

Teaching and Learning In China:  
Lessons from the Wuhan University Summer Intensive English Program  
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A DOUBLE PLAN B ELECTRONIC PORTFOLIO  
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## Abstract

This portfolio summarizes teaching experiences in an intensive English program at Wuhan University, China. Focusing on the theme of developing and adapting lessons for English as a foreign language, it contains reflections on planning and preparing the course, insights gained from teaching, accounts of interactions with students and colleagues, and evidence of professional activity. An in-depth section describes how I developed and taught a course on “US News and Media”, then assessed and adapted the lessons to fit the needs of my Chinese students. An integrative statement relates my teaching experience to coursework in the MA ESL program. A final section on electronic portfolios describes their importance in teacher training and student assessment.

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## Teaching Autobiography

### *Early Influences*

My first exposure to a foreign language was probably something my mother whispered when she tucked me in at night. Though she was raised in the United States, she grew up speaking French, because that was my grandparents' native language. Throughout their lives, Mémé and Pépé spoke only French and heavily-accented English. In our home Mom spoke perfect American English, but she would switch to French during emotional moments or when she thought she was alone. This mysterious other language fascinated me. I would sit quietly soaking up the foreign melodies and rhythm of French, then make up French-sounding words and conversations of my own. I soon began to imitate any foreign language speaker I heard: my paternal grandmother's German housekeeper, my Great Aunt Suzanne from Hungary, the Latin-speaking nuns at church. No one was safe. I told my parents I was not making fun of anyone, I just wanted to understand people and speak their language. I still want to do that.

At that time in my small town there was no foreign language instruction in grade school. When I was eleven I had a very short introduction to Spanish. Our teacher would hold up large, colorful paper flowers and ask “*¿De qué color es esta flor?*” (What color is this flower?) *Esta flor es roja.* (It is red.) It is clear I was a visual learner and colors were very powerful. I still associate the color red with Spanish.

I took my first Spanish class as soon as I could, just at the end of the critical period. Our class was small, and I was with the same group of kids until I graduated. It was a great environment for language learning. We felt so comfortable with each other that no one was afraid to take risks or make mistakes. I try to duplicate that relaxed environment with my own students.

### *Learning a language*

When I was sixteen I went to Spain for my first experience being immersed in Spanish language and culture. I was frustrated at first because the natives spoke much faster than the recordings in the language lab. It was hard to pick out individual words because they all flowed together. The longer I stayed the more I understood, and that gave me confidence to speak with “the natives.” The most important thing this immersion did for me was give me an “ear” for Spanish. As I did with my mother’s French, I could let the Spanish sounds and rhythms seep under my skin so I could call on them when it was time to talk with others or speak in class.

Those teenage years were my golden age of language learning. In college I took two more years of Spanish, and a semester of French. I travelled in Europe and was exposed to more languages. But when I returned I got caught up in my journalism studies and by the end of college I was no longer studying a language.

Over the next fifteen years I rarely spoke Spanish. I used it when I traveled, and for a few years when I was a reporter in Florida, surrounded by Cuban cameramen. I still claimed to speak Spanish, but I forgot how to conjugate verbs. Native speakers could not understand me. When I look back I see this pattern: lack of practice leads to less fluency, which leads to less confidence, which leads to more mistakes, which leads to embarrassment, which leads to unwillingness to speak Spanish. It’s a recipe for second language (L2) failure.

Things turned around when I began studying abroad in Mexico. I was delighted by how quickly the language came back. In Minneapolis I started teaching English to Mexican immigrants at the Minnesota Literacy Council, and later at the Latino Learning Institute of CLUES (Chicanos y Latinos Unidos en Servicio). That gave me a reason to speak Spanish

again -- and the motivation to study it. My experiences as a language learner gave me valuable insights I could share with my Latino students. I was learning their language while they were learning mine. They enjoyed helping me, and it boosted their confidence to know they were also teaching the teacher. I had been teaching and tutoring ESL for about a year when I decided to take the TEFL course at Hamline University.

### *Learning to teach*

Though I was trained to teach ESL at the Minnesota Literacy Council and the Latino Learning Institute, the TEFL certificate program at Hamline was my first exposure to teaching at the University level. Hamline's program taught me the basics of the communicative method and best practices for teaching reading, writing, speaking, listening, and grammar. My objectives when I entered the MA ESL program at the University of Minnesota were to better understand how language is acquired, and to learn techniques for teaching language more effectively. I have accomplished that with the help of the dedicated faculty. I look forward to learning more every day I teach.

During the time I have been part of the program (now known as Second Language Studies) I have gained more knowledge about how language is learned and practiced my teaching skills in a variety of settings. I taught at a private language school in Nicaragua and at community ESL classes in Minneapolis. I did a practicum in an Advanced Pronunciation course and co-taught an Oral Skills class in the Minnesota English Language Program. I have tutored students in pronunciation and oral skills. I also taught a short course in China.

This portfolio documents my experience of teaching English as a foreign language.

It also describes my journey from student to teacher. I offer my thanks to the instructors and learners who have helped me on my way. They have given me skills, knowledge and energy for the road ahead.

*Learning is a treasure that will follow its owner anywhere. Chinese Proverb*

## **Wuhan University Summer Intensive English Program**

### *Structure*

The Wuhan University Summer Intensive English Program (WUSIEP) is a partnership between Wuhan University (WHU) and The Ohio State University (OSU) (see Appendix, items 1,2,3). Wuhan is a top-ten Chinese university located in Hubei Province. The student population is more than 50,000. The two universities formed the partnership in order to bring teachers from all over the United States to WHU to teach a summer institute in English with topics in contemporary US culture. The program began in 2004. I was selected to be part of the program in 2009, but it was cancelled by WHU that year over concerns about the H1N1 virus. As well as two of us from the University of Minnesota, there were teachers from The Ohio State University, Columbia, Georgetown, New York University, Indiana University, Iowa State, West Virginia, and others. Some of the teachers had been working for the Peace Corps in Asia. Only a handful of teachers spoke Chinese well enough to hold a conversation. I was not one of them.

When the program began the institute lasted five weeks. Then it was cut back to four weeks, and in 2010 to three weeks. This year two major changes were initiated: creating a morning homeroom class five days a week, and greatly increasing the number of extracurricular activities offered.

### *Curriculum*

The Contemporary US culture curriculum is divided into 10 themes: USA: The Land & the People; Family Life; Sports in US Culture; Travel in the US; Food, Diet, and Restaurants; US News & Media; The Relationship Between Man & Nature; Entertainment & Fads; Education in the US; and Music in US Culture. During the planning stage, each of the 30

teachers chose one of the themes. We were then divided into three cohorts. (One of the teachers in my cohort had to drop out and was not replaced so we ended up teaching an extra subject – Travel in the US). The idea was to have three teachers in each theme, each in a different cohort.

Theme	Cohort #1	Cohort #2	Cohort #3
Family Life	Diana Nasman	Adi Arad	Rick Treece
News and the Media	Rick Sentieri	Mike Dumbroski	Debra Leach
Music	Don Yorty	Wesley Mills	Janice Showers
Education	Sandy Miller	Leticia Barajas	Kathi Cenamo

Table 1

The three teachers collaborated to design their course and create activities that were compiled into a student workbook. Each theme had three two-hour long lessons. For three days we taught the lessons to one group of students in the morning and a different group in the afternoon. Then those groups moved on to different teachers, and we would get two new groups of students. We taught our six-hour courses to ten different cohorts.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
<b>Week 1</b>	<u>Morning:</u> Lesson 1 <u>Afternoon:</u> Lesson 1	<u>Morning:</u> Lesson 2 <u>Afternoon:</u> Lesson 2	<u>Morning:</u> Lesson 3 <u>Afternoon:</u> Lesson 3	<u>Morning:</u> Lesson 1 <u>Afternoon:</u> Lesson 1	<u>Morning:</u> Lesson 2 <u>Afternoon:</u> Lesson 2
<b>Week 2</b>	<u>Morning:</u> Lesson 3 <u>Afternoon:</u> Lesson 3	<u>Morning:</u> Lesson 1 <u>Afternoon:</u> Lesson 1	<u>Morning:</u> Lesson 2 <u>Afternoon:</u> Lesson 2	<u>Morning:</u> Lesson 3 <u>Afternoon:</u> Lesson 3	<u>Morning:</u> Lesson 1 <u>Afternoon:</u> Lesson 1
<b>Week 3</b>	<u>Morning:</u> Lesson 2 <u>Afternoon:</u> Lesson 2	<u>Morning:</u> Lesson 3 <u>Afternoon:</u> Lesson 3	<u>Morning:</u> Lesson 1 <u>Afternoon:</u> Lesson 1	<u>Morning:</u> Lesson 2 <u>Afternoon:</u> Lesson 2	<u>Morning:</u> Lesson 3 <u>Afternoon:</u> Lesson 3

Table 2

As well as this rotation we taught a one-hour homeroom class every morning to a group that stayed with us for the entire institute. We taught material based on the other teachers'

lessons to reinforce what students were learning in each theme. We were given a lot of freedom to decide what else to teach. My group worked part of the time on pronunciation and public speaking skills. We also did three major projects: preparing a poster presentation, creating TV commercials, and preparing a performance for the Closing Ceremony.

Each teacher worked with approximately 250 students during the course of the program. The students were from all over China and most had just completed their freshman year in college. We were told the students had already been studying English for eight years and were advanced speakers, though there turned out to be a wide range of proficiency levels.

## **Planning and Preparation**

Planning for the 2010 Wuhan Intensive English Program began in 2009 – the year the trip was cancelled because of concerns about the H1N1 virus. That year I attended a pre-program orientation session on the OSU campus in Columbus, Ohio. I met fellow teachers and staff, learned about the curriculum, and visited with Chinese students. Since most of the teachers who were at that orientation elected to re-join the program in 2010, it was decided that another visit to Columbus was unnecessary. Instead, Program Manager Bob Eckhart created a Wuhan Teachers Facebook page (see Appendix, item 4). This became our virtual meeting space and the communication center for our Wuhan experience.

At the beginning of April we posted self-introductions with our pictures, information about our teaching and travel experiences, and the theme we would be teaching. Discussion boards were set up for special events scheduled during the institute, such as a college fair and a technology conference with Chinese faculty. Teachers discussed their post-institute travel plans and made arrangements to travel in groups. There were photos from earlier years, and links to information about program focus and procedures for creating lessons. Some of the teachers were returning to Wuhan for the second or third time, so they were able to provide information and teaching tips for the new instructors (Shepherd, n.d.) (see Appendix, item 5). The Facebook page was a powerful tool for creating a sense of community before we left the US. OSU also provided a Wuhan Wiki (see Appendix, item 6) with links to websites about China and the differences between Chinese and American culture (American International Education Foundation [AIEF], n.d.) (see Appendix, item 7). There was also information about what to pack and what to expect in Wuhan, as well as suggestions for gifts. Since gift giving is an important ritual in China, we brought small presents for students and helpers. We were told to expect that students would give

us gifts as well. This and other etiquette tips I read about (Kwintessential, Ltd., 2010) (see Appendix, item 8) proved valuable for maintaining good relations with Chinese students and faculty.

### *Planning the course*

In the months before we left for China teachers handled logistical details such as obtaining a visa, signing the Wuhan teacher contracts, and making travel arrangements with a Chinese travel agent. Before I could plan my lessons, I also had to educate myself about media trends in the US (“Survey: More Americans get news from Internet than newspapers or radio”, 2010, March 1) (see Appendix, item 9). I found that the digital age has drastically changed how Americans think about news, and created more opportunities for average citizens to participate in news gathering. The popularity of the video sharing site YouTube has led to new forms of entertainment that can be produced by anyone who owns a video camera. Since my students would be digital natives, I decided to focus on “new media” as part of my US News and Media course.

Mandarin is the official language of China, so I researched the differences between Mandarin Chinese and English language structure. According to Plump (2007) (see Appendix, item 10) the syntax and grammar of the two languages have little in common, which can cause problems for learners. In Mandarin, word order is the same in both questions and statements, so the inverted word order of English questions is confusing (Syntax/Grammar section). Verbs are not conjugated to reflect time, leading to tense errors such as “*I have seen her two days ago.*” (Chang, 2001, p. 313). Articles do not exist in Mandarin and there is no gender distinction in pronouns like he, she and it. Chinese learners often drop the “s” in plurals because they are rarely used in Mandarin (Plump, 2007) (Syntax/Grammar section).

I looked for information about English pronunciation features that might prove difficult for my students (Power, “Chinese language backgrounds”, n.d.) (see Appendix, item 11). According to Chang (2001) suprasegmental features such as rhythm and intonation cause problems that affect intelligibility and make it difficult for Chinese learners to understand spoken English (pp. 312-313). Grant (2001) provides excellent activities for practicing suprasegmentals in her textbook “Well Said.” I used this text in an advanced pronunciation course during practicum, and decided to bring it with me to Wuhan.

We did most of the planning and preparation for Wuhan during April, May, and June. During this period the three teachers for each theme were responsible for cooperatively designing their course. I was excited about the opportunity to help develop the curriculum. Collaborating with OSU instructors Mike Dombroski and Rick Sentieri was a positive experience. Since they both had taught at Wuhan in previous years, they were able to tell me about their successes and failures, share resources, give me feedback on my lessons, and brainstorm ideas for new activities. We started with long e-mail exchanges about how the US News and Media material was presented last time and what we should keep, revise, or leave out.

When the program first began, teachers used to print out and copy hundreds of pages of learning materials for the students. In 2008 the teachers and staff put together a student workbook that compiled all the handouts. In 2010 we updated and expanded it. There were four lessons on US News and Media in the first workbook: Newspapers, Magazines, Radio, and Television. Much of the content was about their history and how they evolved. I felt we should shift the focus to what was happening now, as digital media replaces traditional print and broadcast forms. We agreed to combine and condense the material on newspapers and magazines to create a new Lesson One: Traditional Media. Lesson Two became Radio and Television. I

volunteered to create a third lesson called New Media, which would cover Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter as well as the development of “citizen journalism” (see Appendix, items 12, 13, 14). The two other teachers, Mike and Rick, did most of the work on the first two lessons. We reviewed each other’s workbook lessons and gave feedback before turning them in to be printed in early June. Teachers were not required to use all the workbook exercises. I used a few during class and assigned others as homework.

The next step was to decide how to teach the three lessons. We each created our own lesson plans, but first we discussed how to meet program goals. One of them was to create unique learning materials with “personalization,” which meant instructors should include information about themselves in the lessons. For me that meant mentioning my background as a journalist and multimedia producer. Another goal was to use technology. The classrooms had audio and video equipment, as well as computers and projection screens. Mike, Rick, and I brainstormed ideas for creating listening exercises from man-on-the-street interviews we would shoot in the US. We would also send Wuhan students out to interview Americans on campus. I wanted to create a lesson using tweets to summarize news stories. I imagined exploring social networking sites online and watching popular TV programs on YouTube. However, there were two major obstacles. First, China blocks social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. (“China Defends Its Internet Censorship Policies.”, 2010, March 23) (see Appendix, item 15). Second, we would not have an Internet connection in the classroom. Though it seemed strange to us, the officials at Wuhan had a strict policy about this and would not consider providing a temporary connection for the US teachers. I would have to find a way to teach online media without the Internet.

*Preparing materials*

I planned to focus on social media and I wanted to use authentic materials, so I captured screen shots of Facebook and Twitter on my laptop. I downloaded more than 30 YouTube videos to use in different parts of my lessons. I collected TV commercials, sitcoms, reality shows, news and sports coverage, cartoons, and PBS reports about how teenagers in America use social networking. I did not expect to use every video, but wanted to have a large selection so I could make substitutions if some of them turned out to be too difficult for students to understand. I also collected newspapers and magazines for the Traditional Print Media lesson.

When I was a Teaching Assistant at the University of Minnesota I used a Moodle site to organize my materials and access websites in an oral skills class. In China I would need to create PowerPoint presentations. I put together lesson plans for each subject and prepared learning materials. These will be presented in the reflection section of the portfolio. I felt prepared, but other teachers warned me I would need to be very flexible, since there were always surprises in China and the technology was not always reliable.

## **Teaching EFL**

Program organizers told us our students were used to learning passively, quietly taking notes while their professors deliver lectures. This teacher-centered approach is the norm in China. The goal of the intensive English program was to get students to talk in class and take an active role in their education. In this section I describe what I did to create a student-centered classroom in a teacher-centered culture.

### *Student-centered classroom*

I was trained to use the communicative approach in the classroom and am a firm believer in student-centered learning. In their review of literature, O'Neill and McMahon (2005) (see Appendix, item 16) list the main principles of the student-centered approach. First on the list is the requirement that students take responsibility for their own learning (What is student-centred learning?, para. 6). I see myself as a facilitator and a resource person for my students. I expect them to contribute to discussions, participate in activities, and make choices about their education. I knew this approach would make some students uncomfortable, so I tried to create a relaxed and supportive environment where students could make mistakes without losing face. McKay and Tom (1999) advocate building a sense of community in the classroom in order to increase students' commitment to learning English and their ability to form relationships using a foreign language (p. 24).

I asked my students to imagine they were in a typical U of M classroom, where we speak informally, call professors by their first names, and feel free to express our opinions. To increase their comfort level, I told them about myself and showed pictures of my life in Minnesota. I did this with each cohort on the first day of the course. I was concerned about spending what little

class time I had on this, but now believe sharing personal information made it easier for students to talk about themselves and their culture. At the beginning of the course some students would stand up when called on, and answer questions in a very formal style, as if giving a speech. By the end everyone adopted the casual American style of speaking from their seats and offering comments without raising their hands. This made it less stressful for them to contribute to class discussions. I also created PowerPoint presentations for the Traditional Media, Radio and TV, and New Media lessons to visually reinforce the topics we discussed and provide written instructions for our activities (see Appendix, items 17, 18, 19).

### *Collaborative activities*

When I planned the course, I designed activities that required students to use English to accomplish a task. For example, one assignment in the New Media lesson asked students to form groups, listen to a news report, then rewrite the story as a series of tweets. A tweet is a post made on the microblogging service Twitter. Each tweet is 140 characters or less. Since Twitter is banned in China, students wrote their tweets on paper. Each student was responsible for one tweet about the story, and the group was responsible for arranging them in the proper sequence. When the groups presented their reports, the students lined up in order at the front of the classroom and read their tweets.

Most of the time students were happy to work in groups, and told me it made class more fun. However, a few were reluctant to get up from their seats, move to another part of the room, and interact with others. One learner told me he didn't want to work with other students because he was not really *learning* English unless he was talking to the teacher. I asked him to work with a group to *practice* his English while he helped his classmates. I reminded him that the ability to

collaborate with others was an important skill that employers would look for when he finished college. He did not change his opinion about wanting to talk to native speakers, but I hope he learned something about the value of teamwork.

Because we met for an hour every day, there was more time for collaborative projects and community building with my homeroom students. The first week they created posters with their picture, nickname, and information about family, hobbies, and hopes for the future. They did a short presentation to introduce themselves to the class. The second week, students chose a song to perform for the closing ceremony, and practiced it every day for the next two weeks. The final project was planning, writing, and shooting TV commercials. We watched them as part of a “film festival” on the last day of class. Most of the students in my homeroom were studying software engineering, so the process of designing and creating an ad was relevant and interesting. They had to collaborate to develop a plan, discuss the task, and create a product. In the process they used the target language in a variety of ways and provided scaffolding for each other. It was also a good project for developing student autonomy because making all the decisions during the project allowed them to take control of their learning and become more engaged and creative. (Reeve, 1999, Benefits section) (see Appendix, item 20).

### *Using authentic materials*

In a few of the cohorts, it was difficult to get students to participate in group discussions. Some were too shy to speak, some didn't understand the lesson, and some simply weren't interested in the subject. However, all the students responded positively to the authentic materials I brought from the US. Authentic materials motivate students, provide exposure to real language, and support a more creative approach to teaching (Kilickaya, 2004, Authentic

Materials: Definition section) (see Appendix, item 21). I witnessed this in my classes. When I played songs before class and during the break students asked about the artists, tried to decipher the lyrics, and begged to hear more. They read aloud to each other from American newspapers and magazines and wanted to take them home. If certain students were chatting with each other during a lesson, they immediately stopped and faced the screen when I played an English language video.

I began the Radio and TV lesson by showing a clip from the sitcom “Friends.” The students could name each of the characters and remembered several episodes. I divided students into groups to discuss their favorite TV shows and asked them to pick one to describe to the class. They reported information about American and Chinese programs and explained why they liked them. Next we did a TV vocabulary quiz and I explained the types of programming on American television, such as reality shows, sitcoms, and newscasts. During the next activity, I played clips from a variety of shows and students put them in the proper category. At the end of the lesson they brainstormed ideas for their own TV shows and acted out a scene for the rest of the class. Students who barely spoke during the other two lessons seemed to lose all their inhibitions during these performances. One of the students told me later that most of them were expected to go into scientific fields, and rarely had a chance to use their creativity in the classroom.

Another strategy I used to invite discussion was asking students to teach me about Chinese media. When I showed them a screen shot of Facebook, they told me about Renren, a popular Chinese social networking site. They asked me if I used QQ (a free instant messaging service), then offered to help me sign up. Even the most reticent students wanted to explain how people use social networking in China. They could see I was genuinely interested in learning

about their country and culture, and responded enthusiastically. Sometimes I brought in videos I shot while walking around the city, and asked them to describe the scenes. This strategy never failed to spark discussion.

### *Culturally sensitive material*

One topic I worried about discussing was freedom of speech versus censorship. This is a controversial topic because China censors news and opinions that do not agree with government policy (“Internet Censorship in China”, 2010, April 26) (see Appendix, item 22). I believed any lesson about news in the US would be incomplete without explaining the role of a free press in American culture. I asked the other teachers in my theme if they thought discussing it might anger Wuhan University officials, or get students into trouble. Luckily this didn’t happen. When I asked students, “Do you have censorship in China?” some of them lowered their eyes and said nothing, but many were willing to discuss it. Some said the Chinese government censors news because it knows what is best for the nation and wants to prevent social disruption. Others said they think censorship is wrong and the government should change its policy. A third group said yes, there is censorship, but it doesn’t matter because there are ways to get around the governments bans. In some of the cohorts students got into heated debates. I was happy they felt comfortable enough to express their opinions.

### *Feedback*

I was anxious to see how students responded to learner-centered lessons and the strategies I used to engage them. Each week of the institute I asked one or more of the cohorts to fill out course evaluations (see Appendix, item 23). On the form I created, students were asked to

rate the course and instruction from one to ten, then rate each of the three lessons. I was happy to see most students rated the course and the instruction as a 9 or 10 each week of the institute. Most comments were positive. Students said they thought the class was interesting, thought-provoking, and provided many opportunities to practice English. They praised the use of video, the discussion of social networking, and my teaching style. There were a few evaluations where the course rating was as low as 6. In these cases, students said they thought the material was boring and the activities too difficult. Other students in the same cohort said the activities were too easy and they didn't have enough to do. The most frequent suggestion was to include more games and give students the chance to get up and move around the room.

The New Media lesson was consistently the highest rated (9 to 10), followed by Radio and TV (8 to 10), and Traditional Print Media (7 to 10). My prediction that students in the course would show the most interest in online media and social networks proved correct.

Getting student feedback on my lessons every week was extremely helpful for making decisions about what to teach and how to teach it. I was afraid that my Chinese students might hesitate to give their opinions about the course or criticize my teaching. I was pleasantly surprised by the insightful and specific suggestions they made for improving the course.

## Evaluation

The Wuhan program gave me the rare opportunity to teach the same course ten times in a row. Each time I used student feedback to make changes and teach more effectively. On the last day of class I asked my homeroom students to evaluate my teaching (see Appendix, item 24). They knew me better than the other students and were comfortable expressing their opinions. Here are some of their comments:

*“The instructor has improved my spoken English skills.”*

*“She thought of many activities such as games, debates, singing and so on. During these activities we can just use English, so we learn while we play.”*

*“Deb is a really wise teacher. She plays an equal role...”*

They rated how well prepared I was, whether I presented the material clearly, created worthwhile assignments, gave feedback intended to improve their performance, and treated students with respect. On a scale of 1 to 6 they gave me a 5 or 6 in every category, except for one evaluation where I was rated 4 for creating worthwhile assignments. This student commented that the class would have been better if we had played more games so learners could compete. This was the students' most frequent suggestion for change in both the course and teacher evaluations. The second most frequent suggestion was to tell them more about American culture, and the third was to teach more pronunciation. Since so many students mentioned it I will include more games in future lessons whether in China or the US. I will also pay more attention to getting students out of their desks and moving around the classroom.

The Academic Director also gave me a positive evaluation (see Appendix, item 25). She praised my pacing, use of authentic materials, and good rapport with students. She gave me a 6 in all categories. She observed the Radio and TV lesson the second time I taught it, and gave me

valuable advice about teaching vocabulary. The first time I taught the course I presented all TV and radio vocabulary words on one PowerPoint slide. I told students to ask me about any words they didn't know. They asked about several and said they understood the rest. However, the Academic Director spoke to those students afterwards and asked about my course. They said they enjoyed it but felt overwhelmed by the vocabulary. She explained that because of face issues, the students claimed to know the words even though they really didn't understand them. The terms I was teaching form a specialized vocabulary they had never encountered before.

She suggested I cut out words I didn't use in our lesson, and divide the rest into two smaller groups: one for TV and another for radio. I also created matching exercises to do together in class. This was a successful strategy. Students started using the words in our discussions. I decided to provide more scaffolding for several of the other activities as well. As the institute progressed I cut some of the activities and spent more time on collaborative projects. I also did more frequent comprehension checks.

Whenever one of the Chinese teachers from Wuhan University visited my class, I asked for suggestions about how to improve the lesson. One of them watched an activity in which students analyzed a Chinese and an American TV commercial. She thought I spent too much time trying to explain an unfamiliar cultural reference. Looking back, I agree that I got carried away trying to describe an elaborate American wedding. One or two well-chosen sentences would have been sufficient.

Another teacher advised me to call on quiet students during discussions rather than letting the extroverts take over. I agreed that too often a few students dominated the conversation. I needed to stop worrying about embarrassing students and (gently) force them to practice their speaking skills. The students I called on stood up to answer my questions. When they finished speaking I gave them positive reinforcement by smiling and thanking them. In one case the

student was so obviously nervous I applauded afterwards, and the other students joined in. That made her smile, helped her relax, and boosted her confidence. The support and encouragement my students gave each other was a key factor in creating a safe environment to practice English.

### *Self-evaluation*

Teaching requires an on-going process of self-evaluation. I used several techniques at Wuhan. Every evening I would tape record a teaching log to reflect on what happened in class that day. In the past I kept a written journal, but in Wuhan I found it easier to record my voice on a small digital recorder. I then downloaded the audio files to my computer. I liked this method because when I went back to review the files I had information about what worked and didn't work, as well as ideas for improving the lessons. Listening to my tone of voice reminded me how I *felt* at the time.

I also videotaped portions of my class. I did not have anyone to run the camera, so most of my footage is of students working on activities. I reviewed this footage to see how well the activities were engaging students and whether or not they were using the target language. I found this valuable because sometimes my perceptions during class about how well an activity was working changed after watching the tape. In order to evaluate my performance as a teacher I would leave the recorder running while I gave directions or initiated class discussion. By reviewing the audio I could evaluate whether I was talking too much, whether my directions were clear, and whether my voice was conveying the openness and confidence I wanted to project. An important part of this process was learning how to record classroom activities without making students feel self-conscious. I always asked them beforehand to tell me if they did not want to be videotaped. I used a small unobtrusive device such as a "flip-cam" or the

“video capture” on my regular camera. I was able to do these recordings because the learners agreed and because in China I was not required to get release forms from the students.

### *Evaluating students*

Students at Wuhan did not receive grades. I feel that summative assessment (an assessment that summarizes the development of learners after a period of work) would probably have inhibited them from taking chances and making mistakes with language. Chinese students are normally very focused on getting good grades. I wanted them to be motivated by the desire to communicate and collaborate. According to Vali (2010) (see Appendix, item 26) alternative assessment for oral skills could include interviews, videotaped role-plays, or self and peer assessment of student presentations (Review of the related literature, para. 2). When I evaluated student presentations at Wuhan I focused on providing formative feedback. Shute (2007) (see Appendix, item 27) defines formative feedback as information “intended to modify the learner’s thinking or behavior for the purpose of improving learning” (Definition of Formative Feedback, para.1). One of the techniques I used was asking students who watched each other’s presentations to report what they learned. If no one could tell me we discussed whether or not the presenter’s message had been clear. I pointed out effective communication strategies and good presentation skills when students used them. When they did peer evaluations, I asked students to describe what they liked and didn’t like about a classmate’s presentation. Then I taught them phrases they could use to give constructive criticism. Because paper was so scarce, I was not able to print out rubrics for students to use during evaluation. If the workbook is updated for 2011, I would recommend putting one there.

During the institute I continually gathered feedback from students and colleagues so I

could make changes that would improve my lessons. I taught the News and Media course ten times but I never taught it the same way twice. The ability to stay flexible and adapt to the needs of students in a foreign culture was an important survival skill in China. I needed to quickly change plans if a projector in the classroom broke down, or recognize and make use of a teachable moment when our different cultures and languages lead to misunderstandings. My students helped me understand and appreciate their world and thanks to them I ended up learning much more than I taught.

## **Interaction with Students Outside of Class**

It was clear from my first interview with OSU that spending time with our students outside of class was a priority. In 2010 program organizers decided to cut some familiar extra-curricular activities from past years, such as watching American movies, in order to replace them with more active alternatives. Before the institute began teachers submitted ideas ranging from leadership building to geocaching (an activity in which objects are hidden at secret locations for participants to find using GPS positions posted on the Internet). At least three activities were scheduled every weeknight (see Appendix, item 28).

### *Photo and video club*

I signed up to help another teacher with photo/video club, which was offered for the first time in 2010. Mike brought six small “flip-cam” video cameras and we both brought our laptops with video and photo editing software. Our goal was to help students plan, shoot, and edit their own media projects. The turnouts each week were good; usually thirty or forty students. We let them try out the “flip-cams” and helped them brainstorm ideas. The students enjoyed learning about the creative process, but only a few actually finished a project. I think part of the problem is that we met only three times during the institute. We should have met twice a week instead of counting on students to get together on their own to work on projects. We decided that in future it would be better to give them more structure -- perhaps assigning them to groups, asking them to choose from a short list of projects, and having them complete a checklist of steps during production.

As well as leading our own activities, teachers participated in large group events, such as the extremely popular “campfire club.” This was meant to simulate the experience of singing

around the campfire at summer camp. Out on the soccer field just before sundown, one of the teachers would light a candle in a bucket (for safety reasons, no bonfires were allowed). Others handed out lyric sheets for American folk songs. Several of the teachers were talented musicians who played instruments and led the singing. Students loved this activity and there were always more than one hundred of them gathered around the bucket.

Those of us who were not musicians were asked to do some other short performance during the event. I and another teacher did a classic “good news – bad news joke.”

*Doctor: I have some good news and some bad news.*

*Patient: Well, tell me the good news first.*

*Doctor: You have 24 hours to live.*

*Patient: Oh no! What’s the bad news?*

*Doctor: I forgot to call you yesterday.*

Students did not always laugh at the English language jokes, probably because the word play and cultural references were too unfamiliar. They did laugh at this one. The next day in class, three of my students told their own joke in English.

*Student #1: I speak good English.*

*Student #2: Me too.*

*Student #3: Me three.*

These joke-telling sessions sparked some interesting conversations about humor in US and Chinese culture, and how we stereotype each other. During a group presentation one woman told a joke that involved an American. The question was “How do you get someone to jump off a boat?” She gave examples for several nationalities. For an American the answer was to say that someone fell overboard, and whoever rescued him would be a hero and become famous.

In China modesty is a virtue. The stereotype of an American is boastful (AIEF, n.d.).

### *Field trips*

Attending activities each night gave students the chance to make friends and spend extra time with the American teachers. They were also eager to socialize on weekends. Each homeroom class invited their teacher to go out for a meal, or shopping, or sightseeing around town -- or sometimes all three in one day. In the following e-mail message, one of my students suggested we meet early Sunday morning (see Appendix, item 29, Tony's rough travel plan for tomorrow):

*After we meet we can set off the journey. And since the first place we are gonna go is Hubuxiang, which provides all kinds of local snacks, you don't need to take breakfast before we meet. The places we are gonna visit include: Hubuxiang; Jiangnan walking road (the first road designed solely for shopping where there are no vehicles in wuhan), Jiangtan (the riverside of Yangzi River), Yellow Crane tower (the landmark of this city). There's also some flexible time reserved so that we have many choices upon the allocation of our time. Plus, I wanna make sure one thing: are you free all day long, or do you have to prepare for the lessons of Monday? I asked this because I wanna know how much time we have for tomorrow's sight-seeing.*

It was not unusual for students to plan a whole day of activities. While we appreciated their generosity, I and many other teachers negotiated shorter excursions because Sunday was our only un-scheduled day. The next weekend, nine of my homeroom students took me out as a group. In the morning we went to "breakfast street" to eat the local specialty "hot dry noodles." Then we took a ferry across the Yangzi to a special shopping district. I was told that before we bought anything, we should ask students to bargain with the salespeople. Acting as interpreters was a great way for students to practice their English, and they always managed to lower the price of our souvenirs.

These outings and my e-mail exchanges with students gave me a chance to know them on a deeper level (see Appendix, item 29). I learned about their lives and families and hopes for the future. I was touched by their enthusiasm and the pleasure they took in simple activities. They were always polite (B. Eckhart, personal communication, July 12, 2010) (see Appendix, item 30). However, what's considered polite in one culture can seem inappropriate in another.

### *Counseling Tony*

One of the students, whose English name was Tony, had an extremely polite and formal speaking and writing style. When talking to the US teachers his speech was loaded with flowery compliments. When he had to leave the room he spent several minutes apologizing first. He was also a prolific gift-giver. The gifts he gave me and other teachers were inexpensive things like bracelets and calligraphy brushes. We were told it would have been rude to refuse them. Unfortunately though, Tony's super-polite style and frequent gifting gave some people the impression that he was insincere. Some thought he was currying favor with the US teachers in order to get a letter of recommendation to an American university.

I believe Tony was doing what many foreign language learners do, trying to make a good impression by using polite and formal language. He was also likely unaware of how his actions could be interpreted negatively. Tony was not one of my homeroom students, but he made several appointments to see me after being in my News and Media class. After he had given me several gifts I gave him a U of M T-shirt and suggested we call it even. I explained that while I appreciated his thoughtfulness, many Americans feel uncomfortable accepting gifts because it creates a sense of obligation. I pointed out that if he asked a teacher in the US to write him a recommendation, giving a gift might be considered a kind of bribe.

During our meetings Tony and I practiced using colloquial English, and talked about adjusting the level of formality for different situations. We also talked about applying to US graduate schools. He asked me to look at scores he received on English proficiency exams. I told him about the Graduate Record Exam and writing a statement of purpose. I showed him websites where he could research schools and their graduate offerings. I encouraged him to take more English courses and explained why, after having him in class for only three days, I did not know him well enough to write a letter of recommendation.

Tony left before the institute was over to attend a special program in Beijing. He is now studying in Switzerland where he was able to create a Facebook profile and “friend” me (see Appendix, item 31). He keeps me up to date on his activities and I am giving him feedback on the statement of purpose he is writing to apply to US grad schools. Several other students are also studying in foreign countries and have joined Facebook (see Appendix, item 32). I like using the social networking sites we learned about to stay in touch.

## **Interaction with Colleagues**

One of the most rewarding aspects of teaching in Wuhan was spending time with the American and Chinese instructors I met there. We travelled together, taught together, ate three meals a day together, survived a monsoon together, and somehow came through it as friends. The Wuhan teachers were an incredible group; patient, generous, creative, and dedicated to their profession. It was also a diverse group, ranging in age from mid-twenties to mid-seventies. About a third of us had worked in different careers before teaching.

### *American colleagues*

When we arrived in China my theme-mates continued to lend support, answer my questions, and offer ideas. Rick let me borrow a set of note cards with idioms so students could guess their meanings. Mike lent me a “flip-cam” to record in the classroom and shoot videos for narrative exercises. Another instructor had worked as a speech pathologist before getting her master’s degree. She taught me techniques for helping students with particular phonemes. Throughout the institute teachers from each theme e-mailed new exercises to the group and offered ideas for games and activities. I used several of them with my homeroom class and was grateful to have this resource. I was also happy to share my videos and activities with other instructors.

Every week the US teachers in each cohort met to hear program news and discuss classroom issues. We shared information about the teaching techniques and activities we found most effective. Teachers could also ask for help with any problems they encountered. I was grateful for the support and the chance to get advice from experienced instructors. We also met several times for informal gatherings in the Program Managers’ hotel suite to socialize and relax.

Organizers encouraged camaraderie and gave us opportunities to spend time together visiting local museums and tourist attractions (see Appendix, item 33). Before the institute began they paid for several days of touring in Beijing. I think these efforts to help teachers get to know each other and form bonds of friendship was an important factor in the institute's success. We worked long hours once classes began and faced the inevitable challenges that come with adapting to a foreign culture. Few of us spoke Chinese so we were dependent on our hosts to help us communicate and take care of personal needs. We counted on each other for support and the comfort of a shared language and culture.

### *Chinese colleagues*

The Chinese administrators, instructors, and staff were gracious hosts. They held a welcoming banquet when we first arrived so we could meet high-ranking university officials and get to know the Wuhan instructors. We attended a short etiquette lesson beforehand to learn Chinese table manners and toasting customs. After this formal greeting we saw a lot of the Wuhan language instructors. They visited our classes and sometimes ate meals with us. The teachers I spoke with took great interest in the communicative teaching methods we used. They wanted to know how I designed activities and why I spent more time talking to students in small groups than speaking in front of the entire class. (I told them it was so I could hear how the students were using English during tasks and because I was able to give each one more attention that way). I asked the Chinese instructors about how cultural expectations affected classroom behavior. I wondered why students sometimes put their heads down on their desks before class (and once in a while during class) and appeared to be sleeping. They explained that this is an accepted practice so students can conserve their energy during long days at school. The Wuhan

instructors also helped me understand why students reacted well to certain activities but not others.

### *Collaboration*

I had several opportunities to work closely with other teachers on special events. Sandy Miller from West Virginia University and I co-facilitated a workshop at the technology conference. During the busy last week of class Ashley Brenner from the University of Pennsylvania, Ben Fiegert, a technology specialist at a high school in Seattle, Washington and I took on the challenge of producing and organizing the Closing Ceremony (see Appendix, item 34). It was challenging because there were more than twenty groups of students performing, each with multimedia materials we needed to collect. Our technical support people did not speak English. The Closing Ceremony turned out well because the three of us worked together. I remembered telling one of my students how important it was to be able to collaborate with others. I saw that for myself during this project. I am grateful to my partners for their patience and good humor and I am proud of what we accomplished together.

My time in Wuhan showed me how important the support and camaraderie of colleagues is to a teacher's development. I felt energized because I was surrounded by creative, caring people who chose to spend their lives helping others. We have stayed in touch and several of them have aided me with information or advice when I asked for it. I have been able to do the same for some of them. Our connection has made teaching a richer experience.

## **Professional Activity**

### *Wuhan Technology Conference*

Teaching at Wuhan gave me the opportunity to do two technology presentations in the space of a few months, one in China and one in the US. The Wuhan University conference was held the second week of the institute and was devoted to using technology for language teaching. American and Chinese instructors presented their research on such topics as creating a digital storytelling archive, designing effective listening activities, web-based voice recording programs, and using video for teacher education. Sandy Miller (another instructor who teaches oral skills) and I gave a workshop called “Speak, Listen, Learn Online” to demonstrate websites we have used for teaching pronunciation and oral skills. I knew there was a risk that these websites might not be available in China. Before I left the United States, I sent a list of sites to a teacher who was working in Beijing and asked him to try accessing them. He was able to access all but a few and told me that educational material is less likely to be censored than other types of websites. I checked the sites again in Wuhan before the workshop began. As a “handout” for our workshop we created a Word document with links to the sites we discussed and loaded it onto the desktops of the computers where the workshop was held (see Appendix, item 35). These were the computers the American teachers used to prepare classes, so we were able to access Google and some other sites unavailable elsewhere in China. We devoted the last fifteen minutes of the workshop to letting the Chinese participants explore the websites on our list.

I demonstrated a Moodle website my practicum teacher and I created for an advanced pronunciation course. Just before the workshop began I discovered the organizers had not provided external speakers for the computer we were using. I needed audio because I wanted to demonstrate how we used the Wimba voice tools to record, evaluate, and provide feedback on

students' pronunciation. The room was crowded with Chinese and American instructors so I had to improvise for ten minutes while the technician fixed the audio problem.

There was another technical problem while I was demonstrating a mirroring activity we did using a video clip from the movie, "The Wizard of Oz." We had used this clip in my practicum class so I thought it would be available on the website. However, instead of the video clip, the website had a link to YouTube, which is blocked in China. I found the movie on the Chinese video sharing site youku and linked to that. It was not possible to download the entire movie and edit the clip in time for the workshop. Unfortunately, in the middle of my demonstration we lost the Internet connection. Again, I improvised until the problem was fixed and I could continue. I could have prevented this problem by downloading the clip from YouTube before I left the US. It was embarrassing to have technical problems during a tech conference, but apparently the Chinese instructors were used to technical difficulties and were not bothered by it. We received many compliments on the workshop afterwards and it built my confidence to know I can cope with "worst nightmare" situations when they arise.

### *College Fair*

While in Wuhan I also represented the U of M at a college fair (see Appendix, item 36). Before I left I picked up brochures at International Student Services and the Minnesota English Language Program (MELP) where I had worked as a teaching assistant. I gave a short PowerPoint presentation about the university, then answered questions and handed out materials. I talked to dozens of Chinese students who were interested in attending the U of M.

*MWALLT Conference*

When I returned to the US, I began organizing the video I shot and the technology-based activities I created in order to include them in an online portfolio. I heard about a technology conference on campus and submitted a proposal for a presentation called “Do you QQ? Tech tips from China.” It was accepted. The Midwest Association for Language Learning Technology (MWALLT) organizers planned to stream the conference live on the Internet for a “virtual audience.” I was excited to be part of that and looked forward to meeting other instructors who are using technology for language learning. Preparing my presentation gave me the opportunity to reflect on how valuable it is for teachers to be able to use social networking and other online resources to connect with learners. Most of my students chose the New Media lesson as their favorite and some of our best discussions revolved around Facebook and Renren.

In my presentation I described how the Wuhan teachers used Facebook and a wiki to communicate during the planning stage (see Appendix, item 37). I demonstrated how I used video in activities and as a tool to help students self-evaluate. I told the audience about the popularity of extracurricular activities such as flashmob (a group of people who gather suddenly in a public place, perform an unusual activity for a brief time, and then disperse) and geocaching. I also described how students and teachers posted pictures on photo-sharing sites such as Picasa so participants could download copies.

In order to further leverage technology, I used a Moodle site to organize my material and link to websites during the MWALLT conference. I was satisfied with my presentation and audience members responded well to it. However, I felt that I should have included an analysis of how effective our use of technology was for motivating students and improving their oral skills. I will include that if I do another presentation.

Presenting at conferences can be a nerve-wracking experience, but I feel more comfortable each time I do one. It is rewarding to share my ideas with others in my field and I hope they find it helpful. I was inspired by the creative uses of technology I learned about in the other presentations and excited about trying out new web tools with students. I enjoyed meeting and talking with other teachers who are interested in using technology in the classroom and now that I am a member of MWALLT I hope I'll have the chance to get to know them better.

Before, during, and after teaching at Wuhan I had many opportunities to use technology for language learning. I expect to use those skills in future teaching assignments. Learning to use technology to create materials and teach classes was one of the goals I set for myself when I joined the MA ESL program. As I look back at my Wuhan experience, I realize the great opportunity it gave me to try out my skills in the "real world."

## Reflection

*All things change and we change with them. Chinese Proverb*

The teaching skill that served me best in China was the ability to remain flexible and adapt to circumstances. During my teaching practicum, my mentor taught me to prepare my lessons carefully, then be prepared to quickly change them if something does not work. That was valuable advice for teaching at Wuhan.

Before I left for China I felt confident about teaching the News and Media course. We had already decided on content and created activities. However, I was not sure what I was supposed to do in my homeroom class. At first I heard we would be teaching lessons to review what students learned the day before. If they were in the travel course in the morning, and the music class in the afternoon, I should be doing activities that reviewed what they learned about travel and music the day before. Each theme group would prepare supplementary lessons for this purpose, but we would not see them until we reached China.

When we arrived, our Program Manager told us we should use our own judgment about how to spend homeroom time, as long as we remembered our primary goal of getting students to speak English. I appreciated that because I wanted to give them time to work on projects. On the other hand, the prospect of preparing a new lesson for every class was daunting. Our days were long and gathering materials and activities to use the next morning was sometimes difficult. I used some of the ideas teachers shared on the Internet and asked other teachers for suggestions. Though it caused some stress, thinking up and trying out new activities became one of my favorite parts of the institute.

Teaching at Wuhan was a continuous cycle of planning, implementing, collecting feedback and making changes. Because we met every day and did not have a fixed syllabus, I

was able try out more of my ideas about how to encourage autonomy, build community, and collaborate on projects with my homeroom class.

### *Homeroom*

I began encouraging autonomy during the first days of the institute. I told students we had a lot of freedom to choose the activities we worked on each day. I asked them to tell me how they thought we should spend our time. Many seemed hesitant to do this. According to Chang (2001) teachers are highly respected authority figures in Chinese culture so students usually do not voice opinions or disagree in class (p. 322). They were confused by my request because they were not used to being consulted. It may also have appeared to them that I was simply disorganized and not doing my job as a teacher. I explained my goal of getting them to be active participants in shaping our class. After the first week they were more willing to suggest ideas. By the last week, when I suggested a different activity, one of the students raised her voice and said “No! Pronunciation.”

I decided to do a homeroom class project each week during the three week institute. The first week students made posters of themselves (see Appendix, item 38). They drew self portraits, wrote their nicknames, and listed information about family, hobbies, and hopes for the future. We hung the posters on the walls and volunteers presented theirs to the class. I also gave students time to study the posters and learn about their classmates. I asked them to find the person who matched the drawing on each poster (usually a stick figure), then introduce themselves. This led to lighthearted joking while students mingled. The posters stayed on the walls for the rest of the institute. There were thirty students in my homeroom class so it was a good way for me to learn

about each one. In their evaluations students said they felt very comfortable in class. I think doing community building activities the first week played a large role in that.

The second week students began preparing a performance for the Closing Ceremony. They chose the song, and we did a short practice everyday for the next two weeks. Because the song “We Will Rock You” has a strong beat (see Appendix, item 39). I saw an opportunity to teach students about the rhythm of English. In studies of Chinese EFL learners Gong (2002) reported that trouble with English rhythm was a major factor in inhibiting communication (p. 26) (see Appendix, item 40). Because Mandarin is a mono-syllable language, learners tend to stress every word in English, fail to link sounds, and make mistakes with thought groups, which results in a strange, unnatural rhythm (Gong, p. 30). Practicing our song while clapping and stamping their feet was a good way to help students correct the problem.

Our final class project was creating TV commercials (see Appendix, item 41). Harmer (2001) advocates making videos because it gives students the power to create something memorable, use their creativity, and accomplish a task in English (p. 282). The students had already learned about TV commercials in my news and media course. Because one of the goals of the institute was to create activities with “personalization” I told them about my experiences as a director and showed photos of my photographer husband on the set of a commercial. We did activities using scripts and storyboards and I showed them some commercials students in my Oral Skills class had produced. We scheduled a day to shoot and students formed “production crews” to begin planning.

During the planning phase I visited each group and asked about the product, the target audience, and how they would persuade the audience to buy. I answered their questions and made suggestions about how to shoot the scenes. Students were very enthusiastic about the

project and I was impressed with their creativity. We shot all the commercials in one class period, then watched them during a film festival on the last day. This was an excellent project for collaboration because students had to work together to develop a plan, discuss the task, and create the product. In the process they provided scaffolding for each other as they used target language to talk about scripts, camera angles, and persuasive techniques. As in Swain and Lapkin's study (1998) working in groups helped students acquire new vocabulary in their zones of proximal development. It was fascinating to see this principle in action. In their teacher evaluations, students wrote favorably about our homeroom activities, especially ones that involved collaborating on creative projects.

### *Suggestions for change*

My students also made suggestions about how to improve homeroom classes in the future. The most frequent requests were that I include more games, more pronunciation lessons, and more information about American popular culture. I agree that more of each would be beneficial to students. My self-assessment as a teacher is that I was not always as organized as I would like to be. There were a few days when I was not clear about my objective and my lack of focus showed. During the second week of class a handful of students did not show up. We had been warned that would happen because it was the first class of the day and students were up late socializing. They came back the third week. When I asked one of the students where he had been he said he overslept. He may have been bored because we did not play enough games. He may not have liked practicing for the closing ceremony every day. He may just have been very tired. I was inclined to be tolerant. If it were to happen again, I might e-mail the missing students to ask if anything was wrong, or ask the Chinese teachers for advice.

*News and Media course*

The three day News and Media course was much more structured than homeroom. I only had six hours with each cohort, so I carefully planned each lesson. My original lesson plans for Traditional Media, Radio and TV, and New Media each included eleven or twelve activities including group work, vocabulary building, class discussions, and student presentations (see Appendix, items 42, 44, 46). I used videos and other authentic materials each day.

The first cohort to take my course was made up of my homeroom students. They were a high functioning group and seemed not to have any problems understanding the material. I followed my lesson plan just as I had written it. After the first cohort, I observed greater ranges in the students' proficiency level. The second time I taught the course there was one student who was much more fluent than the rest of her class. She dominated discussions because she was able to talk about abstract concepts the other students did not have the vocabulary for. In her course evaluation she said students in her group finished one activity in half the time allowed and were bored while they waited for the others to finish. I was working with other students so did not pick up on this. If I had, I would have told them to do some of the crossword or sudoku puzzles in the workbook. There were two or three other students during the institute who also thought activities lasted too long.

If I taught the course again I would put together an extra activities file and point it out to students on the first day of class. I would include activities that could be done alone or in small groups. An example would be to read a short poem, story, or joke and tell the class about it. Since most students had a cell-phone with Internet access they could also look up definitions of unusual English words and idioms and share those with classmates. Small groups could send each other English language tweets by text message, or use a "flip-cam" to interview each other

while doing a role-play. Games might include American culture trivia, charades, tongue twisters, and collaborative story telling.

The more common problem was students who thought the material was too difficult. In one lesson I showed a TV news report that was too advanced for many to comprehend. That frustrated several students in one of the cohorts. When I reviewed it, I agreed the reporter was speaking very fast and using legal terms the students would not know. I started showing a much shorter section of the video and scanning through it afterwards while I explained the story. In a few cohorts I could see on the first day that the video would be too difficult so I did not use it. I would not include the video in future lessons unless the group was very advanced.

Another variable I noticed was that in a few of the ten cohorts students seemed more “innocent” about the outside world. They knew little about the US and would not make eye contact when I brought up the subject of censorship. If I mentioned that pornography was censored in the US they seemed embarrassed that I had mentioned the word. Some of the women spoke so softly I had to stand right next to them to hear. In these cases I edited my content and stayed away from controversial topics. My goal was to make them feel safe so they could overcome their shyness and practice using English.

### *Suggestions for change*

I adapted the lessons throughout the institute based on my observations and feedback from course evaluations. In the revised lesson plans for Traditional Media, Radio and TV, and New Media the general trend was to include fewer activities, provide more scaffolding, and give students more time for collaborative activities such as inventing and presenting their own TV shows (see Appendix, items 43, 45, 47). I also added more information to the PowerPoint slides

because the visual reinforcement helped their comprehension. I put instructions for each activity on the screen while they worked.

When I videotaped our class and watched the video, I felt I sometimes talked too much. I could see parts of the lesson where students looked bored. When I planned the lessons I was focused on teaching media and creating effective speaking and listening activities. I did not focus enough on their need to get up and move around, have fun, and get a break from the intense concentration needed to speak a foreign language all day. When I cut out activities that were not engaging students, I was able to give them more time for collaborative projects that encouraged creativity. The pacing improved and students no longer seemed bored.

### *Future lessons*

Now that I have taught at one institute I feel the job would be much easier the second time around. I would be more prepared for homeroom lessons and could reuse activities that truly engaged students. I have already collected authentic materials and prepared New Media lessons for the workbook. There would be a whole new group of students with their own set of needs and preferences though, and there could be an entirely new set of rules for the curriculum. However, I now have a much better idea of how to meet the needs of my Chinese students. I was happy to be invited back to the institute and will use their feedback to improve future lessons.

As I look back on my Wuhan experience, several themes emerge that have now become important parts of my teaching philosophy: my belief in student-centered learning, my interest in promoting student autonomy, and my dedication to collaborative learning.

## **Teaching Philosophy**

I started teaching ESL because I wanted to help Latino immigrants. As a journalist I had covered stories about immigrants struggling to overcome language barriers in the United States. I was disturbed by the hostility I witnessed in people who insisted the US is only for those who already speak English. I decided I wanted to welcome immigrants to this country by helping them learn our language and culture. I believe in the power of language to bring people from different cultures together. As I began teaching English language learners from around the world I saw that speaking a common language connected us and gave us the ability to share our different worldviews. Teaching EFL in China and Latin America gave me new perspectives on American culture and the role of English as an international language. Co-teaching ESL classes at Hamline University and the University of Minnesota taught me the benefits of collaborating with other instructors.

I am drawn to language teaching because it combines all the things that are most important to me: good communication, healthy relationships, life-long learning, and the commitment to keep looking for better ways to help people reach their language goals. I treasure the relationships I have formed with my students. Knowing that our lessons give them confidence as English speakers is food for my soul. The English language has always fascinated me. The MA ESL program has prepared me to teach it effectively. During my time at the University of Minnesota I have developed a philosophy of teaching that focuses on meeting the needs of my students.

*How students learn*

I believe students learn best when they can see a purpose for their studies, and are allowed to explore new ways of learning that fit their interests and abilities. In order to practice language, students need an environment where they feel comfortable taking risks. They need to feel that they are respected members of a learning community.

*How I teach*

My role as a teacher is to give students the tools they need to take responsibility for their own learning. It is my responsibility to aid them by being prepared for classes, creating engaging activities that foster collaborative learning, and creating a positive environment in which it is okay to make mistakes. I believe in keeping the focus of any class on the students and their needs, rather than on any personal agenda. I see myself as part of a learning community we create together.

*Goals for students*

I help students articulate personal goals for learning, so they are stakeholders in the classroom and are motivated to find the answers to their own questions. I also encourage them to develop their own learning strategies. I promote learning about and showing respect for the languages and cultures of each person in the classroom. Each class is an opportunity to create a supportive learning community, in which cooperation and good communication play key roles.

*Respect for students*

My students are unique individuals. I show respect for them by taking a personal interest in

their learning, and by adapting activities to fit different learning styles. I strive to be empathetic and encouraging in all my interactions with students. I also try to be sensitive to the fact that I'm working with people from different cultures. I realize that students' expectations about school behavior may not match my own. I work with them to create comfortable routines and set standards for what is acceptable in the classroom.

### *Professional goals*

I grow by teaching and learning new skills. I've attended more than a dozen technology seminars to keep up with new developments for language learning and shared my knowledge at technology workshops and presentations in the US and China. Online resources help me create lessons that connect my students with the world around them. My goal is to collaborate with other teachers to develop new tools and strategies that will benefit my students. I grow by reflecting on my own teaching and using feedback from my students to improve my lessons and become a more effective teacher.

## **Integrative Statement**

When I started work on this portfolio I reviewed the statement of purpose I wrote when I first entered the MA ESL program. I had just returned to the US after teaching EFL in Nicaragua. I wrote that I was “fascinated by the techniques used in language teaching, and inspired by the creativity involved in planning lessons and developing learning materials. It convinced me that my interest in language learning was deep and genuine...” My objectives were to better understand how language is acquired, and to learn techniques for teaching language more effectively. I also wanted to create learning materials and find new applications for technology in the classroom. I have met those objectives with the help of the faculty and students at the University of Minnesota (see MA ESL Handbook, Appendix, item 48).

As a teacher in the Wuhan program I designed curriculum, planned lessons, wrote a workbook chapter, and designed activities using authentic materials. I taught in a foreign country where I did not speak the language. During each step of the process I called on knowledge and experience I gained from my studies (see Second Language Studies website in Appendix, item 49). In this section of my portfolio I will highlight what I learned from coursework in the MA ESL program and how I used it to improve my teaching.

### *The art of teaching*

**TESL 5721:** I took Methods in Teaching ESL before I entered the MA ESL program. I had earned my TEFL certificate from Hamline University, and was investigating whether or not to pursue an MA ESL degree. I had been trained in the communicative approach to language learning and used it in my classes. The Methods course taught me about the evolution of language instruction from Grammar-Translation, to Audiolingualism, to Communicative

teaching (Celce-Murcia, 2001, pp. 3-11). I recognized the Audiolinguism approach in use when I first began studying Spanish. After several years I understood Spanish grammar, could read and write well, and had good pronunciation. However, I was barely able to communicate with native speakers when I began studying in Spain during my junior year. I had been given few opportunities in my courses to practice unrehearsed conversation.

I believe the methods used in communicative language learning are more effective. I agree with the focus on communicative competence, the use of authentic materials and situations, and having students work collaboratively in pairs or groups. A study by Gokhale (2005) (see Appendix, item 50) found that students who collaborated developed higher level thinking skills for discussion, clarification of ideas, and evaluation of others' idea (Implications for Instruction, para.1). The opportunity to collaborate was also a great motivator. My students commented that their favorite activities involved working together on creative projects. They responded enthusiastically to the communicative approach and my efforts to create a learner-centered classroom.

One of the most valuable skills I developed in Methods was lesson planning. Writing out “students will be able to” (SWBT) made me focus on setting measurable objectives and designing activities that would enable students to meet them. Taking the Methods course convinced me to apply to the MA ESL program.

**TESL 5722:** Practicum gave me the opportunity to try out what I had learned about lesson planning under the supervision of an experienced teacher. My mentor was Jenise Rowekamp and the class was an Advanced Pronunciation course in the Academic English program. Jenise is a great role model -- an excellent teacher who cares about her students and uses her creativity to

design interesting and effective activities. We used audio, video, and web resources in every class and that helped me become more adventurous in my use of technology. As well as giving me the opportunity to teach part of every class, she let me design activities, help build the course website, and use the Wimba voice tools to give students verbal feedback on their pronunciation. Up to that point, my opportunities to teach pronunciation had been limited to twenty-minute segments carved out of my two-hour community ESL classes. The Advanced Pronunciation course helped me become more knowledgeable about the subject and better able to aid and evaluate students' progress. I have included pronunciation lessons as part of every class I have taught since then. I have tutored several students at the University of Minnesota in pronunciation and enjoy finding ways to aid learners from different language groups. I look forward to teaching more pronunciation classes in the future.

**TESL 5724:** Introduction to Language Assessment taught me how to evaluate students' learning. It is an important part of teaching I knew little about. I generally do not like to use summative assessment because it seems to promote competition with other students rather than supplying the formative feedback that will help each learner improve. The course taught me that effective summative assessment provides important information about the student's mastery of speaking, listening, writing, and reading skills. The teacher can use the results to make changes in the way the information is presented. I used summative assessments in the Oral Skills class I co-taught. Looking at the results from chapter tests in the "Northstar: Listening and Speaking" text (Solorzano and Schmidt, 2009) told me whether or not I had taught the material effectively and which skills students needed to practice more.

**CI 5660:** Teaching and Learning Pragmatics was a summer CARLA Institute taught by Noriko Ishihara, with Andrew Cohen as a co-presenter. It showed me the importance of teaching students to use language in a way that is culturally appropriate. I used what I learned in this class to teach my Chinese students about the way Americans perform speech acts such as requests, complaints, apologies, and compliments (Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition, 2009, Descriptions of Speech Acts) (see Appendix, item 51). We compared what is considered polite in each of our cultures and I taught them phrases they could use to compliment each other. I believe in the value of explicitly teaching pragmatics to help English language learners avoid misunderstandings and communication breakdowns.

### *Language Analysis*

**TESL 5401 and 5402:** These two Language Analysis courses taught me how to explain English grammar to second language learners. I learned there is a big difference between knowing how to use grammar as a native speaker and being able to teach the rules to non-native speakers. It had been many years since I studied grammar and I had forgotten the rules and the vocabulary used to describe it. The language analysis courses helped me fill in the blanks so I will be more competent when I teach it again. I will be better able to help students address grammar problems, recognize patterns, and focus on the structures that will improve their comprehensibility. I believe there is a need for explicit grammar instruction in ESL and EFL, but that courses should offer a balance between form and meaning.

As part of TESL 5401, we studied the basics of English pronunciation and learned techniques for helping students improve their intelligibility. The text, "Teaching Pronunciation: A Reference for Teachers of English to Speaker's of Other Languages" (Celce-Murcia, Brinton,

and Goodwin, 1996) had many examples of activities to help students improve segmental and suprasegmental production (pp. 131-219). This course sparked my interest in the role suprasegmental features such as intonation and rhythm play in language learners' ability to understand and make themselves understood when speaking English. The way my Chinese students perfected their performance of "We Will Rock You" for the closing ceremony performance at Wuhan convinced me that explicit instruction works.

**TESL 5805:** Second Language Acquisition presented different theoretical approaches to language instruction and taught me about the factors that influence language learning. I was interested in the debate about whether explicit knowledge can lead to the development of the implicit knowledge that underlies spontaneous language use. I do not agree with Krashen's theory (1981, 1982, 1985) that acquisition and learning are distinct processes. I believe that explicit knowledge can become implicit through instruction, practice, and increased exposure. I agree with Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis (2001) which states that learners must notice the ways in which their language structure differs from the target language before they can acquire a linguistic form.

I also learned about interlanguage and the predictable stages ELLs move through as they acquire English. This knowledge has helped me understand student errors and what they can tell me about a student's proficiency level. I appreciated being able to watch the DVD included with our text, "Exploring Learner Language" (Tarone and Sweirzbin, 2009) to practice analyzing learner interviews and task performance. I reviewed the information about the two Chinese learners before I taught at Wuhan.

**TESL 5910:** Discourse Analysis (DA) taught me to look at conversations in context and focus on what people do with language. It helped me understand how participants' language choices shape their interactions. We learned how to transcribe conversations to show how participants take turns and overlap each other. I was intrigued by discussions about Grice's maxims of cooperative communication (1975) and how flouting them can lead to communication breakdowns.

### *Technology*

**LGTT 5110:** Technology & the Second Language Classroom was offered as a CARLA institute. I took it the summer before I began my MA ESL coursework. It offered a survey of online tools teachers can use to enhance language teaching. I think it is essential for language teachers to become familiar with technology because students today are digital natives and live much of their lives online. Audio recording programs such as Wimba have greatly improved my ability to give students individual feedback on their pronunciation and oral skills. I also learned how to use other online recording tools, video and photo editing programs, interactive exercise makers, and programs for creating websites and learning materials. After I took the course, CARLA and the College of Liberal Arts Language Center teaching staff created a wiki with links to useful online technology tools (see Appendix, item 52).

**LGTT 5738:** Web-based Language Instruction taught me how to evaluate and build websites for teaching ESL. I used the iWeb program to create an ESL site for Latino immigrants to educate them about culture shock and teach them pragmatic skills. I am impressed by the wide range of technology training workshops and online resources offered by the CLA Language Center and

the University Technology Training Center. This is an invaluable service for language teachers and I have taken advantage of it by learning as much as I can. I have used these online tools extensively in my classes and to build an online portfolio about my teaching experience in China.

### *Teaching in China*

The courses I have taken at the University of Minnesota prepared me to teach effectively at the Wuhan University Summer Intensive English Program. I will continue to grow as an instructor by reflecting on my classroom experiences, using feedback from students and colleagues, and learning more about pedagogy and technology. This portfolio has demonstrated how the MA ESL program has helped me improve my teaching and better serve my students.

Teaching in China gave me new perspectives about American culture and the English language because I could see it through my students' eyes. Their enthusiasm for learning and curiosity about the world was inspiring. Throughout China's long history there has been a reverence for education. I am grateful for the experience of teaching in that culture.

*If you are planning for a year, sow rice;*

*if you are planning for a decade, plant trees;*

*if you are planning for a lifetime, educate people. Chinese proverb*

## Electronic Portfolios

When I returned from China and began work on my teaching portfolio, it seemed clear that a paper portfolio would not be the best way to demonstrate what I had learned while teaching at Wuhan. Most of the learning materials I had created were in a digital format, and the use of technology was an integral part of my experience. I was aware of only one other MA ESL student at the U of M who had done an electronic portfolio. In 2006 Amy Tarrell used a software program called Dreamweaver to create her teaching portfolio, “integrating technology into language instruction” (<http://www.tc.umn.edu/~tarre004/teachingportfolio.html>) (see Appendix, item 53). Her portfolio has been a valuable resource for demonstrating how to effectively present digital materials and apply technology skills. Amy generously provided information that helped me get started.

Luckily for me, in the four years since Amy produced her portfolio, the proliferation of Web 2.0 tools presented options for creating a website that I found more user-friendly than Dreamweaver, and that would require less time to learn. Web 2.0 refers to web applications that allow people without specialized technology skills to interact, collaborate, create, and share content over the Internet. Examples are social networking sites, blogs, wikis, video sharing sites, and web-based portfolio creation tools. I wanted to try using these Web 2.0 applications to see what a non-digital native like myself could accomplish in the time frame of a few months.

Since ePortfolios were not commonly used in the MA ESL program, there were no guidelines in place for creating one. I had a lot of questions. What exactly *is* an ePortfolio? What should be in it? How should it be evaluated? How do I choose a portfolio creation tool? Because I did not know the answers my experience of creating an electronic portfolio was a process of trial and error. As I began to research the subject, I found a wealth of information that *I wish*

*I had known* before I started. In this final section of my portfolio, I present research that addresses the *what, why* and *how* of electronic portfolios.

### *Portfolios in second language education*

The popularity of portfolios in second language instruction and teacher education is due in part to the rise of Constructivism, a pedagogical school of thought that emphasizes learning by experience and self-discovery (National Guidance Research Forum, 2009, Theoretical Background section, para.1) (see Appendix, item 54). At their simplest, learning portfolios contain examples of a student's work, and the student's reflections about them. Well-designed portfolios demonstrate growth and achievement in an organized, synthesized, and dynamic way, and support a process approach to learning (NGRF, 2009, Skills Required section).

According to Kuhlman (2006) (see Appendix, item 55) portfolios are particularly effective for using multiple measures to portray ESL and EFL students' growth and development in English (para.1). ePortfolios can include projects, homework, essays, and journals from any content area . For example, students could take a recent writing sample and compare it to ones they have done in the past. Kuhlman says students would then look for evidence of growth, such as the use of longer and more complex sentences (Kuhlman, 2006, Evaluation of the Portfolio, para.1). Portfolios include the student's own reflections on their progress, as well as the teacher's. Since they can be used for any content area, students are able to demonstrate, reflect, and get formative feedback on a wide range of competencies (NGRF, 2009, Skills Required, para. 6).

A major theme in the use of portfolios is reflective learning. According to the More Self-Esteem with my ePortfolio Project [MOSEP] (n.d., para. 1) (see Appendix, item 56) reflective learning is an active, conscious process. It involves analyzing and evaluating one's work to look

for patterns and problem solving strategies in order to learn through experience. Creators of ePortfolios generally are engaged in reflection-on-action (Schön, 1983), which means reflections are composed and submitted after a task is completed. The student's reflective activities involve interaction with the teacher and with peers. Examples of reflective activities include writing in journals, group discussions in class, storytelling, and critiquing class presentations.

### *Electronic portfolios*

The rise of information and communication technology (ICT) in the 1990's created a new world of possibilities for creating *electronic* portfolios. In the literature electronic portfolios have been referred to as ePortfolios, e-portfolios, efolios, digital portfolios, and webfolios. Challis (2005) (see Appendix, item 57) defines an electronic portfolio as a "selective and structured collection of information" that is "gathered for a specific purpose to show accomplishment and growth" (The Issue of Definition, para. 7). The collection is developed using multimedia, stored digitally, and managed by software. It is accessed from a website, or delivered by CD-Rom or DVD.

In contrast to paper portfolios, ePortfolios can include digital media such as audio, video, graphics, and photos, as well as social networking capabilities. The following is a list of some of the benefits of using ePortfolios, adapted from Butler (2006, Benefits of Electronic Portfolios section) (see Appendix, item 58).

- Skills: students develop multimedia, technology, and technical problem-solving skills
- Feedback: facilitates exchange of ideas via the Internet, and permits quick feedback
- Artifacts: can integrate pictures, graphics, animation, audio, and video
- Convenience: hyperlinks to other sites enable more content and save paper

- Maintenance: easy to maintain, update, and store, and the content is portable
- Organization: can be non-linear or hierarchical
- Access: accessible from multiple locations, and can be shared with a global audience

Helen Barrett, a former professor at the University of Alaska, has been researching strategies and technologies for ePortfolios for more than twenty years. Her website about electronic portfolios presents her research and contains links to other resources and ePortfolio examples (retrieved March 22, 2011 from <http://electronicportfolios.com/>) (see Appendix, item 59). In her blog, “E-Portfolios for Learning” she comments on recent developments in ePortfolio research (retrieved March 22, 2011 from <http://blog.helenbarrett.org/>) (see Appendix, item 60).

Even though researchers have reported many benefits of implementing electronic portfolios, they have also identified issues that can make their use difficult or ineffective. Creating ePortfolios can be time-consuming because students and instructors need training and support to learn how to use programs and solve technical problems (Abrami & Barrett, 2005, “Who are EP users”, para. 5) (see Appendix, item 61). Some institutions reported problems with faculty acceptance because of the extra time required, or because instructors do not believe there are sufficient benefits to justify using ePortfolios (Meyer and Latham, Findings, para. 7) (see Appendix, item 62). According to Lorenzo & Ittelson (2005) (see Appendix, item 62) there are technical issues to address, such as the need to provide adequate online storage space and a reliable server (Implementation Issues, Hardware and software, para.1). They also report that verification of artifacts is problematic, and that ePortfolios raise questions about copyrights and intellectual property (Implementation Issues, Ownership, para. 4). Finally, it can be difficult to evaluate ePortfolios in a manner that is both valid and reliable (Abrami & Barret, 2005, para. 5).

An increasing number of teacher education programs now use rubrics to evaluate ePortfolios (Meyer and Latham (2008). A rubric is a rating scale that provides the instructor with guidelines for evaluating student performance. The rubric also informs students about expected content and how assignments will be evaluated (Regis University Electronic Portfolio Project [RUEPP], 2003a) (see Appendix, item 64).

Table 3 shows a simplified version of an ePortfolio evaluation rubric developed at the University of Wisconsin-Stout. An important requirement is that there is a thoughtful reflection attached to each artifact.

### **Simplified version of UW Stout ePortfolio Evaluation Rubric**

<http://www2.uwstout.edu/content/art/artedportfolios/evaluating/portevaluationrubric.html>

	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Excellent</b>
<b>Technical</b>	Hard to Navigate	Most links work	All links work
<b>Design</b>	Disorganized, not visual, poor use of media	Organized, good design and use of media	Well organized and highly visual, excellent media use
<b>Reflections</b>	Not related to artifacts, poor quality	Related, but some reflections missing, good quality	Related, no reflections missing, excellent quality
<b>Artifacts</b>	Many missing, poor quality, little variety	Variety of artifacts but some missing, good quality	Good variety of artifacts, none missing

Table 3 (based on a rubric by Klein, 2003) (see Appendix, item 65)

Many teacher education programs use mandated standards as part of the graduation requirement for their students (Meyer and Latham, 2008).

### *Types of ePortfolios*

Though the terminology varies, researchers have identified three types of portfolios for

education: developmental (learning), assessment, and showcase (RUEPP, 2003b) (see Appendix, item 66).

*Developmental* ePortfolios are used to show the development of students' language skills over a period of time, such as a semester-long course. They are viewed as works in progress and include self-assessment and reflection by the student. Electronic portfolios offer multiple opportunities for instructor, peers, and groups to interact and provide feedback.

*Assessment* ePortfolios demonstrate student skills in well-defined areas. An example is an end of course assessment to evaluate how the student performed. The purpose is to measure student competency as defined by program standards and outcomes. In formative assessment students get feedback from the teacher and other students in order to improve their skills.

*Showcase* ePortfolios demonstrate a student's best work. These are typically shown to potential employers at the end of a degree program. Most ePortfolios are hybrids that combine elements of learning, assessment, and showcase portfolios.

### *ePortfolios for teacher training*

According to Meyer and Latham (2008) ePortfolios have the potential to change the face of higher education, especially when it comes to teacher training. Accreditation agencies have encouraged the use of electronic portfolios because they are more manageable than paper copies, display appropriate evidence, and demonstrate a student's performance and mastery (Literature Review, para 1). Meyer and Latham also predict that as teacher education programs become performance based, they will turn to ePortfolios to document teacher competencies and guide long-term professional development (Conclusion, para. 5).

ePortfolios may contain the same basic information found in paper portfolios (evidence

of effective teaching and student/colleague interaction, lesson plans, teaching materials, teaching philosophy, reflection, feedback, and integrative statements). However, ePortfolios can enhance that content by using multimedia to present it in a personalized, creative, and visual way. Barrett (2000) (see Appendix, item 67) suggests presenting a variety of artifacts that use audio, video, and Internet capabilities, making recordings of reflections and feedback, showing video of classroom teaching and professional presentations, and using hypertext links between materials and external websites.

In a survey of teacher education programs that use ePortfolios (Meyer & Latham, 2008) faculty members and administrators reported several benefits. One participant called electronic portfolios an “efficient means for developing a richer portfolio than a hard copy format (“Data Collection”, para. 5). Southeast University reported that it has pre-service teachers use the ePortfolio tool to create online activities so each one gains a database of classroom activities and teaching strategies (Findings, para. 9). In another survey, Strudler and Wetzel (2008) (see Appendix, item 68) reported that perceived benefits included better student understanding of teaching standards, better faculty access for assessing student work, and increased communication between faculty and students (p. 139-140). Others said they appreciated being able to access students’ work over the Internet (p. 136). Both studies reported that some faculty members were concerned about the extra demands on their time.

Barrett (2000) maintains that by reflecting on their teaching experiences, setting goals, and dialoguing with others about their ePortfolios, pre-service teachers will build a good foundation for future professional development (Conclusions, para. 1). She says teachers who develop ePortfolios are also more likely to have students who create their own electronic portfolios (Benefits, para. 2).

*ePortfolios for ESL and EFL students*

The primary purpose of a learning ePortfolio is to demonstrate the development of a student's language skills over time (Kuhlman, 2006, para. 3). In the process of creating the portfolio, students learn to apply reflective thinking to their experiences so they can recognize what they need to do in order to progress (Butler, 2006, Conclusions, para. 1). Teachers and/or students can decide the type of materials to include, such as blog entries, digital images of student projects, audio of students speaking or reading, and video clips of student performances. Some teachers require their students to provide reflections to match each artifact, as well as an explanation of why they selected the artifact (NGRF, 2009, Development of e-portfolios, para. 6).

ePortfolios give students practice in the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills of archiving, linking/thinking, storytelling, planning, and publishing (Barrett, 2007, p. 439, Table 1) (see Appendix, item 69). For example, students use hyperlinks to demonstrate how they view the relationship between their own achievements, other people's work, and external websites. Research suggests that the process of hyperlinking may lead to higher levels of metacognition (Barrett, 2007, p. 441). In order to develop their multimedia communication skills, teachers can create activities that require students to use Skype or social networking sites to interact with native English speakers. English language learners gain important design and technology skills and receive formative feedback on their projects from teachers and other students (Kuhlman, 2006).

To be successful users of electronic portfolios, students need to understand the reasons for constructing a portfolio, be given clear guidelines, and have access to an electronic portfolio system that is easy to use and gives them as much flexibility or as much structure as they

require. If used only as a way of organizing student work, electronic portfolios will fail to truly help students learn (Butler, 2006, Conclusions para. 2).

### *Portfolio development process*

Though the terminology and number of steps vary, researchers (Barrett, 2000, “Benefits”, para. 3) have described the same process for developing teacher and student ePortfolios:

- Collect: class work and other material (create a digital archive)
- Select: work samples (artifacts) that show learning and growth
- Reflect: on learning and identify evidence of growth
- Project: set future learning goals
- Connect: share portfolio with peers, faculty and potential employers

Barrett (Abrami & Barrett, 2005, Process portfolios, para. 2) says participation in each stage of the portfolio development process contributes to teachers’ professional development and students’ life-long learning.

### *Two studies*

LaGuardia Community College in New York City provides an example of a popular and successful ePortfolio program. LaGuardia began its program in 2001 with funding from the Title V program of the US Department of Education. Data collected in 2005 showed key gains for students: increased engagement in learning and critical thinking, satisfaction with college, and improved completion rates (Clark, Eynon, Graciano, and Gross, 2006, p. 23) (see Appendix, item 70). The following student comments are from interviews in a video about LaGuardia’s ePortfolio program (see Appendix, item 71).

“It’s always good to look back and reflect on what you’ve done from start to finish.”

“It’s like a tool that stores all of your achievements.”

“I showed it to my friends and family. They were really impressed because everything was in English.”

These are faculty comments:

“My students and I are learning technology together.”

“It’s a way for our faculty to think about the whole student.”

“It allows students to be independent thinkers and take control of their learning...”

ePortfolios have also been used successfully in English as a foreign language (EFL) settings. In a study by Huang and Hung (2010) (see Appendix, item 72) 30 EFL college students created speaking ePortfolios over the course of a semester. They made bi-weekly voice recordings, paid regular visits to their peers’ ePortfolios, and provided oral feedback on their peers’ work. Compared with a control group that did not create ePortfolios, the ePortfolio group demonstrated significantly better oral performance in terms of language quantity. It also substantially increased the lexical richness of students’ oral production, but failed to uphold such effects for syntactic complexity. Finally, EFL learners in the study expressed a strong preference for using electronic portfolios (p. 192).

### *Selecting an ePortfolio program*

Before choosing an ePortfolio program, it is important to think about the type of portfolio you want, its purpose, and its audience (Butler, 2006, Decisions section). Barrett (2000) warns

that the software you use to create the electronic portfolio could either limit or enhance the portfolio development process (Stage 4: The Connected Portfolio para. 2). On her website, “E-Portfolios for Learning” (<http://electronicportfolios.com/>) Barrett writes about her experiences using dozens of different Web 2.0 applications to create ePortfolios (Tools section).

When I began my ePortfolio project I first used the Moodle course management system to collect and organize my evidence (see Appendix, item 73). However, it did not offer the format or features I wanted for the final portfolio. I then searched for an open source (free) ePortfolio creation program that would be easy to learn, provide a selection of interchangeable templates, and offer a space in the portfolio for students to write reflections and for teachers to leave feedback. After an Internet search I chose eFolio (see Appendix, item 74) a portfolio tool developed by the Minnesota State Colleges and University System (MnSCU) and Avnet, a web solutions provider. The site provides good online support, and there are now videos on YouTube that demonstrate its features (see Appendix, item 75).

I think eFolio was a good choice for creating a Teaching ePortfolio that was simple, yet media rich and easy to navigate. I believe it would be useful to other Second Language Study students who want to do an electronic portfolio. I am now creating another ePortfolio with the open source Mahara program, which is used in more than 70 countries and offers social networking capabilities (Mahara, n.d.) (see Appendix, item 76).

This project was a great adventure in trying out unfamiliar Web 2.0 tools and solving technical problems that would have scared me off not long ago. According to Rehora (2010) (see Appendix, item 77) all teachers should have a visible presence on the web to provide models for students and to participate in extended learning networks. Now that I have a visible presence on the web, I hope to use ePortfolios in future teaching assignments.

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## Appendix

### Online Supplemental Material

“Teaching and Learning in China” ePortfolio (Appendix section)

<http://debleach.efoliomn.com/Home>