

Promoting Students' Learning in Student-Centered Classrooms:
Positive Teaching Experiences of Middle Years Teachers in China and Canada

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By

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the selected middle years teachers' positive experiences of promoting student learning in student-centered classrooms, and how these recalled experiences might affect their own future teaching and assist other teachers to promote student learning. Based on social constructivism as the epistemological foundation, I chose Appreciative Inquiry (AI) as the research methodology. AI values people's positive experiences and emphasizes the importance of the positive core of change (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2000). In total, there were 53 middle years teachers in China and Canada who responded to an online survey. Four Chinese education experts were interviewed online, and 12 Canadian education experts participated in an interpretation panel.

The findings showed that both Chinese and Canadian participants believed that engaging students in their learning was the core of creating student-centered classrooms. They regarded group study as the most popular instructional strategy that was used to promote student-centered learning. Most participants stated that they had changed or planned to change their teaching practices because they had positive teaching experiences in student-centered classrooms. Chinese participants stated that they had shared their positive teaching experiences with other teachers at three levels: school divisions/districts, schools, or grades/subjects. The main activities for communication among Chinese teachers included group discussion, collective lesson planning, and classroom visits. Canadian participants reported that they usually shared their educational ideas and teaching experiences with other teachers in both formal and informal ways, such as chatting with each other during breaks, developing learning projects together, and communicating with each other through school networking websites. In addition, findings also showed that most Chinese middle years teachers teach a single subject, but many Canadian middle years teachers teach multiple subjects.

Based on this research, I suggested that teachers should apply multiple instructional strategies in their classrooms, serve students, and collaborate with parents/families. School boards and schools should make more efforts to encourage their teachers to communicate with each other, formally and regularly by providing policy,

technical, and financial supports for relevant programs and activities. Teachers should choose either a single subject or multiple subjects to teach according to their own willingness and abilities. Future researchers may benefit by using Appreciative Inquiry to explore people's positive experiences in education, and should be more open-minded by conducting cross-cultural and inter-cultural research to facilitate educators to communicate with each other and learn from each other.

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Chapter One

Background and Introduction

Two thousand years ago in ancient China, Confucius advocated that education should meet the needs of society. He stated that moral education should be the main focus of education and teachers should be models of moral persons. He further emphasized that a good teacher should teach with patience and high expectations, and should teach according to students' abilities and without discrimination. He believed that both teachers and students could benefit from the process of teaching and learning. Confucius, himself, promoted student learning by sharing his own learning experiences and by modeling lifelong learning. He encouraged students to ask questions, not only to him, but also to anybody else from whom students could learn. He communicated with students individually, and taught them how to draw inferences about other cases from one example (Zhang & Jin, 2001; Sun, 2000).

Almost at the same time in ancient Greece, about 470 BC to 399 BC, Socrates claimed that the only thing he knew was that he knew nothing; therefore, he taught his students to question everything, which scholars later referred to as "critical thought" (Stokes, 2002). Socrates also preferred to challenge his students by asking them questions, which was later termed the dialectic method of inquiry or Socratic questioning. That is, instead of asking only one question, Socrates "continued to ask guiding questions that would help his students discover the answers for themselves" (Hargrove, 2005, p.31).

As teachers, Confucius and Socrates tended to promote student learning in different ways. Confucius created a model for his students and was happy to answer students' various questions. Socrates was a guide for his students and taught them through asking a series of questions. Today, both Confucius and Socrates are regarded not only great philosophers, but also as great educators (Hargrove, 2005; Zhang & Jin, 2001; Sun, 2000). They have influenced on modern education in both the eastern and western world. What is interesting was that neither Confucius nor Socrates, wrote about their educational philosophy and teaching practices. It was their students who recorded their stories and spread their ideas, indicating that both Confucius and Socrates strongly affected their students. Stronge (2007) stated that effective teachers have a long-lasting positive impact on students' learning and

lives. Although not every teacher is like Confucius or Socrates, most teachers successfully promote students' learning and/or positively influence their lives.

In this study, I focused on Chinese and Canadian middle years teachers' successful stories in their teaching career, and explored their positive experiences of promoting student-centered learning. Seifert and Hoffnung (1994) contended that middle years refer to students from 6 to 13 years old. Pendergast and Bahr (2005) classified middle years students as being 10 to 15 years old. In my research, I defined middle years teachers as teachers who taught Grades 7 to 9. Students in these grades are usually 12 to 15 years old.

This research is not a comparative or a cross-cultural study, because the two groups of participants were selected from two cities, Beijing and Saskatoon, that are not comparable. Beijing is the capital city of China and has a large population, while Saskatoon is a prairie city with a smaller population located in Saskatchewan, Canada. Schools in these two cities are guided by different educational policies and have different curriculum and evaluation systems. I conducted this study because I believed it would be valuable not only for Chinese and Canadian teachers, but also that it would signify to educators worldwide that such communication may promote cross-cultural understanding and mutual learning.

According to Statistics Canada (2014), the number of international students enrolled in Canadian universities has significantly increased since 1998, and more than 50 percent of the international students were from Asia. The Canadian Bureau for International Education (2014) reported that, international student enrolment grew from 136,000 in 2001 to over 265,000 in 2012, a 94% increase. The top three countries of origin were China, India, and Korea. Since 2001, the number of Chinese students in Canada has increased 296%, from 20,371 to 80,627, which was more than 30% of all international students.

China Education Online (2014) also reported that, from 1978 to 2012, there were totally more than 2,644,700 Chinese students who studied abroad. From 2007 to 2011, the number of students who studied abroad increased 20% every year. Although the United States was still the first choice for most Chinese students to study, Canada has become more popular in recent years. In 2011 - 2012, 15% more Chinese students chose Canadian

schools in which to study. In addition, various educational exchange programs and training programs between Canada and China have emerged.

I believed that these statistics revealed a potential communicating space between China and Canada in the field of education; and that there was a need for Chinese and Canadian educators to learn more about each other and learn more from each other. As an educational researcher, I have teaching and learning experiences in both countries and I am familiar with educational policies and practices in Beijing and Saskatoon. I have interests and unique background knowledge to conduct this research and connect middle years teachers in both cities. I hope this research is an opportunity for both Chinese and Canadian teachers to learn from the positive experiences of each other in order to enhance student learning.

In the following sections, I share some of my personal teaching and learning experiences in both China and Canada, which impacted my educational philosophy, and I describe the general background of Chinese and Canadian education. I introduce the purpose and significance of the study, define several terms, and identify the delimitations and limitations of the study.

Personal Experiences Related to Research

My personal experiences as a teacher have played an important role in this research. According to Lincoln (1995), it is important for researchers to consider their positions during the process of conducting research, because researchers play multiple roles in their lives. I was born in China where I completed my 16-year formal education from elementary school to university. After graduating from *Capital Normal University* with a bachelor's degree majoring in Chinese language and literature education, I became a middle years teacher in Beijing. Four years of teaching experience increased my interest in education, and inspired me to move to Canada to continue my study in the field of education. From 2004 to 2006, I completed a Master Degree of Education and a TESL certificate in Canada. Presently, I am a Ph.D. candidate at the *University of Saskatchewan*.

Emigrating from China to central Canada and subsequently to the Western Canada, from teaching in Chinese to English, and adapting from teaching young children to instructing adult learners, I have experienced professional and personal changes. Change becomes an important part of my life. Whenever I face change, I believe I acquire

more energy to face new opportunities. During my learning and teaching journey, I have met many excellent teachers who promoted my learning and changed my life, and as a teacher I have tried sincerely to promote my students' learning and positively influence their lives. The following examples regarding educational experiences have helped to develop my passion for teaching.

When I was eleven years old, I met my drama teacher, Mr. Zhang in the *Children's Palace of Beijing*, and I began to learn from him how to respect and protect each student. In my memory, Mr. Zhang was always smiling at us, and I interpreted his smile as a sign of caring, fairness, and tolerance. Since many extra-curricular activities are not provided by public schools, but offered at Children's Palaces in China, there are few opportunities for students to participate in such activities. If students want to enrol in programs such as drama, they must pass a special interview process. The following story about Mr. Zhang and the interview is one I will never forget.

It was a busy interview day, but Mr. Zhang did not say one word about being tired. As a senior student, I was chosen to help him organize the interview applicants. I still remember that among many children, there was a little girl who was too shy and nervous to say anything during her interview. I was sure that this girl had no chance to pass the interview at all. In fact, there were many children waiting outside the classroom to be interviewed. I thought that it was not necessary to waste time on this girl. However, Mr. Zhang did not disrupt her, on the contrary, he encouraged her to finish what she had prepared and concluded by giving her a warm smile. I could sense that the girl was motivated because she began to relax. Mr. Zhang told me later that "each child should have an equal opportunity in the interview because each of them has prepared for a long time. Although we do not have enough opportunities to offer, we still should protect every child's self-confidence and interest in drama" (personal communication, 1989). Mr. Zhang's words were so meaningful for me. From this experience, I learned that students' confidence and interest are significant in promoting their learning.

Another memorable educational experience occurred when I was sixteen. I went to a small high school in Beijing, which was not an effective high school in many people's eyes. For me, it was my history teacher in this school who motivated me deeply to pursue history. When I reflected on this experience from a teacher's perspective many years later, I realized that the reason why I was supported by my history teacher was that she

provided many opportunities for us to explore knowledge by ourselves. For example, she always encouraged us to borrow history books from the library and to study them by ourselves. She taught us how to make reading notes and draw a history timeline chart. She was quite satisfied with my work and encouraged me to share my learning and reading experiences in class on several occasions. In 1996, my school district held a history competition, and my history teacher and classmates recommended me to participate in the competition. I felt honoured but nervous, because I knew it would be very competitive. My history teacher told me, “Do not worry too much. Just focus on your own material. I trust you” (personal communication, 1996). Ten days later, when I went to school as usual, she ran to me and said: “You won! You won!” Unexpectedly to me, I had been selected as the champion of the history competition. Based on this positive learning experience, history became one of my favourite subjects.

When I worked in a junior secondary school in Beijing, I was a homeroom teacher in charge of more than 50 students. I tried conscientiously to promote student learning in my class. I remember particularly that among my middle years students there was one boy noted for his poor behaviours. He never finished homework on time, was often late for class, seldom participated in extracurricular activities, and sometimes failed his examinations. He had no friends in class. My colleagues were concerned about him, and were worried about me, because I was his homeroom teacher. One of my colleagues suggested that I should let this boy transfer to another school or retain him in the same grade the following year. However, I did give up on him. I tried to discover what his interests and strengths were and how to encourage and support him to learn. I observed him and talked to him and his parents. I discovered that he loved reading books about traditional Chinese literature, and that he was good at painting. One day, I invited him to join my reading club and provided him with an opportunity to share his recent reading experiences. I noticed that he behaved so differently that day. On one occasion, he brought to school a book about traditional Chinese poems and read a poem to the other students in the club and also shared a beautiful picture he had drawn based on the poem. At the conclusion of his presentation, the students spontaneously applauded him. It was one of the most touching moments that I had experienced to that point in my teaching career in China. From then on, he began to care about the class activities. He wrote several articles for our class journal, and drew

pictures for class posters. He talked with me frequently, made several good friends in the class, and was eventually enrolled in a college program to study fine arts.

Years later, my graduates told me how important my encouragement and support were for them as adolescents, and how they appreciated the opportunities I provided them during their school years. I think that positive learning experiences might be the key to promoting student learning, and a student-centered classroom might be a good place where positive learning experiences could happen.

Recently, I have taught Chinese as a second or additional language in Canada. Although I have faced different kinds of challenges in Canadian classrooms, I still believe that good teaching happens when students are engaged in their learning. Therefore, I spent time to carefully learn about my students, and subsequently adjusted my teaching to adapt to their needs and interests. Four years ago, I was teaching kindergarten students in a Chinese language school in Saskatoon. I had never taught children of that age before. The students did not pay attention to me, did not keep quiet and were not orderly. They did not speak any Chinese, nor could they read or write English. I did not know what to do. I was perplexed as to how best to connect with them and meet their learning needs. I began to observe their behaviours in and out of the classroom, and I started talking with them informally. I noticed that many of them liked bringing their new toys to the classroom, and sometimes they exchanged their toys with each other in class. When I asked them about their toys, they were excited and talkative. I found during these conversations that they were fond of animals, colors, food, and music. I decided to change my lesson plans and teaching strategies: I began to use flash cards, toys, and puppets in my classes. I helped them learn the Chinese language by singing songs, drawing pictures, playing games, and watching cartoon movies. Gradually, I witnessed that my students began to enjoy the Chinese language class. They had learned many Chinese words and expressions by the end of the term. Their confidence in speaking Chinese grew.

Based on my own experiences, I realized that the best teaching and learning happens when learners are actively engaged in their learning. In fact, nowadays, both China and Canada have experienced and are experiencing a transition from an industrial society to a post-industrial society. Accordingly, many educators in China and Canada have been paying more attention to the quality of education than to the efficiency of education.

That is, they are tending to focus on how and how well students are learning, as well as on how much and how fast students learn.

Background to the Study

The world of the 21st century is becoming more globalized and is appearing smaller because of rapid development in telecommunications, the influence of the international economy, and new discoveries in natural and social sciences (MacGillivray, 2006). Information is shared by various organizations and institutions all over the world every day (Cheng & Mao, 2002). Creative ideas, new theories, and innovative initiatives help people to achieve new goals by breaking through conventional and traditional ideologies, thoughts, and customs (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Bell (1999) contended that human civilization experienced progressive periods from “pre-industrial” (p. lxxxvii) to “industrial” (p. lxxxvii) to “post-industrial societies” (p. lxxxvii).

Bell (1999) argued that industrial societies were established by the development of the natural sciences and new technologies, in which the elements of productivity, effectiveness, efficiency, function, and order were emphasized and valued. Later sociological development within modern societies, post-industrial perspectives influenced people to become more creative and broad- minded in their ideologies. Current societies may possess the characteristics of both industrial and post-industrial societies.

However, in today’s education, as Lillard (2005) argued, most of our schools are still modeled on factories, with their priority of efficient operation. In these schools, teachers are workers and students are products. Every 40 to 50 minutes, students move from one classroom to another, the learning topics are shifted when the bell rings, not when teachers and children are at a meaningful transition point. Gardner (2004b) also noted that, many schools were designed to facilitate students’ memorization of important texts and meeting the requirements of standardized tests.

In teacher education, constructivism has been widely promoted; however, there are few teachers who are actually able to practice constructivism in actual classrooms, because physical classrooms are still designed for traditional lecturing, which is often based on a banking of knowledge view or a students as deficient view. Therefore, in such a transitional period, schools and teachers face new challenges, new missions, and new

opportunities, as well. How can education policies meet current society's needs? How can schools prepare students for the futures? How can teachers promote student learning in the classroom? These questions are important for all educators to consider, whether they work in China, Canada, or elsewhere.

Education in China

According to the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948) everyone in the world has the right to receive an education. Many countries enact laws that require children to receive formal education, which in many cases is compulsory. Across the nations, periods of time when children receive compulsory education are different. With respect to formal education, People's Republic of China (PRC) has the largest student population in the world. The Chinese government requires that children from 7 to 16 years of age must receive formal education in elementary and junior secondary schools, which is known as the policy of Nine-Year Compulsory Education (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2014; Li, 2008; Cheng & Mao, 2002).

According to the *Education Law of the People's Republic of China* established by the Ministry of Education of the PRC in 1995, all citizens, regardless of ethnic group, race, sex, occupation, property status or religious belief, shall enjoy equal opportunities for education. People's governments at all levels shall take various measures to guarantee school-age children and adolescents access to education. Parents or other guardians of school-age children and adolescents as well as social organizations and individuals concerned shall have the obligation to ensure that school-age children and adolescents receive and complete compulsory education (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2014).

The present education system in China has developed during the last one hundred years and has been shaped by both Chinese and western educational concepts. On the one hand, education in China has been founded based on the Chinese traditional education system. On the other hand, in the past one hundred years, schools and education in China have been also deeply influenced by some foreign countries, especially the United States, the former Soviet Union, and Japan (Sun, 2000). In the Chinese public school system, the Grade 7 to Grade 9 grouping is called junior secondary school, which is separated from elementary school (Grade 1 to Grade 6). Junior secondary schools are sometimes connected with high schools (Zhang & Jin, 2001). According to the *Chinese*

Education Statistical Data 2012 issued by the Ministry of Education of the PRC (2013), there were 53,216 public junior secondary schools and 47,630,607 junior secondary school/Grade 7 to 9 students in China by the end of 2012. Among these middle years students, there were 25,200,142 (52.9%) boys and 22,430,465 (47.1%) girls. The required areas of study at the middle level, Grades 7 to 9, were Chinese language arts, mathematics, political science/virtue education, foreign language (English, Japanese or Russian), physics, biology, chemistry, history, geography, physical education, music, fine arts, information technique, and skills teaching. In some schools, teachers teach comprehensive curriculum, such as science, history and society, and arts. The promotion rate of junior secondary school graduates in 2012 was 88.4%. The promotion rate of junior secondary school graduates is the ratio of total number of new intakes admitted to high schools to the total number of graduates of junior secondary schools of the current year.

The Ministry of Education of the PRC (2013) also reported that in 2012, there were 3,504,363 full-time junior secondary school teachers and 3,939,088 other junior secondary school educators in the public school system in China. The average junior secondary student- educator ratio across the county was 13.59 students per educator. In Beijing, this number was 9.83. However, educators included not only full-time classroom teachers, but also other support staff. Therefore, the average middle years classroom size in China was still big. According to a statistical report of the *Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development* (OECD) in 2012, the number of students per middle years classroom in China was more than 50 (OECD, 2012). Li (2008) and Mao (2002) also stated that the typical class-size of junior secondary school in china was 40 to 50 students.

At present, China is experiencing a transition from an industrial society to a post-industrial society (Bell, 1999; Li, 2008). On the one hand, education in China reflects industrial characteristics, which emphasize the measurement of quantifiable results and efficiency in schools. A major influence on this efficiency emphasis is that China has developed a centralized education system. From the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China at the national level to provincial education bureaus, to municipal education bureaus, to local school divisions, the education system and schooling structure in China reflect a functionalist administrative style (Li, 2008; Cheng & Mao, 2002; Zhang & Jin, 2001; Sun, 2000). In addition,

education in China still follows its traditional form. Standard textbooks, teacher-centered classes, and standardized examinations at municipal, provincial, and national levels all play important roles in schooling (Li, 2008; Cheng & Mao, 2002; Zhang & Jin, 2001).

On the other hand, some post-industrial characteristics are also appearing in the field of education in China by the influences of the natural and applied sciences, the developing technologies, and the global economy. Chinese government officials, educators, and parents today pay attention to the quality of education and schools. Important educational reforms in terms of curriculum, teaching strategies, and student evaluation have recently been initiated and supported by the Chinese government. The traditional examination system is becoming more decentralized. The National College Entrance Examination is no longer designed by the Ministry of Education, but by different provincial educational governments. For example, many well-known universities in China, such as Tsinghua University, Fudan University, Shanghai Jiao Tong University, and University of Science and Technology of China, now independently enrol their students. Interviews are now used as additional technique to select post-secondary student candidates in China (Shanghai Jiao Tong University, 2009; Northeast Education Website, 2006).

Furthermore, the student-centered model is gradually being actualized in schools across the country. More critical and creative ideas, new teaching pedagogies, and innovative teaching strategies and methods are being integrated into everyday teaching and learning in the classroom. In many urban elementary and secondary schools in China, multi-media facilities and computers are widely used; experiments and observations are being conducted in physics, chemistry, and biology classes; small group discussions, presentations, role-plays, and pair-ups are increasingly integrated into Chinese, English, and mathematics classes (Li, 2008; Cheng & Mao, 2002; Zhang & Jin, 2001; Sun, 2000).

Education in Canada

Canada has also experienced a transition from an industrial to a post-industrial period; however, Canada has a much smaller population than China. In Canada, the governance of education is a provincial responsibility as defined in the constitution (Barabett & Cleghorn, 2008; Ghosh & Ray, 1987). Canada does not have a federal department of education, but instead, has ten provincial education systems and three Northern territorial

jurisdictions. Each province/ territory has its own ministry of education that establishes its own requirements, regulations, and teacher-evaluation systems (Young, Levin, & Wallin, 2007).

In Canada, children are usually required to attend school from 5 to 16 years of age (Ghosh & Ray, 1987). Canadian schools are the major institutions that take responsibilities for “the formal socialization of youths” (Livingstone & Hart, 1987, p. 3), as is the case for most industrialized societies. Canadian supporters of public education emphasize two basic themes: (a) “formal schooling” (p. 3) to enhance the Canadian labour force to ensure “economic prosperity” (p. 3); and (b) “the capacity of schooling to promote upward social mobility among the disadvantaged” (p. 3).

Recent trends of globalization and internationalization have also impacted education in Canada. Fullan, Hill, and Crevola (2006) stated, “As societies have confronted the challenges brought about by globalization and technology, especially information technologies, the critical importance of education has become obvious to all” (p. 1). Further, they commented that “political leaders have taken an unprecedented interest in public education and in charting a new mission for school systems” (p. 1). In the 20th century, Canadian educators supported basic education as well as post-secondary education. With the importance of education in modern Canadian society, Canadian educators have proposed a “new mission- to get all students to meet high standards of education and to provide them with a lifelong education that does not have the built-in obsolescence of so much old-style curriculum but that equips them to be lifelong learners” (Fullan, Hill, & Crevola, 2006, p. 1). The benefits from public education would enable graduates to achieve their full potential.

In Saskatchewan, both public and independent school systems provide education from kindergarten to Grade 12. The middle years segment includes grade 6 to 9. According to Saskatchewan Education Indicators Report (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2010), there were total 719 schools across the province, which including 586 public schools, 120 separate schools, and 13 conseils scolaires. As Figure 1.01 shows, among these 719 schools, 334 (47%) schools were located in urban areas; 362 (50%) schools were located in rural areas; and 23 (3%) schools were located in the north areas. There were 39,036 (69%) middle years, 11-14 years old students lived in cities and towns; 12,402 (22%) middle years students lived in villages and rural municipalities; and 5,150

(9%) middle years students lived in reserves. In addition, there were 11,500 (20%) middle years students who self-declared as aboriginal students in the province of Saskatchewan.

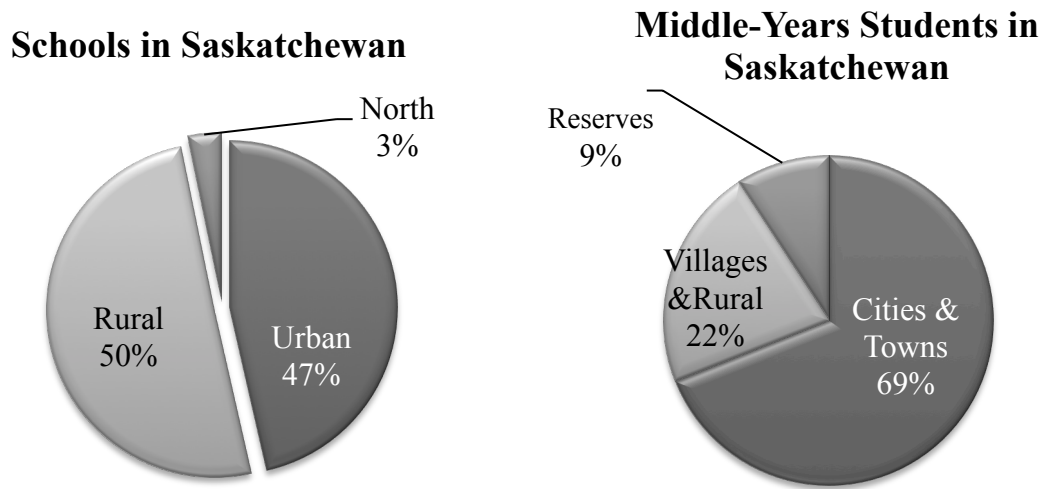


Figure 1.01. Schools and middle years students in the province of Saskatchewan.

The Saskatchewan Education Indicators Report (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2010) also indicated that there were 9,609 classroom teachers, 3,404 teacher assistants, and 1,615 other full-time staff in Saskatchewan schools. Other full-time staff included student support services teachers, English as an additional language teachers, counsellors, social workers and so on. “In 2009-10, Saskatchewan’s student-educator ratio was 13.8 students per educator” (p.114). Educators included not only classroom teachers, but also other full-time staff, such as principals, teacher-librarians, counsellors, and so on. In 2009-10, the provincial average classroom size was 20.8 students. “The average classroom size for northern classrooms was about three students less than that of urban classrooms” (p.116).

According to the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education (2011), the required areas of study within the core curriculum at the middle level, Grades 6 to 9 in the province, were language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, health education, arts education, physical education, and career education. The common essential learning within the core curriculum were: communication, numeracy, critical and creative thinking, technological literacy, personal and social development, and independent learning.

In order to meet the variety of students' needs, flexibility is required within the school program to enable schools and teachers to adapt instructional materials, methods, and environment to provide the most appropriate educational opportunities for students. The adaptive dimension is used to help students achieve curriculum outcomes, maximize student learning and independence, promote a positive self-image and feeling of belonging, and promote a willingness to become involved in learning. These purposes address a primary function of the school, that of helping students to maximize their potentials as independent learners (Ministry of Education, 2011, p.4).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the selected middle years teachers' positive experiences of promoting student learning in student-centered classrooms, and how these recalled experiences might affect their own future teaching and assist other teachers to promote student learning. The reason why I focused on positive experiences was that I believed that one can understand how to achieve success by learning from positive and successful experiences more than by learning from failures and problems (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005).

Research Problems and Questions

During the last twenty years, classroom teachers in many countries have increasingly applied theories of student-centered learning. In both China and Canada, the student-centered model is gradually being actualized in schools to improve quality of teaching and learning. Therefore, it is important to examine how student-centered classroom function by reflecting on teachers' positive experience of promoting student learning and to publicly share these findings so that other teachers/educators can learn from these experiences. In addition, the trends of globalization and internationalization have also impacted education in both Canada and China. To help teachers from both places discuss their respective teaching stories will not only benefit them, but will enrich the global picture of what effective teaching means.

The major research questions were:

1. What were the selected middle years teachers' positive experiences of promoting student learning in student- centered classrooms?

2. After reflecting on these positive teaching experiences in student-centered classrooms, did these teachers change their teaching attitude and practices toward student-centered learning? And if so, in what ways?
3. How might these teachers' experiences assist other teachers in promoting student learning?

Significance of the Study

The study is significant in the following four aspects. First, it provides examples of positive experiences regarding promotion of students' learning at the middle-year level. I applied appreciative inquiry in this study, which focused on participants' positive experiences. Total of 53 middle years teachers and 16 middle years educational experts who shared their positive teaching stories through online surveys, online interviews, or expert panels. Many of these stories are detailed, typical, and meaningful.

Second, the study provides practicing teachers and other educational personnel with insights and suggestions regarding creating student-centered classrooms that promote student learning. Participants not only made comments about their own classroom practice, but they also offered relevant suggestions to school boards, schools, and middle years teachers in both Canada and China.

Third, this research may initiate an interest for increasing international communication and collaboration in the area of the professional development of middle years teachers. This study was not designed as a comparative study, but it may make a contribution to international education. Nowadays, more and more Chinese students are choosing to study in Canada. There are also more and more international educational programs that are being developed between China and Canada. Therefore, both Chinese and Canadian educators need to learn more about each other. This research may provide helpful information about middle years education in China and Canada, and guide the work of educational researchers and practitioners. The implications and recommendations that emerged from this study may also give educators in both countries insights for future collaboration.

Fourth, the study contributes to further application of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) in educational research. AI is a positive experience-oriented approach, which may help participants benefit from their past experiences. Applying AI in educational research may help participating practitioners and researchers focus on what has happened in classrooms that works. This study is an example of using AI in educational research.

Definitions of Terms

The definitions of terms I used in this study are presented below.

Appreciate inquiry (AI): AI is a research model that investigates organizational and individual change and development that focuses on organizational or individual positive and successful experiences and stories (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005).

The 4-D model: This model is utilized in Appreciative Inquiry, and consists of four stages regarding organizational and individual change and development: discovery, dream, design, and destiny (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005).

Inclusive education: Teachers are responsible for meeting the needs of the wide variety of students in their classrooms. It is “the perspective that individuals are entitled to an education that includes full participation with their peers and an educational process that allows access to the same resources as other students” (Jordan, 2007, p.249).

Interpretation panel: The interpretation panel is a form of collaborative research and a type of group analysis. It helps researchers deepen their understanding of research data or results. There are usually six to eight experts in the related field invited in a panel. The experts provide researchers with individual or group insight regarding the topic by interpreting the research data and results (Noonan, 2002).

Teacher education: Teacher education is a program that prepares teacher candidates to teach, by providing them with instruction in education policies, procedures, and practices, so that they acquire relevant knowledge, skills, and attitudes with respect to facilitating students’ learning in schools. Teacher education includes the cultivation of teacher candidates’ knowledge, the preparation of prospective teachers, the professional development of teachers, and the promotion of teacher leaders (Li, 2008).

Instructional strategies: This variety of teaching methods and approaches is implemented to help students achieve learning objectives. Direct instructional strategies that are highly teacher-directed, and indirect instructional strategies which are mainly student-centered, are two major categories (Burden & Byrd, 2010; Saskatchewan Learning, 1991).

Classroom management: Classroom management involves teacher actions to create a positive learning environment, such as “establishing and enforcing rules and procedures, carrying out disciplinary actions, maintaining effective teacher and student relationships, and maintaining an appropriate mental set for management” (Marzano, 2003, pp.88-89).

Multiple intelligences (MI): The theory of multiple intelligences redefined the concept of intelligence in 1983. Multiple intelligences included eight intelligences: linguistic intelligence or *word smart*, logical-mathematical intelligence or *number smart*, spatial intelligence or *picture smart*, bodily-kinesthetic intelligence or *body smart*, musical intelligence or *music smart*, interpersonal intelligence or *people smart*, intrapersonal intelligence or *self smart*, and naturalist intelligence or *nature smart* (Gardner, 2004a; Armstrong, 2009; Lazear, 1999).

Professional learning community (PLC): A PLC is a group of educators who consistently focus on enhancing student learning by collaborating with each other and continuing their own learning (Hord & Sommers, 2008).

Delimitations of the Study

I identify the delimitations to this study.

1. I delimited this study to explore teachers’ positive experiences concerning promoting student learning in student-centered classrooms.
2. I delimited this study by using Appreciative Inquiry (AI) as the research methodology in the “AI 4-D Cycle” model with four key phases: discovery, dream, design, and destiny (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005).
3. In this study, I delimited the participants in this research to Grade 7 to Grade 8 teachers in Beijing, China, and Grade 6 and Grade 8 teachers in Saskatoon, Canada. Their years of teaching experiences would be at least 1 year.

Limitations of the Study

I enumerate the limitations of the study.

1. Due to Chinese participants’ varying levels of English language proficiency, the interview questions were provided in both Chinese and English and participants responded in the language of their choice. If participants chose to answer the questions in Chinese, I translated from Chinese to English verbatim. Because of the

differences between the two languages, the translation from Chinese to English might affect the data accuracy. To help counteract this problem, I asked another graduate student who was fluent in Mandarin and English to audit my translation of the transcripts and to make sure my translations were valid.

2. Because the open-ended questionnaire, document analysis, and previous research are the only research sources used, triangulation of the data maybe limited, which may affect data trustworthiness.

Outline of the Dissertation

The dissertation is comprised of six chapters: the background and introduction, a literature review, the research design and methodology, the Chinese teachers' voice, the Canadian teachers' voice, and the conclusion.

In Chapter 1, I introduced my personal experiences, the background to this study, the purpose of the study, the significance of the study, key definitions of the terms used in the study, the delimitations to the study, and the limitations to the study.

In Chapter 2, I provided a review of the literature related to teachers' positive experiences of promoting student learning, with a particular focus on creating student-centered classrooms. I also introduced the expectations of middle years teachers in both China and Canada.

In Chapter 3, I described the philosophical foundations to the study, and Appreciative Inquiry (AI) as the research methodology. I introduced the selection of participants in China and Canada and how I proposed to conduct the research. I also discussed the trustworthiness of the data in the study and the ethical considerations I addressed.

In Chapter 4, I analyzed the major findings of the Chinese teachers' survey data and presented Chinese educational experts' point of view of the survey findings.

In Chapter 5, I analyzed the major findings of Canadian teachers' survey data and presented Canadian educational experts' point of view of the survey findings.

In Chapter 6, I presented concluding thoughts regarding the study, discussed implications of the findings, and provided relevant recommendations regarding how middle years teachers might create student-centered classrooms to promote student learning and enhance student achievement.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Teaching and learning are the core activities in schools, the quality of which is important for schools. Taylor (2009) stated that effective teaching is a key to school effectiveness and improvement. Marzano (2003) identified that effective schools excel at promoting student learning and enhancing student achievement. He further explained that there are several factors at three levels affecting school effectiveness: school-level factors, teacher-level factors, and student-level factors. Among these three, the teacher level factors play the most important role: “The impact of decisions made by individual teachers is far greater than the impact of decisions made at the school level” (p.71). Teachers who excel at promoting student learning and enhancing student achievement make significant contributions to school effectiveness.

Hattie (2009), based on his research involving 50,000 studies and more than 30 million pupils, suggested that what works best for students is what works best for teachers; and that “teaching and learning are visible in the classrooms of the successful teacher and students” (p.25). He stated,

Visible teaching and learning occurs when learning is the explicit goal, when it is appropriately challenging, when the teacher and student both seek to ascertain whether and to what degree the challenging goal is attained, when there is deliberate practice aimed at attaining mastery of the goal, when there is feedback given and sought, and when there are active, passionate and engaging people participating in the act of learning. It is teachers seeing learning through the eyes of students, and students seeing teaching as the key to their ongoing learning. The remarkable feature of the evidence is that the biggest effects on student learning occur when teachers become learners of their own teaching, and when students become their own teachers. (p. 22)

Therefore, “the more the student becomes the teacher and the more the teacher becomes the learner, then the more successful are the outcomes” (p.25).

Hattie (2012) argued, “learning is a very personal journey” (p.18). He believed that “students are eager to be challenged into learning”. Hattie (2009) also defined the three levels of student achievement: “surface knowledge

of the physical world, the thinking strategies and deeper understanding of the subjective world, and the ways in which students construct knowledge and reality for themselves” (p.26). He stated, “the task of teaching and learning best comes together when we attend to all three levels: ideas, thinking, and constructing” (p.26).

According to Jonassen and Land (2012), during the 1990s, the rise of constructivism in psychology and education “represented a paradigm shift for educators to a view of learning that is necessarily more social, conversational, and constructive than traditional transmissive views of learning”(p.vii). These new theories of learning and thinking have influenced classroom teaching and learning in many ways. In the previous decade, conceptions of student-centered learning environments matured. Here are some typical student-centered learning environments: “problem-based, project-based inquiry-oriented pedagogies in the forms of open-ended learning environments, cognitive apprenticeships, constructivist learning environment, goal-based scenarios, social-mediated communication, and so on (Jonassen & Land, 2012, p. x). They further stated, “learning is not a transmissive process. Rather learning is willful, intentional, active, conscious, constructive practice that includes reciprocal intention-action-reflection activities” (p.ix.)

In a student-centered classroom, student engagement is the key to promoting learning. That is, learning improves when students are inquisitive, interested, or inspired. Here are a few ways in which student engagement may be addressed in schools: Intellectual engagement, emotional engagement, behavioural engagement, physical engagement, social engagement, and cultural engagement. Intellectual engagement means that teachers engage students by providing students with more choices of assignments or projects that appeal to student’s interest or curiosity. Emotional engagement means that teachers may promote positive emotions in students that will facilitate the learning process. Behavioural engagement means that teachers may establish classroom routines and students roles that foster behaviours more conducive to learning. Physical engagement means that teachers should use physical activities to stimulate students’ learning interest. Social engagement means that teachers may use a variety of strategies to stimulate engagement through social interactions. Cultural engagement means that schools should make students from diverse cultural backgrounds feel safe, welcomed and valued (Hidden Curriculum, 2014).

In this chapter, I reviewed literature regarding teachers' positive experiences of promoting student learning. I also highlighted the characteristics of middle years learners and how middle years teachers should promote learning, especially in student-centered classrooms. Then I introduced the expectations for middle years teachers based on the literature and on relevant policies and documents in both China and Canada.

General Positive Experiences of Promoting Student Learning

In order to promote student learning and enhance student achievement, many researchers have conducted studies from different perspectives and listed various characteristics of teaching effectiveness based on qualified teachers' experiences. Ellison (2009) stated that teacher quality had a significant impact on student learning in the classroom. The most effective way of cultivating quality teachers was to identify and determine the characteristics of teacher effectiveness. Through the identification of characteristics of teacher quality, teachers are encouraged to clarify their strengths and weaknesses and further improve their teaching strategies.

Hattie (2012) argued, "what does matter is teachers having a mind frame in which they see it as their role to evaluate their effect on learning" (p.18). He stated, "teachers' beliefs and commitments are the greatest influence on student achievement" (p.25). Hattie (2009) also identified 20 influences on student learning and achievement. Four of these influences were about teachers: micro teaching, teacher clarity, teacher-student relationship, and teachers' professional development. Eight of them were about teaching: providing formative evaluation, comprehensive interventions for learning disabled students, reciprocal teaching, feedback, spaced vs. mass practice, meta-cognitive strategies, self-questioning, and problem-solving teaching. He listed the following teacher contributions to student learning:

- the quality of teaching;
- teacher expectations;
- teachers' conceptions of teaching, learning, assessment, and the students;
- teacher openness;
- classroom climate;
- a focus on teacher clarity in articulating success criteria and achievements;

- the fostering of effort;
- the engagement of all students (p.34).

Hattie (2009) furthered provided the following six signposts towards excellence in education, all of which were related to teachers.

1. Teachers are among the most powerful influences in learning.
2. Teachers need to be directive, influential, caring, and actively engaged in the passion of teaching and learning.
3. Teachers need to be aware of what each and every student is thinking and knowing, to construct meaning and meaningful experiences in light of this knowledge, and have proficient knowledge and understanding of their content to provide meaningful and appropriate feedback such that each student moves progressively through the curriculum levels.
4. Teachers need to know the learning intentions and success criteria of their lessons, know how well they are attaining these criteria for all students, and know where to go next in light of the gap between students' current knowledge and understanding and the success criteria of: "Where are you going?" "How are you going?" and "Where to next?"
5. Teachers need to move from the single idea to multiple ideas, and to relate and then extend these ideas such that learners construct and then reconstruct knowledge and ideas. It is not the knowledge or ideas, but the learner's construction of this knowledge and these ideas that is critical.
6. School leaders and teachers need to create school, staffroom, and classroom environments where error is welcomed as a learning opportunity, where discarding incorrect knowledge and understandings is welcomed, and where participants can feel safe to learn, re-learn, and explore knowledge and understanding. (pp.238-239)

Darling-Hammond and Baratz- Snowden (2005) indicated that effective teachers do much more than stand at the front of classrooms and deliver textbook content to students; they use a repertoire of strategies and methods to help students improve their learning. Marzano (2003) argued that instructional strategies, classroom management,

and classroom curriculum design are three main teacher-level factors that influence school effectiveness. In the book, *Qualities of Effective Teachers*, Stronge (2007) evaluated effective teachers from six perspectives: prerequisites for effective teaching, the teacher as a person, classroom management and organization, planning and organizing for instruction, implementing instruction, and monitoring student progress and potential. Kawell (2008) explored successful teachers' characteristics in a K-12 school in Southern California. The major findings indicated that teachers did a better job when they:

(a) believed all students can learn and had high expectations for their students, (b) emphasized vocabulary and the use of academic language, and (c) relationally connected with their students and offered extra help to students outside of class. Other findings showed that most students described effective teachers simultaneously as strict, fun, and caring. (pp. 4-5)

Burden and Byrd (2010) listed the following elements of effective teaching: preparing for instruction, presenting instruction, organizing and managing instruction, considering learner's instructional needs, evaluating student performance, and working with parents. Taylor (2009) identified that preparedness, caring, collaboration, and reflective teaching were key characteristics of teaching effectiveness. Novak (2009) examined three teacher characteristics that had been demonstrated to affect student academic achievement: "teacher expectancy, teacher efficacy, and teacher curriculum choice" (p. iv). Dieckmann (2009) confirmed that effective teaching practices led to overall teacher effectiveness. The key constructs were: "behaviour management, instructional supports, formative assessment, intellectual challenge, and the use of discipline-specific practices in their teaching" (p. v). He further stated that effective teachers elicited students' ideas, communicated with students to enable them to review school work, monitored students' learning, adjusted their lessons to assist students in clarifying misunderstandings, and highlighted students' potential learning obstacles. Most importantly, they were responsive to individual student's learning needs in the classroom.

In the following section, I summarized the general ideas of promoting student learning from three perspectives: teachers' professional preparation and development, instructional strategies and classroom management, and social skills and relationships.

Teachers' Professional Preparation and Development

To promote student learning effectively, teachers should first prepare and continually develop themselves as qualified teachers beyond the minimum teacher certificate requirement for applying for a teaching position (Stronge, 2007). According to Darling-Hammond and Baratz-Snowden (2005), teachers are prepared in three areas of knowledge before starting to teach: knowledge regarding the subject, knowledge regarding teaching, and knowledge regarding students. Burden and Byrd (2010) emphasized the importance of professional knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and pedagogical content knowledge for effective teachers. Stronge (2007) stated that to promote teaching effectiveness, teacher training programs should emphasize the importance of content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge. Qualified teachers must have received formal and adequate preparation for classroom teaching. Taylor (2009) suggested that pre-service teacher candidates should receive additional mentoring from experienced teachers who are reputed to be effective teachers.

Professional knowledge includes “information about the historical, economic, sociological, philosophical, and psychological understanding of schooling and education” (Burden & Byrd, 2010, p. 3). Content knowledge includes understanding concepts, and structures concerning the concepts being taught (Murphy, Delli, & Edwards, 2004; Shulman, 1987). Wenglinsky (2000) stated that teachers who take courses related to the subjects they teach positively influence students’ academic achievements compared to teachers who do not possess the content knowledge.

Teachers should also acquire pedagogical knowledge that helps them recognize students’ learning needs (Stronge, 2007). According to Burden and Byrd (2010), pedagogical knowledge “includes the general concepts, theories, and research about effective teaching” (p.3). Especially in the subjects of mathematics and science, teachers who have had formal preparation of teaching strategies in these subjects do positively influence students’ learning outcomes (Monk, 1994). Pedagogical knowledge refers to skills for guiding, managing, helping, and communicating with students regarding the subject being learned (Murphy, Delli, & Edwards, 2004). Specifically, pedagogical knowledge can help teachers use a variety of instructional strategies according to students needs; use appropriate questioning techniques; monitor student progress; engage active student participation; motivate

students for learning; give students relevant assignments and provide prompt feedback; and re-teach as needed (Anfara, Jr., & Schmid, 2007).

A teacher's verbal ability further influences teaching effectiveness. According to Moore (2005) and McEwan (2002), communication is an essential skill for teachers. "Students taught by teachers with greater verbal ability learn more than those taught by teachers with lower verbal ability" (Stronge, 2007, p. 4). Reese (2009) stated that students wanted worthwhile communications with their teachers. Students believed that through clear communication, teachers are able to understand their progress and help them address their weaknesses in specific areas. Smith (2009) also found that effective teachers know how to break down a complex concept, formula, or idea and clearly explain it to students. Students regarded teachers' explanation abilities as an asset in everyday teaching and learning.

In addition, in order to promote student learning, having background knowledge regarding students and their learning process (Darling-Hammond & Baratz- Snowden, 2005) is helpful for teachers. Furthermore, Douglas (2009) argued that understanding what students actually do in the classroom is the key to improve student learning. He found that teachers generally possess adequate knowledge of what constitutes effective teaching, but that they do not consistently put the knowledge of effective teaching into practice. Therefore, Ayers (1993) stated that "outstanding teaching is built on a base of knowledge about students" (p. 75). Stronge (2007) also suggested that teachers should understand "how students learn and what they need to be taught" (p. 5).

Moreover, teachers should continue to develop their teaching skills as life-long learners and participate in various professional learning activities, such as workshops, conferences, retreats, academic courses. Teacher professional development activities positively impact their students' learning attitudes and academic achievements (Stronge, 2007). Taylor (2009) suggested that teachers collaborate with professional learning communities to continually improve and perfect their teaching practices.

Instructional Strategies and Classroom Management

The process of teaching and learning is at the core of education. In order to positively affect student learning and make effective decisions that help students learn, teachers should be good instructional planners and carefully

design learning activities (Burden & Byrd, 2010). For example, teachers should consider “who is to do what, when and in what order instructional events will occur, where the events will take place, the amount of instructional time to be used, and resources and materials to be used” (pp. 23-24). There are two main categories of instructional strategies that most teachers use everyday: direct and indirect instructional strategies. Direct instructional strategies, such as direct instruction, presentations, demonstrations, and questions, usually result in the teacher-centered learning. However, indirect instructional strategies, such as inquiry lessons, projects, discussions, debates, cooperative learning, panels, role-playing, and games are more student-centered (Burden & Byrd, 2010).

However, Hattie (2009) argued that teachers should not contrast direct teaching and indirect teaching as bad methods and good methods. He stated, “the model of visible teaching and learning combines, rather than contrasts teacher-centered teaching and student-centered learning” (p.26). Stronge (2007) stated that teachers should adjust teaching strategies based on the content, the students, the teaching resources, and the time available. Therefore, applying multiple instructional strategies to promote student learning is important for teachers. Smith (2009) found that effective teaching results occurred when teachers demonstrated an ability to explain to students specific knowledge points in multiple and diverse ways. Armstrong also (2009) stated that the theory of multiple intelligences “opens the door to a wide range of teaching strategies that can be easily implemented in the classroom” and there is “no one set of teaching strategies will work best for all students at all times” (p. 72). Teachers should select from a repertoire of various instructional strategies to ensure that “all students can have their strongest intelligences addressed at least some of the time” (p. 64). In addition, in order to meet students’ different learning needs and to maintain students’ interest and motivation, teachers should determine the strengths and weaknesses of various teaching strategies in relation to the relevant learning objectives (Burden & Byrd, 2010).

In order to enhance student learning, classroom management is another important skill that teachers should learn. McEwan (2002) mentioned that a good teacher is able to control three factors of classroom life: management of the classroom, management of students, and management of time. Teachers should design and maintain a positive learning environment for students and that a positive learning community is a place “where students feel safe, respected and valued in order to learn new skills” (Burden & Byrd, 2010, p. 11) and “are actively involved in

their own learning” (p. 218). Ayers (1994) stated that students learn best when they trust the environment and feel good about themselves. Teachers must attempt to monitor everything in the learning environment and ensure that the environment is suitable for their teaching purposes and core values. Stronge (2007) also believed that positive reinforcement is important for motivating students to learn; and Anfara, Jr, and Schmid (2007) argued that teachers should create a psychologically warm and inviting classroom for students, and they appropriately praise students when they are successful.

In order to maintain a positive learning environment, teachers should “carefully organize activities, materials, and instruction based on students’ prior knowledge and level of development so that all students can be successful” (Darling-Hammond & Baratz- Snowden, 2005, p. 2). Bluestein (2003) argued that “a poorly arranged environment can lead to confusion, overcrowding, and lost or damaged materials” (p. 78). Therefore, effective teachers make the classroom as comfortable as possible, keeping the organization simple and orderly. They organize teaching materials and learning supplies so they are easily accessible. A classroom may sometimes appear chaotic, but it is highly organized because learning is the central good (Glasgow & Hicks, 2003).

Teachers should carefully manage the teaching-learning time (Stronge, 2007). Burden and Byrd (2010) stated that during learning activities, teachers should ensure students’ academic learning time, which is the total time “students are successfully engaged in learning activities” (p. 198). In a student-centered classroom, teachers are more like facilitators and students are more like co-workers who are required to participate in various learning activities rather than only to sit and listen (Glasgow & Hicks, 2003). Moreover, the instruction pace should be flexible; and teachers should use clear agendas to keep themselves focused on the lessons and help students understand the content and tasks of the sessions. Glasgow and Hicks further suggested that effective teachers overlap activities, supervise several activities at a time, keep monitoring these activities in order to keep time wastage to a minimum, and communicate class rules with students and maintain a good classroom discipline. According to Armstrong (2009), there is no single best discipline approach suitable for all students. In order to gain students’ support to maintain the classroom rules and ensure the quality of learning, teachers may solicit students’

help to create classroom rules. “Highly effective teachers recognize and manage the tension between caring and control” (McEwan, 2002, p. 34).

Social Skills and Relationships

Recently, educational researchers and practitioners suggested that in order to promote student learning and enhance student achievement, schools should be developed as professional learning communities (Roberts & Pruitt, 2003), because a professional learning community (PLC) “promotes and values learning as an ongoing, active collaborative process with dynamic dialogue by teachers, students, staff, principal, parents to improve the quality of learning and life within the school” (Speck, 1999, p. 8). The main characteristics of a PLC are: focusing on student learning; sharing leadership and values; keeping reflective dialogue and interaction among teacher colleagues; and promoting collaboration among teachers, students, and parents (Hord & Sommers, 2008; Kruse et al., 1995; Roberts & Pruitt). In a PLC teachers do not work alone, rather, they develop genuine social relationships with students, parents, and colleagues, and they know how to communicate and cooperate with people and unite individuals and groups to contribute to achieving the central goal of student learning.

The teacher-student relationship is a key factor that impacts on teaching and learning success. Research has shown that teachers can promote student achievement and that teachers’ connections with students determine their influences on students (Haskins & Loeb, 2007). Hattie and Yate (2014) also stated, “establishing positive relationships between young students and their teachers has been shown to cascade and so result in lasting benefits involving trust and affection” (p.17).

In a PLC, teachers maintain strong, positive, and healthy connections with their students (Deiro, 2005) and “care for students first as people, and second as students” (Stronge, 2007, p. 24). They care for students’ school lives as well as students’ personal lives beyond the classroom. Tuckman (1995) found that good teachers are caring, patient, polite, and do not bore students. Allender and Allender (2008) stated that teachers should be humanistic, hoping to help each student learn in ways that are challenging, supportive, and caring. Deiro (2005) stated that when students had positive relationship with teachers who genuinely cared for them, then these teachers make a positive difference for students, and played an important role their learning and ultimately their lives. Developing a

caring connection with students is also a powerful way to help students overcome negative influences in society (Brook et al, 1992; Deiro, 1994; Whiteman, & Cohen, 1990). “Teachers relating well to their students remains one of the most significant factors in generating positive academic and social outcomes” (Keddie & Churchill, 2005, p. 211).

Teachers should show their respect for students by not using discipline as a weapon or a punishment, however, respecting students does not mean that teachers are always non-assertive and permissive with students (Deiro, 2005). On the contrary, teachers may treat students firmly and fairly and help them correct their mistakes (Stronge, 2007). Students who are treated respectfully pay more attention to their own behaviours, and care more about how they are doing in school (Deiro, 2005). McEwan (2002) argued that “if students know their teachers respect them, they work harder, take correction more readily, and are more willing to take responsibility for their actions” (p.32). Mendler (2001) stated that a positive relationship between teachers and students can lead to better classroom management and student self-discipline.

To promote student learning in a PLC, teachers are willing to share time with students and interact with students in various ways (Stronge, 2007). Hattie (2009) stated that effective instruction cannot take place without proper feedback from student to teacher on the effectiveness of the instruction. “A good teacher is there when needed and is always easy to approach” (Simmons & Pitman, 1994, p. 15). According to Deiro (2005), of all the types of interactions with students, having one-to-one time with students is critical. The more positive experiences students and teachers share with each other, the more likely a healthy relationship between the teacher and student will be built. Deiro (2005) further suggested that getting involved in some of the students’ various activities is another natural way to share time with students.

Teachers could also use written comments and nonverbal communication to motivate and support students. Bluestein (2003) argued that effective learning goes beyond the classroom level; therefore, giving an appropriate amount of homework may play an important role in the process of teaching and learning. To promote student learning, teachers should not give students homework as punishment, nor focus on negative feedback. Critique may be necessary, but it should be given in a positive manner. An effective teacher usually provides students with

specific and positive feedback. Erwin (2004) suggested that only writing a grade on students' assignments is not enough; students need more detailed feedback that could help them enhance their learning. Constructive feedback or providing answers to students' questions in a timely way gives students corrective guidance (Anfara, Jr. & Schmid, 2007). Reese (2009) found that constructive feedback could reveal each student's strength and weakness and indicate to students how they may improve their studies.

In a PLC, teachers regard their students as intelligent individuals and have high expectations for them, believing that each student can learn and grow (Stronge, 2007). Students, on the other hand, will also "like teachers who think highly of them" (Deiro, 2005, p. 36). Therefore, teachers could help students set clear goals and intellectual challenges for their learning, and discuss these goals with students (Anfara, Jr. & Schmid, 2007; Armstrong, Henson, & Savage, 1997). To promote student learning effectively, teachers should pay attention to students' different capabilities and make sure students are able to achieve their own success. Deiro (2005) explained that, on the one hand, "effective teachers establish and maintain high academic standards for the students" (p. 36), and on the other, "they truly believe that students can meet these high standards" (p.36). Moore (2005) also suggested that teachers should hold a high but realistic expectation for students, in that the standard be high enough to motivate students, but not too high for them to achieve with reasonable efforts.

To promote student learning in schools, appropriate parental involvement is also important. Hattie (2009) argued that influences from the home on student learning included "parental expectations and aspirations for their child, and parental knowledge of the language of schooling" (p. 33). Within a PLC, teachers may develop a better relationship with students' parents or guardians. Parents have a right to know about their children's performance and achievement in school as well as to know about teachers' teaching strategies (Bluestein, 2003). Parents can provide teachers with important information about child's learning practices at home, and about the family's attitudes towards education (Ayers, 1993). Roberts and Pruitt (2003) stated that "when parents understand the work of the learning community, they can become advocates for the instructional changes that teachers put into place for their children" (p. 15). Glasgow and Hicks (2003) also maintained that, "a high level of parental involvement in children's education generally leads to a high level of academic achievement" (p. 198). To make closer connection

with students, effective teachers are willing to build a successful relationship with students' parents who are important in students' lives (Beiro, 2005).

Bluestein (2003) believed that teachers should contact students' families in various ways, such as arranging home visits or meeting with parents in school, in order to open a positive dialogue with students' families. It is important to create a positive and friendly atmosphere when teachers talk with parents (Moore, 2005). Teachers need to learn how to appropriately communicate with different types of parents. For example, when meeting with aggressive parents, Bluestein (2003) suggested that teachers should listen to them, and write down what they say. Teachers should also ask parents for suggestions in seeking to resolve students' learning problems, and discuss these suggestions with them. An important strategy is to "speak softly if they speak loudly" (Bluestein, p. 13).

Teachers should also provide educational leadership opportunities for parents. Hattie (2009) stated,

Schools have an important role in helping parents to learn the language of schooling so that the parents can provide every possible assistance to their children in terms of developing the child's learning and love of learning, and in creating the highest possible shared expectations for learning. (p.33)

According to Glasgow and Hicks (2003), some parents do not realize that they have the ability to impact their children's education. Teachers should encourage parents to be involved in their children's learning, and they should seek to develop partnerships between themselves and the parents. Teachers should be bridges between students and their parents and know how to lead parents "through affirmation, collaboration, invitation, communication, and information" (McEwan, 2002, p.42), and encourage parents to get involved in students' learning processes. Darling-Hammond and Baratz- Snowden (2005) stated that successful teachers "involve parents in the learning process and help create strong connections between home and school so that students have fewer obstacles and more supports for their learning" (p.3). Glasgow and Hicks (2003) stated that effective teachers welcome parents with diverse cultural backgrounds to actively share their cultures with children.

To improve student learning and make a school more positive, school leaders, teachers, students, parents, and staff members should be all involved in decision making. This is also a core value of a PLC. Hord and Sommers (2008) stated that in a PLC people work together to improve student learning and overall school effectiveness.

Teachers share visions, goals, and values with other faculty and staff members (Hord & Sommers, 2008; McEwan, 2002). They work collaboratively with administrators, other teachers, teaching assistants, and staff members (Stronge, 2007). Furthermore, teachers build professional relationships with colleagues and learn and grow together, professionally, over time. For example, teachers should be willing to spend time conversing with each other about teaching strategies, to meet regularly, and to give each other feedback and suggestions (Glasgow & Hicks, 2003). They need to help, support, and trust each other. According to Glasgow and Hicks (2003), support is expressed in several ways: “having the opportunity to ask questions and pursue feedback, the sharing of similar experiences, suggesting solutions or strategies, or just voicing support either verbally or nonverbally” (p. 189). Effective teachers help each other “to reflect on their practice and experiences, and more important have relevance and purpose for their classroom practice” (Glasgow & Hicks, 2003, p. 190).

In summary, in order to promote student learning in schools, teachers should have completed professional preparation before starting to teach and continue to develop professionally as lifelong learners, be able to apply appropriately a variety of instructional strategies, and maintain a positive learning environment for students. Furthermore, teachers should also be able to work in a professional learning community where teachers, staff, students, and parents collaborate with each other to improve the quality of instruction and learning.

Promoting Middle Years Student Learning

In this study, I defined middle years as Grades 6 to 8, in which students’ age ranged from 12 to 14 years old. According to Lillard and Jessen (2003), Maria Montessori believed that “The constructing of one’s own self lasts for the whole period of childhood into young adulthood: from birth to twenty-four years old” (p.3). From birth to age 6 is the first period. From age 6 to 12 is the second period. From age 12 to 18 is the third period. From age 18 to 24 is the last period. During the third period, especially from 12 to 15 years old, children are very self-centered and self-absorbed once again, like the first three years of life. Seifert and Hoffnung (1994) stated that middle years children begin to develop a strong sense of social selves. They construct their identities by distinguishing themselves from others. In other words, they begin to have their own beliefs, values, thoughts, and feelings. Seifert & Hoffnung (1994) also stated that middle years represented a transitional period of early adolescence in human

development. Piaget (1965) stated that middle years children develop several important cognitive skills, such as decentration, sensitivity to transformations, and reversibility of thought. Seifert and Hoffnung (1994) noted that several important thinking skills, such as convergent thinking, divergent thinking, and reflective thinking, are developed in middle years. To promote student learning in middle years, teachers should emphasize higher order thinking. That is, they should pay attention to students' creative or critical ideas; and they should teach students how to synthesize, generalize, hypothesize, and interpret information (Hilton & Hilton, 2005).

Middle years teachers should understand the intellectual growth spurts and the developing cognitive needs of their middle years students. About one hundred years ago, the "intelligence quotient"(IQ) was established. Later on, the IQ test, which seemed like a useful and scientific tool, became more popular in education. Intelligence was regarded as something that could be objectively measured and reduced to a single number (Armstrong, 2009; Gardner, 2004a). However, According to the theory of multiple intelligences (Gardner, 2004a), intelligence is not a static element that is fixed at birth. On the contrary, he postulated that human beings have multiple types of intelligence: linguistic intelligence or word smart, logical-mathematical intelligence or number smart, spatial intelligence or picture smart, bodily-kinesthetic intelligence or body smart, musical intelligence or music smart, interpersonal intelligence or people smart, intrapersonal intelligence or self smart, and naturalist intelligence or nature smart. Gardner further explained that although people have the ability to enhance their intelligences in any age, middle years is a critical period for developing people's multiple intelligences. Armstrong (2009) also stated that a New York University professor once said that children go into school as question marks and leave school as periods: "What do we do in the intervening years to convince children that they're not intelligent?" (p. 45). Therefore, effective middle years teachers seek to "reach beyond the text and the blackboard to awaken students' minds" (Armstrong, 2009, p. 56).

Lillard and Jessen (2003) stated that during the period of age 12 to 15, children also "have great need of close, one-to-one adult attention. They want mentors outside their immediate families and need the comfort and companionship of intimate, supportive peer groups" (p.10). Piaget (1963) believed that peer relationships play a significant role during middle years. Therefore, an important way of enhancing quality of teaching in middle years

is to promote collaborative learning among students. In a collaborative classroom, teachers organize space, time, and activities with and for students. They introduce new concepts, provide students with help and support in various activities, and encourage students to learn together. Instead of letting students share their opinions together and then separating them to do individual work, effective middle years teachers often set specific goals for collaborative learning situation and they periodically evaluate students as small groups, as well as individually (Brown, 2005). Moreover, to promote student learning, middle years teachers should establish a mutually respectful teacher-student relationship (Keddie & Churchill, 2005). Middle years children grow substantially both in body and emotions, such that accelerated growth at this stage gives them more opportunities and potential abilities to participate in various activities. This stage of rapid growth makes this age group sensitive and often brings them emotional and psychological problems (Seifert & Hoffnung, 1994). Effective middle years teachers are skilled at showing respect to students, sharing power appropriately in learning situations, understanding students' worries and concerns, and supporting student learning (Keddie & Churchill, 2005).

Creating Student-Centered Classrooms

There are two flawed ideas of traditional education: the school as a factory and the children as empty vessels (Lillard, 2005). In a factory-like school, the major goal is efficiency. For the empty vessels-like students, teachers must give certain information (Thorndike, 1962). Therefore, in a traditional classroom

students sit in neat row of desks facing the front of the room, and a teacher either sits at a large desk correcting papers or stands near a blackboard lecturing to students. This is certainly one way to organize a classroom, but it is by no means the only way or the best way. (Armstrong, 2009, p.99)

Stronge (2007) stated that “classes don't learn, students do” (p.70). Therefore, to keep students at the center of learning is significant for promoting students' learning. Murphy, Belli, and Edwards (2004) stated that “good teachers and good teaching are characterized by student-centered instruction where the students are happy and the teacher is standing or moving around the classroom” (p. 87). Although teachers like to talk, teachers should know “when to stop talking and start listening” (McEwan, 2002, p. 39). In fact, students learn in various ways. Teachers should vary their use of instructional strategies to meet students' needs and learning styles. Direct instruction is not

the same as traditional schooling. Both direct and indirect instructional strategies could be used to promote students' learning, provided that teachers use them appropriately (Burden & Byrd, 2010).

Brunn (2010) defined ten qualities of successful lessons: teachers “plan lessons with their students in mind, not just the content” (p. 13); “use a predictable lesson structure that allows students to grow academically and socially” (p. 14.); “make listening to students’ thinking the heart of their lessons” (p. 15); “keep the body of their lessons focused on open-ended topics” (p. 17); “never lose track of the lesson’s objective” (p. 19); “use facilitation techniques to probe student thinking” (p. 20); “listen and invite students to do most of talking” (p. 21); “set up students to work independently” (p. 22); “help students develop the social skills for successful peer interaction” (p. 24); and “work with students to create a sense of community” (p. 25). These qualities suggest that instructional strategies and classroom management are two interdependent factors affecting student learning.

In a student-centered learning classroom, teachers provide numerous opportunities for students to learn and practice (Ayers, 1994). Teachers connect learning to students’ lives, and teach students through conversations (Dalton, 2008), as Socrates did. Kaje (2009) found that students were able to learn well when teachers were able to utilize new teaching and learning approaches and engage students in real-world scenarios. Two factors were important: “the institutional setting and teacher background” (p. 8). Teachers should also create opportunities for collaborative work, such as using group study among students (Bluestein, 2003). “A student centered classroom will help students develop responsible learning behaviours” (Bluestein, 2003, p. 78). Inductive approaches, social approaches, and independent approaches are three typical instructional strategies that effective teachers use in student-centered classrooms (Burden & Byrd, 2010).

In a student-centered learning classroom, teachers value students as effective thinkers (Richetti & Sheerin, 1999). The basic but essential ability that effective thinkers should have is the ability to ask and seek answers to important questions. Effective teachers are capable of applying “question-driven problem-solving strategies” (p. 59), including comprehensive, adaptable, discriminating, productive, and transferable strategies. All the teachers should promote students’ critical and creative thinking to answer open-ended questions (Bluestein, 2003), but they should also “help students ask the right questions” (Richetti & Sheerin, 1999, p. 58). Effective teachers encourage

students to participate in various learning activities at specific times, such as debating, discussing, researching, writing, evaluating, or experimenting (Darling-Hammond & Baratz- Snowden, 2005).

In a student-centered learning classroom, respecting students is another important principle to guide teachers. Teachers should “have appropriate dispositions to promote learning for all students” (Burden & Byrd, 2010, p. 4). Teachers should sincerely listen to students, understand students’ concerns, consider their needs, and pay attention to their questions (Stronge, 2007). Deiro (2005) stated that good teachers treat students with dignity and respect, which means “honouring their position and their abilities and seeing them as worthy of esteem” (Deiro, p. 47). Treating students with respect also means “showing regard for their basic human right of expression and believing in their ability to manage their own lives successfully” (Deiro, p. 47).

The Expectations of Middle Years Teachers in China

Teacher training, teacher certification, and teacher professional development are modern concepts in China. Li (2009) stated that during last century, teacher training in China was deeply influenced by three countries: Japan, the United States, and the former Soviet Union. The traditional model of teacher training was called normal education. Normal schools and normal universities played major roles in preparing teachers for elementary schools, junior secondary schools, and high schools. Teachers’ professionalism was not legalized in China until the Teachers Law of the People’s Republic of China was promulgated in 1993 (Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China, 2010), whereas the state instituted a system of qualifications for teachers. Any Chinese citizens may enter teacher education and obtain formal teaching qualifications if he/she abides by the Constitution and laws; takes a keen interest in education; has sound ideological and moral character; possesses a record of formal schooling as stipulated in this Law (or has passed the national teachers’ qualification examination); has educational and teaching ability; and has been evaluated as qualified.

In order to prepare new teachers for the 21st century, teacher training in China is experiencing a transition. Normal education, a traditional way of teacher training was regarded as the pre-employment training. This education was usually provided by a teachers’ college. Knowledge of content, especially knowledge of specific subjects, was highly focused in the process of training. However, teacher education is a holistic process of teacher

training, which contains pre-employment training, in-service training, and graduate studies. Teacher education programs today are typically provided by the faculty of education at a comprehensive university. Teacher education upgrades the requirements of pre-employment training and emphasizes teachers' life-long learning (Li, 2009).

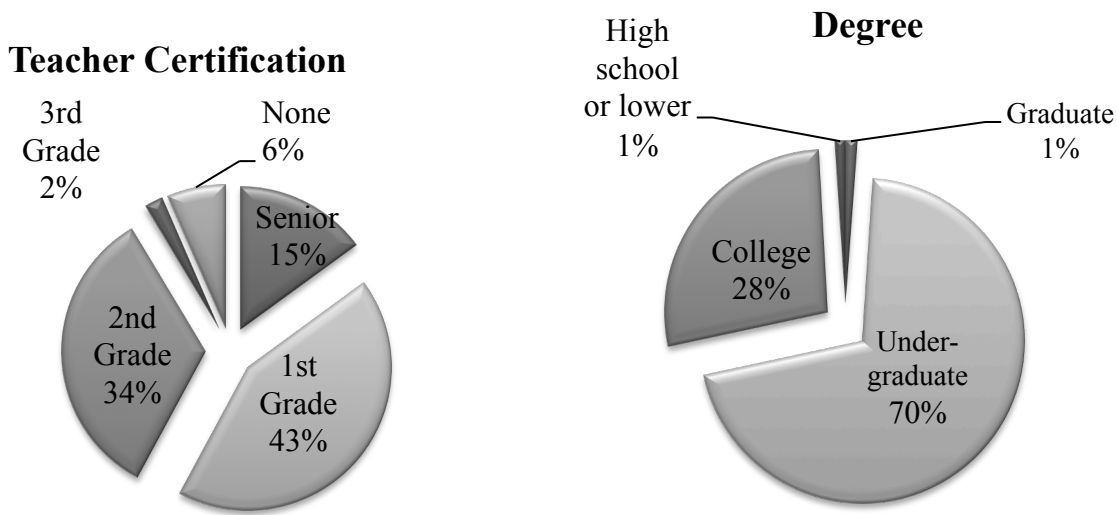


Figure 2.01. Professional and educational background of middle years teachers in China.

According to the Ministry of Education of the PRC (2013)'s statistical report of 2012, As Figure 2.01 shows, among the 3,504,363 full-time junior secondary school teachers, 523,172 (15%) teachers hold Senior Teacher Certificates; 1,504,325 (43%) teachers hold First Grade Teacher Certificates; 1,176,614 (34%) teachers hold Second Grade Teacher Certificates; and 72,541 (2%) teachers hold Third Grade Teacher Certificates. In addition, there were 36,424 (1%) teachers who hold graduate degrees; 2,473,810 (70%) teachers who hold undergraduate degrees; and 963,243 (28%) teachers who have received teacher college training or equivalent college training. However, across Chinese public junior secondary school system, there were still 227,711 (6%) teachers without any appropriate teacher certification, and 30,886 (1%) teachers with only a high-school diploma or below high-school educational background.

Currently in China, middle years teachers teach in junior secondary schools, Grade 7 to Grade 9. According to *Teachers Law of the People's Republic of China* and the *Regulations on Teachers Qualifications*, to obtain qualifications for a teacher in junior secondary school, one shall be a graduate of a specialized higher normal

school, or other colleges or universities with at least two or three years' schooling (State Council of the PRC, 1995; National People's Congress, 1993; Zhang & Jin, 2001). Li (2009) stated that Chinese educators are expected to develop in the following aspects: (a) to upgrade their educational degrees (e.g., a junior secondary school teacher must hold a bachelor's degree or diploma and an appropriate teacher certificate); (b) to ensure morality, long-term goals, and specific techniques in teaching; (c) to demonstrate educational expertise in general; and (d) to be life-long learners.

The Beijing Municipal Education Commission (2005) set requirements for applying for junior secondary school teacher certificates and all middle years teachers should hold junior secondary school teacher certificates. First, applicants must hold bachelor degrees or diplomas in education granted by normal universities or colleges. Second, applicants must participate in an examination of their language skills in standard Mandarin. This examination is organized by both the Ministry of Education and specific institutions that specialize in Chinese language studies. Candidates must obtain at least B grades on the examination. Third, applicants must pass physical check-ups according to prescribed health criteria set for qualified teachers. Fourth, applicants who have graduated from universities other than normal universities or colleges must have earned certificates in education and psychology. Fifth, applicants must submit formal application forms including an ethical evaluation and approval. And finally, normal universities can assign university graduates with bachelor degrees to appropriate positions according to these graduates' unique situations and abilities.

Ye (1998) identified the expectations for teachers in China. She indicated that teachers should adjust their educational philosophies, beliefs, and attitudes to fit into current missions of education. A new view of students and teaching should be developed. Teachers should have a comprehensive knowledge of their profession, which includes general knowledge of both the natural and social sciences, specific knowledge of one or two majors, and overall knowledge of pedagogy and instruction. In addition, teachers should also have appropriate abilities and skills in social communication, educational administration, and educational research. Chen (2003) also described the role of middle years teachers in China. He stated that teachers should be promoters of students' development, teach students, not curricula or textbooks, and teach students how to learn. Second, he declared that teachers should

be researchers of education and teaching and know how to discover and solve educational problems. Third, teachers should be active participants in social activities. In the 21st century, he postulated that the school should no longer be a closed organization. Teachers should be successful at communicating and cooperating with people both in and out of the school setting. Chen believed that effective teaching must be established on the basis of collaboration among schools, families, and communities.

In order to normalize teachers' instructional behaviours and improve their teaching quality, the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China in 1985 instituted a policy called, "Ethics Standards for Elementary and Junior Secondary School Teachers". The latest version of this policy documents published in 2008, was revised based on suggestions and comments obtained from various segments Chinese society. The renewed ethics standards have the following six themes:

1. Teachers must be loyal to the country, love people, support Chinese communist leadership, support socialism, follow education policies made by the Ministry of Education, and assume responsibilities according to the education law. Teachers' behaviours must follow the national and communist party's policies and regulations.
2. Teachers must be loyal to the career of education and its goals. Teachers must be diligent and enjoy making educational contribution for the development of students. Teachers must take responsibility for their work, conscientiously prepare for classes, carefully correct students' work, and effectively teach students.
3. Teachers must care for students, respect them, and be fair to them. Teachers must be firm yet kind to students, and be friendly to them. Teachers must protect students, care for students' physical and psychological health, and maintain students' rights. Teachers must not mock, reprimand, or discriminate against students. Teachers must not physically abuse students or abuse students in other ways.
4. Teachers must teach students according to educational principles and educate students in a patient manner and teach students in accordance with students' respective situations and abilities. Teachers must educate students to be ethical, promote students' creative thinking, and enhance their comprehensive competencies, and they must not evaluate students solely on their examination scores.

5. Teachers must be ethical toward students and become models for students, and must have high standards for themselves, wear suitable clothing, use appropriate words and standard sentence structure, and behave in a respectable manner. Teachers must care for students as a whole, collaborate with fellow teachers and staff members, and respect other teachers, staff members, and parents. Teachers must avoid making money by tutoring students out of school, and they must not use their identities as teachers to conduct any personal business or obtain any personal benefits.
6. Teachers must have life-long learning goals, broaden the scope of their knowledge, and renew their knowledge structures. Teachers must be professional in the process of teaching and learning, conduct research in teaching and learning, and continuously engage in professional development and improve their teaching quality (Ministry of Education of People's Republic of China, 2008).

In addition, the China Association for the Promotion of Education (2008) emphasized the importance of the following characteristics of outstanding teachers: loyal to the country, determined to pursue the career of education, loyal and faithful to other people's career in education, love schools, teach students according to the education law, follow and implement education policies, love students, educate students artistically as persons, improve teaching quality, be accountable and responsible for teaching and learning, become models for students, behave professionally and ethically, be self-disciplined, teach students in an acceptable manner, collaborate with other teachers, and be willing to take initiatives and be innovative in teaching and learning.

In 2013, Beijing Municipal Commission of Education (2013) issued a *Notice of Effectively Reducing Heavy Academic Burden on Elementary and Junior Secondary School Students*. The reason why the government issued this notice was that the majority of elementary and junior secondary schools exist the following phenomena: students have more learning time, more homework, more examinations ranking, and more tutoring classes after school; but have less sleep time, less physical education and activities, and less self-control time. According to the *Notice*, all the Beijing elementary and junior secondary schools and teachers must strictly control students' learning time in school and the amount of homework, and regulate the examination and evaluation. Specifically, junior secondary school students' in-school time should not more than six hours per day and schools shall arrange

educational activities no earlier than 8:00 am. Junior secondary school students' daily homework should not exceed 1.5 hours per day. In addition to the high school entrance examinations, there should be no other unified examinations at junior secondary level. Any schools, teaching and research institutions, educational institutions, and other off-campus training schools should not organize any tutoring class on weekends or other legal holidays.

The Expectations of Middle Years Teachers in Saskatchewan

In Canada, provincial governments establish the educational policies and regulations (Barakett & Cleghorn, 2008). The Saskatchewan Ministry of Education requires that teachers who teach in the province's pre kindergarten to Grade 12 education system must hold a Saskatchewan Teacher's Certificate issued by the Ministry of Education. Certificates are required to work in both public and registered independent schools and may be required by schools operated by First Nations (Government of Saskatchewan, 2014c). Candidates for a Saskatchewan Teacher's Certificate must meet the following requirements:

have completed Grade 12 or equivalent; have complete 4 years of post-secondary education and hold a bachelors degree; have completed a teacher education program comprised of at least 48 semester credit hour of teacher education that includes an extended practicum; and hold a teaching certificate for the jurisdiction where they completed their teacher education program. (Government of Saskatchewan, 2014b)

There are different types of teacher certificates in Saskatchewan. The most common teaching certificate issued is the Professional A Teacher Certificate. An applicant who completes four years of post-secondary education and holds a bachelor degree in education will receive the Professional A Certificate and be certified to teach all subjects from Kindergarten to Grade 12 (Government of Saskatchewan, 2014b). Specifically, middle years teachers who hold Professional A Certificates must complete a minimum of 39 semester hours in at least three teaching fields, and have at least 3 semester hours in English. They also have to complete 48 semester hours of teacher education including a practicum, at least 6 semester hours in educational psychology, and curriculum and instruction course in the areas of reading and language, science, social studies, and mathematics (Government of Saskatchewan, 2014a). The applicant who holds a degree in an approved area of specialization or equivalent and

who completes 48 semester hours of professional education including a practicum will receive the Professional B Certificate and will be certified to teach a specific subject (Government of Saskatchewan, 2014d).

To gain teacher certification in Saskatchewan, candidates must meet specified criteria established by the Ministry of Education, including “content knowledge derived from the various disciplines, general pedagogical knowledge, curriculum knowledge, knowledge of learners and the learning process” (Saskatchewan Education, 1988, p. 11). The Ministry of Education, Saskatchewan Learning (1991) developed a framework for teachers’ instructional practice to support core curricula in the province. The four foundations for refining teachers’ instructional practices are “instructional practice to be improved through professional development programs that encourage teachers to be reflective practitioners” (p. 2); “teaching is an art as well as a science” (p. 4); “teachers should see themselves as instructional decision-makers” (p. 6); and teachers should view students “as autonomous learners who can become aware of their own learning needs and their own ability to meet them” (p. 7).

Based on the aforementioned four foundations, Saskatchewan Learning (1991) expects that teachers in the province to be competent in communication, cooperation, perception, and appreciation. Within this context, communication is the ability to interact with students and their parents; cooperation is the ability to develop a collaborative relationship with students, parents, and colleagues. Perception requires teachers to adjust their lessons appropriately to students’ needs, and appreciation helps teachers develop their self-worth when they overcome difficulties in their work and lives.

Specifically, the instructional framework for Saskatchewan teachers (Saskatchewan Learning, 1991) has four levels. The first level relates to instructional models. Saskatchewan adopted Joyce and Weil’s (1986) four broad models for instruction: the information processing model, the personal model, the social interaction model, and the behavioural model. The information processing model emphasizes “the acquisition, mastery, and processing of information” (Saskatchewan Learning, p.14). The personal model focuses on “the development of the individual’s self concept” (p.14). The social interaction model emphasizes “the personal and social relationships among people” (p.14). The behavioural model “emphasizes changing the visible behaviour of the learner to be consistent with his or her own self concept” (p.14).

The next level reflects instructional strategies. There are five categories of instructional strategies that are described (Saskatchewan Learning, 1991): Direct instruction is highly teacher-centred teaching. Indirect instruction emphasizes student-centered learning, in which teachers are facilitators, supporters, and resource providers. Interactive instruction and experiential learning are also student-centered strategies, which provide students with opportunities for sharing experiences and ideas, and connecting knowledge with practices. Strategies of independent study focus on fostering students' abilities and attitudes toward life-long learning.

The third level consists of instructional methods. Different instructional strategies require different methods. For example, lecture and didactic questioning are two main methods for the strategy of direct instruction. Concept formation, deductive inquiry, and inductive inquiry are appropriate methods for the indirect-instruction strategy. Group discussion is applicable for interactive instruction, and simulation is an appropriate method for experiential learning. Assigned questions are often applied in independent study. Teachers should create an open learning climate for their students, use multiple methods to teach, and help students transform from being dependent learners to independent learners (Saskatchewan Learning, 1991). The last level relates to instructional skills. Explaining, demonstrating, and questioning are basic skills which teachers apply. "Good questions should be carefully planned, clearly stated, and to the point in order to achieve specific objectives" (Saskatchewan Learning, 1991, p. 28). In fact, "No matter how experienced or how effective a teacher may be, the development and refinement of these skills and processes is a continual challenge" (p.27).

In Saskatchewan, middle years teachers play a significant role in promoting student learning in six aspects: developing students' language and literacy abilities and communication skills; supporting students to increase their numeracy, which includes "problem solving, calculation, measurement, space and shape, and data analysis and interpretation" (p. 23); providing students with a positive learning environment that helps students improve critical and creative thinking abilities; emphasizing the importance of students' technological literacy; helping students develop personal and social values and skills; and developing a healthy relationship with students. Teachers understand students' learning processes, encourage students' ideas and practices, provide students timely help and useful feedback, and transfer learning responsibility from teachers to students (Saskatchewan Education, 1988).

The Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation (STF), a "professional organization representing over 12,000 teachers in publicly funded schools in Saskatchewan" plays an important role in assisting teachers in the province (Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, 2014c). And the STF's (2014a) *Code of Professional Competence* indicated that teachers in Saskatchewan should

(a) create and maintain a learning environment that encourages and supports the growth of the whole student; (b) demonstrate a professional level of knowledge about the curriculum and the skills and judgment required to apply this knowledge effectively; (c) demonstrate and support a repertoire of instructional strategies and methods that are applied in teaching activities; (d) carry out professional responsibilities for student assessment and evaluation; (e) reflect upon the goals and experience of professional practice, and adapt one's teaching accordingly; (f) work with colleagues in mutually supportive ways and develop effective professional relationships with members of the educational community; and (g) conduct all professional relationships in ways that are consistent with principles of equity, fairness and respect for others. (www.stf.sk.ca)

The STF's (2014b) *Code of Professional Ethics* identifies ethical expectations for teachers. In Saskatchewan, teachers must respect their profession, respect and support each student, respect and support other teachers, and work with the larger community. For example, to respect teaching profession, Saskatchewan teachers should

act at all times in manner that brings no dishonour to the individual and the teaching profession; act in a manner that respects the collective interests of the profession; and make the teaching profession attractive in ideals and practices so that people will desire to enter it. (Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, 2014b)

To respect and support each student, Saskatchewan teachers should

deal justly, considerately and appropriately with each student; develop teaching practices that recognize and accommodate diversity within the classroom, the school and the community; respect the right of students to reach the highest level of individual development; encourage each student to reach the highest level of individual development; seek to meet the needs of students by designing the most appropriate learning

experiences for them; and render professional services to the best of the individual's ability. (Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, 2014b)

To respect and support other teachers, Saskatchewan teachers should

respond unselfishly to colleagues seeking professional assistance; and support objectively the work of other teachers and evaluate the work of other teachers only at the request of the other teacher or when required by role as a supervisor. (Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, 2014b)

To work with the larger community, Saskatchewan teachers should

respect the various roles and responsibilities of individuals involved in the educational community; keep parents and the school community informed and appropriately involved in decisions about educational programs; and model the fulfilment of social and political responsibilities associated with membership in the community. (Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, 2014b)

Summary of Chapter Two

In this chapter, I reviewed literature related to teachers' positive experiences of promoting student learning. Teachers should be well prepared professionally and continue to develop themselves as life-long learners through professional learning. They should be able to design and maintain a positive learning environment, apply multiple instructional strategies, and maintain classroom order and organize teaching time. Creating a professional learning community in schools also benefits student learning. In a PLC, teachers develop a healthy relationship with students, make a positive connection with parents, and collaborate with colleagues to improve student learning.

For middle years teachers, in order to adopt their teaching strategies for the developing physical, cognitive, and psychosocial needs of students, they should pay more attentions to improving students' higher order thinking and multiple intelligences, promote collaborative learning among students, and establish a mutually respectful teacher-student relationship. In addition, creating student-centered classrooms is significant for promoting middle years student learning. In a student-centered classroom, teachers respect each student, value students as effective thinkers, and provide a variety of learning and practice opportunities for students.

Furthermore, I described the expectations for middle years teachers in both China and Canada based on the relevant policies, documents, and literature. In China, teacher training is experiencing a transition and a more holistic teacher professional development system is emerging. Chinese middle years teachers are expected to upgrade their educational degrees, demonstrate educational expertise, focus on students' development, and become life-long learners. In Beijing, middle years teachers are expected to meet the published standards of junior secondary school teachers and related ethical requirements.

In Saskatchewan, an appropriate teacher certificate is the basic requirements for a teaching position in a public school or independent school. Kindergarten to Grade 12 teachers are expected to have content knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, curriculum knowledge, and knowledge of learners. The four-level instructional framework is to be practiced by teachers in the Province. This includes instructional models, instructional strategies, instructional methods, and instructional skills. Middle years teachers are expected to improve student learning in six aspects: language and literacy abilities, numeracy abilities, critical and creative thinking abilities, technological literacy, personal and social values and skills, and a healthy relationship in peers. In addition, Saskatchewan middle years teachers are also expected to follow the regulations and rules established by the Saskatchewan Teacher Federation.

In chapter 3, I described the philosophical foundations of the study and Appreciative Inquiry (AI) as the research methodology, and I introduced the selection of participants and the process of data collection and analysis. I also discussed the trustworthiness of the data in the study and the relevant ethical considerations.

Chapter Three

Research Design and Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore selected middle years teachers' positive experiences of promoting student learning in student-centered classrooms, and how these recalled experiences might affect their own future teaching and assist other teachers to promote student learning. I chose Appreciative Inquiry (AI) as the research methodology. AI values people's positive experiences and emphasizes the importance of the positive core of change (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2000). In this chapter, I presented the philosophical foundation of the study. Then I introduced AI as the research methodology, described the potential participants and the process of data collection and analysis; and discussed trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and criteria for quality in qualitative research.

Philosophical Foundation of the Study

Within an interpretative paradigm, I conducted this qualitative research from a positive perspective. Social constructivism was the epistemological foundation of the study and AI was used as the research methodology. Creswell (2007) described, four different paradigms that qualitative researchers believe: postpositivism, constructivism, participatory, and pragmatism. Each of them represents a different paradigm for making claims about knowledge. In a social constructivist worldview, "individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. They develop subjective meanings of their experiences. These meanings are varied and multiple" (p. 20). Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2010) stated that there are multiple subjective realities "that consist of stories and meanings produced or constructed by individuals within their natural settings" (p. 26). Dewey (1938) wrote that life is education. As a researcher, I value people's experiences and I believe that their knowledge is developed through their experiences and interpretations of these experiences. People not only learn from their own experiences, but they also learn from others' experiences. Confucius and other Chinese philosophers also argued that one's past experience, if not forgotten, was a guide for the future (Sun, 2000). However, I believe that truth in social reality is changeable and multidimensional, because people's understandings of realities are flexible, reflexive, partial, and biased (Creswell, 2002). Multiple truths and perspectives reflect the nature of people and their social world. In this research, teachers' beliefs, values, feelings, biases, and subjective understandings of

teaching and learning were describable. I paid attention to their positive experiences and I emphasized their reflections on their positive experiences.

Denzin and Lincoln (2003) stated that compared to quantitative researchers, who attempt to keep a distance from participants in order to collect and analyze “objective” data, qualitative researchers tend to build a closer relationship with their participants. In qualitative research, participants are regarded as fully human rather than as value-free objects. In addition to the participants’ experiences, my personal experiences of teaching and learning in China and Canada shaped this research. Creswell (2007) stated that “researchers make an interpretation of what they find, an interpretation shaped by their own experiences and background” (p.21). I believe that researchers and people they research could develop meaning together.

The reasons I decided to use a constructivist epistemology and qualitative research methods in this study were that: I believed that (a) these elements were applicable to the field of education -people and their perspectives are at the center of education; and education is a human enterprise; and (b) people’s voices needed to be heard, their concerns needed to be understood, and their experiences needed to be investigated and shared. Qualitative research has the potential to influence people, provided that the researcher is able to adequately present participants’ experiences and refine deep meanings from their experiences. Creswell (2002) stated that phenomenon understanding and interpretation should be emphasized in qualitative research. From a social constructivist point of view, “the goal of research is to rely as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation” (Creswell, 2007, p. 20).

Appreciative Inquiry as the Methodology

I used Appreciative Inquiry (AI) as the research methodology in this study. Cooperrider and Whitney (2000) stated that Appreciative Inquiry (AI) as “a methodology that takes the idea of the social construction of reality to its positive extreme” (p. 5). They further defined AI as “the cooperative, co-evolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the world around them” (p. 8). Barrett and Fry (2005) also stated that “AI is a strength-based, capacity building approach to transforming human systems toward a shared image of their most positive potential by first discovering the very best in their shared experience” (p.25). They further explained, “the

word appreciate originates from the Latin word, *appretiare*, and has four different, but related, meanings: to set a price or place a value upon; to increase in value; to admire; and perceiving or seeing” (p.35). They also stated that “The inquirer means to search and discover. Inquiry is the act of exploration. AI is a constructive, generative, and capacity building mode of action-research in which inquiry, learning, and change are seen as a related, integral whole” (p.36).

Traditionally, people conduct research by starting with the definition of the problem. Problem-solving is the purpose and core of the study. Therefore, with a focus on problem-solving, people are more concerned with fixing poor performance. “People learn to do what is feasible rather than seeking what is possible” (Barrett & Fry, 2005, p.30). However, Cooperrider and Whitney (2005) argued that the problem-solving approach was “painfully slow” (p.11), “rarely results in new vision” (p.12); and was “notorious for generating defensiveness” (p.12). They argued that one can hardly achieve success or make further improvement solely by learning from failures, problems, and negatives. Rather, one can learn how to achieve success by studying and evaluating successful examples and experiences. Barrett and Fry (2005) also stated “AI is a quest for learning, rather than for a solution to a problem. AI puts all the emphasis and value on the search for new, shared understandings of what has already caused the system to be at its best” (pp. 37-38). According to Cooperrider and Whitney (2005), people’s positive perspectives and successful experiences contain wisdom and insight beneficial for their future decisions.

AI shifts research from problem core analysis to “positive core analysis” (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, p.11), but it does not mean that people should ignore negative events or problems, nor does it mean that AI is advocating the end of problem solving. AI researchers examine problems from a positive perspective with a positive attitude and deal with problems by focusing on the positive aspects. Using AI, researchers were able to systematically discover what gives life to participants, and to focus on the most effective and capable characteristics of participants (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008). In fact, Barrett and Fry (2005) warned against undue negativism, stating that “We warn that if we are not careful, problem-solving may become our default option and its overuse can be dangerous” (p.30).

Organizations from outside the educational sector have used AI to enhance their effectiveness by purposefully emphasizing the positive aspects of their work. For instance, a company called *Roadway Express* chose AI as a tool to help improve the company. Jim Staley, Roadway's CEO stated that "it is not that we do not deal with the negative anymore, but the value of AI is that, in anything we do there is a positive foundation of strength to build on in addressing those problems" (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, p.41). *GTE/Verizon*, an American telephone company, which created a positive organizational culture through practicing AI, also did not ignore problems and challenges it faced every day. In fact, Tom White, the president of GTE/Verizon did not advocate "mindless happy talk", rather he explained that "telephone companies are among the best problem solvers in the world. We cannot ignore problems. We just need to approach them from the other side" (p.5).

Cooperrider and Whitney (2005) defined AI as "a narrative-based process of positive change" (p. 15), which is called the "AI 4-D Cycle" (p. 16). There are four key phases of an AI process: *discovery, dream, design, and destiny*. Discovery, the first phase, is to identify the "best of what has been and what is" (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, p. 16). In this phase, people or an organization's strengths and best practices should be appreciated. Researchers are looking for participants' past positive experiences. Dream, the second phase, creates a vision of higher goals, or what might be? "What is the world calling us to become" (p.16)? In this phase, researchers focus on encouraging participants to think how to make the future better by reflecting on their positive experiences. People may envision the results of the positive change. People or an organization's potential goals are emphasized.

Design, the third phase, is to "create possibility propositions" (p. 16) of the ideal organization or situation. It is a bridge between the first two phases: "the best of what is" and "what might be". Cooperrider and Whitney (2005) called this process "co-constructing" (p.16). In this phase, researchers develop a practice plan for the future. Destiny, the fourth phase, is to realize the dream and sustain positive change. For AI research, destiny may be the future positive influence for the participants and their larger communities. The core of the AI 4-D Cycle is the positive change, which means learning from positive experiences and holding a positive attitude throughout the whole process of change. Emphasizing this perspective helps AI adherents face address negative situations that inevitably arise with rationality and confidence, rather than with apprehension and dread.

Originally, the theory of AI was applied in the field of organizational change. Organizations across the world, such as McDonald's, Canadian Tire, and the U.S. Navy, have benefited from AI (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008). Some researchers have recently applied AI in the research field of education. For example, Lodewyckx (2009) used AI to examine the perceptions of children with disabilities, and the perceptions of their parents, using a positive standpoint. Hummel (2007) employed AI to describe eight elementary school teachers' experiences in a teaching and learning context. He used semi-structured interviews, semi-structured paired interviews, and focus groups to gather the data. In 2006, Walker and Carr-Stewart applied AI to collect beginning principals' successful administrative stories and then they examined their professional growth. Yoder (2005) also applied AI to explore organizational climate and emotional intelligence in a community college.

Based on these results, and because, the purpose of this study was to explore selected Chinese and Canadian middle years teachers' positive experience of promoting student learning, I selected AI as an appropriate methodology. In this study, I applied the AI 4-D Model at two levels: the personal level and the organizational level. At the personal level, I used a series of survey questions to identify participants' positive teaching experiences in the past, and then to let participants dream an ideal student-centered classroom, design their future classroom practice, and examine whether they had realized a positive change in their classrooms and whether their positive experiences had influenced a larger professional learning community. At the organizational level, all the findings of the survey data were the results of this identification or discovery process. Then I discussed the major themes with Chinese and Canadian educational experts, and requested them to dream an ideal student-centered classroom, and design a broad picture of how to develop student-centered learning. The future recommendations of this research for the participants and their schools in were to form the last phase of the process - destiny of the 4-D model at the organizational level.

In addition, I applied the following specific research methods in this AI research: the online survey, the online interview, and the interpretation panel. The reason why I chose these research methods is that AI emphasizes people's voice and ideas. Interviews and the interpretation panel provided participants with more opportunities to share their stories and opinions, especially evidenced in the panel, where groups of experienced educators candidly

exchanged their educational views and school-based experiences. In the survey, participants could also freely share their individual stories and personal opinions, because the key questions were open-ended. The main point in all of these methods was that participants were encouraged to reflect on their positive teaching experiences. The reason why I used online surveys and interviews for participants in China was the distance barrier, which rendered face-to-face data collection unfeasible.

Participants

There were two groups of participants in this research, one of which was a group of Grade 6 to 8 teachers in China and Canada who held appropriate teacher certificates and had at least one year of teaching experience. The other group consisted of middle years education experts, which included superintendents, school principals or administrators, and experienced teachers. Fifty-three middle years teachers and 16 middle years education experts were recruited to the study. In China, I surveyed 47 junior secondary school teachers who taught Grade 7 or 8 students and I interviewed four junior secondary school educators in Beijing. In Canada, I surveyed 6 elementary school teachers who taught Grade 6, 7, or 8 students and invited 12 middle years expert educators to participate in an interpretation panel held in Saskatoon.

I selected the participants by means of a nominational-reputational technique that has been commonly used in qualitative, social science research over the years (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Wiersma & Jurs, 2008). This purposeful sampling strategy required that I first contacted superintendents or school principals via email in both China and Canada, and then sent them formal invitation letters to solicit their participation. In the invitation letter, I briefly introduced the research purpose, research questions, research procedures, expectations of participants, and approximate length of time that the study would take. In order to account for candidates who may have declined to participate and to protect candidates' identity, I initially identified 60 possible participants for the study. I subsequently contacted each individual on the list to determine his/her interest in participating; and I continued this contacting process, until I obtained the desired quota of the 50 teachers.

In addition, in order to enrich the data, I also invited several graduate students in the College of Education at University of Saskatchewan to participate in my research by being part of a focus group. My rationale for doing so

was that they were experienced teachers or school principals. I requested the graduate studies secretary in the college to forward my invitation email to the graduate students. In this email, I introduced my research purpose, research procedures, and length of time the interpretation panel would take. I provided the volunteers with my survey questions via email prior to the meeting. As I did previously, I notified them in the invitation letter that their participation implied consent.

Data Collection and Analysis

There were three phases of data collection during this research project. I first surveyed 53 teachers by email in both Beijing and Saskatoon. After analyzing the survey data they returned and identifying the major themes, I selected and interviewed four Chinese middle years educators via telephone or on-line audio/video connection. Then, I invited 12 Canadian middle years education experts to participate in the interpretation panel in Saskatoon.

1. Survey of Selected Middle Years Teachers:

Because of distance and ethical considerations, I used email questionnaires to collect the initial data and I used pseudonyms for all participants. The questions in the questionnaire were open-ended and were worded using positive perspectives. Cooperrider and Whitney (2005) stated that in order to discover participants' positive perspectives, researchers should be able to identify and further magnify the factors that positively impacted the participants. Questions I asked were used to seek and/or explore participants' responses and thoughts regarding positive elements related to the research topic.

I focused on each participant's positive teaching experiences regarding the promotion of student learning in student-centered classrooms. My major research questions were:

- What were the selected middle years teachers' positive experiences of promoting student learning in student-centered classrooms?
- After reflecting on these positive teaching experiences in student-centered classrooms, did these teachers change their teaching attitude and practices toward student-centered learning? And if so, in what ways?
- How might these teachers' experiences assist other teachers in promoting student learning?

In the survey, my open-ended questions were centered on:

- Could you please describe one of your student-centered lessons that promoted student learning?
- What did you value most about this lesson?
- Did these positive experiences change your teaching practice? Please explain.
- Did you share your positive experience with other teachers in your school or school division? Why or why not? How might your positive experiences help other teachers promote student learning?

After receiving ethics approval from the University of Saskatchewan, I identified the Chinese middle years teachers by contacting three junior secondary school principals in Beijing. I informed the principals of the purpose of the study and asked them to post a notice of my research and my contact information in their schools. If any teachers who met my requirements were interested in my research, they were requested to contact me within one month. After the volunteers responded to me, I sent the formal invitation letters and consent forms to them via email. If they agreed to participate, they were to respond to me via email within a week. Then I emailed them the questionnaire to these respondents within two days (Appendix1). To select the Canadian middle years teachers, I contacted the Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools informing them of the purpose of this study. Similarly, I asked the Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools to post a notice of my research and my contact information in their schools. If any teachers who met my requirements were interested in my research, they were to contact me in within one month. Afterwards I sent the formal invitation letters and consent forms to these responding teachers via email. If they agreed to participate, they were to respond to me within a week. Then I sent them my questionnaire within two days (Appendix1).

The questionnaires I sent to the Canadian teachers were printed in English, while the questionnaires I sent to the Chinese teachers were printed in English with Chinese translations. In addition, I asked the Chinese teachers to answer the questionnaires using either English or their first language, Chinese. After collecting these data, I translated the Chinese responses into English, myself. I also invited another educator, who was fluent in both Mandarin and English, to audit my translation. I then coded the qualitative data responses, and identified the major themes that emerged from the survey questionnaires by categorizing participants' responses to each survey question. To support each theme that appeared from the responses, I provided participants' original words as first-

hand evidence. Furthermore, I compared and contrasted participants' points of view with those reported in the reviewed literature, and I summarized the findings.

2. Interview of Chinese Junior Secondary School Educators:

After analyzing the survey data and identifying the major themes by categorizing respondents' comments, I interviewed four Chinese middle years educators, who had participated in my initial survey or who had worked in the school division or schools that I had surveyed. I first contacted prospective participants who had responded to my initial email surveys or who had contacted me during the survey process. If they were interested in participating in the follow-up interview, I sent them a consent form. Once they signed the consent form, I conducted the interviews at participants' convenience, either by telephone or by on-line audio/video connection. Each interview lasted 20- 60 minutes. The conversations were recorded if the participants agreed to it. Their interview content was kept separate from their survey answers, and no identifying information appeared in the research reports.

In each interview of the Chinese education experts, I first reported the major findings that emerged from both the Chinese and Canadian data to the Chinese education expert. Then I asked the interviewees the following guiding questions:

- What did you think about the survey results from China and Canada?
- How do you understand “student-centered learning”?
- What advice would you give to other teachers interested in promoting student-centered learning?

3. The Canadian Middle Years Education Expert Panel:

Once I determined the major themes from the Chinese and Canadian survey, I also invited 12 middle years principals, vice-principals, teacher-educators, or experienced teachers to participate in an interpretation panel in Saskatoon. According to Noonan (2002), the interpretation panel is a form of collaborative research. It could help researchers deepen their understanding of research data or results. There are usually six to eight experts in the related field who are invited to join an expert panel, some of whom might have participated in the study. In the panel's deliberations, these experts share their understanding of the topic in question, and they often provide researchers with insight into the topic by helping interpret the research data and results. In this panel research

process that used principles of appreciative inquiry, I first reported the major findings that emerged from both the Chinese and Canadian data. Then I let the experts discuss the following guiding questions in the panel:

- What did you think about the survey or interview results from China and Canada?
- How do you understand “student-centered learning”?
- What advice would you give to other teachers interested in promoting student-centered learning?

Because I had been a middle years teacher in Beijing before studying in Canada, I was aware of my own feelings and understandings that had emerged from my own experience and perspectives. I believed that my previous background would help me better understand both the Chinese and Canadian teachers’ responses. I anticipated that new knowledge and new meanings could be created and developed during the process of this research.

Data Reporting

I reported the data of this study in Chapter Four and Chapter Five. In Chapter Four, I present the Chinese teachers’ survey data and the Chinese middle years educators’ interview results. In Chapter Five, I report and discuss the Canadian teachers’ survey data and the Canadian middle years education experts’ panel reports.

Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, trustworthiness of data indicates that qualitative data are credible, dependable, and reliable (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In order to make the qualitative data in my research credible and reliable, I triangulated different sources of data, and checked whether all the data made sense to the participants, readers, and me. Mabry (2007) maintained that triangulation of qualitative data is an effective way of ensuring data trustworthiness. In this study, I used member-checking and peer review to address trustworthiness of the qualitative data.

Ethical Considerations

In order to ensure that the confidentiality of participants in this study was protected, I considered the following ethical requirements regarding the behavioural science research guidelines that involve people at the University of Saskatchewan. This study followed the ethical guidelines set by the Advisory Committee on Ethics in

Behavioural Science Research of the University of Saskatchewan. I sent participants the questionnaires and documentation of the ethical protocol, interviewed selected middle years educators, and conducted the expert interpretation panel after the Advisory Committee approved the study.

I also informed participants that the questionnaires, the interviews, and the expert panel were anonymous. The participation in this research was voluntary, and the participants could answer only those questions with which they were comfortable. The research information that was shared was held in strict confidence and discussed only with the research team. The participants could withdraw from the research project at any time for any reason without penalty of any sort. If they withdrew from the research project, any data that they had contributed would be destroyed. After data had been pooled, it would not be possible to withdraw participants' data, because some form of research dissemination would have already occurred.

Data from the responses were stored in the office of my advisor, and the electronic documents were saved on my computer, which cannot be opened without a pin number. When I analyzed and reported the data, each participant's personal information was not disposed. I used pseudonyms, and removed demographic details from participants' quotes and descriptions, other than their nationalities, because that information was important to the research findings.

Criteria for Quality in Qualitative Research

Lincoln (1995) mentioned that qualitative research is essentially a person-centered nature of inquiry, which has the following criteria: "positionality" "critical subjectivity" "voice" "reciprocity," and "community" (pp. 9-13). Lincoln (1995) interpreted the meaning of positionality as "standpoint judgments" (p. 9). Positionality was expressed in texts, which were "partial, incomplete, socially, culturally, historically, racially and sexually located, and can therefore never represent any truth except those truths which exhibit the same characteristics" (p. 9). That is, any text that claimed "whole and complete truth" (p. 9) or presented universal or generalizable knowledge that could be used to describe all individuals across different periods of time and contexts were "inauthentic and misleading" (p. 9). Only the texts that presented people's specific contexts for argumentation would be believable and authentic.

Critical subjectivity is the researcher's ability to understand others' feelings and to be aware of others' personal and psychological concerns (Lincoln, 1995). Lincoln maintained that critical subjectivity could help researchers develop a mutual relationship with participants, and thus be able to explore their potential contradictions regarding different interpretations and understandings of texts and data in qualitative research. For qualitative researchers, critical subjectivity is important, because every person has his/her own standpoint based on his/her unique background, and the extent to which researchers understand their participants affects how meaningful and valuable their research could be.

According to Lincoln (1995), researchers should also pay attention to "voice—who speaks, for whom, to whom, for what purposes" (p. 12). Lincoln stated that voice indicates that participants are not silenced but have opportunities to fully express their thoughts and opinions. Guba and Lincoln (2005) noted that voice means not only allowing a researcher to have voice, but also "letting research participants speak for themselves" (p. 209).

Reciprocity implies that a person has a relationship with others, living within a community (Lincoln, 1995). In order to address relationships between the person and others, researchers need to study these relationships to try to understand the meanings of the person's stories. Lincoln indicated that researchers and participants should have positive relationships that are "marked by a deep sense of trust, caring, and mutuality" (p. 14). Community is an important quality criterion in qualitative research. Qualitative research should "serve the purpose of the community in which it was carried out" (Lincoln, 1995, p. 10). In Lincoln's opinion, traditional scientific research, which prompts researchers to objectify "teaching, inquiry, public service, and collegial relations" (p. 10), is "a destruction of community" (p. 10). Qualitative researchers need to abandon seeking to objectify social relations, in order to integrate their "research, critical reflection, and action" (p. 11), as well as to consider any social consequences of their research.

In this study, I emphasized the importance of teachers' voices. I let them share their opinions, express their feelings, and tell their own stories. I believe that every participant's respective opinions and stories about promoting student learning would be unique to his/her situation. I directly cited portions of their accounts to present their stories and I attempted to understand their educational beliefs. I paid attention to teachers' reflective

ideas. That is, when they thought back on their positive experiences of promoting student learning, they reflected about how these positive experiences changed their teaching practices, and about how their positive experiences and practices might have improved student learning and enhanced student achievement at the school level. I believe that my own teaching experiences in both countries helped me better understand my participants and their stories.

Summary of Chapter Three

In this chapter, I outlined the philosophical foundation, methodology, and research design used in the study. Social constructivism was the epistemological foundation of this study. I believe that people's voice should be heard, and that they can learn from their own experiences. In this study, I regarded the participating middle years educators as full human-beings rather than as value-free objects. I valued their experiences, knowledge, and reflective ideas about teaching and learning.

This research was an Appreciative Inquiry study, in which I focused on participants' positive experiences. The three major research questions were:

- What were the selected middle years teachers' positive experiences of promoting student learning in student-centered classrooms?
- After reflecting on these positive teaching experiences in student-centered classrooms, did these teachers change their teaching attitude and practices toward student-centered learning? And if so, in what ways?
- How might these teachers' experiences assist other teachers in promoting student learning?

There were two groups of middle years educators who participated in this research. One group of participants consisted of Grade 6 to 8 teachers in China and Canada who held appropriate teacher certificates and had at least one year of teaching experience. Another group of participants was middle years education experts consisting of superintendents, school principals/administrators, and experienced teachers. There were three phases of data collection, the first of which was my surveying of 53 middle years teachers in China and Canada. I also interviewed four Chinese middle years experts via telephone and online audio/video connection. Finally, I invited

12 Canadian middle years education experts to participate in an interpretation panel. In chapter 3, I also discussed trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and the criteria for quality in qualitative research.

In chapter 4, I analyzed the major findings of the Chinese teachers' survey data and presented Chinese educational experts' points of view of the survey findings.

Chapter Four

Teacher Voice: China

In order to explore the selected middle years teachers' positive experiences of promoting student learning in student-centered classrooms, and how these recalled experiences might affect their own future teaching and to assist other teachers to promote student learning, I surveyed 47 middle years teachers in Beijing, China using email. After receiving the completed surveys, I further discussed the survey findings with four selected Chinese educational experts through online interviews. The major themes that emerged from the survey findings that we had discussed in the interviews included a general picture of student-centered learning, key values of student-centered learning, the teacher's role, the teachers' communication, and the difference between single subject and multiple subject teaching. In this chapter, I analyzed the major survey findings of Chinese teachers' experiences and the comments recorded in the interviews regarding student-centered learning. Then I reported the Chinese educational experts' understanding of the survey findings.

Chinese Middle Years Teachers' Experiences

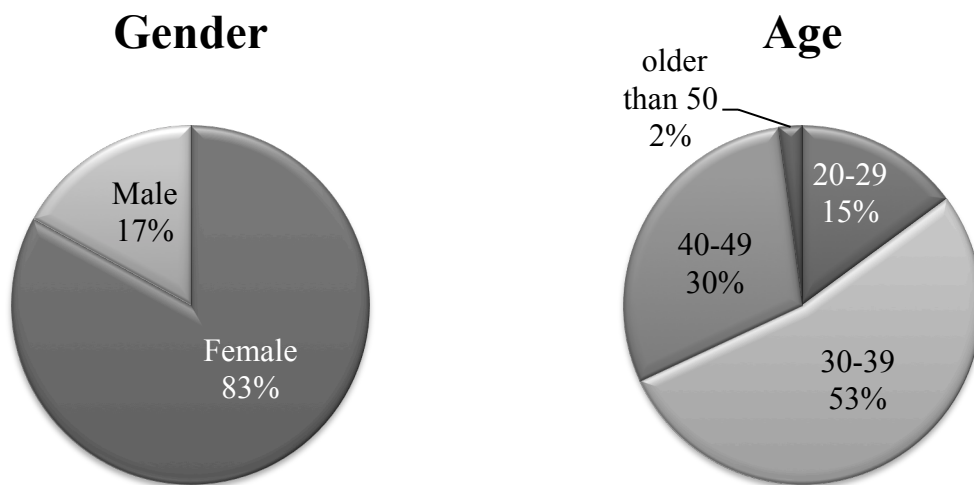
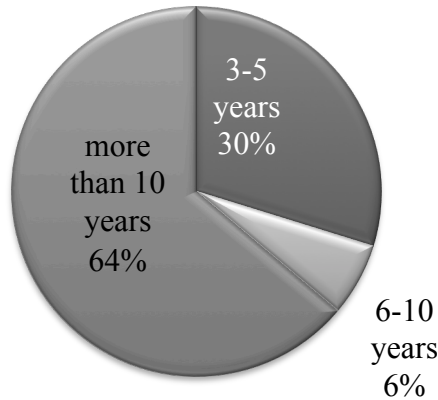


Figure 4.01. Gender and age of the Chinese participants.

I surveyed 47 Grade 7 and Grade 8 teachers from three junior secondary schools in Beijing, China. As Figure 4.01 shows, 39 (83%) of the 47 participants were females, and 40 (85%) were more than 30 years old. In reference to teaching experience, Figure 4.02 shows that all participants had taught middle years students for at least three

years; and 30 participants (64%) had more than 10 years of teaching experience. Seventeen teachers (36%) taught Grade 7 and 30 (64%) taught Grade 8. As Figure 4.03 shows, the curriculum subjects they taught included Chinese language arts, English, math, natural science (physics and biology), and social studies (history, geography, politics, ethics, and mental health).

Years of Teaching Experience



Grades

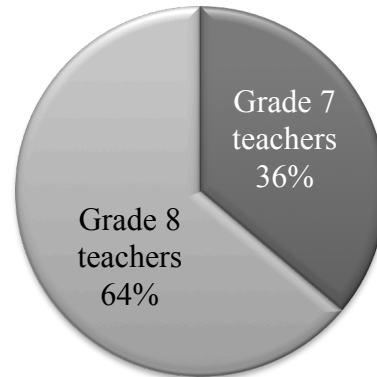


Figure 4.02. Chinese participants' years of teaching experience and teaching grades.

Subjects

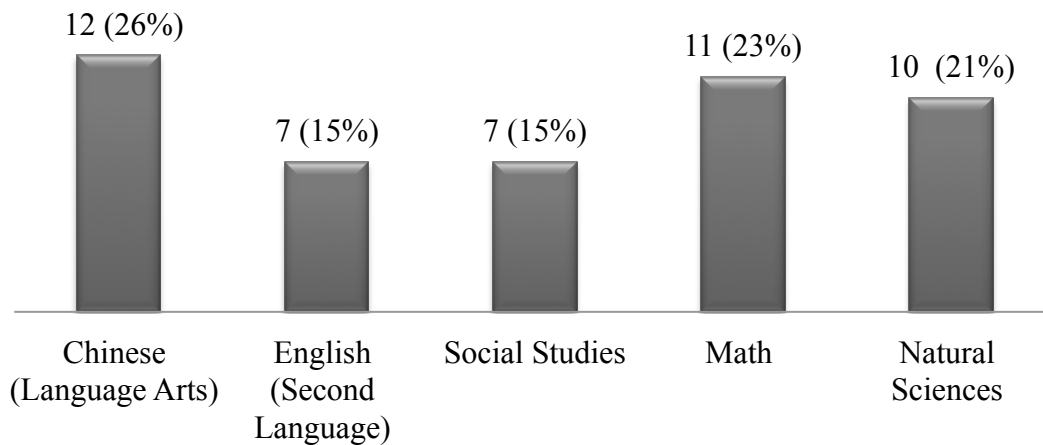


Figure 4.03. Subjects taught by Chinese participants.

Discovery Phase: Teachers' Positive Experiences in the Student-Centered Classrooms

Discovery is the first phase in the Appreciative Inquiry process. The purpose of discovery in this research study was to identify participants' positive experiences of promoting student-centered learning in the past

(Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). To identify these experiences, I asked the question in the survey: “Could you please describe one of your student-centered lessons that promoted student learning?” All participants answered this question and stated that they had promoted student-centered learning in their classrooms. According to their descriptions of teaching/learning processes, I found that although the teachers had unique lesson plans, they shared common ideas and instructional strategies. For instance, they encouraged their students to explore new knowledge by emphasizing student self-study, organizing small-group activities, and leading student problem-solving sessions. The respondents were also aware of the importance of students’ interest, practice, and reflection during the learning process, and they appeared to create a friendly learning environment for students.

According to the Chinese participants’ point of view, in student-centered classrooms, providing students with opportunities to explore new knowledge by themselves seemed to be the core of the lesson design. Forty-two teachers from the Chinese cohort (89%) indicated that they had encouraged and helped students to learn by themselves in various ways. Some teachers reported that they paid more attention to students’ personal interests and reflective thinking abilities, as illustrated by one respondent (BT1) who stated, “When I taught a reading course, I asked students to read materials by themselves, find out their favourite passages, and share their reflections on these favourite passages with other classmates (p.1).” Further comments were: “I encouraged students to read books they liked and to make some reading notes when they found any parts that inspired them;” and “In my class, students acquired knowledge by pursuing their own interests (p.1).”

Other Chinese teachers emphasized students’ learning abilities, such as discovering natural laws from observation, searching and collecting useful information for study, applying their knowledge into practice, and explaining their ideas to others. Examples of these views were:

- “I gave students two examples of division of rational numbers and let them find out what the typical way of solving this problem is.” (BT7, p.1)
- “In my writing class, I asked students to observe their classmates carefully and write down a short paragraph to describe their classmates’ appearances. I think that students have chosen their words in much detail than before.” (BT12, p.1)

- “When I taught the history of Ming and Qing dynasties, I let students prepare presentations. They took the responsibility to search for relevant historical materials from libraries and websites. Some students even found several good online videos.” (BT25, p1)
- “I want to enable students to understand that knowledge comes from life and that knowledge should serve people. I usually give students word problems that connect to their daily life. For example, to welcome the 2008 Olympic Games, a community agency wants to build a rectangular garden. Its length is 202 meters from south to north; its width is 198 meters long. What is the area of this rectangular garden in square meters.” (BT36, p.1)
- “In order to make the lesson of rectangular plane coordinate system more interesting and practical, I introduced the traditional Chinese game of Go Chess to the class, and let students play with it. I assigned students a task: Using the math language – coordinate, to describe each step you move during this game.” (BT27, p.2)

Among all the instructional strategies the participating teachers employed, organizing group activities was most popular, in that 29 Chinese teachers (62%) mentioned that they had organized group activities in class. For example, one teacher (BT8) explained:

When I taught articles written by ancient Chinese writers, I divided the whole class into several small study groups. I let students in the same group translate the articles to modern Chinese. If they had encountered any difficulties, they could have helped one another as group members. If a problem could not be solved within their group, they could seek assistance from other groups. (p.2)

A teacher of geography (BT23) mentioned that she had organized a group activity for her students to learn the map of China, well. The teacher explained, “I instruct my students to manually make map puzzles of China in study groups. There were five to six students in one group” (p.2). During this process “students were more familiarizing themselves with the names, shapes, and locations of different provinces of China” (p.2). Another teacher (BT24) organized a mini-conference in her geography class in which students presented information in multiple ways: “Each study group represented a country in class. They had one week to collect relevant

geographical information (e.g., a country's location in the world, its natural resources, climate, and culture) before presenting it in class (p.2).”

Seven math teachers indicated that they had used group activities when teaching math. Based on the descriptions of their teaching processes, they had following steps:

1. Students first learned a new concept/formula by themselves: “In the first 15 minutes of the class, I asked my students to study a new concept by themselves and write down questions they had (BT33, p.3)” and “I gave students 10 minutes to read and discuss the new formula and its examples in small groups before formally teaching them in class” (BT32, p.3).
2. Teachers gave students a typical question related to a new concept or formula and encouraged them to discuss and solve it in small groups. For example, the fractional equation was a new lesson for Grade 8 students, but a teacher thought that it was similar to the equation of a degree with a denominator. Therefore, she stated: “I gave students a question of the fractional equation and let them find out a solution by using similar strategies of solving an equation of a degree question. Students discussed it in groups and solved the problem together” (BT29, p.3).
3. Each study group demonstrated their answers and/or solutions to assigned questions by means of a group presentation. They could also share their understandings of the new concept/formula with other groups. One teacher (BT29) stated, “After group discussions, I asked each group to demonstrate their solutions on the blackboard and explain their understandings of the questions. During this process, other audience groups could ask questions to the presentation group” (p.3). Another respondent (BT31) shared, “Each group had a lead presenter who introduced their discussion results to the rest of the class. In addition to reporting an answer, the lead presenter further explained their understandings of the new concept and the process of solving this problem in detail” (p.3).
4. Teachers explained the new concept or formula, answered students' questions, and drew a conclusion. Two illustrative comments were: “Following student presentations, I summarize major knowledge points in this lesson and evaluate student presentations” (BT31, p.3); and “I encourage students to raise questions in class.

If no one was able to answer the questions, or if the students' understanding of a knowledge point was not correct, I would explain and/or demonstrate it again" (BT32, p.3).

The related literature on effective teaching indicated that these steps resemble similar learning strategies that have been shown to enhance student learning. For instance, Burden and Byrd (2010) defined group study as cooperative learning which "involves students working together in small, mixed-ability learning teams to address specific instructional tasks, thus aiding and supporting each other during the learning process" (p.151). The authors further explained the typical process of group study: "The teacher presents the group with a problem to solve or task to perform. Students in the group then work among themselves, help one another, praise and criticize one another's contributions, and often receive a group performance score" (p.152). Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock (2005) stated that comparing to complete learning tasks individually or to compete against each other, cooperative learning would lead students to higher academic achievement.

My data showed that group studies, especially group experiments, were commonly used in science classes. Among the 10 science teachers surveyed, seven mentioned that they had organized group activities when instructing students to do experiments in class. The teachers remarked that students were highly motivated in group activities. For example, when a teacher (BT38) explained to students discrepancies between two types of electrical circuits (i.e., series and parallel), she wrote "I instructed students to do relevant experiments and manually draw circuit diagrams in small groups: How could you connect two light bulbs well in different ways" (p.4).

Another teacher (BT45) organized small groups to perform experiments that aimed to help them discover and measure density. She stated, "As a group, several students measured a liquid's volume and mass and found out the liquid's density. Each student participated in the experiment and contributed to the final result. I supervised student activities" (p.4). Two similar comments were: "Students shared their experiences of doing experiments among groups and evaluated each other's work and results" (BT45, p.4); and "Students collaborated with one another during the process of doing experiments and asked questions about their experiments" (BT44, p.4).

Brainstorming was another teaching strategy that the Chinese teachers employed. Three typical examples emerged from the data: In one English writing class, the teacher's objective was to help students learn how to

describe attractions of a place/city through words. In order to achieve this objective, the teacher reported using brainstorming as a warm-up activity. She remarked, “Students talked about places they had visited and its most attractive things” (BT13, p.5).

In a social science class, a teacher (BT20) facilitated a lesson entitled “fairness matters in society”. In order to help students understand that fairness is important for making a healthy society and to teach them how to properly deal with unfairness, the teacher guided students in the following brainstorming activities: “I engaged students to brainstorm any unfair things they knew that had occurred around them, encouraged them to share their ideas, feelings, and reflections on these occasions, and led them to discuss appropriate solutions” (p.5).

In another social science course on ethics, a teacher (BT21) also used brainstorming to help students build their self-confidence. The topic was “I can do it”. She let students brainstorm their personal strengths from many perspectives, not only regarding their studies in school, but also in extracurricular activities such as arts, sports, and volunteering work in community. Then the teacher asked students to share one of their stories that had made them feel “I can do it”. When telling these stories, students answered the following questions: “What kind of difficulties did you encounter? What did you think about the difficulties? How did you deal with them? Was there any result? And what was your general reflection” (p.5)?

Some teachers who participated in this research identified role-play as also a useful activity for language arts and social studies. A teacher (BT9) of Chinese language arts told a story entitled the Shipwrecked Normandy. To help her students learn from the experiences of a brave captain who sacrificed himself in this disaster, the teacher asked students to perform a role-play. She shared, “One student acted as the captain, the other students acted as sailors and passengers saved by the captain” (p.6). She allowed students to write their own scripts in this role-play, prompting them with questions like: “When you were saved by the captain and saw him sinking in the sea.... what would you do? What would you say” (p.6)? After the students had completed the role-play, the teacher asked them to reflect on their activities by asking: “Why did you do or say this? Did the captain’s courage and spirit touch you? Could you please specify”(p.6)?

Another teacher (BT10) recalled that she had used role-play technique to teach students how to observe manners and behaviours in her Chinese writing class. She wrote, “In order to improve students’ writing abilities of describing manners and behaviours, I have made a role-play with my students together: I acted as a little animal, another student acted as a person who played with me” (p.6). Other students observed the role-play and wrote down a short paragraph about it. The teacher stated, “I found that after observing the role-play, many students could describe our manners and behaviours in more detail” (p.6).

When a teacher (BT16) of English taught the following dialogue: “Where is ...? It is...” she asked students to prepare some classroom articles such as books and rulers for a role-play. She described the role-play: “One student put books on his/her desk and asked another student: Where is my book? The other student answered: It is on the desk. Students participated in pairs in this activity. They were highly motivated, and the learning atmosphere was great” (p.6).

In one social science class, the teacher (BT21) divided her students into several groups to create a role-play called confidence. In this activity, there were three roles to play in each group, the first role being a confident student, the second role being an over-confident student, and the third, a student who lacked confidence. She described the scenario for the class: “After taking a math exam, the three students went home together. What would they talk about on their way home? How would they talk” (p.6)? Then, all students watched each small group’s role-play together and guessed their roles, the confident student, the over-confident one, and the less confident one. After the students had completed the role-plays and discussed the different roles, the teacher discussed self-confidence, and she led a discussion regarding why it was so important, and how we might lead a confident life style.

Oral questioning was also valued by the teachers surveyed as an effective way to promote student-centered learning. Twelve teachers (25%) emphasized that during the teaching-learning process, asking meaningful questions was important. Examples of their comments were: “Teachers should ask questions appropriately according to different learning objectives” (BT3, p.7); “I have used a series of questions to lead students to learn the text by themselves step by step” (BT5, p.7); and

I found that meaningful questions would motivate students to learn better. In my history class, I asked students a main question: Why did the Byzantine Empire disappear? Students discussed various reasons and found out historical evidence, which supported these reasons. During this process, students learned how to regard history as a mirror and look forward to the future. (BT26, p.7)

Six teachers in this study preferred letting students ask questions themselves. One teacher (BT3) declared, “When I taught an essay titled *The Spring*, I let students read it themselves and found out any words, sentences, or paragraphs that they did not understand, and asked me questions about the essay in class” (p.7). Another respondent (BT14) stated, “I encouraged students to ask questions to each other and found that they were more willing to read textbooks and reading them more carefully” (p.7). A third teacher (BT29) commented, “In my math class, students asked questions among themselves and worked together in a group to solve math problems” (p.7).

Dream Phase: An Ideal Student-Centered Classroom from Teachers’ Perspectives

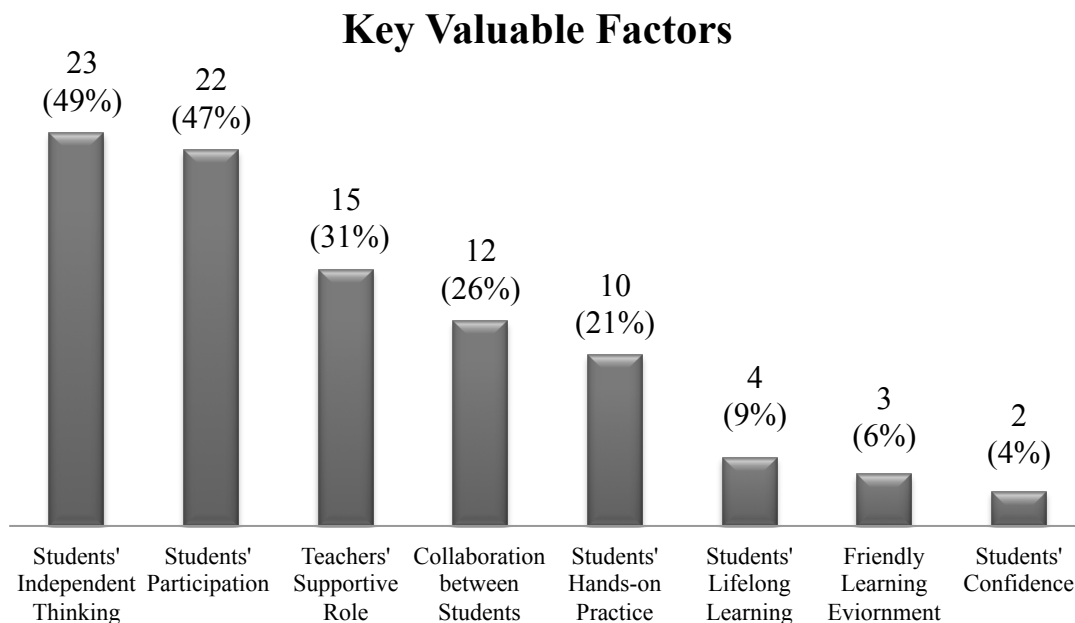


Figure 4.04. Chinese participants’ views of key valuable factors in a student-centered classroom.

Dream was the second phase in the Appreciative Inquiry process. The goal is to lead participants to create their visions of higher goals by letting them reflect on their past positive experiences (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). In order to identify participants’ reflections on their own teaching and obtain a general picture of an ideal student-centered classroom, I asked: “What do you value most about this student-centered lesson?” All participants

responded to the question. Each of their answers described an ideal student-centered classroom. One participant may have mentioned more than one valuable factor. Therefore, as Figure 4.04 shows, all of these factors represent the voice of Chinese participants. The five aspects that teachers valued most regarding student-centred teaching were: students' independent thinking, students' participation, teachers' supportive role, collaboration among students, and students' hands-on practice. In addition, students' lifelong learning, students' confidence, and a friendly learning environment were mentioned, but less frequently.

1. Students' Independent Thinking

Twenty-three teachers (49%) mentioned that their students thought independently, indicating that the respondents felt that their students explored knowledge or solved problems by themselves. Evidence Chinese teachers provided for this assertion was illustrated by the following statements: "I valued students' voluntary and independent thinking and practice" (BT45, p.15); "Students' abilities of thinking independently and working independently are valuable" (BT44, p.15); "Later on, students began to know how to think when they have questions" (BT31, p.15); "Through discussion and debate, students learned how to express their own ideas" (BT26, p.15); "What I valued most was students' ideas" (BT22, p.15); and "What I valued most was not how much historical knowledge students have, but how they think about history and what they learn from history" (BT25, p.15). Several other statements illustrating the importance of students' independent thinking were:

- During the process of discovering knowledge by themselves, students realized their own weaknesses and learned how to solve problems together. This was a process of discovering, thinking, practicing, reflecting and rethinking. Students would benefit from this process. (BT2, p.15)
- Five learning abilities are very important for students: to discover, observe, explore, analyze, and summarize. As such, students independently explored and acquired knowledge instead of passively waiting for teachers to tell them answers. (BT35, p.15)
- What I have paid more attention to in my class was not whether students have remembered any key points of knowledge, but whether they have realized the process of thinking. (BT38, p.16)

- Instead of rushing to draw any conclusion by myself in my physics class, I let students enjoy the process of exploring natural disciplines. (BT46, p.16)
- During the process of conducting experiments, students corrected mistakes by themselves. (BT47, p.15)

2. *Students' Participation*

Twenty-two teachers (47%) indicated that in their classrooms, students became what they called “masters of learning.” Teachers appeared to regard students’ participation as the most valuable achievement in their student-centered classrooms. Some respondents who held this perspective offered the following comments: “The thing I valued in my classroom is students’ participation” (BT42, p.16); “Whether the students have participated in learning, whether their abilities have been improved, and whether they have obtained knowledge will be all important for me” (BT33, p.16); and “All students have participated in my class, which realized my ideas of letting students think and be more engaged in class” (BT6, p.16). The Chinese teachers further explained that when students participated actively in the learning activities, their enthusiasm for learning was significantly improved. Illustrative statements reflecting this belief: “By participating in various learning activities, students had more opportunities to practice their knowledge points and skills acquired. Both their learning enthusiasm and learning efficiency were improved” (BT23, p.17); “Students studied with passion. The learning atmosphere in the classroom was great. Every student participated in the class” (BT16, p.17); and “When students became masters of learning, the whole class was active” (BT10, p.17).

3. *Teachers' Supportive Role*

Fifteen teachers (31%) shared their ideas about the teacher’ role in my survey. Ten of them indicated that the teachers’ role in a student-centered classroom was different from that in a traditional classroom. One teacher (BT5) stated, “We should change our roles in the classroom- we are learning guides and facilitators for our students, not knowledge providers” (p.19). Other teachers commented: “The teacher should be an organizer of the classroom, a promoter of learning motivation, and a participant of learning activities” (BT15, p.19); “Teachers should assist students in acquiring their knowledge and improving their skills” (BT4, p.19); “Teachers should be able to provide students with valuable comments when necessary” (BT44, p.19); and “Teachers should motivate students in the

classroom and make sure that each student is engaged in learning activities. Teachers should create a space for students to communicate and collaborate with one another” (BT36, p.19). Furthermore, five teachers re-emphasized the importance of teacher’ role in the student-centered classroom when they responded to the last question in the survey: Is there other additional information you want to share? One respondent (BT2) declared:

Student-centered learning needs teachers to change their minds of teaching. How to teach? It does not mean that teachers are useless in a student-centered classroom; on the contrary, teacher’ role is more important than ever. Teachers should have strong leadership and be able to lead student to analyze and solve problems. (p. 20)

Two other respondents who illustrated this category stated: “Student-centered learning should be realized through good lesson designs. When teachers plan a lesson, they should sufficiently consider students’ interests, abilities, and previous knowledge background” (BT47, p.20); and “Teachers should avoid formalism, return to the nature of teaching and learning, and improve themselves continually” (BT3. p. 20).

4. Collaboration among Students

The survey results identified that collaboration among students was an important factor in the student-centered classroom. Twelve teachers (26%) mentioned that they valued collaboration among students. Three respondents declared that they cared about “whether students’ group discussions are deep and comprehensive enough” (BT8, p. 17); “whether students could solve problems with their group partners together” (BT14, p. 17); and “whether students communicated with one another in a study group” (BT28, p. 17). Teachers further commented, “Instead of teaching students by myself, I prefer students’ group activities in class” (BT5, p. 18); “In a study group, students shared their ideas with one another and practiced skills acquired in class. When they taught themselves, they learned from one another” (BT36, p. 18); “When students asked and answered each other’s questions, they were highly motivated in the classroom” (BT3, p. 17); and “It did make more sense to students if they could interpret a concept in their own words and from their own perspective. Therefore, I valued communication among students” (BT22, p. 17).

5. Students’ Hands-on Practice

Ten of the teachers (21%) indicated that they valued students' hands-on practice, as reflected in the following: "Through hands-on practice, students became masters of learning" (BT23, p. 18); "By practicing, students discovered knowledge and drew learning conclusion" (BT28, p. 18); "I valued students' abilities of practicing knowledge" (BT45, p. 18); "Students learned how to practice by themselves" (BT40, p. 18); "Let students experience the process of exploring knowledge. Let them realize learning by doing" (BT36, p. 18); and "How to practice knowledge or connect knowledge with reality was important for students. This is what they really need in the future" (BT38, p. 18).

6. Students' Life-Long Learning, Friendly Learning Environment, and Students' Confidence

In addition to the aforementioned five points, students' lifelong learning, a friendly learning environment, and students' confidence were identified by some of the teachers surveyed, as shown in Figure 4.04.

- Four respondents mentioned students' lifelong learning, two of whose comments were: "Translating knowledge students acquired into practice is their real need for future learning" (BT38, p.20); and "Students not only need to acquire knowledge, but also need to develop learning abilities and learn how to become competent and ethical citizens. These would benefit their long-term learning" (BT4, p.20).
- Three teachers in the survey mentioned creating a friendly learning environment for students. "In class, students did not feel stressed when studying...When I designed this course, I grouped students at different levels. I prefer providing them with sufficient space for learning from one another to letting them feel stressed and overwhelmed in class. In class, each and every student could participate in activities and achieve success" (BT1, p.20).
- Two teachers reported that they believed students developed self-confidence by being in a student-centered classroom, "I valued students' confidence most. I think that teachers should design a performance stage for all students to demonstrate their strengths and interests. Students at each level should have an opportunity to experience a happiness of success in order to build their confidence in math learning" (BT36, p.21).

Design Phase: Changing Practice in Classrooms toward Promoting Student-Centered Learning

Design was the third phase in this Appreciative Inquiry process and bridged first two phases, discover and dream (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). In this study, design indicated changing practice in classrooms positively toward an objective of promoting student-centered learning. From teachers' answers to the question, "Did your positive experiences change your teaching practice? Please explain" I found, as shown in Figure 4.05 that 41 teachers (87%) indicated that because they had experienced positive results in student-centered classrooms, they either were planning to change their future teaching practices or had already changed their teaching practices and attitudes. Five teachers (11%) stated that they did not benefit much from their past positive experiences; therefore they would not change their future practice or would change it only somewhat. Only one teacher (2%) was unsure if his positive experiences would change his future practice or not.

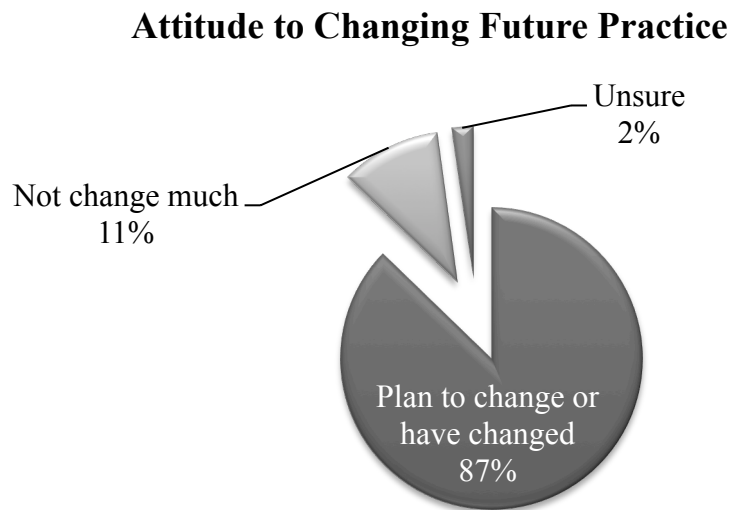


Figure 4.05. Chinese teachers' attitudes toward changing their practice.

Some of the Chinese teachers further explained why they planned to change or had changed their teaching practice toward student-centered learning. "When students communicated with one another in their own language, they would understand new knowledge points more quickly" (BT22, p.22); "When students behaved actively in learning, they would enjoy sharing ideas together or ask more questions, which would help them deepen their understandings of knowledge acquired in class" (BT29, p.22); "Based on my more than ten years of teaching experience in physics, I think the best way of teaching science is to teach students how to think scientifically. I love to see students participate in various activities and discover knowledge in the classroom" (BT43, p.22); and "I

believe that interest is the best teacher for students. When they achieved success in class, they would love to learn” (BT42, p.22).

Some teachers described how they intended to create student-centered classrooms. Samples of their descriptions were: “I would encourage students to ask questions. Based on the questions, I would organize relevant group discussions through which students not only know how, but also know why” (BT7, p.23); “To motivate students, I would ask them to practice knowledge points introduced to them more frequently in my class” (BT23, p.23); and “Now I believe that students have the ability of discovering. Therefore, I want to leave enough space for students to think and try. Instead of giving students a correct answer by myself, I would let them discuss questions in their groups” (BT2, p.23).

Eighty-eight percent of teachers expressed a positive attitude toward student-centered learning, and five teachers declared that their past experiences in a student-centered classroom would not substantially change their current practice. Statements from this latter sub-group included the following: “It changed a little bit” (BT17, p.25); “It is hardly to change, because students were used to receiving correct answers from teachers and memorizing knowledge points” (BT4, p.25); and “It could be partly changed, because student-centered learning might not fit every student, though it did enhance some students’ enthusiasm of learning” (BT24, p.25). One teacher was not sure if he would change his future practice toward student-centered learning. He wrote, “I am not sure if I would change my future practice because I just start to try it in my class. Although I think student-centered learning is good, I do not think it could be implemented well in each classroom” (BT3, p.26).

In order to explore teachers’ ideas of helping other teachers improve their teaching skills, I asked the following question: “How might your positive experiences help other teachers promote student learning?” All forty-seven teachers answered this question. As Figure 4.06 shows, 38 teachers (81%) identified their plans or ideas of sharing positive experiences with other teachers; 3 teachers (6%) stated that they hoped their good experiences would benefit other teachers, but did not mention any specific strategies; 3 teachers (6%) indicated that they were not sure if their positive teaching experience would help other teachers or not; and 3 teachers (6%) stated that because they were new or beginning teachers in their schools and did not have much experience to share, they

instead stated they would prefer to learn from other teachers with more teaching experience. Nevertheless, teachers wished to share their positive experiences in various ways.

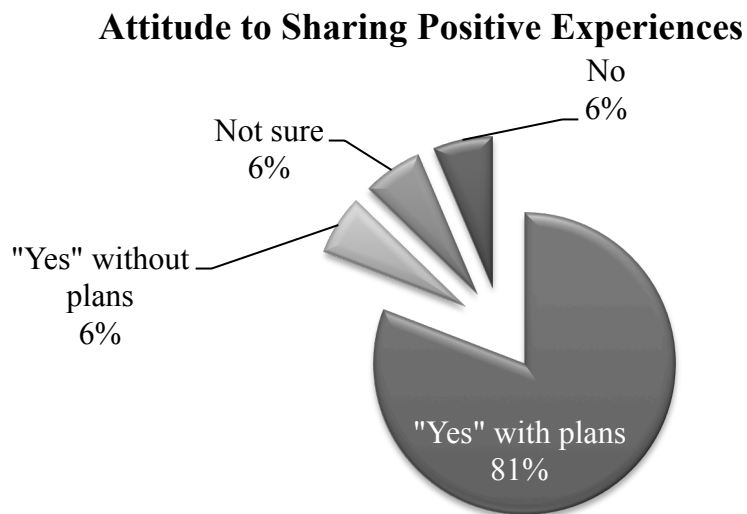


Figure 4.06. Chinese teachers' attitudes toward sharing their positive experiences.

- Group work: Comments included: “Group work is important for teachers. Teachers in the same teaching group should help and supervise one another and create a good learning atmosphere”(BT29, p.34); “Teachers in the same grade should meet regularly to discuss teaching strategies, and share ideas and wisdom” (BT2, p.33); and “We should communicate with each other both before class and after class” (BT28, p.33).
- Visiting other teachers' classrooms: “Teachers should visit each other's classrooms and learn from each other” (BT8, p.34); “Through attending other teachers' classes, we can learn from others” (BT4, p.34); and “We should visit more classes and observe experienced teachers who teach the same subject to ours in the same grade. If we do not have time to visit others' classes, we could watch videos of their teaching practice. Teachers' good lessons should be video-recorded, and their teaching materials should be documented” (BT41, p.34).
- Sharing teaching resources/materials: Two responses from teachers were: “We should share our teaching resources, attend each other's class, and develop together” (BT19, p.33); and “Teachers could make experimental tools and teaching materials together and share them in classrooms” (BT40, p.33).

- Mentoring new teachers: One respondent declared, “As experienced teachers, we should communicate with new teachers frequently, share our past teaching experience with them, and help them develop themselves” (BT44, p.33).
- Publishing journal articles: “I would like to publish articles in academic journals to introduce my ideas of teaching when I have free time. I think it would help more teachers” (BT37, p.34).

Some teachers emphasized that the importance of the purpose of sharing their positive experiences in the student-centered classroom was to help change other teachers’ teaching philosophy and attitude. Some of the statements they made supporting this notion were: “We should share our teaching values together, not only specific teaching strategies”(BT46, p.34); “Through communication, every teacher should have his/her own reflection on student-centered learning” (BT12, p.35); “Student-centered learning was a new idea for many teachers. I hope my positive experiences would help other teachers revise the traditional rules in the classroom. They might be able to develop it, too” (BT1, p.35); and “The key is to help teachers understand that students are real masters of their learning. We should administer our classes for student-centered learning” (BT35, p.35).

Several teachers elaborated on their ideas about communication among teachers, as illustrated by these remarks: “Teachers should communicate with each other frequently, but when they start to learn from each other, they should be very careful. They should make their own choices and decisions according to their own practice situation” (BT43, p.35); “Every teacher and every student are different. Teachers should learn how to apply their teaching strategies appropriately” (BT15, p.35); and “Teachers teaching the same subject could learn from each other a lot. Teachers teaching different subjects could hardly learn from each other” (BT26, p.35).

Destiny Phase: Sharing Positive Experience in the Professional Learning Community

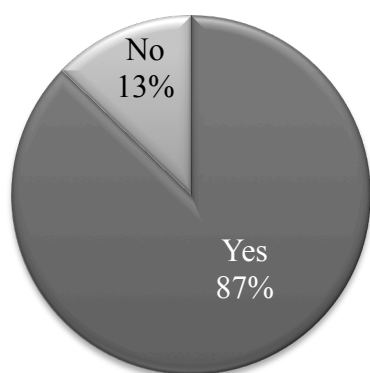
Destiny was the last phase in Cooperrider and Whitney’s model (2005, p. 16), which sought to realize the positive change for the participants and their larger communities in the future. In this survey, I asked two questions to examine whether teacher participants began to realize a positive change in their student-centered classrooms and whether their positive experiences influenced a larger professional learning community. The questions were:

- Did these positive experiences change your teaching practice? Please explain.

- Did you share your positive experience with other teachers in your school or school division/district? Please explain.

All 47 teachers answered the above questions. As Figure 4.07 shows, 41 of the teachers (87%) indicated that their positive experiences in student-centered classrooms had changed their teaching attitude and/or practice toward student-centered learning. Furthermore, 46 teachers (98%) stated that they had shared their positive teaching experiences with other teachers in their schools or school divisions/districts.

Changed Attitude/Practice



Shared Positive Experiences

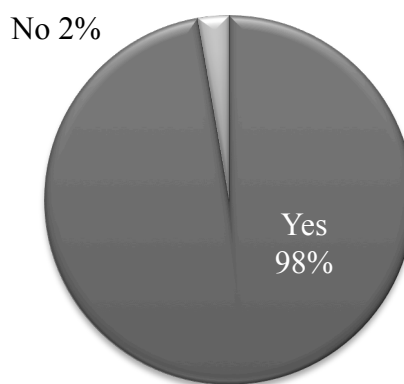


Figure 4.07. Chinese teachers’ changed attitude/practice toward student-centered learning and shared positive experience in the larger learning community.

After changing their attitude toward student-centered learning, these teachers indicated that they and their students received many benefits. Some of their statements included: “I have benefited a lot from giving students a stage upon which to perform. My role was changed from an actor to a director. Students took responsibilities for preparing and presenting learning materials. Students were so smart. Sometimes, their presentations would give me some insights. Students loved the stage and enjoyed activities in which they could participate” (BT25, p.24); “Students changed their learning styles, too. They began to know how to learn and think independently. Their learning efficiency as well as exam scores was improved” (BT19, p.24); “Students do not feel bored any more in my class and their thinking skills were improved a lot” (BT2, p.24); and

To prepare a lesson for student-centered learning, teachers should prepare and do more work before they enter the classroom. However, students were interested in this type of class because they enjoyed the learning process and achieved their success. For example, when students discovered a natural law by themselves, they would always go beyond the requirements listed in the textbook (BT40, p.24).

Regarding making positive change in a large learning community, sample responses from the 46 teachers were: “We always share our teaching experiences with each other. Every time, I learned a lot from other teachers” (BT13, p.27); and “When we shared teaching ideas and experiences together, we focused on how to communicate with our students and let them learn well” (BT29, p.27). Only one teacher stated, “I am new to this school and have not shared my teaching experience with others yet. Every teacher in Beijing is excellent! I just began to learn from them” (BT25, p.27).

Three teachers did not provide details about sharing experiences, but others shared their teaching experiences regarding student-centered learning at three different levels of learning communities: with teachers in the same grade or subject, with teachers in the same school, and with those within the same school district. Statements from the thirty-four teachers (72%) who declared that they had communicated with other teachers in their schools included: “I usually shared my teaching experiences with other colleagues in my school (BT27, p.28);” “When I shared my positive experiences with other teachers in my school, I found that they had similar experiences” (BT14, p.28); and “In my school, we learned from each other. Now most math teachers began to use this method (student-centered learning) to teach math” (BT37, p.28).

Among the 23 teachers who shared teaching experiences with others who in the same grade and were teaching the same subject, statements included: “I have shared my teaching philosophy of student-centered learning with my lesson preparation group members whose students and my students are in the same grade” (BT2, p.29); “I shared in my teaching group the idea that is to connect students’ current knowledge with the reality. We discussed how to make our teaching more effective” (BT21, p.29); and

I shared my experiences about teaching a writing course with other language arts teachers whose students and my students are in the same grade. We decide together that we should encourage students to read more

according to their own interests and start from interesting reading materials that will also develop their writing skills (BT25, p.29).

In addition, 10 teachers (21%) reported that they shared their good teaching experiences at a school district level. Some of their comments in this regard were: “We frequently shared our successful lesson plans together in my school district” (BT20, p.27); “I usually attend teaching and research events organized by my school district. We could always learn from other teachers” (BT47, p.28); “As a master teacher, I shared my lesson plans and teaching experiences with other teachers at the beginning of every term” (BT36, p.28); and “I shared my teaching experiences with teachers in other schools and also learned from them. I have discussed teaching strategies with them and also brought back their valuable ideas” (BT40, p.28).

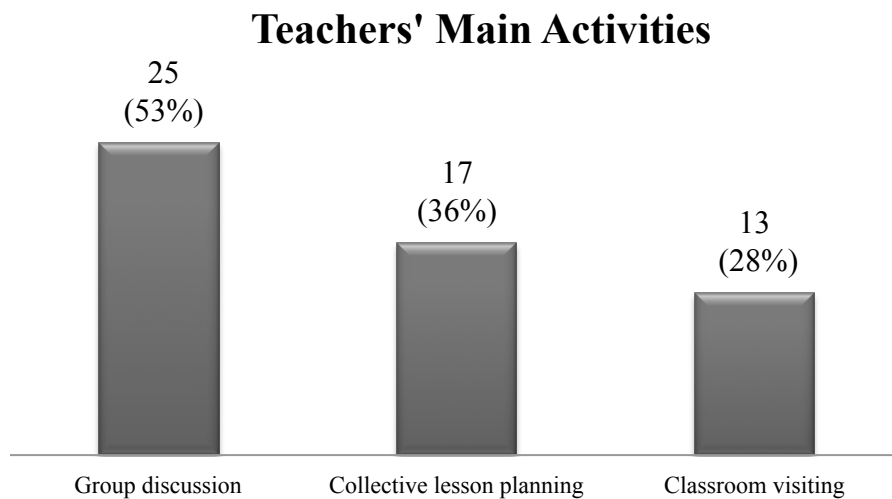


Figure 4.08 Chinese teachers' main activities for communication.

As Figure 4.08 indicates, there were three main activities in which teachers frequently engaged to share their teaching ideas and experiences: group discussion, collective lesson planning, and classroom visiting. Survey results indicated that 25 teachers (53%) mentioned, they had communicated their teaching ideas with other teachers through group discussions. Comments illustrating this category were: “In my school, teachers have regular meetings for discussing teaching and learning issues. The school district also has similar meetings” (BT43, p.31); “We discussed the model of student-centered learning within our teaching and research group” (BT8, p.29); “In my school, especially in my group in which every teacher teaches students in the same grade, we always discuss our

teaching strategies and contents together before preparing our next lesson” (BT31, p.29); and “In our grade-8 science teaching group, we discussed how to improve students’ learning interests in science by encouraging them to participate in group studies and group presentations”(BT42, p.30).

Seventeen of the surveyed Chinese teachers (36%) reported that they collaboratively prepared lesson plans with other teachers. Statements from this sub-group were: “We designed our lesson plans together and discussed strengths and weaknesses of specific teaching strategies” (BT19, p.32); “We prepare our lesson plans together and share teaching materials for classes in the same grade” (BT3, p.31); and

In my grade, we communicated with each other frequently. When we prepared lesson plans together, we discussed many details related to teaching and learning. For example: How to explain a question? How to prepare assignments for students to work at home? If students had difficulties in learning, what should we do to help them (BT30, p.32)?

Thirteen teachers (28%) stated that they had experienced some occasions when their teaching and learning processes in class had been publicly observed by teachers from other schools and districts; and these 13 teachers also observed other teachers’ classes. The following comments that relate to these teachers were: “In my school, we attend other teachers’ classes and make comments to help them improve their teaching” (BT18, p.33); “As an exemplar, my class has been publicly observed and studied by teachers in my school district” (BT7, p.33); and “The school district encourages teachers to share their good teaching experiences with other teachers. Sometimes, people from the general public are invited to observe my class” (BT20, p.33).

Chinese Educational Experts’ Perspectives

I discussed the survey findings with four educational experts in China by means of online interviews. Among these four experts, one of them was working with the District Board of Education in Beijing and was an elementary school vice-principal; another was a junior high school principal; and two of them were senior middle years teachers with more than ten years of teaching experience. During the online conversations, I first reported the major findings from the previous surveys to the Chinese experts. I then asked them to describe their understanding

of student-centered learning, to interpret the survey findings from their perspectives, and to introduce relevant policies or to share their experience of supporting or supervising other teachers in their schools/school divisions.

Definition of Student-centered Learning

“What is student-centered learning?” was the first major question that I discussed with the four Chinese experts during our online conversations. From their definitions, I determined that Chinese experts emphasized the following two themes in a student-centered classroom: “Students should be actively engaged in their learning” (BE3, p.6); and “Teachers should guide students appropriately” (BE4, p.8). BE1 stated, “Student-centered classroom is a combination of teachers’ guidance and leadership and the students’ engagement in learning” (p.1). In a student-centered classroom, “Students are the focus in the classroom where the teacher conducts multiple activities to engage students”(BE1, p.1); “Whatever teaching strategies teachers use, students should be able to think actively and acquire the relative knowledge” (BE2, p.4). BE3 stated, “Students should be actively involved in their learning. They should enjoy learning” (p.6). BE4 stated, “Student-centered learning means that to help student realize that learning is their own business and they have ability to acquire knowledge by themselves” (p.8).

Following the general discussion about their understanding of student-centered learning, I sent a written summary of the previous survey results in student-centered classrooms in China and Canada to the Chinese educational experts. I invited them to comment or add any thoughts about these major findings.

According to the previous survey results, 62% of Chinese participants mentioned that they had used group activities to engage students in their classrooms, especially in science classes where group experiments were commonly used. It seemed that Chinese teachers regarded group study as a key effective instructional strategy to promote student-centered learning. In addition, other useful instructional strategies in student-centered classrooms that Chinese participants had mentioned in the survey included brainstorming, role-playing, and questioning.

All four of the Chinese educational experts agreed that group study was an effective instructional strategy to promote student-centered learning and which is becoming more and more popular in the middle years classrooms in Beijing. BE3 commented, “Students’ group study is an effective way to promote student-centered learning,

because it will motivate students a lot when they support each other and discover knowledge together during the learning process” (p.6). BE4 also stated,

Group study would let student help each other, learn from each other, and learn to make contributions to others. Group study would also help students to develop their creative thinking and critical thinking. Group experiments gave students a lot of hands-on experience, which would promote their learning interests of science (p.8).

BE1 further explained,

Through group activities, the students can actively explore their questions, go deeper about what they are learning in class, and engage in learning tasks more often. In such a positive learning atmosphere, the students are always willing to learn, active in learning, and excited about what they’ve learned in class. Furthermore, these group activities are completed under the guidance and supervision of the teacher. Students can directly allocate the work among themselves and collaborate with each other. In this way, they can interact with each other and better achieve the learning tasks (p.1).

BE2 pointed out the following three advantages of student group study:

First of all, students who are in a same grade and age usually have similar knowledge base. Therefore, they communicate with each other, understand each other, and motivate each other easily. Secondly, group study creates a relaxing environment for students to develop their own thinking. Finally, when they work together, they learn from each other’s strengths and help each other with their weaknesses. Students also build their self-confidence during the study (p.4).

However, BE1 raised a concern about students’ group study. She stated, “However, with respect to those courses which have much more knowledge points and are difficult for students to understand and grasp what they are learning, it is still better that the teacher teaches the students, answer their questions, and solve their learning problems” (p.1).

In addition to group study, the four Chinese educational experts mentioned the following instructional strategies that work in a student-centered classroom according to their experiences: students’ self-studying, project

research, on-line learning, social practice/activities, multiple activities in students' clubs or associations, and career orientation.

Key Values of Student-Centered Learning

According to the previous survey findings, the key factors that Chinese teacher participants valued the most in a student-centered classroom were: Students' independent thinking, students' participation, teachers' supportive roles, collaboration between students, and students' hands-on practice. When I reported these findings to the Chinese educational experts, BE2 stated, "I emphasize students' learning interests and pay more attention to students' learning responsibility, because I think interests and responsibilities are the foundations of effective learning" (p.5).

Two Chinese educational experts stated that Chinese and Canadian teachers had shared similar key ideas but that they expressed them in different ways. BE1 stated,

Although Chinese teachers and Canadian teachers focused on different factors regarding the student-centered classroom, I still think that they shared some similarities. For example, student participation mentioned by the Chinese teachers and student real-life experiences mentioned by the Canadian teachers are consistent; students' independent thinking mentioned by the Chinese teachers and students' responsibility for their studies mentioned by the Canadian teachers are consistent (p.2).

BE3 commented,

I think there is a strong relationship between students' participation and students' hands-on experiences. They could not be separated from each other. As a teacher, I value students' participation in real life. Hands-on experiences are very important for students. In addition, students' learning interests are also related to the students' participation, because no students would really participate in learning activities when they are not interested in it (p.6).

In addition, BE1 found that there were some different ideas about student-centered learning between Chinese and Canadian teachers according to the survey results. She stated,

On one hand, the Chinese teachers pay more attention to collaborations among students, because each student is the only child in her/his family and lacks the awareness and abilities of positively working with others. On the other hand, I think that it is a tradition that Canadian teachers value students' learning interests, because they emphasize the importance of students as individuals, which I think is important. Chinese teachers should promote students' learning interests and pay more attention to the students' needs so that the quality of learning could be improved, and the students could enjoy the process of learning rather than suffer themselves to achieve so called learning success in such a process (p.2).

The Teacher's Role

Because Chinese educational experts emphasized the teacher' role in the student-centered classroom, which was also mentioned in the previous surveys in China, I asked them for a further explanation of the teacher' role from their perspectives. Key words for the teacher' role included guiding, supervising, assisting, serving, and communicating. They argued, "Teachers are guides and supervisors of students"(BE3, p.6); "Teachers play an assisting role in the student-centered classroom"(BE2, p.5); and "Teachers should serve students' learning and communicate with students about their learning appropriately"(BE4, p.9). BE1 described teachers' roles in details as follows:

In the student-centered classroom, teachers should focus on teaching key knowledge points, conduct intensive teaching and instruction, and provide students with sufficient feedback on time. Teachers should also make efforts to create an active, relaxing, self-motivating, and harmonious learning atmosphere and engage students to actively complete learning tasks and comprehensively and deeply think about what they learn in the process of learning. Teachers should be aware of the importance of summarizing key knowledge points students learned in class and provide guidance and suggestions of effective learning for students. Actually, teachers act as facilitators, let students practice and think more in class, and leave more valuable time to students (p.2).

Teachers' Communication

According to the survey findings, in China, teachers usually communicate with other teachers at three levels: the school district, the school, and the same grade or same subject. The three main teachers' activities in which teachers frequently engaged to share their teaching ideas and experiences included group discussion, collective lesson planning, and classroom visiting. In my survey, 98% of teacher participants stated that they had shared their positive teaching experiences with other teachers in any of these three levels; 53% of participants had communicated their teaching ideas with other teachers through group discussions; 36% of participants had collaboratively prepared lesson plans with other teachers; and 28% of participants had visited other teachers' classrooms or had been visited by other teachers in their schools or/ and school districts.

All four of the Chinese educational experts commented on the teachers' communication and mentioned the teachers' activities in their schools or school divisions. According to their comments, group discussion, collaborative lesson planning, and classroom visiting were commonly used among teachers in China, and communicating through the internet was also growing. BE2 stated, "Group discussion, collaborative lesson planning, and classroom visiting are the major teachers' activities in my school, but sometimes, we emailed each other, too. I prefer classroom-visiting, because it benefits me the most" (p.5). BE3 stated, "We usually discuss lesson plans and design students' learning activities together. Sometimes we visited each other's classrooms and made comments for each other through emails. All of these are very effective" (p.7). BE1 stated, "In my school, the most commonly used methods include group discussions, collaboratively lesson planning, class visiting, sharing teaching ideas and experiences on the school's blog, and teacher seminars. These multiple ways of communication have positive effects on student learning" (p.3). BE4 stated, "In my school, senior/experienced teachers and junior/young teachers were paired up to learn from each other" (p.9).

I also asked the Chinese educational experts: "As a senior teacher, principal, or other education expert, how would you help other teachers create a student-centered classroom? What other advice would you give to teachers who are interested in promoting student-centered learning?" BE2 answered, "I think it is important to help teachers change their teaching philosophy and attitude toward student-centered learning. Once teachers did so, they could easily plan lessons and design students' learning activities to realize student-centered learning" (p.5).

BE1 shared her ideas and experience of how to supervise and assist other teachers in developing student-centered learning. There were four key points in her ideas:

- Enhancing teacher training programs and teachers' professional development programs;
- Visiting teachers' classrooms and discussing classes with teachers;
- Inviting educational researchers and experienced teachers to supervise teachers;
- Inviting students to share their classroom experiences and discovering students' learning needs and expatiations during the process of student-centered learning (p.3).

BE4 stated, "We supported teachers' professional development. Teachers were encouraged to apply for the graduate-learning programs, attend different reading clubs, or participate in various teaching-skill competitions" (p.9).

Single Subject vs. Multiple Subjects

According to my Canada survey findings, in Canada, each middle years teacher participant taught four to six subjects. In China, most middle years teachers only taught one subject. Four Chinese educational experts made their comments on the topic of teaching single subject or multiple subjects. BE2 stated, "Teaching several subjects at the same time would provide teachers with a whole picture of their students. They would understand the different learning needs of different students" (p. 5). BE3 stated, "When a teacher teaches multiple subjects, he or she would have a holistic understanding of the curriculum that students are learning. They might assist their students' learning better" (p. 7). However, BE4 stated, "There is no teacher who is teaching multiple subjects in my school. We prefer to have expert teachers in each subject" (p.9). BE1 also thought that teaching multiple subjects would not be a good idea for middle years teachers in China. She argued that in China, because of the large student population and the scarcity of learning resources, "the pressure of graduation or attending college entrance examination is still heavy. If teachers taught multiple subjects or grades, they would hardly improve their knowledge and skills in each of the subjects" (p.3). Furthermore, BE1 stated, "There are too many students in one class. Teachers should spend more time on assisting students and communicating with students instead of

preparing lessons for multiple subjects. Teaching multiple subjects does not fit China's current school situation" (p.3).

Summary of Chapter Four

In this chapter, I presented the survey data collected from China, and I identified the major themes of student-centered learning that emerged from the survey data. My survey of 47 Chinese middle years teachers in Beijing showed that they regarded group study, role-playing, brainstorming, and questioning as the most effective instructional strategies to promote student-centered learning. They valued students' independent thinking, students' participation, students' hands-on practice, collaboration between students, and teachers' supportive roles in their classrooms. Because of their positive teaching experiences, 87% of Chinese participants indicated that they planned to change or had changed their teaching practice toward student-centered learning. In addition, 98% of Chinese participants had shared their positive teaching experiences with other teachers at three levels: school divisions/districts, schools, or grades/subjects. The main activities for communication between Chinese teachers included group discussion, collective lesson planning, and classroom visiting.

In order to deepen my understanding of teachers' perspectives of student-centered learning, I further discussed the major themes that emerged from the survey with four Chinese educational experts through online conversations. In this chapter, I reported Chinese educational experts' understandings of the previous survey findings and their opinions of the following themes: definition of student-centered learning, key values of student-centered learning, teacher's role, teachers' communication, and teaching single subject vs. teaching multiple subjects.

In chapter 5, I analyze the major findings of the Canadian teachers' survey data and the Canadian educational experts' points of view of the survey findings.

Chapter Five

Teacher Voice: Canada

In this research, I also surveyed six middle years teachers in Saskatoon, Canada using emails. After receiving the completed surveys, in order to deepen my understanding of the survey findings, I further discussed the findings with 12 Canadian educational experts through an interpretive panel- special focus group. The major themes that emerged from the survey findings that we had discussed in the interviews and interpretive panel included a general picture of student-centered learning, key values of student-centered learning, the teacher's role, the teachers' communication, and the difference between single subject and multiple subject teaching. In this chapter, I analyzed the major survey findings of Canadian teachers' experiences and opinions of student-centered learning. Then I reported the Canadian educational experts' understanding of the survey findings.

Canadian Middle Years Teachers' Experiences

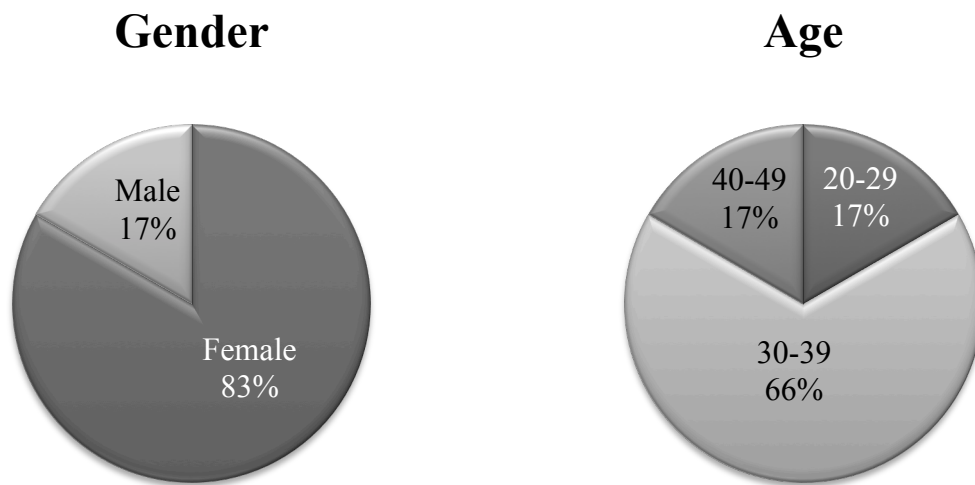


Figure 5.01. Gender and age of the Canadian participants.

In Canada, six middle years teachers from the Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools responded to my survey questions. As Figure 5.01 shows, five (83%) of the six Canadian participants were female. Four participants (66%) were between 30 to 39 years old.

Years of Teaching Experience

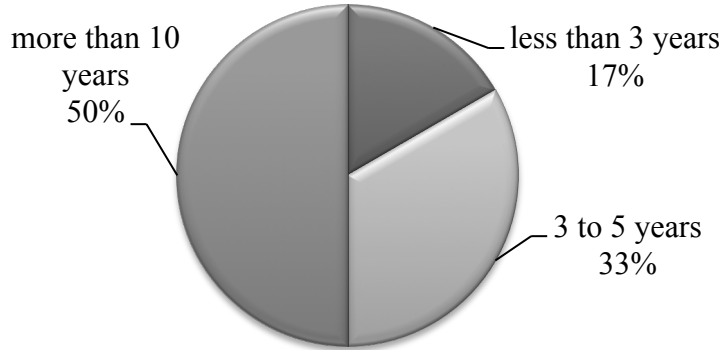


Figure 5.02. Canadian participants' years of teaching experience.

Subjects Taught

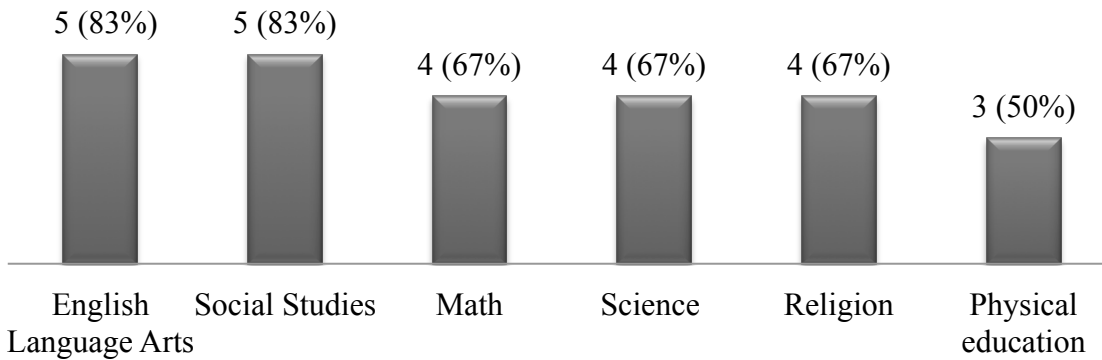


Figure 5.03. Subjects taught by Canadian participants.

Among the six Canadian participants, there were two Grade 6 teachers, one Grade 7 teacher, two Grade 8 teachers, and one teacher who taught both Grade 7 and 8 students. Figure 5.02 shows that only one teacher among the six had taught middle years students for less than three years. Two teachers had taught middle years students for three to five years. Three teachers taught middle years students for more than ten years. Each of Saskatoon teachers taught multiple subjects at their schools: two of them taught four subjects, one of them taught five subjects, and three of them taught six subjects. The subjects taught included English language arts, social studies, math,

science, religion, physical education, health, arts education, career education, and writers' workshop. Figure 5.03 documents the six major subjects that Canadian participants taught.

Discovery Phase: Teachers' Positive Experiences in the Student-Centered Classroom

All six Canadian participants responded to the first question based on their positive teaching experiences: "Could you please describe one of your student-centered lessons that promoted student learning?" One teacher (ST4) stated, "I hope that all of my lessons are student-centered and promote student learning" (p.2). According to their shared stories, I identified the following instructional strategies and educational ideas they applied in their classrooms, which promoted students' learning.

1. Inquiry-Based Learning:

One respondent (ST6) commented, "We teach inquiry-based learning at our school, so we try to teach as many student-centred lessons as possible" (p.2). Another teacher (ST3) introduced the general process of inquiry-based learning: "Students created questions to guide their research, researched on the computer and made jot notes. Then they organized their essay and worked through the draft process. Students then worked in partners revising each other's drafts" (p.5). She further commented,

To start off the project, I gave them a handout outlining the curricular outcomes that will be met by this assignment along with a rubric outlining how they would be graded. No deadline was set as we worked through the steps and has due dates for their questions, research, draft 1, draft 2 then finally for their final copy. Students are marked on completing all the necessary steps: research questions, jot notes, drafts and revisions (p.5).

Two teachers shared examples of inquiry-based learning. One teacher commented on a science class: "We taught lessons about the different systems of the body and then let students pursue inquiry projects in an area that they had a particular interest. They then had to present their findings to the class in a creative way" (ST6, p.2). Another inquiry research project was in an English language arts and social studies class: "We were learning what it means to be a Global Citizen and learning about places in the world that are faced with hardships that we should be aware of. Students were assigned to do an inquiry project" (ST3, p.1). The teacher further explained,

Students chose the global issue that they wanted to research. They were then shown how to construct questions to formulate their research by modelling an example. Students were given research time on the computers to answer their questions. From these questions, students were then guided to organize their research and come up with topics for their paragraphs (ST3, p.2).

The teacher “modeled an example of how to write a research essay”. Then “students wrote their own. The last part of the assignment the students had to come up with ideas of how they could help in efforts to bring awareness to this global issue” (ST3, p.2).

2. Hands-On Practice:

One teacher (ST4) stated, “The most successful lessons are those that involve the students’ life experiences and hands on applications” (p.2). She used one of her science lessons as an example: “In a science lesson on motorized vehicles and gears we brought in several bikes and learned about the gear set up, how to shift and why and when we would shift to certain gears” (ST4, p.2). A second teacher (ST1) shared a hands-on practice example in her classroom: “Students create a business plan and execute that business plan. They devise an advertising strategy and sell products to the students, staff and parents on two separate afternoons” (p.1).

3. Group Work:

One respondent (ST3) reported that she “used group work numerous times in the year” (p.6). She described two examples of student group work in her classroom: “We have daily guided reading in our school. Students are grouped into levelled groups and read books at their level. This allows for group discussions and questioning” (p.6). Another example was “the video production unit we did. Students came up with scripts and acted out a commercial then edited the commercial in groups” (p.6). This teacher also shared her opinion of group study, in that group study “can be effective for some students to have student-centered learning formed by groups but other students don’t get the full advantage of it. Some students work better on their own than in a group setting” (p.6).

4. Brainstorming:

One teacher (ST2) stated that she used brainstorming in her classroom to teach students how to write persuasive letters. “We brainstormed topics for our letters. The students came up with the idea of writing to

different snack companies, persuading them to send us snacks to sample. We decided each student would write to a company” (p.1). The result was that students did get responses and feedbacks from those companies they contacted. She stated, “We received snacks, or reply letters from many companies, which were shared as a class” (ST2, p.4)! Therefore, in this case, students’ brainstorming led to their real-life experience.

5. *Performing experiments:*

One teacher (ST5) regarded experiments as a good way to promote student-centered learning in her science class. She stated, “Students learned about static electricity by performing experiments at 3 stations. At each station, they had to predict what would happen, draw a diagram of the experiment, and then record their observations” (p.2).

Dream Phase: An Ideal Student-Centered Classroom from Teachers’ Perspectives

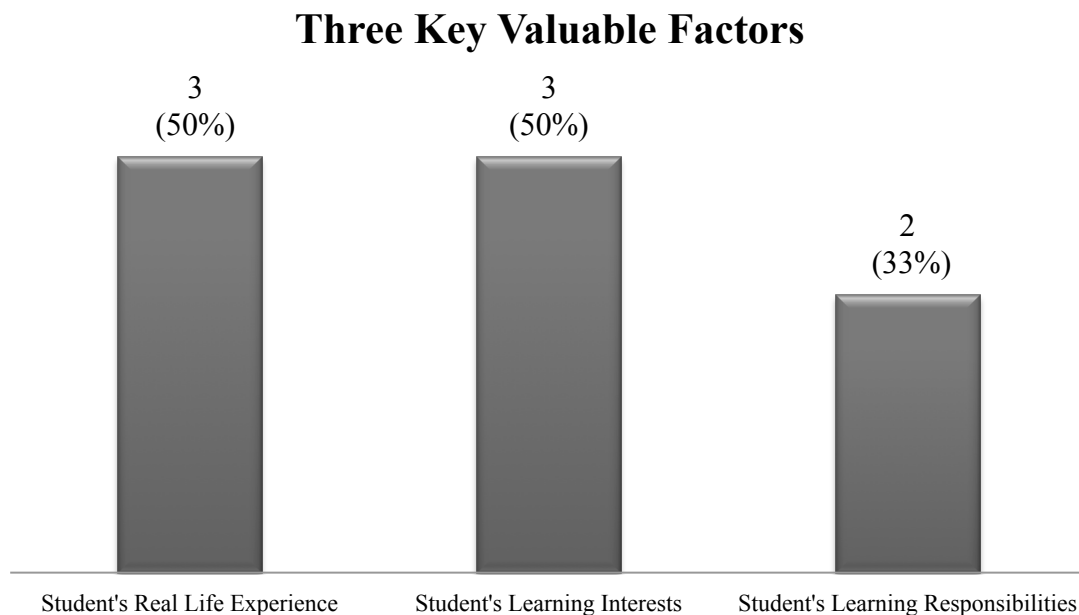


Figure 5.04. Canadian participants’ views of key factors in a student-centered classroom.

By reflecting on their own teaching experience, all six Canadian participants answered the second question: “What do you value most about this student-centered lesson?” As Figure 5.04 documents, based on their positive teaching practices, Canadian teachers emphasized three valuable factors in their student-centered classrooms:

students' real life experience, learning interests, and learning responsibilities. All of these factors represent the voice of Canadian participants.

1. Students' Real Life Experience

Three Canadian participants mentioned that they valued students' real life experiences the most. One teacher (ST2) stated that students "were writing to real companies. It was an assignment that was relevant to real life. If they were very persuasive, they might get a response" (p.2)! Another teacher (ST1) commented, "Hands on, real-life experience made students actively engaged" (p.2) in their learning. The third teacher (ST4) explained,

I value the student experience. Many didn't know why certain gears worked better than others for different terrain and many knew how to change gears but not why or how it actually worked. This information was valuable to their everyday life experience and information that they could transfer to a different situation and build upon it. (p.3)

2. Students' Learning Interests

Three Canadian participants valued their students' interests during the learning process. One participant (ST2) believed that "students were motivated because they came up with the idea themselves" (p.2). Another participant (ST6) explained, "Students were allowed to express curiosity about a particular area of interest and then could pursue and research their questions" (p.3). The third participant (ST3) commented, "The lesson allowed students to choose a topic that interested them. This engaged the students and they wanted to do research to learn more about their topic" (p.2). This participant (ST3) further shared a particular case to support her teaching value when she answered the last survey question, "Is there other additional information you what to share?" She stated

it was very interesting to see a particular student engage with her topic and produce her best piece of writing this year. Prior to this assignment, she wasn't engaged and did not reach her full potential. I believe that her being able to figure her topic out for herself gave her the freedom she was looking for (p.4).

3. Students' Learning Responsibilities

Two Canadian participants emphasized that students must take learning responsibilities themselves during the process of learning, which was also valuable in a student-centered classroom. One participant (ST5) stated,

“Students needed to take ownership in order for the lesson to succeed. By predicting then performing the experiments themselves they became responsible for their own learning” (p.3). Another participant (ST3) further explained how to enable students to take responsibilities for their own learning and what the benefits were by doing so: “With the students in charge of coming up with the questions and the format for their essay, they were able to work at their own pace. This assignment also gave a lot of responsibility for the student. If they did not complete one step they were not able to move onto the next step” (p.3).

Design Phase: Changing Practice in Classrooms toward Promoting Student-Centered Learning

Attitude to Changing Future Practice

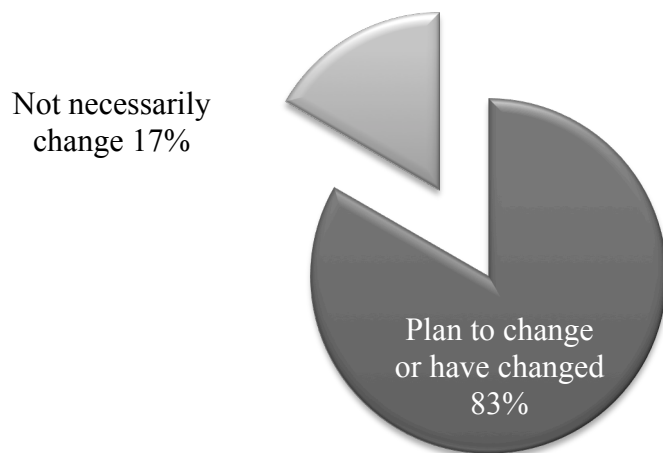


Figure 5.05. Canadian teachers’ attitudes toward changing their practice.

All the Canadian participants responded to the question: “Did your positive experiences change your teaching practice? Please explain”. As Figure 5.05 shows, five out of six Canadian teachers indicated that they have changed or they would change their practice toward student-centered learning according to their positive experience. One teacher (ST3) commented, “teaching is profession where teachers are always reflecting on their experiences and shaping their teaching practices to best suit the needs in their classroom” (p.7). Only one teacher (ST5) stated, “They didn’t necessarily change my teaching practice, but they reinforce what I am doing” (p.3). Four teachers shared their teaching belief in student-centered learning or feelings about their students in a student-centered

learning environment: “Of course they did! I always strive to have successful student centered lessons that encourage learning experiences” (ST4, p.3); “Students love to learn. It comes naturally. We just do not always value their ideas or questions as important” (ST6, p.3); “I learned how motivating it is to have the kids come up with their own ideas for writing, especially if it is for a real-life purpose” (ST2, p.3); and “I was very impressed with how the students were able to come up with a topic on their own and come up with the questions to guide their research. I learned that when students are passionate about a topic it engages them in their learning. Students like the opportunity and responsibility to do their own research essay rather than a teacher assigned topic” (ST3, p.3).

Three teachers identified their follow-up student-centered teaching plans: “Next time I do a research project, I will not be so limited in the topic and let students come up with their own topic. I am already thinking of ways to change some assignments so students will have more input in the topic so they are interested in it and want to learn about the topic rather than given something they have to do” (ST3, P.7); “I will use it again and/or build on it and/or modify it to determine future lessons in that subject or use it with another topic” (ST4, p.3); and “ I try to incorporate more real life connections to everything I teach” (ST1, p.3).

All six Canadian participants answered the following question: “How might your positive experiences help other teachers promote student learning?” Their suggestions included: “Other teachers might try to connect writing assignments with real-life experiences” (ST2, p.4); “By collaborating and sharing my successes, this might encourage other teachers to try more student-directed methods” (ST5, p.4); and “I find this method of teaching increases student engagement and that rigorous learning is also possible. If we share our ideas with each other, good ideas can spread and hopefully aid in increasing student learning” (ST6, p.4).

Destiny Phase: Sharing Positive Experience in the Professional Learning Community

From the Canadian teachers’ responses to the question: “Did you share your positive experience with other teachers in your school or school division/district? Please explain” I determined that all the Canadian participants’ positive experiences in their student-centered classrooms had influenced their professional learning community. They shared their educational ideas and teaching experiences with other teachers in both formal and informal ways.

The main activities for their communications they mentioned in the survey included using the school network website, developing learning projects together, and conversing with each other informally. A teacher (ST3) generally introduced the teachers' activities in which she was involved,

Our school division has division wide PLCs (professional learning communities) where grade-alike teachers meet a couple of times a year to meet a particular goal. This forum gives opportunity to share experiences, challenges, successes and ideas. Also, we have PLCs at our school level that meet every other week. Again, it is a place to share ideas and meet a common goal. I have a lot of friends in the teaching community that are more than willing to share resources when needed. We will swap assignments and units. (p.7)

Two teachers indicated that they had formally shared their positive experiences with other teachers in their schools: "Our school is sharing their experiences with other schools. I will be sharing them via our school network PLC and I try to blog my experiences as often as possible on my website" (ST6, p.4); and "I like the school level PLCs as we are in the same school with the same challenges. The teachers have provided me with a lot of guidance and support over the year" (ST3, p.8).

Three teachers mentioned that they usually shared their teaching experience informally. "I might have shared it informally with my colleagues, but nothing formal" (ST5, p.4); "I have told other teachers about this, and they thought it was great" (ST2, p.4); and "I shared the lesson ideas with other middle years teachers that I work with. I also discussed it with friends in the teaching profession and how I saw success with this student centered approach" (ST3, p.4). One teacher (ST4) stated that she had shared her teaching ideas both formally and informally: "Often just chatting with colleagues is about sharing but during collaboration time or subject specific meeting times, we share positive lessons" (p.4). Another teacher (ST6) stated, "We need to promote sharing ideas, but also allow teachers time to do so" (p.4), which indicated that he felt that there might be lack of time or opportunities for him to share his teaching experience with others.

All the aforementioned survey findings emerged from the discovery of the AI 4D cycle at the organizational level in this research. In order to deepen my understanding of middle years teachers' perspectives of promoting

student-centered learning, I further discussed the major themes that emerged from the survey findings with both Chinese and Canadian educational experts. They dreamed an ideal student-centered classroom and designed a big picture of promoting student-centred learning. The major topics discussed included definition of student-centered learning, key values of student-centred learning, teacher' role, teachers' communication, and single subject vs. multiple subjects.

Canadian Educational Experts' Perspectives

While I interviewed Chinese educational experts online, I also invited some Canadian educational experts to participate in an interpretive panel – a special focus group to discuss the main findings that emerged from the survey data. There were 12 participants who attended the interpretive panel, all of whom were graduate students in education. Among these 12 participants, ten of them were female, seven were teaching middle years students, and nine were more than 40 years old.

Their professional backgrounds and work experiences in education were diverse: they were or had been middle years teachers, elementary/high school principals, post-secondary instructors, teacher mentors, educational consultants, and educational researchers. Some participants had strong background and rich experience in middle years education: One participant had been a school principal for 17 years and had taught middle years students for 22 years. He had also completed several research-projects in the area of middle years education. Another participant had been a school principal for 12 years, a middle years teacher for 10 years, and a teacher mentor for 4 years. She had taught all the middle years subjects. Another participant had supervised middle years teachers for 12 years and had taught middle years students for 6 years. The major subject she taught was math. She was also a math curriculum reform-leader in her school division.

The interpretive panel deliberated for two hours. During this panel session, I first introduced the major findings of both the Chinese and Canadian survey data. Then the Canadian educational experts discussed these findings from their own perspectives. They made several comments, shared their relevant experience, and presented their ideas about student-centered learning. The leading discussion questions I asked were:

- What is your understanding of student-centered learning?

- How do teachers in your school/school division communicate with each other?
- What could Canadian teachers and Chinese teachers learn from each other regarding this topic?

Definition of Student-centered Learning

During the panel discussion, I found that Canadian educational experts emphasized students' experiences and roles in the process of learning, and which they seemed to see as the core of student-centered learning. Their comments included,

- “Student – centered learning is allowing students abilities and creativity of evolve during the learning process instead of prescribing it” (SE10, p.1)
- “Student engagement is key” (SE1, p.1).
- “Students are in the middle of the process” (SE6, p.1).
- “Students determine how to meet their learning needs” (SE9, p.1).
- “Achieves the same learning outcomes by allowing students to decide the needs to get these rather than the curriculum” (SE8, p.1).
- “Based on students’ interests, needs, and strengths-respecting their values and ways of knowing” (SE11, p.1).
- “Focuses on students creativity, sense of ownership, stimulation of curiosity, having fun with process” (SE3, p.1).
- “Where the teaching and thus learning is based upon the interests, learning styles, learning needs, and prior knowledge of the students” (SE7, p.1).
- “Learning is directed by students, performed by students” (SE9. p.1).

Some Canadian educational experts further shared their favourite stories of student-centered learning. SE1 stated, “We have learning centers outside the classroom. Students could do the activities at these centers after they finished the core math and reading activities. We usually have five or six activities that all related to the same theme that we are working on” (p.2). For example,

One time I let students make a gingerbread house...Students could read the recipe. They worked in pairs. When they were done the activities, they signed off. They could receive a certificate after they had done all of it. We made practical use of this student-centered learning. They were learner-centered, because it was a kind of interest that they had student-led rather than teacher-led (pp.2-3).

SE4 shared an example from her son's school: "They did a project for school on residential schools and they developed the rubric themselves on how they were be evaluated for the assessment" (p.4). She stated, her son's teacher "just gave them a chart and said that they had to have levels of like what would be a poor assignment, what would be a great assignment ... but she did not give many criteria for what, just the topic. Students could present in any ways" (p.4). So students could "work with partners, or by themselves. Some students did posters, some students did presentations, and some students gave PowerPoint presentations" (p.5). SE4 concluded that what her son and other students had done in this project increased their confidence, and minimized the fear of evaluation, "because it was more about the learning. Students pushed themselves to do well. That was what the evaluation worth for" (p.5).

SE2 stated, "[As a mentor teacher], I worked with a school here [in Saskatoon] once a week. I always challenge the teachers I am working with to we make this [student-centered learning] happen in their classrooms? What is a great environment" (p.3)? She told a story about one of the students who had found the power of library books and started asking questions about books. She thought it was all students' own questions were building their ideas. She commented, "It is definitely looking for what their prior knowledge was? What their interests were? And what their learning styles and needs were? It did not just write something down on the board. It was you want to try it... Let's try it" (p.3).

SE1 told a story about "books" that happened in her classroom. One activity was called "writing process". Students would write anything they wanted. They built their own books, and they would create their own pictures. She said, "They would all publish their books, and read each other stories. So huge, huge increase in the reading and writing" (p.11).

Key Values of Student-Centered Learning

According to the previous survey results, the key factors that Canadian teacher participants valued included students' real life/hands-on experiences, students' learning interests, and students' learning responsibilities. Chinese teacher participants valued students' independent thinking, students' participation, teachers' supportive roles, collaboration between students, and students' hands-on practice.

In the panel, I reported these results to the Canadian educational experts, and asked their opinions about key values of student-centered learning: "What do you value most about student-centered learning?" Their ideas were different from the survey results. The key values they mentioned were:

- "Students' engagement/participation/involvement/creativity, and relevant learning" (SE3, SE6, SE11 & SE12, p.2).
- "Sense of ownership" (SE3, p.2).
- "Student independence, confidence of knowing who they are, high level thinking connection" (SE1, p.1).
- "Freedom for students to be creative and for teachers to create innovative learning space" (SE2, p.2).

Among all these factors, students' engagement/participation appeared to be the most important one, because several experts in the panel mentioned it. SE11 stated, "I think for me, student-centered learning is if you found the way to get students to be engaged, you can actually see their level of knowledge and their joy for learning leave forward hugely" (p.10). She taught students in different ways and found that the student-centered learning engaged students who "started to love learning" (p.10). SE6 also emphasized the advantage of engaging students in middle years. She stated, "I found that at the middle years level, the students are willing to be actively involved in their learning. So I think as the teacher, you need to take the advantage of that. When they get so involved, they get very active" (p.11).

The Canadian educational experts added comments about the survey results. SE9 stated, "What an interesting result. Canadian teachers chose the students' learning responsibilities as the priority. I am not sure whether that would be one of my priorities" (p.19). She further explained:

Can some of the responsibilities have to do with wanting to learn, to be engaged, and to be there? But the way that our education system says you do not have a choice. You have to be there. You have to go to school. So I think

that should be independent thinking? Like in China: independent thinking, participating, collaborating. They are all very teamwork orientated and group focus, or trying to improve everybody. Whereas the students' responsibilities are kind of individualistic. I mean it is for me... when I was teaching students about the group... how would we all learn together (p.19).

However, some Canadian experts varied in their understanding of "students' learning responsibilities". SE11 stated, "People have different learning styles. If you have the responsibility of your own learning, learn how you learn. And you bring that for throughout everything you do. I thought that the biggest part of students' learning responsibilities" (p.19). SE 4 stated, "Students' learning responsibilities includes independent thinking, participation, and collaboration between students. It is not about being there. It is about becoming a responsible learner. You are developing independent thinking" (p.19).

SE10 shared her view on values and advantages of student-centered learning. She stated, "What I knew about student-centered learning is you are able to reach all the personalities. When you have a class as the student-centered, students are given the opportunities to be themselves" (p.12).

The Teacher's Role

In the panel, I also asked the following question to the Canadian educational experts: What is teacher' role in a student-centered classroom? They regarded teachers as facilitators, moderators, and catalysts. In their opinions, teachers should "help students clarify what they desire to learn and guide students if needed" (SE2, p.1); "in-depth and ongoing assistant student" (SE7, p.1) and "enable students to successfully enact a student-centered approach to learning" (SE8. P.1). SE3 stated, "Teachers should play the role of facilitator rather than the source for information; keep students excitement up and direct it forward when student is ready; keep communicating to receive clues for next move" (p.1).

SE7 introduced a math program called "Math Circles" and shared her opinions of how teachers should lead students to learn: "Before you start with your students, you want to picture where you like to go with them...But you have to just open up the field and ask big question, and see where they go" (p.7). She stated, "Every time they go somewhere, you need to explore, as the teacher, what is this telling me? Where are they heading? And then ask

the next question” (p.7). She said, “The other thing about student-centered is that we do not make it to where we picture or attempt, because there was somewhere more important to go” (p.7). She declared, “It is a whole thing about going where the students are in their thinking and what do they bring to the table. It is respect. And evaluating of their knowledge is the key for me (p.8)”. SE9 provided another meaningful story she observed in a classroom that discussed the teacher’s role from the opposite perspective. It was a story about a child who came to a school for the first day. SE9 stated,

The teacher said, “Today we are going to draw flowers.” So she handed out the paper, and the child right away picked up the pen. She said, “Wait...I have not told you how to do it yet!” So it was totally the opposite of what was student-centered. And when this child went to another school, the teacher said, “We are going to draw flowers today” and the child just sat still. So the teacher said, “How come you are not drawing flowers?” The child said, “I am waiting for you to tell me how to do it.” So the kid knew how to do it before, and now she doesn’t. And I think that why we moved to try the student-centered is because we have stolen away the creativity and the natural imagination and enthusiasm for learning (p.8).

SE3 further compared the teachers in the past with current teachers. She stated,

I think about the way I was taught ...I basically was given a prescriptive curriculum to follow, and now ... based on your environment... It is so different now. The teacher’ role is really the key now. (In the past), teachers were given the book and followed the plan. Teachers think outside that box now. How do I get my students to think? I have to plan. It is a big change and I see a lot of teachers are struggling with that. They used to have that curriculum guide and being told what to do instead of planning based on you getting to know your students, student’ experience, and strengths (p.5).

Some experts also discussed the teacher’ role from the perspective of a larger community. They believed that teachers play a significant role in promoting parental involvement in the student-centered classrooms. SE6 stated,

Teachers are also the bridge between the school and home. If you (teachers) sending the kids home with activities, you have to make sure that parents would be able to figure out that what it is you want to do, you are trying to do, especially in middle-year... Because as the principal, at the parent-teacher interview, over

years, I received complains from parents who did not understand what the teacher was doing. So I think that is the part of we need to remember: maybe you are not student-centered learning, but parent-centered learning. How can we involve the home (p.9)?

Similarly, SE9 added, “I think this is very true. The teachers’ responsibilities are communicating with staff members as well as the community” (p.9). SE7 further gave the example of teachers who engaged the students’ parents successfully. She stated,

What they usually do is the parents are invited to come along with their children, and then they do a short 20 minutes learn. They said just go with your child and set up the stations, so they go with their children and the children show them what to do. And it is so much fun. It does not matter what grade level it is, you see the parents pushing the kids further and further away, so they can get in ... and that what student-centered learning is as well. They are experiencing the concepts that I do not want to be doing this versus I have to do this. And usually, they walk away and say, “if you taught me that way, maybe I could get it” (p.10).

The Teachers’ Communication

According to the previous Chinese and Canadian survey findings in my study, Canadian teachers shared their teaching experiences and ideas with other teachers in both formal and informal ways. The main activities for the communications that they mentioned included using the school network website, developing learning projects together, and chatting with each other informally. In China, teachers usually communicated with other teachers at three levels: the school district, school, and grade or subject level. The teachers’ main activities included group discussion, collective lesson planning, and classroom visiting. I reported these results to the panel. SE7 made the following comment:

We are really in the informal side from my experience of working with teachers in Canada versus the much more formal type of things that seems to be happening in China. There is an environment of caution and not wanting to share, not wanting to open the door of the classroom. And I think it is something that maybe the Saskatchewan teachers can take on as the best practice. Is that finding ways to engage their colleagues and

their division? Some of the divisions have it. You do something, and we give you sometime to prepare, so you have to tell us about it. But that is not really effective, either. Not surprising, but I think it is an important one (p.13).

SE10 shared an example, “To me, we just did it on our own. If somebody is doing something interesting, we check it out” (p.15). Some Canadian experts further shared their experience, understanding, and opinions of the professional learning community (PLC) in Saskatchewan. SE9 discussed the professional learning community:

Once you realize you have a topic of interest, and you can work together, then team tends to stay together. It is need, because I need really support each other as you go and learn to teach, work as a team together. It is easier to learn how to teach better. For me, it is a support system (p.14).

SE7 expressed the following concerns about professional learning community, in which she was involved, I question their (PLC) value, because what I am seeing in the province is the things like pick one thing that you did bad on the assessment for learning, and then... you have to write a smart goal and you have to achieve 20 percent improvement. So the teachers involved in those professional learning communities do not have input into what they like to learn and how they would like to grow. It is being dictated from outside. So my opinion is, right now in a lot of places of professional learning communities are actually causing more harm than they can good. There are some really fabulous what is going on as well, but they do harm the characteristics of being student-centered (pp.13-14).

SE7 was involved in developing the early Saskatchewan math teachers’ professional learning community, so she further shared her opinion on this topic. She indicated that at the beginning, she was told about PLCs, but had no idea about what it was. She stated,

There was an opportunity, as the teacher, to contact the teachers in the school division and say anyone else interested in talking about, and if you got more than three people who want to talk about whatever was, you have to do with teaching in the classroom. Then you were given this beautiful boardroom to meet in a division office. I took a part of the math group. It was because there was new curriculum coming out, and I was the only person who knew about it. People just start calling me and asking me questions. I think it is

letting people know that there are opportunities to share. I hate to see in where you are good at doing this and you have to talk about it. And I have seen some school divisions in Saskatchewan do that, and they always shoulder checking the same teacher or two teachers to do all the presenting. It has to be a want or desire from the teachers (p.15).

Single Subject vs. Multiple Subjects Choice

According to my previous survey results, most middle years teachers in China taught only one subject. However, all the Canadian participants in this study indicated that they had experience teaching multiple subjects in middle years. Some of them taught six different subjects during one school year. When I reported this finding at the panel, all the Canadian educational experts confirmed this common practice. During the discussion, they shared their relevant experience, analyzed the strengths and weaknesses of teaching multiple subjects regarding student-centered learning, and indicated that the lower enrollments was the main reason for the multiple-subjects curriculum, especially in rural Saskatchewan schools.

The following comments show that several of the Canadian educational experts believed that teaching multiple subjects provided teachers and students with an opportunity to connect different areas of knowledge.

- When you teach the lower grades, grade five and six, you have a lot of different subjects. You can cover a lot of areas. The good thing is you can show how all of these areas connect, which is a kind of fun, but it is a lot of work (SE1, p.17).
- The teacher sees ways to create some of these student-centered learning opportunities...If you are just a math specialist, and the students is bringing in something for another subject, you are not going to value it. And that can be a huge concern for many of our students, because they do not come to knowledge as these categorizations. They come to the knowledge as a holistic view (SE7, p.18).

Some experts thought that teachers should focus on major content. SE10 commented, “I think, working in one area and improving yourself in that area works better. When you work in a particular area, you are better able to express your self, and develop your competences in that area” (p.16). SE11 stated, “I think the way that our education structure could be first, second teaching area...At least some specialization is needed” (p.17).

SE7, a consultant for 12 years, did not focus on strengths or weaknesses of teaching multiple subjects, but she emphasized the teachers' different strengths. She stated,

I see teachers who I would never want them to be a specialist, because they are so powerful as a generalist. They are able to help the students see things connected. They take the things that would be working for the English language arts, and put them to the mathematics classroom. If there were only specializing in one area, that gain would not be made, but there are other teachers who should be specialists. So it depends on the individual (pp.17-18).

SE7 further analyzed the main reason why teachers in Canada, especially in rural Saskatchewan, have to teach more than one subject. She indicated, "If you live in rural Saskatchewan, there is no way unless you pay higher taxes and government is willing to fund education at higher amount, to have 20 teachers for 32 students. It is not going to happen" (p.17).

Summary of Chapter Five

In this chapter, I presented the survey data collected from Canada, and identified major themes of student-centered learning that emerged from the survey data. There were six Canadian middle years teachers who responded to my survey. They regarded inquiry-based learning, hands-on practice, group work, brainstorming, and performing experiments as effective ways of promoting student-centered learning. They valued students' real life experiences, learning interest, and learning responsibilities in their classrooms. Most of Canadian participants stated that they had planned to change or had changed their teaching practice toward student-centered learning based on their relative positive teaching experience. In addition, Canadian participants indicated that they usually shared their educational ideas and teaching experience with other teachers in both formal and informal ways, such as chatting with each other during breaks, developing learning projects together, and communicating with each other through the school network website.

In order to deepen my understanding of teachers' perspectives of student-centered learning, I further discussed the major themes that emerged from the survey with twelve Canadian educational experts through an interpretive panel. In this chapter, I reported the Canadian educational experts' understandings of the previous survey findings

and their opinions of the following themes: definition of student-centered learning, key values of student-centered learning, teacher' role, teachers' communication, and teaching single subject vs. teaching multiple subjects.

In chapter 6, I present concluding thoughts regarding the study, discuss implications of the findings, and provide recommendations regarding how middle years teachers might create student-centered classrooms to promote student learning and enhance student achievement.

Chapter Six

Conclusion and Discussion

In this chapter, I review the research process and summarized the participants' responses to the three research questions. I discuss implications of this research in terms of teachers' understanding and practice of promoting student-centered learning. I also provide middle years educators in China and Canada with relevant recommendations regarding current practice and future research with respect to effective teaching for middle years students.

Review of the Research Process

The purpose of this study was to explore the selected middle years teachers' positive experiences of promoting student learning in student-centered classrooms, and how these recalled experiences affected the teachers' own current and future teaching. This research was not a comparative or a cross-cultural study, but a study of middle years educators in two sites. The reason why I chose Canada and China was that there has been increased educational communications and collaborations between the two countries. It is important that Canadian and Chinese educators learn more about each other, and I, as a researcher, had a unique cultural and educational opportunity to create a space for both Canadian and Chinese middle years teachers to share their opinions and experiences.

I chose Appreciative Inquiry (AI) as the research methodology in this study, because I wished to focus on participants' positive teaching experience. There are usually four phases in the AI process: discovery, dream, design, and destiny (4-D model). In this research, I designed an AI 4-D Model at two levels: the personal level and organizational level.

At the personal level, I solicited participants' positive teaching experiences from the past, and then encouraged participants to dream of an ideal student-centered classroom, to design their future classroom practice, and to examine whether their positive experiences influenced a larger professional learning community. At the organizational level, I identified Chinese and Canadian teachers' best practice of promoting student-centered learning in their classrooms. I then identified major themes that emerged from teachers' positive experiences, and I

discussed them with educational experts, requesting them to dream of an ideal student-centered classroom, and to design a big picture of developing student-centered learning. The recommendations of this research for the participants and their schools would become the last phase, destiny, of the 4-D model at the organizational level.

There were three data-collection phases during this research process. By means of an email survey, I first gathered information regarding effective teaching practice from 53 middle years teachers in China and Canada. After analyzing the survey data and identifying major themes, I interviewed four Chinese middle years educators through on-line conversations and I invited 12 Canadian middle years educational experts to participate in an interpretation panel in Saskatoon. During the interviews and interpretation panel, both Chinese and Canadian educational experts discussed the previous research findings and shared their perspectives regarding the major themes with respect to student-centered learning.

Of the 53 middle years teachers who responded to my email surveys, 47 were Chinese and 6 were Canadian. Among the Chinese participants, 83% of them were female, 85% were more than 30 years old, and 64% had more than 10 years of teaching experience. Each Chinese teacher taught only one subject, among which were Chinese language arts, English, math, physics, biology, history, geography, politics, ethics, and mental health. Of the Canadian participants, 83% were female, 83% were more than 30 years old, and 50% had more than 10 years of teaching experience. Each Canadian teacher participant taught 4-6 subjects. The subjects they taught included English language arts, math, science, social studies, religion, physical education, health, arts education, career education, and a writer's workshop.

Responses to the Research Questions

In order to explore the selected middle years teachers' positive experiences of promoting student learning in student-centered classrooms, and to discover how these recalled experiences might affect their own future teaching and assist other teachers to promote student learning, I developed three major research questions:

1. What are the selected middle years teachers' positive experiences of promoting student learning in student-centered classrooms?

2. After reflecting on these positive teaching experiences in student-centered classrooms, did these teachers change their teaching attitude and practices toward student-centered learning? And if so, in what ways?
3. How might these teachers' experiences assist other teachers in promoting student learning?

Through email surveys, online interviews, and an interpretation panel, the participants responded to these major research questions. I summarize the responses below.

Responses to Research Question 1:

In this research, all participants shared their teaching stories of promoting student learning. They not only identified effective instructional strategies that they actually used in their student-centered classrooms, but they also emphasized how they valued student-centered learning and they dreamed an ideal student-centred classroom. According to the survey findings, group-study was the most popular instructional strategy that was used to promote student-centered learning, especially in China, in that 62% of Chinese participants mentioned that they had productive experience in engaging students through group activities. Performing experiments, especially group experiments, was a commonly used strategy in science classes. Brainstorming and role-playing were popular for language arts and social study classes. In addition, Chinese participants regarded oral questioning, and Canadian participants regarded inquiry-based learning, as effective ways of promoting student-centered learning. In student-centered classrooms, Chinese teachers valued students' independent thinking, participation, hands-on practice, collaboration between students, and the teacher's supportive role. Canadian teachers valued the students' real life experience, learning interests, and learning responsibilities.

In order to deepen my understanding of the teachers' perspectives of student-centered learning, I further discussed the major themes that emerged from the online survey with four Chinese educational experts through online conversations and with twelve Canadian educational experts through an interpretive panel. All educational experts agreed that group study was an effective instructional strategy to promote student-centered learning, and it seemed to be popular in middle years classrooms. Chinese experts further added the following effective instructional strategies: students' self-study, project research, on-line learning, social practice, multiple activities in students' clubs or associations, and career orientation.

Experts from both countries made comments regarding the values of student-centered learning. One Chinese expert agreed with Canadian teachers' views regarding students' learning interests and responsibilities, but two other Chinese experts believed that Chinese and Canadian teachers had basically shared similar ideas but expressed them in different ways. One Chinese expert further explained why Chinese and Canadian teachers sometimes emphasized different factors in student-centered learning. Canadian experts shared their different understandings of students' learning responsibilities. One Canadian expert identified another factor related to student-centered learning, which was to have teachers attempt to reach all personalities.

Responses to Research Question 2:

According to the survey results, 87% of the Chinese participants and 83% of the Canadian participants stated that they had changed or planned to change their teaching practices because of having positive teaching experience in student-centered classrooms. These teachers reported that they had tried to engage students more in various learning activities, because they believed that students learned best when they were fully immersed in their learning.

Chinese experts emphasized that in a student-centered classroom, "students should be actively engaged in their learning" and "teachers should guide students appropriately". Canadian educational experts stated that students' experiences and roles in the process of learning were the core of student-centered learning. In reference to the teacher's role in the student-centered classroom, the key words that Chinese educational experts emphasized included guiding, supervising, assisting, serving, and communicating. Canadian experts regarded teachers as facilitators, moderators, and catalysts.

Responses to Research Question 3:

In this research, all participants indicated that they assisted other teachers by sharing their positive experiences regarding student-centered learning in different ways. Chinese participants stated that they had shared their positive teaching experiences with other teachers at three levels: school divisions/districts, schools, or grades/subjects. The main activities for communication among Chinese teachers included group discussion, collective lesson planning, and classroom visits. Canadian participants reported that they usually shared their

educational ideas and teaching experiences with other teachers in both formal and informal ways, such as chatting with each other during breaks, developing learning projects together, and communicating with each other through school networking websites.

All experts commented on the teachers' communication methods. Chinese experts identified that group discussion, collaborative lesson planning, and classroom visits were commonly used among teachers in China. They reported that Internet was also growing as a medium to exchange ideas. They also mentioned that as educational leaders, it was important for them to help other teachers develop their teaching philosophy related to student-centered learning. However, Canadian experts stated that the teachers' communication in Canada was less formal than it was in China, because many Canadian teachers did not want to or did not have time to share their experience with other teachers or to open their classrooms for visitation. There were professional learning communities in Canadian schools and school divisions, but some participants reported having concerns about being involved in such PLCs.

Discussion

Data that emerged from this research not only helped answer the three research questions, but they also provided me with additional information in terms of promoting student-centered learning. Based on the findings of the research and my review of related literature, I discussed implications of this research and offer recommendations to Chinese and Canadian middle years educators related to modifying their current educational theory, practice, and policy. For those who hold a more traditional outlook toward teaching, perhaps they will consider increasing their emphasis on student-centered learning and enhancing their focus on student-centered classrooms. I also provide Chinese and Canadian educational researchers with relevant recommendations concerning future research in the field.

Implications and Relevant Recommendations for Educational Theory: Student engagement is the core of student-centered learning.

There might be a growing number of middle years teachers in China and Canada who will embrace goal of student-centered learning. In this study, teachers from both countries understood that engaging students was the

key to create a student-centered classroom. In order to create student-centered classrooms, teachers should re-focus on their teaching practice, philosophy, and attitudes toward student-centred learning, they should acknowledge the value of students' engagement and participation, and they should pay more attention to meeting students' learning interests during the process of learning.

According to my study, both Chinese and Canadian participants believed that engaging students in their learning was the core of creating student-centered classrooms. I found that teachers in Beijing and Saskatoon accepted the core value of student-centered learning. This finding was in accord with the literature. Stronge (2007) stated that "classes don't learn, students do" (p.70). Hattie (2009) argued, "visible teaching and learning occurs when there are active, passionate and engaging people participating in the act of learning" (p.22). Ayers (1994) also stated that in a student-centered learning classroom, teachers provided numerous opportunities for students to learn and practice.

In reference to teachers' emphasis on student-centered learning, Chinese and Canadian participants valued: students' participation and real-life experiences, students' independent thinking and learning responsibilities, students' learning interests, collaboration between students, and teachers' supportive role. These findings were confirmed in the literature review: for instance, Hicks (2003) argued that in a student-centered classroom, students are more like co-workers who are required to participate in various learning activities rather than only to sit and listen. Because middle years children develop several important thinking skills, teachers at this level should emphasize higher order thinking, such as creative, critical, and reflective thinking (Hilton & Hilton, 2005), and should respect students' multiple intelligences (Gardner, 2004a). Promoting collaborative learning among students was an important way of improving middle years students' learning because middle years children begin to develop a strong sense of social selves and peer relationships play a significant role during middle years (Brown, 2005; Seifert & Hoffnung, 1994; Piaget, 1963). In addition, both the literature and my research findings affirmed that middle years teachers should establish a mutually respectful teacher-student relationship (Keddie & Churchill, 2005).

My research also identified the value of student-centered learning. The Chinese teachers and Canadian teachers as two collective groups emphasized different perspectives of this value. Most Chinese teachers highlighted “collaboration between students”, while most Canadian teachers focused on students’ learning interests. One of Chinese educational experts believed that the reason why Chinese teachers paid more attention to collaboration among students was that in China, each student was the only child in her/his family and may therefore have lacked the awareness and abilities of positively working with others. In a somewhat similar way, the Canadian teachers usually valued students’ learning interests, because they typically emphasized the importance of students as individuals.

Furthermore, learning abilities were highlighted more than learning interests by teachers in China. In the past, schools and teachers in China emphasized knowledge. Many Chinese students often had a wide array of knowledge but they had relatively low abilities to practice their knowledge. Nowadays, however, more educators, teachers, parents, and students are recognizing the importance of enhancing students’ transfer and application of knowledge to skills in critical and creative thinking, problem solving, and collaboration (Li, 2008). Recently, students’ learning interests were still not the most important factor in the learning process from China’s perspective. Therefore, many Chinese students could memorize facts and concepts in each subject well and achieve high scores, but they often did not know what they were really fond of, what their strengths were, and what they would like to do in the future (Cheng & Mao, 2002).

To promote student-centered learning and engage students in classrooms, students’ learning interests must be valued and supported by teachers, especially in China, where an exam-oriented educational system still exists (Cheng & Mao, 2002). I believe that attempting to satisfy students’ interests would be an effective teaching strategy for teachers to apply with students. Meeting students’ learning interests will lead students toward real learning achievement and life-long learning. Although I know that under an exam-oriented educational system, teachers and students in China might not have adequate choices toward achieving their true learning interests, I still suggest that in a student-centered classroom, teachers should pay more attention to students’ learning interests. By

pursuing their learning interests, students might be able to lead themselves to further explore their knowledge and enjoy the learning process much more.

Implications and Relevant Recommendations for Current Classroom Practice:

1. Teachers should serve students and collaborate with parents/families.

Teachers who valued student-centred learning changed their roles in classrooms and supported their students to achieve learning success. In order to promote student-centered learning, teachers should play an appropriate role both in and outside the classrooms.

In this present research study, I found that the teacher's role was highly emphasized by the participants in the survey and particularly discussed among the educational experts during the interviews and interpretive panels. Although Chinese and Canadian participants defined the teacher's role by using different terms, they still shared the similar ideas. They stated that in a student-centred classroom, teachers were facilitators, moderators, and catalysts. They declared that teachers should guide, supervise, assist, and serve their students, and be willing to communicate with their students. Glasgow and Hicks (2003) maintained that in a student-centered classroom, teachers are more like facilitators, and students are more like co-workers. Stronge (2007) also stated that to promote student learning, teachers should be willing to share time with students and interact with students in various ways.

In addition, several Canadian participants mentioned that teachers should act as the bridge between schools and families, and engage parents in their children's learning. However, only one participant in the Chinese cohort mentioned parental involvement. I thought the reason why Canadian teachers and Chinese teachers had different focus of teacher's role regarding engaging parents and families in students' learning was probably that the traditions of parental involvement in Canada and China were quite different.

China had a tradition of pursuing better education and respecting teachers, although during the 10 years Cultural Revolution, many schools were closed and many educators were treated unfairly (Sun, 2000). In addition, the previous one-child policy and the competitive society in China also influenced parents and grandparents to be highly supportive of their child's learning, especially in the cities. Each family had high expectation for their only

child. Therefore, parents communicated with their children's schools, teachers, and other parents to ensure that their children were doing well at school. They attended parents' meetings every term, telephoned or emailed teachers frequently, checked their children's homework, and occasionally visited classrooms sometimes. Although many Canadian parents attend schools' social events regularly, I found that it was difficult to get parents directly involved in their children's learning. Several Canadian principals and teachers advocated that Canadian parents needed clear guidance and instructions for helping their kids' learning at home.

To promote student-centered learning, teachers should play an appropriate role both in and outside the classrooms. Hattie (2009) stated,

Schools have an important role in helping parents to learn the language of schooling so that the parents can provide every possible assistance to their children in terms of developing the child's learning and love of learning, and in creating the highest possible shared expectations for learning (p. 33).

Bluestein (2003) postulated that teachers should contact students' families in various ways, such as arranging home visits or meeting with parents in school in order to open a positive dialogue with students' families. Participants in this research suggested that appropriate parental involvement and positive dialogue between school and home were keys in this regard. For example, in China, on the one hand, teachers find it relatively easy to get most parents involved in their children's learning. On the other hand, excessive parental involvement may also bring undue pressure on the students, teachers, and schools. Sometimes, students, especially in middle years, do not like their parents to be too involved in their learning, because the students are becoming increasingly independent. Teachers should help parents understand their middle years children and assist them to communicate with their kids appropriately.

2. Teachers should apply multiple instructional strategies.

Most middle years teachers in the study identified effective instructional strategies to promote student-centered learning and they applied them in classrooms. Group study is an effective way to promote student-centered learning, but teachers should apply multiple instructional strategies according to students' learning needs. Teachers may also bring more new technologies to classrooms in the future.

In order to engage students in their learning, participants of this research mentioned that they had positive experiences when they were applying the following instructional strategies in their classrooms: group study, role-playing, brainstorming, questioning, inquiry-based learning, and hands-on practice. Most participants reported that they had applied group-study approaches in their classrooms. This finding was consistent with the prior research, for example, Lou, Abrami, and d'Apollonia (2001) argued that small-group learning had significantly more positive effects than individual learning on student achievement.

I identified all of these instructional strategies, except questioning, in my literature review as being typical indirect instructional methods, which indicated that most teachers distinguished student-centered instructional strategies from the teacher-centered ones and applied them appropriately in their classrooms. However, Hattie (2009) suggested that teachers should not contrast direct teaching and indirect teaching as bad methods and good methods. They should combine teacher-centered teaching and student-centered learning. Burden and Byrd (2010) also stated that indirect instructional strategies were more student-centered than direct instructional strategies, but this assertion does not mean that the appropriate use of direct instructions could not promote students' learning.

On the one hand, this research finding indicated that nowadays, more and more Chinese teachers, especially in the cities, accepted the philosophy of student-centered learning and made the effort to practice it in their classrooms. On the other hand, it also indicated that most middle years educators seemed to seldom apply multiple student-centered instructional strategies in their classrooms as the literature suggested. Stronge (2007) stated that applying multiple instructional strategies to promote student learning was very important for teachers; and yet my findings suggested that this area may have been somewhat ignored in the classrooms represented in my study.

For example, several student-centered /indirect instructional strategies, such as debates, panels, and games (Burden & Byrd, 2010) were seldom mentioned by the participants in my study. Several participants in this research stated that they had used questioning to promote student-centered learning successfully, which indicated that questioning might be also an effective way to promote student-centered learning in some situations or for some students. Such a case may occur especially when teachers ask in-depth questions, such as "how" and "why"

questions, although according to the literature, questioning is classed as a typical direct /teacher-centered strategy (Burden & Byrd, 2010).

I believe that teacher education programs should provide middle years teachers with more training opportunities toward promoting student-centered learning and make more effort to help teachers learn various student-centered instructional strategies. Although group study is an effective way to engage students, teachers should still apply multiple instructional strategies in their classrooms for the purpose of meeting students' multiple learning styles and needs (Burden & Byrd, 2010). I also recommend that teachers today should bring more new technology to their classrooms. In my study, some participants mentioned that they had applied certain contemporary technologies to assist students' learning, such as showing educational videos during class, encouraging students to search for information on the Internet, and using PowerPoint slides to facilitate presentations. Promoting students' learning is not about how much knowledge and skills that a teacher possesses and/or teaches, but it is about how much knowledge and skills students could acquire in and outside the classrooms. Students love using smart boards, computers, iPads, iPhones, Twitter, and Facebook. Why not use them appropriately in classrooms to assist students' learning? The ever-evolving technology is changing our students' way of learning and the world around us. Teachers may not necessarily know everything, but they have an obligation to be creative in their teaching and have an open mind and heart for the future.

Implications and Relevant Recommendations for Current Educational Policy:

1. School boards and schools should make more efforts to encourage their teachers to communicate with each other, formally and regularly by providing policy, technical, and financial supports for relevant programs and activities.

Although all teachers reported collaborating with colleagues, the ways of collaboration and communication among middle years teachers in China was much more formal than that in Canada. Communication about positive experiences in student-centered classrooms between teachers has been shown to be important for developing student-centered learning.

Collaboration and communication among teachers was a factor I investigated in my study. Participants in this study shared their views about their own professional development, including their experience of collaborating and communicating with other teachers in their professional learning communities. According to the previous research, teachers participated in various professional learning activities to continue developing their teaching skills as life-long learners. Teachers collaborate with professional learning communities to communicate with other teachers and improve their teaching practices (Taylor, 2009). In my study, I found that Chinese and Canadian participants' relevant experience and opinions were quite different. The data suggested that teachers' communication and collaboration in Beijing seemed more effective than that in Saskatoon.

Chinese participants stated that they usually shared their teaching experiences with other teachers at three levels: school divisions/districts, schools, or grades/subjects. The main activities for communication between Chinese teachers included group discussion, collective lesson planning, and classroom visiting. That is, they reported often discussing educational issues together, regularly planning lessons together, and frequently visiting each other's classrooms. According to my own teaching experience in Beijing, I had experience of attending three-levels teachers' meetings and professional development events.

Canadian teachers reported that they usually chatted with each other during breaks or communicated with each other through the school network website. Sometimes, they developed students' learning projects together. Several Canadian education experts stated in the panel that teachers' communication in Canada was less formal than it was in China. These experts believed that Saskatoon teachers lacked time and formal opportunities for communicating with each other. Canadian experts even stated that some teachers did not want to open their classrooms for visitation by colleagues. There were professional learning communities in Canadian schools and school divisions, but some teachers had concerns about being involved, because they thought the benefit of being involved in a professional learning community was sometimes valued much less than was its cost.

In addition, in this research, I originally planned to survey 15-20 middle years teachers from both China and Canada. However, when I contacted the local school boards/districts or principals and attempted to recruit participants through email, only six teachers in Saskatoon responded. Although the total number of participants

was sizable, the number of Canadian participants was low. Because this research was not designed as a comparative study, the unbalanced survey data from both research sites was not a major concern, but I believe that there must be some reasons for this unbalanced number. First, the different teacher populations in China and Canada might be a reason. In addition, in recent years, Chinese education has been undergoing substantial change, and Chinese educational and political leaders are looking to other countries to assist them in this process. Therefore, in China, especially in some cities, such as Beijing, schools and teachers appear to pay more attention to international education research. I found that it was easier for me than I had originally anticipated to solicit the Chinese teachers' participation. However, in Canada, according to one Saskatoon superintendent, Saskatoon teachers received numerous research requests from email every term and simply cannot reply to all requests.

I believe that collaborating and communicating with other teachers in professional learning communities is important for teachers to improve their teaching practices. Isolated teaching brings more workload and pressure to teachers, and does not benefit students' learning (Taylor, 2009). I agree and suggest that students would benefit from teachers' collaboration. In both countries, school boards should make more effort to create a safe and friendly environment for teachers' communication and could encourage teachers to share more time and ideas with each other. If possible, teachers from different schools might have regular professional meetings and could visit each other's classrooms more often. This research study revealed that some teachers shared their ideas with each other by using new technology, such as the school network website. I think school network websites are effective spaces for communication between teachers. Important issues or topics that emerge from discussions or debates on these websites could be responded to in due time. Therefore, if school boards want to encourage more teachers to communicate with each other regularly and formally, and wish to make professional learning communities benefit more teachers and schools, then they should consider providing more policy, technical, and financial supports for relevant programs and activities.

2. Teachers should choose either a single subject or multiple subjects to teach according to their own willingness and abilities.

Whether to be a generalist or a specialist in middle years education is an ongoing question. Communities' needs will influence future decisions regarding teacher-training programs and teachers' choices in this matter. School boards might consider having teacher candidates choose a single subject or multiple subjects to teach according to their own willingness and ability. Teacher-training programs should balance communities' needs and teacher candidates' own choices.

To teach single subject or multiple subjects was not a designed topic for this research, but it emerged from the research findings and caught the attention of the educational experts. I also regard it as an important finding of this research. The survey results showed most Chinese middle years teachers only taught one subject, but all the Canadian participants stated that they had experience teaching multiple subjects in middle years. The literature also showed that China and Canada had different teacher training programs: In China, the middle years teacher training programs usually prepared candidates for teaching one particular subject, but in Canada, teacher candidates at the middle years level were required to master several different subjects.

During the online interviews and expert panels, educational experts discussed this issue and shared different opinions. Chinese experts provided two opposing views. One perspective was that by teaching several subjects, teachers would acquire a whole picture of their students and a holistic understanding of the curriculum. Another view was that it was impossible to teach multiple subjects in China, because China had a large student population. Canadian experts also had two different perspectives regarding this topic. Some participants believed that teaching multiple subjects provided teachers and students with an opportunity to connect different areas of knowledge, and Canada's comparatively small student population did not allow Canadian teachers to teach only one subject. Another group of experts argued that teachers should have their own teaching areas in order to develop their professional knowledge and skills.

One implication of this issue is that relates to population differences. There are more middle years students in China than in Canada. Therefore, in China, especially in urban areas, more specialist teachers are needed, and teachers in China could have an appropriate workload by only teaching one subject. On the other hand, in rural and remote Canadian schools, the small number of students is the main reason for having teachers teach the multiple-

subjects curriculum. As one Canadian educational expert (SE7) stated, “If you were in rural Saskatchewan, there is no way unless your tax payers and government is willing to pay, to have 20 teachers for 32 students. It is not going to happen” (p.17).

Teaching multiple subjects or teaching a single subject each has its strengths and weaknesses. As a teacher, either to be an expert in a specific area or to be a generalist is not important. The key is whether a teacher can motivate his or her students to learn, can engage them in their learning, and can help them become life-long learners. Although I understand that communities’ needs might influence teachers’ choices, I recommend that school boards and teacher-training programs provide teacher candidates with an opportunity to choose the subjects they prefer to teach and be able to teach, because teachers’ unique strengths, interests, and abilities are also important factors influencing teaching effectiveness. As was illustrated during the Saskatoon panel, some experts argued that because teachers had different strengths, some of them were more effective as generalists, while other teachers were best suited as specialists, due to their specific abilities, personalities, professional backgrounds, prior experiences, and formal education/training/preparation. The critical element depended on individual differences.

Implications and Relevant Recommendations for Future Research:

1. Future researchers may benefit by using Appreciative Inquiry to explore people’s positive experiences in education.

Appreciative Inquiry is a positive experience-oriented approach, and participants shared critical ideas along with their positive experiences. The value of AI is to solve problems from a positive point of view. AI is a valuable tool for educators to consider when conducting educational research. I recommend AI because educators could gain a fresh perspective to learn differently from studying positive experiences in their classrooms.

This research was an Appreciative Inquiry study. According to Cooperrider and Whitney (2005), Appreciative Inquiry (AI) shifts research from problem core analysis to “positive core analysis” (p.11). The reason why I chose AI as the methodology in this study was that I believed teachers’ positive teaching experience would help them adjust their attitude and future practice toward student-centered learning more quickly and easily than if they based their decisions only on trying to remove negative elements. However, AI does not ignore problems, difficulties,

and limitations; rather, it addresses them uniquely, namely: “We just need to approach them from the other side” (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, p.5). For example, in this research, when I asked the questions about teachers’ positive experience in the student-centered classroom in the surveys and discussed the relevant major themes with educational experts in the interviews and panel, several participants still mentioned the problems and difficulties they had encountered in their classrooms. I did not ignore these data. I analyzed and addressed them as an important part of my final reports.

Therefore, I suggest that when researchers conducting AI research in the future, they should focus on participants’ positive experiences and study positively in those negative issues that may emerge from the data. The key to AI is not to ignore problems, but to learn from the best and make things better.

2. Future researchers should be more open minded by conducting cross-cultural and inter-cultural research to facilitate educators communicating with each other and learning from each other.

There were both similar and different opinions and practice regarding student-centered learning and middle years education identified by the educators in the study. Further cross-and inter-cultural studies focusing on educational experiences in several countries could be conducted in the future.

This project was not a comparative study, but rather a study of middle years educators in two countries. I chose Canada and China because of the expanding communications and collaborations between the two countries. It is important that Canadian and Chinese educators learn more about each other, and I, as a researcher, had a unique cultural and educational opportunity to help create a space for both Canadian and Chinese middle years teachers to share their insights and experiences. During the process of data collection and analysis, I found that many ideas, strategies, and perspectives emerged from this research that enabled middle years teachers to learn from each other.

When I communicated the survey results with the educational experts, I found similarities and differences in opinions and practices among participants in both sites. I suggest that future research on this topic might seek participants from similar-sized cities in China and Canada or from other countries. Future research might focus on further exploring the differences between student-centred classrooms. Chinese educators and Canadian educators

may wish to pursue opportunities to further discuss educational ideas through conferences or online communication spaces for interested educators.

Summary of Chapter Six

In this final chapter, I reviewed the whole research process and summarized the participants' responses to the major research questions. I discussed the implications that emerged from the data, and provided relevant recommendations regarding current educational theory, practice, policy, and future research.

The purpose of this study was to explore selected middle years teachers' positive experiences of promoting student learning in student-centered classrooms, and how these recalled experiences affected the teachers' own current and future teaching. I chose Appreciative Inquiry (AI) as the research methodology in this study, because I focused on participants' positive teaching experiences. In this study, I surveyed 53 middle years teachers in China and Canada, interviewed four Chinese middle years educators through on-line conversations, and invited 12 Canadian middle years educational experts to participate in an interpretation panel.

The data that emerged from this research answered the three major research questions: What are the selected middle years teachers' positive experiences of promoting student learning in student-centered classrooms? After reflecting on these positive teaching experiences in student-centered classrooms, did these teachers change their teaching attitude and practices toward student-centered learning? And if so, in what ways? How might these teachers' experiences assist other teachers in promoting student learning? In this research, teachers identified that group-study was the most popular instructional strategy to promote student-centered learning. In addition, brainstorming, role-playing, and questioning were also widely used. In student-centered classrooms, Chinese teachers valued students' independent thinking, participation, hands-on practice, collaboration among students, and the teacher's supportive role. Canadian teachers valued students' real life experiences, learning interests, and learning responsibilities. According to the survey results, most participants stated that they had changed or planned to change their teaching practices, because they believed that students learned best when they were fully involved in their learning. Finally, all participants indicated that they assisted other teachers by sharing their positive experiences regarding student-centered learning in different ways.

In this chapter, I also discussed the implications that emerged from the findings and provided relevant recommendations regarding current educational theory, practice, policy, and future research. Based on the results of this research, I confirmed a finding of previous research, namely that, student engagement is the core of student-centered learning. For current classroom practice, I suggested that teachers should serve students and collaborate with parents and families. Teachers should also apply multiple instructional strategies to promote student-centered learning.

The appropriate use of direct instructions, such as questioning, would also promote students' learning. In order to help teachers promote students' learning, school boards and schools should make more effort to encourage their teachers to communicate with each other formally and regularly by providing policy, technical, and financial supports for relevant programs and activities. Teachers should be able to choose either a single subject or multiple subjects to teach according to their own willingness and abilities. Concerning future research in the field, I suggested that future researchers might benefit from employing Appreciative Inquiry to explore people's experiences in education by conducting cross-cultural and inter-cultural research to facilitate educators mutual communication and learning.

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9. Did you share your positive experience with other teachers in your school or school division? Please explain.

10. How might your positive experiences help other teachers promote student learning?

11. Is there other additional information you what to share?

Survey Questions (调查问卷问题)

A. Demographics (背景问题)

Please check whichever applies: (请在适用的一项上划勾)

1. What is your gender? (您的性别是什么?) Female (女) Male (男)
2. What is your age? (您的年龄是多少?)
 20-29 岁 30-39 岁 40-49 岁 over 50 (50 岁以上)
3. How long have you taught middle years students? (您教初中学生多久了?)
 3-5 years 年 6 - 10 years 年 more than 10 years (10 年以上)
4. Which grade (s) are you teaching? (您教几年级?)
 Grade 7 (七年级/初一) Grade 8 (八年级/初二)
5. Which subject(s) do you teach? (您教哪个/些科目?) _____.

B. Positive Teaching Experiences of Middle years Teachers
(初中教师的积极教学经验)

Please respond in the space following the questions. If you need additional space, please feel free to enlarge the space. (请在每个问题后的空白处回答问题。如果您需要更多的空间填写信息, 请自己扩大文档的空间。)

6. Could you please describe one of your student-centered lessons that promoted student learning? (请您描述一节以“学生为中心”的方法促进学生学习的课。)
7. What do you value most about this lesson? (您最看重这节课的什么方面?)
8. Did these positive experiences change your teaching practice? Please explain. (您的这些积极的经验是否改变了您后来的教学实践? 请解释说明。)

9. Did you share your positive experience with other teachers in your school or school division? Please explain. (您和您学校里或学区里的其他教师分享过积极的教学经验吗? 请解释说明。)

10. How might your positive experiences help other teachers promote student learning?
(您的积极教学经验可能怎样帮助其他教师去促进学生的学习呢?)

11. Is there other additional information you what to share? (您还有其他相关补充内容需要分享吗?)

Appendix 2: Invitation Letter to School Boards/ School Principals

Dear School Boards/ School Principals,

My name is Meng Li. I am a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Educational Administration, College of Education, University of Saskatchewan, Canada. I have received the ethics approval to start collecting data for my doctoral research from the Behavioural Research Ethics Board of the University of Saskatchewan. I would like to invite relevant teachers under your school board/ school to participate in my research.

My dissertation research is titled “Promoting Student Learning in Student-Centered Classrooms: Positive Teaching Experiences of Middle years Teachers in China and Canada”. The purpose of this study is to explore the selected middle years teachers’ positive experiences of promoting student learning in student- centered classrooms, and how these recalled experiences might affect their own future teaching and assist other teachers to promote student learning.

This research will be an Appreciative Inquiry (AI). AI is a research methodology to “search for the best in people, their organizations, and the world around them” (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, p.8). The benefits of this study are that by exploring positive experiences of promoting student learning in student-centered classrooms, the teacher participants will have an opportunity to reflect on their own teaching and adjust their teaching practices accordingly. By reading findings of this dissertation, teachers may learn from selected teachers’ positive experiences and improve their own ways of promoting student learning. This research might also benefit the communication between Chinese and Canadian middle years teachers.

In this research, I would like to invite up to 40 Grade 7 or Grade 8 teachers (20 teachers in Beijing and 20 teachers in Saskatoon) who have at least 3 years teaching experiences to complete an email survey questionnaire. I will first contact superintendents and/or school principals in both China and Canada through email informing them of my research study, purpose, and the need for and role of participants. I will ask the superintendents and/or school principals to inform teachers in their schools of my research and of my invitation to teachers to participate in my research study by putting the research information in the school website, school newsletters, information board in teachers’ office, or other public places that teachers might access to. I will provide my contact information so that any potential participants may contact me directly. All those teachers who subsequently contact me, I will provide them with a letter of invitation to participate in this study and the email survey. I will ask the participants to return completed email survey to me. Returning the completed email survey to the researcher is implied consent.

The risk is minimal in this study, because participants will be invited to complete and submit an email survey, which is anonymous. Their personal email addresses will not be part of the survey and will not be shown in the findings or any other part of this research. The survey includes two parts of questions: demographic questions and open-ended questions concerning promoting student learning in student-centered classrooms. Although the five demographic questions include gender, age, years of teaching experiences, the grades they teach, and the subjects they teach, the responses will not be presented individually.

There are my “survey questionnaire” and the “certificate of approval from university” in the attachments. Could you please have a look? I hope you could allow teachers under your school board/school to participate in my doctoral research. Your understanding and support will be sincerely appreciated. If you have more questions or concerns about this research, please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you very much in advance. I’m looking forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely,

Meng Li, Ph.D. Candidate

Department of Educational Administration,

College of Education, University of Saskatchewan

Phone: 1-780-224-2272

mel137@mail.usask.ca

Appendix 3: Invitation Letter to Teachers

Dear teachers,

My name is Meng Li. I am a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Educational Administration, College of Education, University of Saskatchewan, Canada. My dissertation research is titled “Promoting Student Learning in Student-Centered Classrooms: Positive Teaching Experiences of Middle years Teachers in China and Canada”. The purpose of this study is to explore the selected middle years teachers’ positive experiences of promoting student learning in student- centered classrooms, and how these recalled experiences might affect their own future teaching and assist other teachers to promote student learning.

If you are currently teaching Grade 7 or 8, I would like to invite you to participate in an email survey. The survey includes two parts: demographic questions and open-ended questions concerning promoting student learning in student-centered classrooms. Completing the survey will take about 15 to 20 minutes. The risk is minimal in this study. The email survey will be anonymous. Your personal email addresses will not be shown in the findings or any other part of this research. Responses to the demographic questions will not be presented individually. Confidentiality will be maintained throughout and after the study. Your completion of the survey and returning such to me implies consent. Your right to withdraw data from the study will apply until data has been pooled. After this it is possible that some form of research dissemination will have already occurred and it may not be possible to withdraw your data. You may also refuse to answer any questions that you think are too personal or sensitive.

By participating in this study, you may have an opportunity to reflect on your own teaching. By reading my dissertation findings, you may learn from other teachers’ positive experiences of promoting student learning, especially teachers in China. After the completion of my dissertation, the documents will be available through the University of Saskatchewan library services.

If you are interested in this research and wish to participate in it, please complete the survey and return it to my email address: mel137@mail.usask.ca

This study was approved by the University of Saskatchewan’s Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB) on May 4th, 2011. Questions or concerns regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to the Beh-REB Committee through the Research Ethics Office at 1-306-966-2975 or ethics.office@usask.ca.

If you are not interested in this research, please ignore this email. Thank you for taking time to read the email. If you have further questions or concerns about the survey, please do not hesitate to contact me, my supervisors, or the Behavioural Research Ethics Board.

Supervisors: Dr. Sheila Carr-Stewart
Department of Educational Administration
Email: sheila.carr-stewart@usask.ca
Phone: 1-306-966-7611
Dr. Edwin Ralph
Department of Curriculum Studies, College of Education
Email: edwin.ralph@usask.ca
Phone: 1-306-966-7583

Student Researcher: Meng Li
Email: mel137@mail.usask.ca

Yours sincerely,

Meng Li, Ph.D. Candidate
Department of Educational Administration,
College of Education, University of Saskatchewan
mel137@mail.usask.ca

Appendix 4: Invitation Letter for the Interpretation Panel

Dear prospective participants,

My name is Meng Li. I am a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Educational Administration, College of Education, University of Saskatchewan, Canada. My dissertation research is titled “Promoting Student Learning in Student-Centered Classrooms: Positive Teaching Experiences of Middle years Teachers in China and Canada”. There are two phases of data collection in this research process. I have completed the first phase: surveyed about 50 grade 6 to 8 teachers in both Canada and China. Now you are invited to participate in the second phase of my data collection by attending an interpretation panel in Saskatoon if you are a graduated student in the college of education and an education expert in middle years. The middle years education experts include superintendents, school principals, experienced teachers, and teacher educators.

An interpretation panel is a group of individuals who are knowledgeable on a particular topic, and who participate in a form of collaborative research and a type of group analysis regarding that topic. This work of the panel could help researchers deepen their understanding of related research data or results (Noonan, 2002). In my research project, the panel meeting will be held in a private room at the University of Saskatchewan. In the panel meeting, the researcher will first summarize the previous research results for you. Then, I will invite you, as a group, to address several related questions. The conversation will likely last from one-and-a-half to two hours, and will be audio recorded.

The risk is minimal in this study. Your name and other personal information will not be shown in the findings or any other part of this research. Your demographic information including gender, age, years of teaching experience, the grades you teach, and the subjects you teach will be asked by the researcher, but not be presented individually. Data collected from the panel will be used for the researcher’s dissertation. The data may also be used for purposes of articles, which will be submitted to potential journals for potential publication. The only potential risk that you take in the panel is that other participants might not respect your confidentiality of the discussion. However, you could refuse to share the sensitive stories or ideas with the researcher and other participants in the panel if you do have concern.

By participating in this research, you will have an opportunity to learn about other middle years teachers’ positive teaching experience and reflect on your own. By learning findings of this dissertation, you might be able to improve the ways of promoting student learning in your schools or classrooms.

Your participation in this research is voluntary, and you can answer only those questions that you are comfortable with. You may withdraw from the research project for any reason without penalty of any sort until data has been pooled. If you withdraw from the research project, any data that you have contributed will be destroyed at your request. After data has been pooled, it may not be possible to withdraw your data because some form of research dissemination will have already occurred.

This study was approved by the University of Saskatchewan’s Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB) on Aug. 20th, 2012. Questions or concerns regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to the Beh-REB Committee through the Research Ethics Office at 1-306-966-2975 or ethics.office@usask.ca.

If you are interested in this research, please contact me directly at mel137@mail.usask.ca

Upon receipt of your email, I will forward to you further information of the interpretation panel.

If you are not interested in this research, please ignore this email. Thank you for taking time to read the email. If you have further questions or concerns about the survey, please do not hesitate to contact me, my supervisors, or the Behavioural Research Ethics Board.

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Department of Educational Administration,
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Yours sincerely,

Meng Li, Ph.D. Candidate
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College of Education, University of Saskatchewan
mel137@mail.usask.ca

Appendix 5: Consent Form for the Interpretation Panel

You are invited to participate in a research project entitled “Promoting Student Learning in Student-Centered Classrooms: Positive Teaching Experiences of Middle years Teachers in China and Canada”. Please read this form carefully, and feel free to ask questions you might have.

Co-supervisors: Dr. Sheila Carr-Stewart
Department of Educational Administration, College of Education
University of Saskatchewan
Email: sheila.carr-stewart@usask.ca
Phone: 1-306-966-7611

Dr. Edwin Ralph
Department of Curriculum Studies, College of Education
Email: edwin.ralph@usask.ca
Phone: 1-306-966-7583

Student Researcher: Meng Li, Ph.D. Candidate
Department of Educational Administration, College of Education
University of Saskatchewan
Email: mel137@mail.usask.ca

Purpose of the Study: I am investigating selected middle years teachers’ positive experiences of promoting student learning in student-centered classrooms.

Procedure of the Study: An interpretation panel is a group of individuals who are knowledgeable on a particular topic, and who participate in a form of collaborative research and a type of group analysis regarding that topic. This work of the panel could help researchers deepen their understanding of related research data or results (Noonan, 2002). In my research project, the panel meeting will be held in a private room at the University of Saskatchewan. In the panel meeting, the researcher will first summarize the previous research results for you. Then, I will invite you, as a group, to address several related questions. The conversation will likely last from one-and-a-half to two hours, and will be audio recorded. The findings will be reported by direct quotations, but your name or other personal information would not be shown on the research reports. Data collected from the panel will be used for the researcher’s dissertation. The data may also be used for purposes of articles, which will be submitted to potential journals for potential publication.

Potential Benefits: By participating in this research, you will have an opportunity to learn about other middle years teachers’ positive teaching experience and reflect on your own. By examining the reading findings of this dissertation, teachers in China and Canada might learn from each other and improve their own ways of promoting student learning.

Potential Risks: The risk is minimal in this study. Your name and other personal information will not be shown in the findings or any other part of this research. Your demographic information including gender, age, years of teaching experience, the grades you teach, and the subjects you teach will be asked by the researcher, but not be presented individually. The only potential risk that you take in the panel is that other participants might not respect your confidentiality of the discussion. However, you could refuse to share the sensitive stories or ideas with the researcher and other participants in the panel if you do have concern.

Storage of Data: All data will be stored on electronic files which will be securely stored on a password-protected computer. The computer will be housed in the researcher's secure office; only the researcher has access to this office. After completion of the study, all data will be stored in my supervisor Dr. Sheila Carr-Stewart's office for five years. After this time, all data will be destroyed.

Confidentiality: The panel will be anonymous. Your name or any other personal identification data will not be included in the research findings. Demographic information including gender, age, years of teaching experiences, and the subjects taught will not be presented individually. The researcher will ensure that anonymity will be maintained throughout the study and no identification data will be included in the written dissertation.

The researcher will also undertake to safeguard the confidentiality of the discussion, but cannot guarantee that other members of the group will do so. Please respect the confidentiality of the other members of the group by not disclosing contents of this discussion and personal information of other participants outside the group, and be aware that others may not respect your confidentiality.

Right to Withdraw: Your participation in this research is voluntary, and you can answer only those questions that you are comfortable with. There is no guarantee that you will personally benefit from your involvement. The information that is shared will be held in strict confidence and discussed only with the research team. You may withdraw from the research project for any reason without penalty of any sort until data has been pooled. If you withdraw from the research project, any data that you have contributed will be destroyed at your request. After data has been pooled, it may not be possible to withdraw your data because some form of research dissemination will have already occurred.

Questions: If you have any questions concerning the research project, please feel free to ask at any point; you are also free to contact me or my supervisors at the numbers provided if you have other questions. This research project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board on (insert date). Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Ethics Office (966-2084). Out of town participants may call collect.

Dissemination of Results: All data collected from the panel will be used only for the researcher's dissertation and application for dissemination through scholarly journals and conferences. The study may be published in scholarly journals.

Debriefing: After the dissertation of the study has been completed, an electronic version of the dissertation will be available through the Library of the University of Saskatchewan.

Consent to Participate:

I have read and understood the description provided; I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered. I consent to participate in the research project, understanding that I may withdraw my consent at any time. A copy of this Consent Form has been given to me for my records.

(Name of Participant)

(Date)

(Signature of Participant)

(Signature of Researcher)

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