The Path Forward for Chinese Education

Master of Educational Leadership

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Abstract

Education plays a large part in the future advancement of the world’s societies, economies, and life satisfaction. The purpose of this research process is to examine several aspects of early childhood education, which is a foundational building block of education in general, and then specifically to focus on weaknesses in the Chinese educational system. I begin by comparing educational features, mostly applied in Western countries, to what is practiced today in China. China currently relies on traditional forms of education and could gain by changing some educational methods.

The framework of this project is divided into five parts. China is affected by many contemporary problems, which I discuss in detail in the first part. Then, I review changes China has applied in the past and adjustments it could make in the future to better its system. I provide a sample of the resources I reference and a timeline for my research project. There are key differences between early childhood education in China and Western countries, which include aspects of teaching methods, educational resources, and cultural norms. Based on my research, I developed several conclusions regarding issues China faces and potential solutions. Changes to education requires collaboration between government, education institutions, and parents. Moreover, China needs to pay more attention to improving the educational resources it provides. For instance, reducing teacher turnover would improve both educational quality and early child development. There is a long road ahead of us, so we must continually learn, adjust, and apply new educational methods to our own cultural contexts.
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Chapter One: Introduction

Statement of Purpose

A new global ranking of school systems, produced by the Economist Intelligence Unit for Pearson, has found Finland’s education system is the best in the world. The rankings combined international test results and data such as graduation rates between 2006 and 2010, the BBC reports. What does the best education look like? What is the best measurement of an education system? How has Finland become the best country for education?

I personally believe that their education system might be the best for themselves, but is not necessarily suitable for all countries. There is a famous quote by Shakespeare, “There are a thousand Hamlets in a thousand people’s eyes.” As a Chinese person, I am passionate about finding a better education system that could improve China’s education and meet international practices while remaining suitable to China’s domestic features. Thus, my research will mainly focus on past changes to the Chinese education system, which parts could be improved or innovated, what kinds of dilemmas we face, and prospects and visions for the future.

Personal Context

I am currently studying Educational Leadership for my master’s degree at Vancouver Island University. I worked at a college in Beijing from 2010 to 2014. My main job position was administration officer, and I was a class adviser for adult students as well. I taught English at a public kindergarten as a part time job for two years starting the third year of my working career. During this work, I found that some aspects of classroom instruction needed to be improved.
More recently, I left my job in China and came to the United States to participate in a cultural exchange program for a year, spending most of my time with American families and children, observing the local preschool and kindergarten, and building up my own abilities and understanding of educational ideas. Last year in my Vancouver Island University coursework, I completed a comparative report on Chinese versus American education systems that made me even more interested in education’s globalization and the diverse methods of education. I want the Chinese education system to become the best it can be by incorporating any compatible teaching methods and education philosophies.

**Statement of Problems**

As an educator, I believe high-quality education requires us to take responsibility to bring out the best in all learners, help individuals reach their potentials, and encourage them to achieve their personal goals. I believe every student has intelligence, skills, and unique abilities. Education is life-long learning, and we should find ways to encourage growth at all ages.

Although the Chinese education system has made huge positive changes, it still needs to face and overcome several dilemmas and challenges. These changes must be made at all levels including government, schools, and families. For example, the government should provide more and better policies to support the development of quality-orientation education. China, although rich in tradition, needs to find a balance between traditional education and modern education.

For example, Keju, an examination from thousands of years ago, was an important test used in imperial China for selecting government officials. In modern China, the GaoKao
has been modeled after Keju and is used as the college entrance examination. On one hand, such standardized test taking has long and traditional roots in China. On the other hand, many studies have shown that the high workload of Chinese students is neither effective nor healthy.

The Chinese government has tried to take steps by creating laws forcing schools to reduce academic burden on students, but in response parents began making their children take a variety of extracurricular classes outside of school. Many parents, influenced by their own education as youths, believe you must get good grades and get into a good university. Only then will you have a bright future. Certainly, gaining a good education helps one become stronger and more affluent – both financially and morally. However, is this the only way to be successful in life?

There is no doubt that formal education has improved living standards around the world and is a critical part of student and human development, so it is important that we in China strike an appropriate balance and try to help parents understand how they can help their children most effectively within the system that has been developed. But, as good as that system has been for Chinese students, changes are required. Questions remain: Generally, how can China improve its education system? Specifically, should schools help students cultivate individual interests instead of training them to pass standardized tests? Does this examination remain meaningful and valuable? What should China do with the Chinese college entrance examination?

During my Master of Education Research, which follows, I will research and discuss those topics in the following sections.
Rationale

Every place has its own culture, language, and education system. Each has advantages and disadvantages. Accepting anything blindly from others will likely result in the opposite of our wishes. I am undertaking this masters project because I believe China should find the way that fits itself the best, and as a Chinese person I want to help that process. The exploration of educational change is never ending, and my piece will be small, but I hope it will be important and will help.

There is no denying the Chinese education system has been changed in many good ways. First, in 2008, we legislated nine-years of free compulsory education for all Chinese children. This step is important in the history of Chinese education. Nine years of compulsory education enables children to receive a better education and provides educational access to all students regardless of their location, wealth, or social status. The next generation is the future of China and will help influence the world.

Second, China has been making much progress moving from test-oriented education to a quality-oriented education, which has improved students’ reasoning and abilities all-around. This change respects students’ individual development and their physical and mental health. Furthermore, as China participated in the World Trade Organization in 2001, education moved towards cultural pluralism and globalization. Many schools have established friendly co-operative ties and academic exchange programs with international education institutions. These include, for instance, Sino-foreign educational cooperation programs, teacher training programs in foreign countries, the Confucius institute, and so on.

In the 21st century, educational systems around the world influence, communicate,
compete with, and have a mutual tolerance and respect for each other. I will investigate world-wide education in a step-by-step process to improve my understanding of education so that I can have a large positive impact on the Chinese education system.

Overview

During this research project, I collected my data by discussing the subject with my professors at Vancouver Island University during course work and informal conversations; reading research papers and books; studying the Chinese Education Ministry website and looking through their data, statistics, and policies; watching documentaries about global educational systems; and attending conferences on education.

My hope is that the synthesis of this data gathering, which has ended in my research, will provide new ideas and open new doors that better reveal what the education system might look like in China ten years from now. I hope we all can continuously learn from each other and improve the quality of our own educations systems around the world.

At the end, I believe a prospective future for China’s education involves students who are passionate about learning and who don’t feel pressured towards rote memorization – as has traditionally been the case in China. The main purpose at school should be to help all students achieve their personal goals, help them cultivate their own personalities, and teach them to be creative and entrepreneurial. I believe parents will eventually – it might take another generation – become more opened-minded and won’t try to control or push their children too much towards old ways. Instead, children will have more freedom to explore on their own. The school will guide them to career paths that suits their passions.
In this chapter, I discussed my foundational beliefs that all countries and cultures have their own unique context that must be carefully considered developing an education system. China is no different, but the current system is lacking in many areas from teachers to regulations. In the next chapter, I will provide an overview of China’s educational system in the past and present, and the dilemmas and challenges that innovations to the systems might face.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Background

Education is extremely important for every country. Rowen (1997, as cited in LaFleur (2010) argues that the prosperity of a nation depends on the development of its educational system (p. 206). Education is the best way for individuals to improve themselves. China has a large population, with almost 400 million students. This number surpasses the total population of the United States (p. 206). The Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China states there were 241.2 thousand primary schools, 54.1 thousand middle schools, and 27.6 thousand high schools in 2015. In 2015, the Chinese education budget totaled 3.6 trillion yuan, 4.26% of Gross Domestic Product. As Zhao (2012) comments, “There is no doubt that the Chinese have a laser focus on education.”

I am passionate about educational changes and different ideas about education from around the world, especially those that could have a positive impact on China. The more I learn from my university classes, from my reading, and the more I gain from my own experience in education, the more I think many improvements need to be made to the education field in China. This literature review will involve three main pieces, including (a) changes that have been made to the Chinese education system in the past, (b) what challenges potential innovations might pose, and (c) prospects and visions for the future. This research will be on-going because educational change will continue forever, so my goal is to achieve a clear snapshot of the system today and suggest changes.

Changes in the Past

Everything in the world is changing, and will inevitably continue to change, to meet
the needs of constant development. Levin (2010) indicated that more than 60 percent of high school graduates in China now attend university, up from 20 percent in the 1980s.

Chinese citizens must attend school for at least nine years. According to data from China’s Ministry of Education, China has a 99 percent attendance rate for primary school. Nine years of compulsory education enables Chinese children to receive a better education and provide to all students regardless of their location, wealth, or social status. These policy changes have had a dramatic effect on poverty in rural China according to Zhang and Minxia (2006), who indicated that “the poverty-stricken population, which had inadequate food and clothing, was reduced from 250 million in 1978 to 8 million in 1995” (p. 265). Moreover, the nine years of compulsory education is provided by the government for free to the students, in addition to free textbooks and some allowance for living expenses. This policy gives all the children of school age equal access to education, regardless of their socioeconomic status. Compulsory education embodies an inevitable trend of social development to provide to all students fairly.

In addition, China has been making much progress moving from test-oriented education to a quality-oriented education, which has improved students’ reasoning and abilities all-around, respecting students’ individual development, and students’ physical and mental health. “To achieve the vision of quality-oriented education, the Chinese government has introduced drastic changes to the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in China, with variations across provinces and municipalities” (Tan & Chua, 2015). The Chinese Ministry of Education, the central government branch responsible for all educational institutions, has repeatedly issued regulations that forbid schools from offering extra lessons to students over
the last few decades (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2012). For example, in the Jiangsu Province, the local congress has introduced laws to punish elementary schools and preschools if they teach curriculum too early, such as mathematics, Chinese writing, or any foreign languages (Jiangsu Provincial People’s Congress, 2012). Quality-oriented education differs from test-oriented education, but it is not the complete opposite. With the rapid changes in technology today, China needs to continually pay great attention to the development of quality education, as well as cultivating innovation and entrepreneurship.

Furthermore, “In 1978 the Chinese government adopted a new policy which Westerners have referred to as the ‘open door policy.’ This policy has altered China’s development strategy from one based on self-sufficiency to one of active participation in the world market” (Huan, 1986, p. 1). These policy changes allowed both students and teachers to study abroad and expand their skill sets. The International Consultants for Education and Fairs and other education-focused organizations have theorized that Chinese students have a "dramatic impact on the global marketplace for education" and drive global trends in student mobility abroad. The Chinese Ministry of Education (2016) reports that 459,800 Chinese students went abroad to study in 2014. From 1978 to 2014, the number of people going abroad to study from China has reached 3.52 million. In recent years, the trend of Chinese students studying abroad has accelerated. In addition, many schools have established friendly co-operative ties and academic exchange programs with international education institutions.

With the development of globalization and diversity, students and educators have more chances to see and learn from Western countries, get to know new strategies and ideas, better understand international perspectives, and bring back education techniques from all
over the world, which should help China find the correct next steps in improving its system. George (2013) pointed out “the group of returned students has become quite visible in China. With the ideas, knowledge and expertise they bring home, these returning Chinese students have played important leadership roles in academia, government, business and other areas” (p. 11). These students will surely have a large impact on developing China’s future.

Dilemmas and Challenges of Innovation

Academic achievement is the continuation of a long Chinese tradition. Chinese students are good at taking tests and getting high scores, particularly in reading, math, and science. The cost of this tradition is that Chinese students are required to study for longer periods of time and take less part in extracurricular activities.

Government policy support

Chinese education departments have been working toward transforming their education for decades, but these numerous orders have not been effective so far. Li (2010) claims that the loudest criticism is China’s failure to produce creative and entrepreneurial talents through its education system because everyone must focus and prepare to pass the Gaokao, the college entrance examination. Considering whether to end the college entrance examination system or what form to replace the college entrance examination system with is a complicated problem. To solve this problem, China’s education system is constantly exploring the next steps, trying to find the best directions for Chinese students.

Zhao Yong is the presidential chair and associate dean for global education at the University of Oregon’s College of Education. He pointed out that “exams not only work against the development of individuality and creativity, but also prevent equality by limiting
the opportunities for the laboring class to gain access to higher education” (Zhao, 2014, p. 144). I am inclined to agree with Zhao’s opinion that the college entrance examinations are a double-edged sword, with advantages and disadvantages. However, determining the proper metrics to allow entrance to colleges still needs much deliberation before disregarding test scores. Simply stated, the Chinese people wouldn’t stand for such an abrupt shift in culture.

**Influence from school leaders and teachers**

People spend a large amount of time accepting schools’ guidance in learning cultural and social norms, moral codes, and values. Nowadays, I believe the biggest problem in schools is that teachers do not encourage students in personalized development; instead, students are all taught the same way and emerge like products from an assembly line. The Open University (2008) noted, “In most Chinese schools, students will be mostly be learning through listening, note-taking and reading the textbook. Activities such as problem solving, critical analysis, collecting evidence and experimentation are rare, and there is little emphasis on study skills in many schools” (p. 23). In addition, children in China have homework to do from morning until night, so they have little time for fun or social lives.

Lucenta (2011) reported that Chinese education’s main aim is training students to pass standardized tests, instead of peaking students’ interest in learning. The Gaokao is critical to students’ futures. The importance of this test forces the school system to teach to the test at the cost of everything else. Teachers don’t have time to engage students in open-ended discussion, instead students spend all their time memorizing facts by rote. A study sampling 1,506 high school students concluded that students in China study longer hours than students in Japan, Korea, and the United States, with Chinese students averaging 11.7 hours a
day (Zhang, 2013). The impact of long study hours primarily focused on traditional learning influences students to overdevelop their sense of duty and to lack creativity. Students are trained to listen to superiors’ instructions instead of cultivating their own opinions. Because course work is purely rote learning, students’ creativity is stifled from the beginning of formal education. Duty and tradition are important strengths of Chinese society, but overreliance on these traits does not develop well-rounded students. How can China keep the best of the past and merge it with the hopes of the future? This issue is complex, but important.

On the other hand, strengthening teacher professionalism should not be ignored. Using Finland as an example, Sahlberg (2013) stated that people who become teachers have to sincerely want to be teachers. It is difficult to become a teacher in Finland without a high level of general knowledge, good social skills, and clear moral purpose. Teachers in China need to have more strict professional standards and be full of passion regarding the cause of education. Moreover, teachers must teach students how to think, not what to think. Teachers should also respect individual needs and provide a loving and relaxed learning environment for students.

From the data that I collected and analyzed to this point, I believe schools in China should adjust their focus, to achieve balance between academics and students’ personal growth. However, achieving this balance is difficult without policy support.

**General cultural bias of parents: Learning is the only way to go**

Parents are both a child’s first and lifelong guides and also play a significant role in their children’s development. In China, many parents believe that it is important for their
children to achieve academic success, so they send their children to the best schools possible where they expect their children to learn, work hard, complete assignments, get great grades, and, as a result, find a good job. Therefore, Chinese parents like to involve children in many extra-curricular tutoring classes.

According to Zhao (2012), “parents make a significant investment in their children’s education. They spend enormous amounts on securing a good school and extra lessons for their children. Over 80 percent of parents send their children to tutorial schools” (p. 124). Many Chinese parents start sending their children to after school tutoring as early as kindergarten. Laurence (2016) indicated there is popular, old saying in China is “never let the kids lose at the starting line.” Therefore, children take extra-curricular tutoring classes three or four days a week, and even the whole weekend. Parents want their children to get good scores, get into better universities, and thus have higher competitiveness in the job market.

In my opinion, Chinese parents have some room to improve their attitudes about education: for example, they can give their children more freedom, let children have free time, and let them explore the world. Getting a good score is not the only measure of success. Helping children develop independence, communication skills, collaboration with others, and showing them how to relax and enjoy life should be as important to a child’s health and happy life as academic achievement.

Looking Forward to the Future

“Education must face modernization, the world, and the future,” said Deng Xiaoping, a Chinese communist leader and a powerful figure in the People's Republic of China.

The fundamental purpose of education is to cultivate people: the fundamental
purpose of education is not to pursue higher tests scores, get into the best school, nor find a high-paying job. For individuals, I believe the role of education everywhere (not just in China) is to inspire students' interest, excavate the potential of students, and lead them to become useful people. For any nation and society, education should foster qualified builders and successors, pass on culture, and promote the progress of humans and of civilization.

China has been working hard to improve its education system, but it still has a long way to go. There are many types of education systems in the world and each shows distinctive features, which are closely related to their own culture. Each culture or society needs to consider its own context before learning from other countries; accepting anything blindly from others might do more harm than good. As I engage in the work of researching to help improve China’s educational system, I believe Chinese education should keep exploring potential teaching methods that are suitable to China that could positively improve students qualitatively. I believe China’s educational system should strengthen communication and cooperation between governments, schools, and parents. Any forward-thinking educational system should listen to voices and interests from all sides and use these voices and interests to achieve a path of sustainable development for Chinese education in the future.

In this chapter, I discussed the positive changes that China has been taking over the last several decades to move from test-oriented teaching to quality-oriented education, from a relatively closed system to one with many students traveling abroad, and regulations China has introduced. On the other hand, China faces deep cultural barriers when considering changes to formal education. In the following chapter, I will establish my research timeline and my data gathering procedures.
Chapter Three: Procedures and Methods

In this chapter, I will lay out my research plan for engaging in study that will help me better understand education globally so that I might imagine how the essence of these changes might help to improve China’s educational system. I have divided my master’s research into two parts: part one is a study of exemplary education systems globally; part two is my speculation about how the best of the world’s educational methods might be integrated into the Chinese educational system. In this Chapter Three, as well, I will give both the reader a picture of what the remainder of my thesis looks like.

From my perspective, I believe gathering information is the most critical and essential procedure for a research thesis. My paper is supported by the research data that I found, not just my own thoughts written down. Moreover, as an academic paper, everything must refer to and be found in legitimate and original educational sources.

There are many aspects of Chinese education that I could have researched and discussed, but I delimited my research and mainly focused on early childhood education for my research project. In addition to the fact that I am interested this topic, it also represents probably one of the most controversial areas of study in Chinese education. In my research project, I tried to find as much information as I could, both in support and opposition of educational change in China so that I could present as clear a picture as possible to readers who do not understand Chinese education. At the end of the Chapter Four, I will review how China’s education system is impacted by school education, family education, and social education; then I will work to compare the differences, methods, reasons, and results of the diverging directions of Western countries and China.
Specifically, as I worked through my research, I came to divide Chapter Four into five parts. The first part includes a definition of early childhood education and discusses why I would like to talk about it. The second part shows what early childhood education looks like in China at the present day. The third part attempts to explain what is happening globally in the field of early childhood education that could inform China’s educational system. The fourth part will discuss how I believe China can adapt its education system based on what is happening globally and find the best ways to improve its system in ways that best suit China’s unique needs to improve its educational system. The fifth part will include a summary and reflection that includes my underlying thesis from which I began my masters work: Every country has the right to choose an education system that suits its national conditions best; however, I believe we can all learn from each other’s methods to develop education.

I would like to compare using three factors that differ between early childhood educations in China vs. Western countries: (a) classroom environment, (b) teaching content and methods, and (c) teaching qualifications. Chapter Four will include the following:

**Teaching environment**

According to Klein (2014), a good study environment for preschool can enhance learning. Chapter Four includes research into the following areas:

1. The effects of classroom arrangement;
2. The influence and importance of classroom environments;
3. The layout and geographical environment of Chinese classrooms in early childhood education;
4. The layout and environment of Western countries’ classrooms in early childhood education; (This section will reflect on China’s own system, and how to apply quintessence of others’ systems into China’s system.);

5. Compare the two systems in ways that considers both benefits and detriments.

**Teaching methods**

Finland is a world leader in education, but why? According to a Finnish novelist Samuli Paronen, “Real winners do not compete.” (Pasi Sahlberg, 2015, Finnish Lessons 2.0.p.139). I believe Paronen believes that, in any performance, there are people who generously help others because they confidently understand that their own standards are high enough that they need no competitive proof – either to themselves or to others. They no longer expend energy trying to prove anything; instead, they expend their energy helping others. As Sahlerg suggests, teachers in Finland are not competitive, nor do they teach competition by engaging their students in it.

Further, based on LynNell (2011, September),

Teachers in Finland spend fewer hours at school each day and spend less time in classrooms than American teachers. Teachers use the extra time to build curriculums and assess their students. Children spend far more time playing outside, even in the depths of winter. Homework is minimal. Compulsory schooling does not begin until age 7. (par. 14)

Finland’s education system believes there is no need to rush young learners to study too early; instead, Finnish believes it should wait for children to mature so they can absorb knowledge better and faster. There is no point risking stressing children out so early when the
results are neither effective for learning and might result in students learning to dislike learning in general and the school specifically. This comparison highlights differences found in China’s educational system. In Chapter Four, I discuss these differences:

1. The study hours in China for young children.
2. The teaching content, methods, and assessment for Chinese preschool.
3. Pedagogy and curriculum in Western countries for early childhood education.
4. A comparison of the two styles for advantages and disadvantages.
5. An answer to the question: How should China carry out education reform for early education?

**Educational resources**

In this part, I will mainly discuss the number of early childhood education teachers and qualifications. In addition, I will discuss the cause of China’s lack of early childhood education teachers and the high turnover rate. Moreover, I will try to give solutions to alleviate these issues.

In Chapter Four, I also discuss:

1. Early childhood education teachers’ qualifications in China.
2. Early childhood education teaching qualifications in Western countries.
3. I will discuss the reasons why early childhood education lacks teachers in China.
4. An answer to the question: How should China improve the professional development of early childhood teachers?

In Chapter Five, as a young teacher and researcher who cares deeply about China’s
educational system and hopes to help improve it, I hope to use this opportunity to help find better education methods through a comparison of differences of Chinese education with the world’s best educational systems. At the same time, I hope this thesis provides some helpful suggestions that might help Chinese educators develop healthier and more well-rounded students in the present and for the future.

**Research Timeline**

My timeline for this project was as follows:

**Research Design**

The goal of my project was to research changes that happened in the Chinese education system during the past, study which parts could be improved or innovated, come to better understand what kind of dilemmas we will face as Chinese educators, and design and imagine prospects or visions for the future. Because a large portion of the project focused on future changes to the education system, obviously there are no exact answers. Most of my research involved collecting data from a variety of books and online resources.

**Step 1: Getting Started**

My first step in my research process was to find a research topic that I was passionate about it, wanted to keep working on, and hoped to dig deeper into. I chose the future of Chinese education as my topic. I remain passionate about it.

**Step 2: Research Plan**

Time management is really important for all studies/projects. My second step was to develop a plan that would help keep my study and life on track, thereby improving work efficiency. I created a timeline for my whole research process and tried my best to complete
Step 3: First Round of Data Collection

During the first round of data collection, I worked to find all kinds of topics that might be related to my research project. I read extensively, increased my relevant background knowledge, and considered many ideas about the research. During this stage of the research process, I believe I irrigated my mind so that I might understand the problems more fully.

Read literature. There was so much literature to read, so I started to read from Vancouver Island University’s databases and library. Also, I continually tried to write literature reviews for the articles that I read. I must note that, because of the nature of my topic and its currency, the net I cast for my reading was perhaps wider than many graduate students. I felt that, although books and peer reviewed educational articles were valuable, there was value in reading magazines, newspapers, and online journals. Thus, I have included these more up-to-date sources in my research. At the same time, I tried to be judicious in my choice of what to read and used my best sense as a growing scholar to weed out sources that were problematic or that lacked depth of insight.

For example, the following were readings I began with (full citations can be found in my reference list):

1. Take China or Make China? By George Ye [Online article]
2. Why are Finland’s Schools Successful? By LynNell Hancock [Online Journal]
3. Why Finland’s Education System Shows Us that “Less is More” By Kelly Day [Online Journal]
4. A Shifting Education Model in China. By Bruce Fuller [Online article]
After all my readings, I have come to understand that education is not only for a single country, but it is important for all countries. Although some counties do better, all countries have room to improve. We – as global humans – are trying to build and have a diverse, collaborative, healthy, and sustainable education system for the living world. Academic achievements can be used as one measure of success, but is never should be the only measure. The ultimate goal of education should to cultivate a well-rounded person and enhance human communities, which classroom education alone does not achieve. Education in the future should teach students in accordance with their individual aptitudes to help students develop stronger fundamental skills while also encouraging individual passions, better community relationships, socialization, and emotional stability via individualized education, so that all children and adults can better learn to serve the society and achieve self-realization in the future. I suppose in laying out these goals, I have come from a Chinese perspective.

Read books. Some education books were highly recommended by our professors. These include:

1. *Who is Afraid of the Big Bad Dragon? Why China has the Best (and Worst) Education System in the World?* By Zhao Yong. [Book]


I read through these and several other books and highlighted key points. What impressed me most was the book written by the Chinese academic, teaching in the United States, Zhao Yong. This educator and author mainly talks about the differences between the...
Chinese education system and North America’s. In his work, he compares the two countries, and presents each advantages and disadvantages. For example, Chinese parents invest much money and time in their children. Schools have extra classes for teaching and good amount of homework for students. Therefore, Chinese students are good at taking tests and getting high scores, particularly in reading, math, and science, but education in China neglects students’ creativity and imagination.

However, Gao (2003) indicated that American education is exactly the opposite: there are no uniform textbooks, no standardized tests, and no rankings of students. At the same time, teachers respect and support students’ individual differences, help students find out their own potentials, and inspire students to pursue life paths. However, American education lacks overall academic achievement. Gao’s book inspired me to think more rigorously and comprehensively about the complexity of such problems. Different education systems create different kinds of talents, but all education systems have pros and cons. In the future, my goal is for China’s education system to have fewer downsides and more upsides.

**Attend conferences, events, and workshops.** As an example of how I collected my data, I attended the Western Canadian Association for Student Teaching (WestCAST) held from the 16th to 17th of February 2017 at Vancouver Island University. The WestCAST is an annual education conference that has been going on for thirty years. One of the most fascinating presentations I saw talked about the positive impact of video games as a learning tool in educational classrooms.

The presenter believed that video games provided a unique opportunity to incorporate students’ interests while still meeting the learning outcomes prescribed by the
province. People usually do not pay attention to boring classroom strategies, but interesting activities help students learn. Adding videogames into classrooms will help students understand and master course knowledge, it also improves students’ study interest and enthusiasm. Internet and technology promotes changes to the education structure and teaching mode. I believe using videogames as a teaching method makes class and learning more fun. However, there is a line that teachers must keep in mind: specifically, we should not let students become addicted to videogames at the expense of other learning opportunities.

Another presentation I attended was the Vancouver Island University Create Conference on Wednesday, March 29, 2017. This conference showcased major projects and research completed by VIU students through posters, displays, artwork, performances, and presentations. Attending these presentations gave me more ideas about how to present my findings in the near future when I have completed my work.

Watch documentaries and movies. “Waiting for Superman” is a good documentary which talks about the American education system. Many people believe the American system is good, but there are still many problems within the system. These include difficulties finding high-quality teaching resources and teachers not caring about their students. This documentary gave me many feelings, and many questions remained in my head after I watched it. What should the characteristics of a great school be? Is the teacher’ tenure system reasonable? What is the measure of a good teacher? How can we improve our education system?

As I have stated before, my grounding for this work is the belief that education is
important for everyone. I think all the parents in the world are the same; they always want to
give their children the best education they can. But good educational resources are always
limited. For example, the mother in a documentary I watched wanted her child to get into a
better school so she was prepared to wake up at 5 am and take a two hours bus to get there. It
touched my heart deeply, as an educator. We need to create an equitable and equal education
system for all learners, even though that is not easy. Education should be all children, and all
families.

**Research journal.** My research journal became a great way to collect data and to
reflect upon my own thinking as well. During the time between when I finished my course
work at Vancouver Island University and the present, I utilized a journal format to write down
thoughts from my discussions with others and from the books I have read.

**Conversations.** As part of my research work, I continued to have conversations and
to make notes about these conversations with my classmates and instructors; and, I gained
more ideas and opinions from others. Being a good listener sometimes is more important than
studying alone because the process of listening can refresh your mind and bring new points of
view to the research that I am doing.

**TED Talks.** I watched many TED talks on educational systems throughout the globe.

For instance, these included:

- Ken Robinson: “How to escape education’s Death Valley”.
- Rita Pierson: “Every kid needs a champion”.
- Clint Smith: “The danger of silence”.
- Diana Laufenberg: “How to learn? From mistakes”.
• Emily Pilloton: “Teaching design for change”.

Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China website. This website was the most authoritative and the fastest way for me to come to know and understand the policies and information about the Chinese education field. Websites:

http://www.moe.gov.cn/

http://www.chinaedu.edu.cn/

Step 4: Sorting the Data

As I collected data from all these different resources in Step 3, I gained a great deal of insight about most aspects of the education field. I sorted data into separate piles by the types, such as “Potential Changes”, “Challenges” and “Future Projections”. This system made it easier to review the data often when new information was found.

Step 5: Second Round of Data Collection

After the first round of data collection, I worked to find several areas to narrow and focus my search around. These areas were those that fit my topic best. All further research was based on questions from those first pieces of data and related to keyword searches. I filled in as much concrete information as possible during this step.

Step 6: Organizing and Analyzing the Data

First, I highlighted all the important points in the articles. Then, I summarized the most important points. Using technology, I put all the pieces of data in different folders on my computer. Next, I began to organize the data to form arguments and trends for my paper. I started to put the data into a sensible order and built up my paper around those points.

Step 7: Reviewing and Shaping the Report
Finally, as I was completing my paper, I reviewed all my sources, tried to ensure they were valid, and ensured the conclusions I had drawn were clearly supported. I consulted my critical friends, the writing center, and instructors to get feedback. I worked to ensure there were no grammar or spelling problems in my research project.

**Step 8: Presenting Research Project**

At the end of my research, I have written and presented a White Paper about education in China, that both shows the work I have been doing and attempts to address the question put forth in a scholarly manner. This goal of this research will be on-going because educational change in China, and elsewhere, will continue forever. This work was just a beginning, and the steps of exploring educational change are never ending.

In this chapter, I discussed the different ways I collected data and reviewed the chronological timeline and plan I used for my research project which helped me manage my time effectively. In the next chapter, I focus on specific aspects of early childhood education in China that require attention. I explore potential solutions based on my inspections into outstanding educational methods from around the world.
Chapter Four: Early Childhood Education

In this chapter, I will shift focus down to one specific part of the Chinese educational system, early childhood education. I will provide detailed analysis of problems in China’s early childhood education and propose solutions in those areas.

Education not only helps people gain basic knowledge about the world, but also could help people live better lives and gain more achievement in their careers. Moreover, the impact of education on social development and economic growth is crucial to all countries. As shown, early childhood is an important stage in human development (Early Childhood Development: The key to a full and productive life, 2016). In my opinion, early childhood education provides children with fundamental tools to deal with life effectively. Therefore, focusing on early childhood development can help a child’s physical and mental health grow.

Education creates human futures.

China has the largest education system in the world, with almost 260 million students. There are more than 15 million teachers working in about 514,000 different schools (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2014). However, the education styles in China have many significant differences compared to Western countries. This chapter will mainly focus on early childhood education which plays an important role as the first component of basic education and the foundation of life-long education. Alberta Education (2018) claims that children who had positive experiences and were cared for during their early years, especially the first six years of life, are more likely to develop, learn, and reach their full potential.
An overview of early childhood education in China

Based on Wikipedia (2018), the definition of the early childhood period is from birth to about age eight. However, China considers early childhood education to end at age six. For instance, primary education in China starts at age of six for most of children as set forth in provisions of the Education Law of the People’s Republic of China in the second chapter (2015), which implements early childhood education, primary education, secondary education, and higher education in the country. Further, Bradley (2015), who is a high school principal in China, also claimed that in the Chinese education system early childhood education is for children under the age of six. In addition, early childhood education in China includes three forms: nurseries, kindergarten, and preschool (pre-primary school in China).

Moreover, early childhood education is not compulsory, and there are many privately owned kindergartens and nurseries. Based on a published report from the Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China (2017) there were 239,800 kindergartens in the whole country in 2016, an increase of 16,100 over the previous year. Of these, 154,200 are private kindergartens. The number of private kindergartens has exceeded the number of public kindergartens and is gradually becoming a main part of China’s early childhood education.

With the development of the Chinese economy, more and more attention is being paid to education. In China, 44,1386 million children who were enrolled in kindergarten, an increase of 1,490,300 kindergarteners from the previous year. There were 2,498,800 kindergarten leaders and teachers, an increase of 195.6 thousand over the previous year. The gross enrollment rate of Chinese children in early childhood education reached 77.4%, which
was 2.4 percentage points higher than the previous year (Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China, 2017). However, overall, early childhood education is still the weak link in the Chinese education system due to the lack of education resources, inequality between urban and rural development, unqualified teaching staff, a lack of sufficient kindergarten facilities, and sometimes a steep tuition cost.

The environments of preschool

Children’s experiences are limited by their surroundings; the environment we provide for them has a crucial impact on the way a child’s brain develops (Strong-Wilson & Ellis, 2007, p.43). Environment, as a kind of invisible guide, affects the development of children's intelligence and can play a unique role promoting the harmonious development of personality. That is to say, the creation of kindergarten environments has become an important part of the work for teachers in early childhood education.

Klein (2014) stated creating a well-designed pre-school classroom environment helps children interact, learn, and avoid unproductive activities, such as running and getting in each other’s way; therefore, the environment actually becomes another teacher in the classroom. However, the environments of many kindergartens in China are set up by teachers who have little knowledge of how to design classrooms for kindergartners: their lack of knowledge often leads to sub-optimal layouts. Such environment creation is the teacher's wishful thinking based on that teacher's limited understanding from an adult perspective; she/he does not consider the children's interests and hobbies much, and thus will lose influence on the children's personality development.
Teachers who are proficient balancing layouts and their individual students’ needs help provide many more opportunities for children to use their hands-brain capacity. According to HundrED, “We have pretended to be doing the best for kids but we have not really. We have just done what is convenient for ourselves, and that has to change” (Heppell, par.26). Therefore, when setting up the environment, kindergartens can not only assume subjective opinions, but should fully consider the children's age characteristics and personality features when creating a suitable environment.

Klein (2014) pointed out that we should design preschool classrooms carefully so that they suit the needs and comforts of the student who will occupy them. Comfortable surroundings make students happier and help them learn better and more (par. 5). Based upon my own experience, the traditional Chinese classroom, including kindergartens, have all the tables facing the teacher, a teacher standing in front of the classroom teaching, each student listening carefully and behaving well. However, kindergarten classroom setup in Western countries usually is composed of a whole-group circle, where all students gather together, and where it is easy for them to work together. Moreover, most young children in Canada are free to play at pre-school. Canadian schools are set up clearly and organized well: there are art areas, dress-up areas, drawing areas, mess-up areas, reading areas, and playgrounds. Teachers do not constrain students from exploring alone, and the classroom layout is flexible and helps students move freely.

Chen Heqin (1940), the founder of children pedagogy in China, is a famous expert on early childhood pedagogy and psychology. His essence in the “Living Education” theory indicated children should act independently and choose their own activities; every child can
think, we should let them to think; all children can explore and discover, we should let them do so; and, what they find in the world is their world indeed. That is to say, children’s understanding of things is formed by their own perception and activities.

In addition, it would be nice if young children were consulted about their classroom environments so that teachers could apply that feedback to personalize spaces for their students. Adding such personalization would increase student comfort and give students a sense of ownership over their learning space, thereby enhancing their ability to learn. For instance, teachers could allow the children to participate in discussions about classroom features and help establish themes. If these discussions were to take place, then teachers and students could work together to decorate the space. In this process, children's positive investment, joy of success, and hands-on practice abilities have been improved. Therefore, the kindergarten environment creation is not only confined to the teacher’s choice, but can be used to encourage children to take an active part in its creation.

**Teaching methods**

As a master’s student in the education field in Canada, I visited and volunteered at several different preschools and kindergartens in North America. I feel like the education methods in Western countries greatly differs from education in China.

In Western countries, teachers are often given more freedom and flexibility about how they teach. Day (2015) claimed that, in Finland, teachers are given much more control over how they run the classroom and what they teach. They are trusted to take appropriate risks and try new activities with students to increase engagement instead of being stuck on a
strict curriculum track. They have the freedom to engage each student individually and craft classes that suit each student’s interest to educate them in both standard curriculum and basic living skills. Learning and Child Care Centers indicated “curriculum is not a list of topics that need to be taught or activities that have to be completed. It is the way teachers design interactions, relationships, environments, and experiences to create learning opportunities. It describes your intention to support children’s learning and development” (Manitoba Child Care Program, p.4).

In China, the traditional Chinese model with the teacher directing the whole-class session is still the standard practice. Most curriculum reform ideas have been expressed by teachers in their self-reported beliefs, but have not been implemented into their teaching practices (Li, Wang, & Wong, 2011, p.6). I believe teachers should control the classroom but should not dominate the classroom; instead, teachers should give their students more freedom and let them think for themselves. Teachers should give general instructions regarding the curriculum and allow students absorb the information using their own strategies. Moreover, a teacher’s responsibility is to observe each student in class to determine if that student is reaching the skills and ability levels for the student’s age group, to give positive feedback and encouragement, and to find the unique traits of each child to help that child become the best person he or she could be.

Additionally, in Western countries students are given more freedom in the classroom. For instance, methods such as learning through play are used as an effective way to educate students. Play leverages children’s natural curiosity to encourage them to investigate, examine, engage critical thinking, and resolve problems in their own individual
The Council of Ministers of Education Canada (2014) has reported that “Intentional teaching involves educators being deliberate and purposeful in creating play-based learning environments — because when children are playing, children are learning. (p. 18).” Bennett and Tayler (2006) further explained that Finland’s early childhood curriculum guidance emphasized the important use of play and games during early ages because knowledge is more likely to be retained if learned with joy.

However, in China, teachers offer children few freedoms because they worry children will get hurt and they feel they do not have enough time to cover all the required curriculum even under current circumstances. First, Chinese parents are sensitive to their children being in danger. Therefore, young Chinese students are quite restricted compared to their peers in Western countries. For example, in my own experience I encountered a Chinese kindergarten student living in Canada whose parents were worried about the fact that Canadian kindergartens let students play outside during snow or rain. To them, this seemed like an unnecessary risk. A second example, my classmate’s 5-year old daughter told me that she was allowed to play quietly during nap time, whereas she would be forced to actually take a nap during nap time in China. She preferred the freedom to choose what she wanted to do and that made Canadian kindergarten more enjoyable for her.

Second, Chinese parents often feel strongly that their own child needs an educational advantage over their peers, so they select schools with high curriculum workloads. Chen (2018), who is Minister of Education of China, has reported that many private kindergartens start teaching primary school curriculum early since parents want their child to have a higher chance of admission into better primary schools. It is likely that
Chinese parents would see more freedom in the classroom as a waste of time.

There is no generally applicable teaching method that can be effectively adopted in all different cultures and countries. Context and culture vary across the world, therefore effective teaching methods and curriculum must identify and utilize unique aspects of the environment. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) pointed out that the state of Education in Finland is the result of more than thirty years of exploration, reform, and continuous improvement, not something that happened instantly. Finland’s education was not the best when it began this journey thirty years ago. In the beginning they also considered modelling or copying the educational ideas and methods of the United States, Sweden, and other countries; but, instead, Finland choose its own path, which has uniquely and successfully suited Finland context.

Therefore, based on the data I have found, I believe the teaching methods of early childhood education in China should no longer be limited to traditional classroom teaching. Teachers should gradually decrease the amount of time they spend teaching using expository methods in kindergartens and preschools. Children should have a happy and cheerful time while they are at school. Early education should provide maximum freedom and more opportunities to children. Students should be able to have more choice about how and what they want to learn; teachers should guide and inspire them, try to make learning fun, and teach students how to independently learn. Students should be provided with customized curriculum that actively engages them instead of being forced to listen to the teacher and passively absorb information.
Educational resources

As stated by Joint Urban Studies Center (2006), in the past decade, early childhood education had a great positive influence on children and society. Growing evidence shows high quality early childhood education is not only conducive to children in the short-term, but also will benefit them lifelong, which in turn promotes society’s sustainable development.

Shortage of early childhood teachers

Nowadays, early childhood education in China faces one main dilemma, the lack of school teachers. As a result, the existing teachers are insufficiently experienced; their quality and professional skills need to be further expanded. In China, the Ministry of Education (2013) has stipulated that full-time kindergarten classes either need to provide two full-time teachers and a child-minder or three full-time teachers, and should reduce the ratio of teaching staff to children to 1 to 7 up to 1 to 9. Whereas, the actual ratio of the kindergarten teaching staff to children in the whole country is 1 to 26. Even the most developed areas, such as Beijing and Shanghai, only have a ratio around 1 to 13, which does not meet the suggested standard. Some economically depressed areas lack even more early childhood teachers.

Throughout all my reading and research, I considered that one of the most important reasons for early childhood education’s lack of teachers is because the high turnover rate of teachers. According to Sohu statistics (2017), over the past five years China has lost about a million early education educators. This loss is the equivalent of 40 percent of kindergarten teachers leaving their jobs each year. Early childhood teachers’ mobility has become a dominant problem, which can be psychologically and emotionally damaging to young
students who no longer have a stable set of teachers.

Additional evidence provided by Bright Horizons (2003) indicates that when an early childhood teacher leaves a program, children and parents often feel a sense of loss. Not only does the familiar teacher leave, but also a stranger shows up in class to teach, which can be traumatizing for young children. Thus, figuring out how to reduce the high resignation rate of early childhood education teachers is becoming more and more necessary.

Based on Sohu (2017) and all my research, the following sections present the main causes early childhood teachers leave their jobs:

Reason #1: Countless meetings, and many inspections

China Education News Network (2015) has showed that kindergarten teachers are often distracted by too many of inspections and assessments and some of the meetings are not necessary. Such a system of excess meetings and inspections wastes teachers’ energy and limits their time to prepare for classes. Consequentially, this leaves little time for teachers to engage in curriculum design, reflect on teaching methods with other teachers, or give additional support to students in need during their daily working hours.

Reason #2: Low salary, poor social welfare

China’s Minister of Education Zhao (2018) asserted that kindergarten teachers are among the poorest paid education professionals in China. Many kindergartens pay low salaries and don’t include good benefits. Early childhood educators do not make enough money to comfortably cover basic living expenses, so they often change their line of work. The lower salary and extra work needed also makes early childhood education unappealing to new graduates.
Reason #3: High pressure at work

Kindergarten teachers, in addition to the daily course schedule, also need to worry about children’s safety. Because of their age, children are weak in self-care and self-defense, so accidents can happen at any time. This places a large psychological burden on educators, making an already stressful job even harder. Furthermore, due to the one-child policy, the only child is usually overprotected and indulged by parents and grandparents. If this child had any accident in school, parents will react very strongly.

Reason #4: Low social status; parents do not show respect

Hargreaves and Shirley (2012) proclaimed, “Teachers and learning have high status in Finnish society” (p. 53). In contrast, Rongcheng Education Bureau (2018) found that, although Chinese primary and secondary school educators are respected, parents usually feel that early childhood educators are little more than babysitters and thus do not treat them with much respect or value their professional skills. To attract more qualified teachers to the professions, we must first convince the public to respect the role early educators play in children’s success.

Reason #5: Chinese teachers are not provided with enough professional development or training

Economist Intelligence Unit (2012) concludes that the Finnish teachers spend liberally on professional development training. Teachers’ daily schedules in Finland foster teacher collaboration when planning lessons, discussing challenges, and other professional responsibilities. However, in China, a kindergarten teacher I know said that, after working two years, she was very familiar with the routine and details of the work. She wanted to
expand her skillset, but there were no opportunities for professional development offered by her school. This lack of professional development led her to feel there is not a better future for her in early childhood education.

**Teacher qualifications**

Building a high-quality early childhood education system not only requires more teachers, but also ensures that teachers are of a high quality. High-quality, early childhood educators are key to children’s healthy growth and self-development (Sheridan, Edwards, Marvin & Knoche, 2009). At the same time, the United Nations Children’s Fund (2010) stated that education during a child’s early years can have serious effects on brain development and continually affect the child for years into the future. Therefore, having quality early childhood teachers is critical because they play an important role in cultivating children’s intelligence and helping their brains fully develop.

Due to the reasons I mentioned earlier, the early childhood education institutions in China find it difficult to attract highly-educated people for a long duration. The lack of the rigid entry level qualifications, where applicants have no degree of the academic qualifications or the low specialization, results in underqualified people becoming kindergartens teachers. I will discuss two points in this section:

**Point #1: Employment certification requirement**

My review of the body of research concluded that Finland is universally recognized as having one of the best education systems in the world, particularly for early childhood education. Finland also has a strict system to select teachers, according to the Economist Intelligence Unit (2012), “to ensure quality, Finland has systematically developed teaching as
a professional career. Teachers have to attain high university qualifications: all have three-or four-year bachelor’s degree in education, while many complete a master’s degree” (p.13).

For the purpose of improving the quality of early childhood education, starting in 2010, the Chinese Ministry of Education began requiring early childhood teachers, primary school teachers and secondary school teachers have to spend 120 hours in special training program before beginning their normal job responsibilities (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2016). Moreover, the Chinese Ministry of Education (2017) issued "opinions on the implementation of the early childhood education action plan," which required that, by 2020, China would basically implement certification for kindergarten teachers. This means, from that point forward only those teachers who have qualified can be hired as an early childhood teacher. The government is energetically reorganizing and standardizing early childhood education regulations to create a high-quality education environment for all learners. All the literature I reviewed regarding the Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China indicates that this mission is really tough, but I am optimistic about the future.

In addition, we in China should be concerned about the professional ethics of teachers. The policy written by the Ministry of Education in China requiring kindergarten teachers to hold certificates to work is a more achievable and enforceable goal, but we must also pay attention to the "love" problem. It is easy to determine if a teacher is academically capable of teaching, but it is much harder to measure and track which teachers are loving, caring, empathetic, and patient. Even a highly-educated person might not be able to love and be patient with naughty children (Rongcheng Education Bureau, 2018).
Point #2: Career development

It is not only important to require that teachers pass a qualification examination ensuring a certain quality level has been reached when they begin employment at a kindergarten, but also that teachers are given more time on a daily basis to enhance their teaching abilities.

Walker (2015) stated that Finland’s early childhood teachers work shorter in-classroom hours, which allows them time to work with other teachers to plan, discuss challenges, and grow professionally. It has been recognized that improving an education system both requires that teachers maintain their current skillsets while also developing new skills, and the most effective way to do these things is to empower individual teachers to develop themselves (Sheridan et al., 2009). It is important that teachers always develop their skills because ideas about education are always expanding.

To achieve the goal of improving early childhood teachers’ qualifications, the Chinese government has started experimenting in Beijing with different training methods for teachers. In the past, the government tried to develop teacher’s skillsets by sending teachers to lectures on different teaching theories, which didn’t turn out to be very effective. Nowadays, teachers visit other partner schools and join into school activities. This hands-on approach has proven more effective in helping increase teachers’ professional development.

Furthermore, researchers at OECD (2016) highlighted another effective teacher improvement strategy that is being used in China, the Study Group System. The Study Group System forms groups of teachers who teach the same subject. The group is made up of both
new and experienced teachers who work together to develop class plans and explore teaching methods. The group meets regularly to reflect on each other’s teaching difficulties and advise each other. These meetings, and the professional development inherent within them, have shown to be a rapid way to increase the quality of all teachers. Thus, new teachers can learn from experienced teachers and older teachers can learn about newer techniques from fresh perspectives.

In my opinion, it is important that early childhood education teachers have more opportunities to job shadow other teachers in other schools. Being able to shadow peers allows teachers to reflect upon, consider, and work to overcome their shortcomings and learn from others’ successful experiences. We should ensure that the school system encourages teachers to participate in shadowing programs. Besides, the whole world has moved closer together due to globalization and, in the future, we should provide teachers with more opportunities to join exchange programs. Such exchanges would allow teachers to teach abroad and experience different cultural education environments, allowing them to bring back new ideas and teaching strategies to their home countries. Personally, I can affirm that I learned much from my time studying in Canada.

Summary

In China, the early childhood education market is chaotic: preschool education is often primary education-oriented; teaching staff is regularly shorthanded; and, schools have a high teacher demission rate. The essence of the lack of educational resources comes because China’s education system is unsound. To build up a standardized, orderly, and healthy early
childhood education field, we cannot just depend on the society, schools, and market self-correcting mechanisms. Therefore, in light of international experiences, speeding up the development of early childhood education should rely on governmental functions via legislation as well. In addition, in studying the differences between global educational systems, I think, to recruit more excellent preschool teachers, we should raise teachers’ salaries, improve their working and living conditions, and offer them more opportunities to upgrade their own professional development. We also should give teachers more freedom to teach using the methods they want to instead of letting schools force certain curricula and styles on teachers.

The development of society has altered the demand for the education, which has resulted in a scarcity of educational resources. Resolving the shortage of China’s early childhood educational resources and promoting the overall quality of the early childhood education industry is a problem that affects educators and everyone who cares about education.

In the next chapter, I will share what I learned throughout the project and some conclusions I have drawn concerning education in China.
Chapter Five Conclusion and Solutions

My research this year has allowed me to go into more detail and learn more about the different education systems around the world. The more I read the more I feel positive about the educational field.

Due to the development of globalization, there are many educational reforms happening in different countries all the time. For instance, a number of these policies included the “No Child Left Behind Act,” which was signed into American law by President George W. Bush in 2002, the “Thinking Schools, Learning Nations” implementation introduced in Singapore in 1997, and the “Comprehensively Promoting Quality-Oriented Education” reform made by the Ministry of China in 1999. The purpose of these reforms was to find a better education system, which is more suitable to its own national conditions. Each educational policy reform had its proponents and critics; however, what they shared was a sense that things were not good enough the way they were.

My research also comes from a place where I believe things in China are not yet good enough. From what I believe, all success comes from trying new experiences, reforming, collaborating, reflecting, correcting, and then applying new ideas. The world is beginning to pay close attention to education reform and has started to take its first steps; this is a good sign that a new chapter in education advancement is on its way.

After assessing the data and examples from the previous chapters, I have arrived at a small number of conclusions. On one hand, schools in China should adjust their foci to achieve balance between students’ personal growth and examination results by cultivating students’ creativity, thinking ability, passion, teamwork, and individual growth. On the other
hand, Chinese parents need to relax more and trust schools; they should not put too much pressure on children nor should they over-focus on academic achievement. Furthermore, parents need to spend more time seeing their children as uniquely and differently skilled, teaching children to value and utilize these unique skills and abilities in practical ways, helping them develop independence, helping them learn the importance of collaboration with others, teaching them the value of other people and the importance of relationships, and gaining the competency and life skills that will help them courageously engage their own futures in individual and corporate ways. Getting a high score on a standardized test, – which fundamentally is based upon the belief that every child should become more similar by learning the same body of knowledge, should not mean everything and should not be the only measurable success in parents’ minds.

Second, China’s education is not developing enough practical skills in students due to the time pressure of examinations. Chinese students are generally good at foundational knowledge, but are weak in skills such as communication, teamwork, valuing others, and creativity. Many students do excellent work in the school, but when they get out of school they find it hard to adapt to society.

For example, in the experience of my own supervisor for this masters’ research project, Jim Parsons, who worked extensively in China to develop an English-language program for Hebei Province, prior to building the curriculum and pedagogy for this new English-language program, students were getting good grades, but were not learning to speak English. Students had been learning by rote so that they would receive good grades, but teachers and students had replaced the “big picture” goal of learning to speak a new language
with the traditional goal of receiving good grades – and these goals had become mutually exclusive.

Obviously, when exam-oriented education emphasizes rote learning and ignores improving students’ abilities, there are disconnects between theory and practice. As a result, a new phrase, “high test scores, but low abilities,” came into being. But why does China focus so much on exams and stress academic achievement above all else? In my personal opinion, the problem is not that simple; the pressure not only comes from within the education system, but also comes from the whole society and China’s cultural heritage.

China knew its former education system had drawbacks and has been working hard on educational reforms all the time. Although the traditional teaching methods are indifferent to personalized development and creativity, we cannot turn a blind eye to their bright side. For instance, teachers can efficiently teach via direct methods and help students learn quicker, and the system provides a relatively fair testing system for selecting talent.

Furthermore, Chinese education is not without superior features compared with Western countries. The rise of modern China and the growth of high-quality, talented people has attracted the attention of other countries who would like to learn the strategies China has been employing. Economically, China has become a global force: however, it is my belief that educationally China could also grow to become a global force. I trust my humble masters’ research might contribute that growth.
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