



TEACHERS AS LEADERS

Executive Book Summary of *West Meets East: Best Practices from Expert Teachers in the U.S. and China*

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West Meets East

This collaborative effort by Leslie Grant, James Stronge, Xianxuan Xu, Patricia Popp, and Yaling Sun is an examination and comparison of the differences and similarities of U.S. and Chinese Education. By interviewing award-winning teachers from each country with years of teaching experience under their belts, the team of scholars initially intended to only examine the U.S. education system before they were captivated by the educational reforms in China. Each country has aspects of education they admire about the other: the U.S. longs for China's high assessment scores, while China wishes to learn how the U.S. "fosters innovation and creativities in students." Though both countries are vastly different in demographics, culture, and political structures, one aspect of education in these countries transcends all of these divides: great teachers are delivering great teaching. Each side has its own successes along with a list of improvements, and teachers from both sides have a responsibility to lead their students to success.

Before and After Reading *West Meets East*

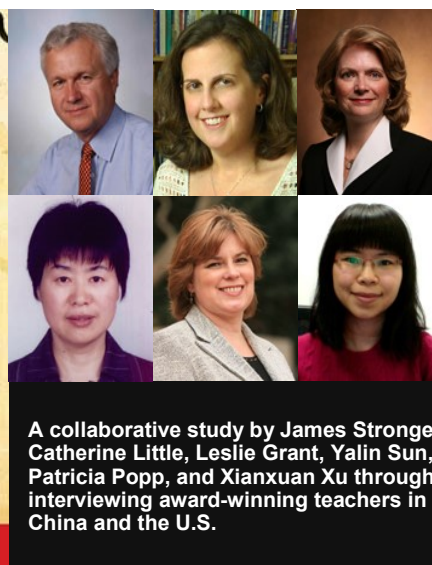
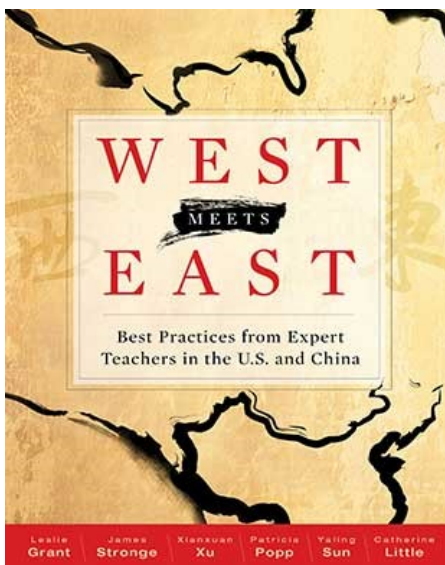
The essential question I asked myself before reading the studies along with the conclusions I came to was:

Q: What sort of leaders are the most effective teachers?

A: Award-winning teachers that are not only well-loved by students, but backed by excellent classroom management, assessment scores, and respect all exhibit successful servant leadership as defined by Northouse. Despite differences in curriculum, culture, and instructional methods, the best teachers practiced key elements of servant leadership which earned them their success.

"We found that teachers are far more alike than they are different. Caring, fairness, respect... [it] didn't matter that the class sizes were different, it didn't matter that the structure of the schools were different. We found an overriding focus on quality instruction and connectivity with students."

- James Stronge, Professor of Education



A collaborative study by James Stronge, Catherine Little, Leslie Grant, Yalin Sun, Patricia Popp, and Xianxuan Xu through interviewing award-winning teachers in China and the U.S.

Organized by:

- Introduction and Overview
- The teacher, The Person
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- Classroom Organization, Management, and Discipline
- Lessons Learned

Introduction and Overview

Though the political climates of the two countries that represent Western and Eastern education could not be more different, there is a recognition that education must be made a priority for a sustainable national economy. Though the education systems of the China and the U.S. are roughly equally developed through countless reforms and refinement, globalization has necessitated a greater demand for higher quality education, causing both countries to look to each other's strong points. As the study was initially started with the purpose of enriching American schools, to "remain competitive in order to support tomorrow's economy and American prosperity," the introduction and overview of "West Meets East" focuses greatly on some tendencies of American education as areas for improvement. Even when examining top American public schools, there is said to be a "profound disconnect between what employers look for in potential employees (critical thinking skills, problem-solving skills, collaboration, creativity, and effective communication) and what our schools provide (passive learning environments and uninspired lesson plans that focus on test preparation and reward memorization) (Grant et al. 2014)." Though the book does conduct a fair examination of both sides, the idea main source of impetus for the study is that "while other countries have made significant improvements to their education systems, the United States has made only incremental changes" (Grant et al., 2014). My executive book summary examines the styles of leadership that award-winning teachers from both countries use to earn their country their deserved reputations in the other.



"In this globalized world, people compete for jobs—not just locally but also internationally."

Chinese Education System

Moving Away From...

Transmitting pure knowledge

"Bookish" knowledge

Repetitive and mechanistic rote learning

Moving Toward...

Fostering learning attitudes and values

Relevance and interest of the content in the curriculum

Increased student participation, real-life experience, capacity in communications and teamwork, and an ability to acquire new knowledge and analyze and solve problems

Teachers as Leaders

Northouse has defined servant leaders as those who possess and practice certain characteristics in their leadership. The 10 skills are:

1. Listening
2. Empathy
3. Healing
4. Awareness
5. Persuasion
6. Conceptualization
7. Foresight
8. Stewardship
9. Commitment to the growth of people
10. Building community

The paradox

As a style of leadership that "is a paradox—an approach to leadership that runs counter to common sense," good teachers from both China and the U.S. share similar intentions, motivations, and principles when it comes to leading their students to success (Northouse, 2013). Award-winning teachers have all practiced these 10 skills in order to help their students develop an attitude fit for learning; though some may see that teachers in China are made to be respected and authoritative in the classroom, the actual work of top teachers there do as leaders are no less servant-like. On the surface, claiming that Chinese teachers practice servant-leadership leads the concept to be even more paradoxical as a result of their culture. The ultimate goal for teachers in both countries is, however, is to tirelessly work to serve the students by gently creating positive relationships, creating welcoming environments conducive to learning, preparing and planning lessons to best reach students, varying instructional methods to support differentiated learning, and organizing and managing the classroom, all of which is no different from servanthood considering their jobs become more difficult as a result (Grant et al., 2014).



Relationship Building

Both teachers from the U.S. and China understand the importance of creating a positive, productive relationship with the students over stressing academic achievement.

Being warm, friendly, inviting, and interested in the students as people is cross-culturally recognized as one of the most important aspects of effective teaching (Grant et al., 2014).



"I think knowing your students and making sure that they know that you care about them goes a thousand percent to getting results from them" - U.S. teacher

The Teacher, the Person

Both countries recognize the importance of building a relationship between themselves and their students for effective teaching, but teachers from each nation practice relationship-building in subtly different ways based on their circumstances.

China

- Students and teachers are part of the same family, and in order for effective education, there must be a harmonious relationship between them all.
- Teachers go out of their way to take responsibility over students as a parent would
- Emphasis is placed on educating the person, not just knowledge
- "The responsibilities of a teacher are not only to transmit the knowledge of subject matter but also to nourish the student as a whole person."
"First of all, as a teacher, you have to care about and love the students, just like the parents."
- Award-winning teachers in China

U.S.

- Teachers treat teaching more professionally and less like a parent, but still stresses the importance of building a strong relationship.
- Teachers work to create a sense of community between teachers and students, but set subtle professional boundaries to be able to assist them in ways parents may not be able to.
- Emphasis is placed on educating the person, not just knowledge.
- "I just try to know them as people and try to meet them each day where they are. And also know their interests, so I can make my lessons meaningful to them."
- Award-winning teacher in the U.S.

To be effective leaders in the classroom, teachers must practice listening, empathy, healing (making whole, caring about the personal well-being of students), awareness, commitment to the growth of people, and building community by engaging students as people by building positive relationships. Character education is also paramount to teacher success, which is also in line with servant leadership as students could possibly follow the example of their teacher to have a positive impact on society.

Planning for Student Success

There is a big difference in the amount of planning time and class-time given to teachers from China and the U.S.

American teachers typically teach 25 hours a week with 5 hour of preparation time allotted while Chinese teachers typically teach 12 hours a week with 24 hours of planning a week.

The ratio of a U.S. teacher planning time to instructional time is 1:5, while in China, it's closer to 1:2.



Careful planning and assessment are part of teachers' commitment to the growth of their students

The Teacher, Instructional Planning, and Assessment

Effective teachers in the U.S. and China both plan extensively to meet the needs of every student. A disengaged student is seen as the result of a lack of relevancy or unclear learning goals, and is treated as a failure of the teacher, the leader. In this manner, teachers are responsible for learning student needs and interest, and to plan accordingly.

China

- Teachers use their longer planning time to collaboratively create highly-structured lessons, analyzing the flow and outcomes of each topic and transition. Teachers follow the teaching manual, use shared resources, and consult with each other to improve.
- “Effective instruction in China emphasizes whole-class activities over small-group activities,” and “All Chinese teachers try to maximize instruction time” due to the limited amount of time in each class, and the exam-driven system (Grant, 2014).

U.S.

- Teachers use their longer instructional time in a more student-centered approach where they use more group-work to learn the needs of their students.
- Teachers have more autonomy in the classroom to use their own resources as they see fit, and are able to assess student learning on a more individual basis.

For both sides, the approaches' greatest strengths are also their greatest weaknesses; though China is able to have a much more structured consistency across the board in terms of curriculum delivery, they suffer a lack of autonomy and flexibility by being able to incorporate assessment into their instruction, and vice versa. For this difficult task of planning effective lessons for student success, teachers must possess further qualities of a servant leader: foresight considering teachers' responsibility to plan around obstacles, as they believe “leaders should be held accountable for any failures to anticipate what reasonably could be foreseen and to act on that understanding,” and conceptualization by the need to see the “big picture” in help students achieve higher learning goals through effective planning (Northouse, 2013).

Differences in Practice

The gap between class sizes and lengths between U.S. and Chinese classrooms are very large; Chinese classes are typically upwards of 40 to 50 students for 40 to 50 minutes for each class, while classes in the U.S. are much smaller at 20 to 30, each class being 60 to 90 minutes.

Teachers from both countries however use the number of students they have in their classes to help student learning; teachers in China appreciate the fact that in a bigger class, students feel a greater sense of belonging to the collective group, whereas in the U.S., there are more opportunities for teachers use assessment strategies to engage every student, personalizing their lessons to meet every need.

"I believe honestly that every student is a special needs student. Every single one of them has something special, some special need. I think they are all important."

- U.S. Teacher



The way Instructional Planning is Implemented is constantly reflected upon by teachers in the U.S. and China to better serve the students.

Instructional Practice

Teachers in both countries are given a set of circumstances in an environment that they must adapt to in order to effectively lead their students to success. Though the cards teachers are dealt in both countries can vary wildly, there is a common understanding for the need to create a safe, welcoming environment both physically and emotionally through their instructional methods.

China

- Less opportunities for teachers to rearrange the physical layout of the classroom due to space constraints, and class sizes.
- Teachers are aware of the need to be sensitive during instructional practice to include students who may be marginalized
- Teachers work to create a safe space for students to learn by celebrating and supporting student successes wherever they can.

U.S.

- More flexible in the physical layout of the classroom to better promote group, individual, or pair learning.
- Frequent changes can be made in instructional delivery, resources provided to support student needs.
- Teachers work to create a welcoming space for students, which allows them to feel more comfortable taking risks

The actual delivery of the curriculum planning through instructional practice for Chinese teachers must be well-rehearsed, structured, and somewhat rigid as the circumstances surrounding their class sizes and class length dictate. On the other hand, American teachers have more flexibility to change the direction of their plans depending on what students need in order to further their understanding. Both approaches require teachers practice similar servant leadership characteristics as the planning stage, with added awareness and listening for assessment.

A Matter of Respect

Though it may seem like in China, the respected position of a teacher automatically commands respect from the hierarchically lower students, but it is not the case; teachers are well-respected due to their tireless efforts in preparing and studying to serve the students.

In the U.S., though there are increasing concerns about the lack of respect teachers receive from the general populace along with the media, with an attitude of servitude towards students, by providing cheer, love, care, and nurture, students are able to respect teachers by staying engaged, and achieving high standards. The teacher therefore has a hand in ensuring that they are always serving students in order to be respected.

"A number of teachers considered it their responsibility to make sure students' behaviour met the moral norms of the culture and to compensate for any perceived lack of parental support."

- Chinese Teacher



Teachers use persuasion and stewardship to take responsibility over their students, and to organize the classroom into a place fit for learning, and using practiced gentle, nonjudgmental management and discipline techniques.

Classroom Organization, Management, and Discipline

Classroom organization between the two countries can vary, as again, Chinese classrooms are limited by their space and size. Rows of desk with the occasional poster is all that could usually be hoped for, especially in rural areas. The goal of teachers in both countries, however, is to create an environment that is welcoming of all learners, and in this respect, though teachers in the U.S. have more options physically, Chinese teachers work hard to welcome students emotionally.

Teachers are treated very differently in the two countries socially; in China, teachers are well-respected and generally referred to as "nation builders," whereas in the U.S., teachers are facing increasing challenges financially and socially. Despite this, the award-winning teachers of each country dismiss classroom management as a problem, stating that it should instead be called "relationship building" (Grant, 2014). With a positive relationship where students know and understand that teachers care for them and are working to serve their needs, there is said to be an inherent trust and respect that prevents classroom management from being an issue. Additionally, good classroom management is "not obvious and is seamlessly woven into the lesson" through proper planning (Grant, 2014).

Discipline is described in "East Meets West" as a distinct concept from what's understood in the modern interpretation as "punishment," bringing the word back to its roots in Latin, *disciplina*, which means "teaching" and "learning" (Grant, 2014). Discipline is a way for teachers to practice stewardship by carefully managing students, correcting their behavior most often through caring dialogue to exhibit another characteristic of servant leadership: persuasion. Classroom management in a nutshell is "persistent communication that convinces [students] to change [their behavior] through the use of gentle nonjudgmental argument" (Grant, 2014).

Over the course of a day, teachers are said to make over 1000 decisions in one day when it comes to classroom management, which necessitates "sufficient practice in order to develop a repertoire of nearly automatic responses to situations if they want to successfully manage a classroom."

Lessons Learned

Overall, teachers and researchers have learned that good teaching begins and ends with a teacher's goal and attitude regardless of cultural, historical, political, Each nation has come to its current iteration of educational practice through centuries of practice. Neither satisfied, however, each country looks to the other in order to learn of ways to better serve their own students to achieve even greater scores, innovation, creativity, and critical thinking. Successful teachers practice the ultimate form of servant leadership, particularly in the U.S. where some teachers endure financial difficulty in what is often considered an non-lucrative, thankless job. In this exciting time of globalization, teachers have the ability to learn from each other in many new ways, but the keys to good teaching and good results remain the same, which are to value care, love, and passion for serving students over academic expectations.

Teaching as a Metaphor

To end off the study, the researchers encourage teachers to create a metaphor for teaching in to add to their philosophy in order to better illustrate their views on teaching. As one who analyzed this book from a leadership perspective, the following is the metaphor I leave with:

"Teaching is serving as a leader for students. The respect teachers may or may not enjoy as a leader in a position of authority is tied to how servant-minded a teacher is in his or her preparation, instruction, and relationships with students. A teacher is only an effective leader when students' needs are put first."

"The quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers" (Grant, 2014).

References

Grant, L., & Stronge, J. (n.d.). West meets East: Best practices from expert teachers in the U.S. and China.

Northouse, P. (2013). Leadership: Theory and practice (6th ed.). Thousand Oaks: SAGE.

Teaching is...

"Teaching is like performing. You should know what your audience wants to know."

"Teaching is like a beautiful process of watching flowers come into bloom and listening to them bloom."

"Teaching is like a crutch. It's like a guide for the students, but students should not keep using it all the time—otherwise it will break."

- Teachers in China

"Teaching is like a diamond in the rough—you know, something that you need to find and polish."

"I think of teaching as the lighting of a fire. It's striking passion in children."

"Teaching is like coaching. It's really, really, really about the students, and coaches get that."

- Teachers in the U.S.