how much extra effort did you make so that the lectures were more easily understood by a non-native English speaker?

__ None or almost no extra effort __ 25% more effort __ 50% more effort __ 75% more effort __ 100% more effort

5. How much of the above changes in your course communications did you keep when you returned to teaching in the U.S.?

__ None or almost none __ 25% __ 50% __ 75% __ All or almost all

6. How much effort do you believe your students put out compared to students in a similar U.S. class?

__ 50% or less effort than in the U.S. __ 25% less than in the U.S. __ Same amount of effort as in the U.S.

__ 25% more than in the U.S. __ 50% more effort than in the U.S.

7. Please provide comments about communication between you and your students during lectures that you feel should be included in future surveys. Feel free to cover issues of student resources, preparedness from previous courses, technology available (to you and/or students), and other issues.

_____

Student Participation

1. Concerning student participation in class, were the Chinese students more or less participative with <u>you</u> in class?

__ 50% less participation __ 25% participation __ Same amount of participation

__ 25% more participation __ 50% more participation

2. Concerning student participation in class, were the Chinese students more or less participative with <u>other classmates</u> in class?

__ 50% less participation __ 25% participation __ Same amount of participation

__ 25% more participation __ 50% more participation

3. Consider the effort you spent to have Chinese students interact with <u>you</u>, was your effort more or less than with your U.S. classes?

__ 50% less effort in China __ 25% less __ Same amount of effort

__ 25% more effort __ 50% more effort in China

4. Consider the effort you spent to have Chinese students interact with <u>other classmates</u>, was your effort more or less than with your U.S. classes?

__ 50% less effort in China __ 25% less __ Same amount of effort

__ 25% more effort __ 50% more effort in China

5. How much of the above changes in your class participation efforts did you keep when you returned to teaching in the U.S.?

__ None or almost none __ 25% __ 50% __ 75% __ All or almost all

6. Please indicate what questions you would like to see on future surveys to gather information about Chinese students' participation with the instructor and/or other classmates.

_____

Critical Thinking

1. Concerning critical thinking skills, did you cover more or less material about critical thinking than the same course in the U.S.?

__ 50% less material in China __ 25% less __ Same amount of material

__ 25% more material __ 50% more material in China

2. What is your opinion concerning Chinese students' critical thinking skills compared to U.S. students in a comparable course?

__ 50% less skilled in China __ 25% less __ Same skill levels of critical thinking

__ 25% more skill __ 50% more skilled in China

3. How much of the above changes in your critical thinking course materials did you keep when you returned to teaching in the U.S.?

__ None or almost none __ 25% __ 50% __ 75% __ All or almost all

4. Please indicate what questions you would like to see on future surveys to gather information about Chinese students' critical think skills.

_____

Demographics:

If you prefer not to answer a question, please leave it blank.

1. What is your gender? __ Female __ Male

2. What is your age? __ 29 or below __ 30 to 39 __ 40 to 49 __ 50 to 59 __ 60 or older

3. What is your highest degree? __ Bachelors __ Masters __ Ph.D. or terminal degree in your area

4. What type of institution is your home college/university?

__ 2 year college __ 4 year college, no graduate programs __ 4 year college with graduate programs

5. Is your home institution public or private? __ Public __ Private

6. What is your tenure status? __ Tenured __ Not Tenured __ Not On Tenure Track

7. What is your rank? __ Lecturer or Instructor __ Assistant Professor __ Associate Professor __ Professor ___ Other

8. In which area do you teach (please choose the closest match)?

__ Language – English __ Language – not English __ Math

__ Social Science __ Physical Science __ another department in arts and sciences

__ Business __ Engineering __ Medicine __ Education

9. What is you proficiency in speaking Chinese? (any Chinese dialect; Mandarin, Cantonese, Shanghainese, or some other)

__ No ability beyond simple words __ Survival or "traveler's" Chinese __ Conversational __ Proficient/Fluent

Assignment in China (please answer these questions relating to your ***last*** experience teaching in China):

1. What was the length of your last teaching assignment in China?

__ Year assignment (calendar or academic) __ Semester assignment __ Summer study abroad assignment

__ Other - 30 days or less __ Other - more than 30 days

2. When was the last semester you taught in China?

Fall / Spring / Summer Please circle only one Year _____

3. At which college/university did you teach in China?

_____

4. In what city is the college/university located? Please also indicate China PRC, Taiwan, or Hong Kong.

_____

5. In what language did you teach?

__ Chinese __ English __ Other (please specify) _____