

CHINESE UNIVERSITY TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES OF A FINNISH UNIVERSITY PEDAGOGICAL WORKSHOP

Kirsi Kettula¹, Maija Lampinen¹, Fei Fan², and Dan Jiang²

¹*Aalto University* and ²*Tongji University*

Abstract. The purpose of this study is to investigate Chinese university teachers' experiences of a Finnish university pedagogical workshop. The qualitative research data were collected from the participants' learning journals and feedback. The findings reveal that Western educational practices cannot be imported as such, but have to be adapted to the Chinese culture. In a multicultural training, participants may face challenges that remain unrecognized by the educators. Similarly, participants may expect educators to behave in a manner that is unfamiliar to the educators. In order to further develop worthwhile tools for teaching and learning in the Chinese context, there is a need for collaboration between educators and participants. The findings of this study have practical implications for higher education related to developing university pedagogical training in multicultural and multidisciplinary contexts. In particular, the study generates new information for pedagogical cooperation projects between Western and Chinese universities.

Keywords: transnational higher education, pedagogical training, teacher training, collaborative pedagogical programme, reflection, learning journals, China, Finland

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1. Introduction

Western universities are cooperating with universities in Asia in increasing numbers (e.g. Ennew and Fujia 2009). China and India, in particular, have been the countries of interest to foreign higher education institutions (Yang 2008). According to Yang (2008), it is evident that both the scale of the foreign higher education activity in China and the extent of foreign commitment have been growing rapidly in recent years. Of the countries that encourage diverse forms of transnational higher education, China considers cooperation and partnership as important, and particularly encourages Sino-foreign cooperative institutions and programmes (Gu 2009). As an example of this trend, Aalto University (Aalto),

Finland and Tongji University (Tongji), China, have founded the Sino-Finnish Centre (SFC), which is a strategic cooperation project between Aalto and Tongji. As a part of the strategic partnership, the two universities have also agreed on a pedagogical collaboration project during 2012–2014. One form of this collaboration is pedagogical workshops (1–2 days twice a year) that are held in China by Finnish educators.

The Aalto–Tongji pedagogical collaboration operates in the field of “transnational higher education”, a term that is widely used to cover education that a higher education institution organizes outside its home country. There are a number of studies on Asian or Chinese students in foreign universities (e.g. Watkins and Biggs 2001, Foster and Stapleton 2012, Gieve and Clark 2005) and transnational undergraduate study programmes in Asia (e.g. Yang 2008, Dunn and Wallace 2004). There is also a growing body of studies on transnational teaching (Smith 2009), and in addition, there are some sporadic studies on preparing teachers for transnational education (e.g. Haley and Ferro 2011). However, no literature on transnational pedagogical training of university teachers was located. Thus, the present study has been designed to address this gap. It also seems unique that two universities from two different continents collaborate in teachers’ educational training which is the case in the Aalto–Tongji pedagogical collaboration programme.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Transnational higher education

There is no agreement on what exactly should be included in the concept of transnational education (e.g. Yang 2008, Adam 2001). An often-cited definition is the wording by the UNESCO/European Council Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education (2001):

All types of higher education study programmes, or sets of courses of study, or educational services (including those of distance education) in which the learners are located in a country different from the one where the awarding institution is based. Such programmes may belong to the education system of a State different from the State in which it operates, or may operate independently of any national education system.

Here, the educational services include, among others, “training modules that lead to professional development” (UNESCO 2001). The Aalto–Tongji pedagogical workshops studied in this paper can be regarded as fitting in this category.

Depending on what or who moves cross borders and where the qualification is awarded, Knight (2003) has identified four categories for cross-border education: people, providers, programmes, and projects and services. Based on this categorization, OECD (2006a) has named and described three mobility forms, i.e. people mobility, programme mobility, and institution mobility:

- A **person** can go abroad for educational purposes (people mobility).
- An **educational programme** can go abroad (programme mobility).
- An **institution** or **provider** can go or invest abroad for educational purposes (institution mobility).

(OECD 2006a: 23-24)

Regarding these mobility forms, people mobility and institution mobility involve foreign awards granted by a foreign institution, whereas programme mobility involves domestic, double or joint awards (Knight 2003). Knight's (2003) fourth category for cross-border education, projects and services, involves a wide range of education related projects and services, but it does not involve any award-based programmes. Regarding the OECD (2006a) mobility forms, projects and services may be included in all three mobility forms. While student mobility embodies the bulk of cross-border education, transnational higher education in the form of institution mobility has remained relatively rare, albeit growing strongly (OECD 2006a, 2006b). However, programme mobility is growing much more quickly than institution mobility (OECD 2006b).

Four general approaches to transnational postsecondary education can be detected: mutual understanding, skilled migration/developing human resources, economic revenue generation, and capacity building (Gu 2009, OECD 2006b). In the mutual understanding approach, countries seek openness to the world and strengthened ties between countries through the creation of international networks (OECD 2006b). In contrast, in the three remaining approaches, transnational higher education can be seen as a means to support economic growth and competitiveness in a knowledge economy. In the skilled migration approach, the main target is to attract and develop human resources. The capacity building approach is an importer perspective that views transnational education as a means to meet an unmet demand as well as help build capacity for quality higher education (2006b). The economic revenue generation can mainly be considered an exporter perspective. Gu (2009) argues that for provider countries, generating revenue is the primary driving force, and thus highlighting competition. On the other hand, the receiver countries are keen on capacity building and the development of human resources, thus emphasizing cooperation. For example, according to Gu (2009:634), the main reason for developing transnational education in China "is to enhance the overall educational system, to diversify educational supply, to build capacity for colleges and universities, and to attract and develop human resources".

There are also some challenges and concerns associated with transnational higher education, including quality assurance, cultural appropriateness, the possible undermining of the public nature of education, and the possible loss of educational sovereignty (Yang 2008, Gu 2009). In particular, transnational higher education has been criticized for being insensitive to the local culture and educational traditions (e.g. Hu 2002, Pyvis 2011), and for prioritising economic revenues over the quality of education (e.g. Gu 2009, Lieven and Martin 2006, Yang 2008).

2.2. Reflection

Reflection is a concept that does not have one single definition. Boud et al (1985:19) consider reflection “a generic term for those intellectual and affective activities in which individuals engage to explore their experiences in order to lead to new understandings and appreciations”. Furthermore, Boud (2001:10) argues that “Reflection involves taking the unprocessed, raw material of experience and engaging with it as a way to make sense of what has occurred. It involves exploring often messy and confused events and focusing on the thoughts and emotions that accompany them”. Hence, reflection can be seen as a tool to make sense of and give meaning to unstructured and nebulous ideas or experiences. Moreover, the target of reflection is to turn experience into meaningful learning (Bourner 2003, Boud 2001).

The quality of reflection can be nurtured by introducing different types of structures, learning and teaching strategies, and prompts (e.g. Moon 1999, 2009, Nückles et al 2004, Hübner et al 2010). According to Nückles et al (2010), prompts (prompting questions) particularly support reflective writing when the students are unfamiliar with the learning journal method. One example of a structured model of reflection is Gibbs’ (1988/2001) often-cited reflective learning cycle, where reflection is divided into six different stages: describing, feeling, evaluating, analysing, concluding and action planning. To support reflection, different prompts and instructions are given for each stage (Gibbs 1988/2001: chapter 4.3.5):

Description: What happened? Don't make judgements yet or try to draw conclusions, simply describe.

Feelings: What were your reactions and feelings? Again don't move on to analysing these yet.

Evaluation: What was good or bad about the experience? Make value judgements.

Analysis: What sense can you make of the situation? Bring in ideas from outside the experience to help you. What was really going on? Were different people's experiences similar or different in important ways?

Conclusions: (general) What can be concluded, in a general sense, from these experiences and the analyses you have undertaken?

Conclusions: (specific) What can be concluded about your own specific, unique, personal situation or way of working?

Personal action plans: What are you going to do differently in this type of situation next time? What steps are you going to take on the basis of what you have learnt?

Critical reflection is a concept that is often regarded as the deepest form of reflection, which is also sought after in higher education (Dyment and O’Connell 2011, see also Kember 1997). According to Mezirow (1990:13), “Critical reflection is not concerned with the how or the how-to of action but with the why, the reasons for and consequences of what we do”. Besides content and process of

learning, Mezirow (1991:104) also includes underlying premises as targets for reflection, when he considers reflection as “the process of critically assessing the content, process or premise(s) of our efforts to interpret and give meaning to an experience”. According to Mezirow (1990), being exposed to different perspectives may initiate a process of critical reflection that brings to the fore an individual's own points of view and, if needed, sometimes leads to perspective transformations.

3. The present study

3.1. *The context: pedagogical workshop*

The aim of the current study is to investigate Chinese university teachers' experiences of Finnish university pedagogical training. The context is a pedagogical collaboration programme between Aalto University (Aalto), Finland, and Tongji University (Tongji), China. The collaboration programme is a part of a strategic partnership between the two universities, the main objective being to improve the quality of education in the multicultural environment in both universities. As a project in transnational higher education, the emphasis is on enhancing mutual understanding and developing human resources. To some extent, it can also be regarded as capacity building, because Tongji can partly tap into the pedagogical training brought by Aalto. However, because transnational higher education is very often associated with generating economic revenue as the main aim, it is worth highlighting that neither of the two universities seeks economic profit through this collaboration. The training can be considered unique in the sense that it is free of charge to the participants, and both universities cover their own costs, i.e. no fees are paid or received as tuition. The aim is to develop the pedagogical collaboration between the universities through mutual discussions and shared feedback from the participants. In addition, joint projects on research and teaching can be considered focal.

In the Aalto–Tongji pedagogical collaboration programme, Aalto provides pedagogical training for both the Finnish and Chinese university teachers (participants). Workshops are held in Finland and in China, and there are both common and separate workshops for Finnish and Chinese participants. The workshops are held in English. In May 2012, two Finnish educators from Aalto gave the first pedagogical workshop of the whole programme for 20 Chinese (Tongji) university teachers (i.e. teacher students) in Shanghai, China. Teacher students were selected by the Tongji HR department, and a particular criterion for selection was the participants' ability to communicate and study in English. The teacher students represented different fields and disciplines. The objectives of the two-day workshops were to highlight the participants' own conceptions of learning and determine how they are related to their teaching practices. In addition, the learning outcomes-based teaching, different teaching methods, and creativity in teaching were discussed. The intended learning outcomes of the workshop were expressed as follows:

After the workshop the participant will be able to

- a) explain the meaning of conception of learning and its relation to university teaching,
- b) describe how to design learning outcomes-based teaching (constructive alignment),
- c) reflect on strengths and weaknesses of different teaching methods, and
- d) use various activating and creativity inspiring teaching methods in practice.

In addition, to practice English language was a focal objective for the Tongji University, and thus two English language tutors also participated in the workshop. The tutors occasionally helped participants with the English vocabulary, but they did not need to act as translators, because all the participants were able to communicate in English. The workshop concentrated on such topics as conceptions of learning and teaching; competencies needed in the future working life (Biggs and Tang 2007, Liu 2010); teaching methods to be used to enhance the needed future competencies; constructive alignment (Biggs and Tang 2007); reflection and reflective writing. Most of the themes were novel for the participants. Teaching methods employed during the workshop included numerous activating methods, and there was a particular emphasis on various forms of group work activities. The workshop was held at the Sino-Finnish Centre of Tongji University, where the space is especially designed for group work activities and does not resemble a conventional lecture hall. Because the interior design was done by Finnish professionals, the interior of the space is more Finnish than Chinese.

3.2. Research questions

For this study, the following research questions were posed:

- What issues did the Chinese participants reflect on in their learning journals after a Finnish university pedagogical training/workshop?
- Were there particular elements (in the training) that were challenging to the Chinese participants?

4. Method

The qualitative research data were gathered from the Chinese participants' learning journals that were written after the workshop. Additional data were collected from the feedback gathered by Tongji HR department. In the following, both sources of data are described in more detail.

4.1. Learning journals

The Chinese participants were asked to submit their learning journals through an e-learning platform (Moodle) within three weeks of the workshop. Altogether eighteen (out of twenty) participants submitted their learning journals.

The basic guidance for journal writing included a suggested structure for a journal entry. The concept of reflection was explained and practised at the end of

the workshop, and prompts were given to help reflection. The guidelines mainly followed Gibbs's (1988/2001) model of reflective cycle, and the following prompts were given as a handout and also explained at the end of the workshop:

1. Description of the event
 - Describe in a few sentences the workshop (e.g. where were you; why were you there; what were you doing; what were other people doing; what happened.)
2. Feelings and thoughts: Try to recall and explore ideas or thoughts that were going on inside your head.
 - How were you feeling when the workshop started?
 - What were you thinking at the time?
 - How did it make you feel?
 - How did you feel about the outcome of the workshop?
 - What do you think about it now?
3. Evaluation and analysis
 - What went well?
 - What did you do well?
 - What did others (including the trainers) do well?
 - What went wrong or did not turn out as it should?
 - In what way did you or others influence this?
4. Conclusion
 - Review what you have written in the previous stages 1, 2 and 3
 - Try to detect any insights you gained (i.e. what did you learn) during the workshop. Remember that the purpose of reflection is to learn from experience. During this stage, you also should ask yourself what you could have done differently.
5. Action plan – Now what?
 - What could you do now (with the issues you have learned about during the workshop)?
 - What might be the consequences of this action?
 - Be as realistic as possible. Small realistic steps are better than huge unrealistic ones.

The learning journals were written in English, and the required length was 750–1500 words.

4.2. Feedback gathered by Tongji HR department

Complementary research data were gathered from feedback collected by the Tongji HR department. Information of the required feedback was sent to the participants straight after the workshop. Providing feedback was compulsory for all the teachers who had participated in the training. The feedback was written in Chinese, and it was gathered by e-mail within three weeks of the workshop. The required length was 1000 words. The questions to be answered in the Tongji HR feedback were:

1. What have you gained directly/ indirectly from this pedagogical training?
2. What do you think is the advantage of Finnish teaching methods?
3. What impressed you most that you think could be used in your own teaching?
4. Were there particular elements (in the training) that were challenging to you?
5. Could you please comment on this workshop according to your personal experience?

5. Analysis

The two sets of data, learning journals and feedback, were first analysed independently. The Finnish authors analysed the learning journals that were written in English, and the Chinese authors analysed the feedback written in Chinese. Finally, the findings based on the two sources of data were put together by the Finnish authors for further discussion and conclusions. The processes of analyses are explained in the following.

5.1. Analysis of the learning journals

The learning journals were analysed using qualitative thematic analysis. The relevant themes were identified from what respondents said (here: wrote), and selective quotations were presented as illustrations of each of the identified themes (Silverman, 2011). The two Finnish authors analysed and categorized the diaries individually. First, both authors read the diaries through several times and then inductively created themes out of the items about which participants had written. The analysis also involved regular references to the original texts in order to ensure correct understanding of the created themes. Through this sequence of analysis, each Finnish author individually created the initial framework for findings. Second, the authors discussed the findings to strengthen the credibility (Graneheim and Lundman, 2004). Unclear cases were discussed, and findings were amended and further defined based on these discussions. At this phase, the themes were further sorted under four categories as shown in Table 1.

5.2. Analysis of the feedback

Based on the two research questions, the two Chinese authors made a qualitative analysis on the feedback gathered by the HR department. First, the third author read through the feedback and underlined text passages that were relevant to the research questions. These text passages were marked as her findings. In case there was nothing to underline, the author also made a marking on that on the paper. Next, the fourth author read the same feedback and similarly underlined text passages that she considered relevant to the research questions. After this phase, the two authors cross-checked their findings paper by paper. In case the findings on a particular paper were the same, they moved over to the next

Table 1. Theme classification based on reflections

Sources of reflection:	Prompts given for learning journals	Substance covered during the workshop	Activities during the workshop	Other elements of the workshop
Themes reflected on	<p>Teachers' and students' role in the workshop <i>"One thing which especially impressed me most is that the two Finnish teachers also participated in the warm-up exercises, and it seemed to me that they are part of us learners."</i> P1</p>	<p>Constructive alignment (CA) <i>"Through the learning of CA, I understood that teaching a class is not just to give a lecture, nor to make students discuss on topics. Teaching a course is a system made up of some related processes---"</i> P7</p>	<p>Teaching methods in general <i>"I see the teachers introduced this workshop and grouped us. Then, after the warm up, some questions are proposed for groups. I think we are playing a game."</i> P9</p>	<p>Chinese context and comparison between different cultures <i>"As a usual lesson in China, teacher will explain many; students sit there silently and listen. The same lesson in Finland, the main function for teacher is to guide the students. Discussion is very important in their teaching and learning."</i> P18</p>
	<p>Feelings <i>"When the workshop starts, I felt it is strange and fresh."</i> P2, <i>"All in all, any time when I thought of the two days' learning, my feeling was relaxing, enjoyable and positive."</i>P7</p>	<p>Student vs. teacher oriented approaches <i>"Finnish teaching and learning approach is the student-centered one and the teacher is regarded as a guide or an organizer which is little different from that of the Chinese approach that is the teacher-centered."</i>P1</p>	<p>Group work and discussion <i>"When we discuss what's a good teacher and prepare to draw he or her, we have large disagree with each other because everyone want to be the group leader."</i> P9</p>	<p>Physical and social learning environment <i>"It amazed me that the arrangement of desks and chairs was different with that of common classrooms. The desks made a diamond shape that meant the training should be fruitful. The colorful chairs let us in a happy mood although it was rainy."</i> P10</p>
	<p>Challenges and critique <i>"Time passed quickly, and it is a pity that no lunch buffet was served."</i> P13</p>	<p>Conceptions of a good university teacher and student <i>"The elements which were much impressive for me are? What is a good university teacher? What is a good student?"</i> P4</p>	<p>Collecting and giving feedback <i>"I pay more attention to the feedback of student since I can reflect and adjust my teaching methods accordingly."</i> P11</p>	<p>Teachers' outer appearance and manners <i>"It's my first time to see 2 teachers in one class. Their perfect cooperation, graceful manners and broad knowledge impressed me deeply."</i> P8</p>
	<p>Applying learned issues in practice <i>"My class scale is similar with Sino-Finnish workshop this year, so it is convenient to introduce Finnish teaching methods in my class."</i> P6</p>			<p>English language <i>"I tried my best to understand the English and recall my teaching experience--"</i>P4</p>
				<p>Networking <i>"I am glad to meet new people. I wish I can have a good experience with them."</i> P9</p>
	Expected responses			Unexpected responses

one. Otherwise, the authors made a re-analysis together and discussed controversial issues in order to reach a consensus on the findings. After the authors had followed the same procedure with all the feedback, they translated their findings (i.e. the relevant text passages) into English.

5.3. Further analysis

The two Finnish authors continued the analysis by further categorizing the findings based on both the learning journals and the feedback. The result of this phase of analysis is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Challenges and critique based on a different source of reflections

Challenges (CH) and critique (CR)	
Based on the learning journals:	Based on the feedback collected by Tongji HR:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English language (CH) • Some single teaching methods (CH) • Uncertainty of being able to apply the learned issues in practice (CH) • Practical arrangements of the workshop (CR) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English language (CH) • Methods (CH/CR): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> time consuming not suitable for bigger classes not suitable for all subjects involvement of all students (free-riders) difficult • Applying the learned issues in Chinese context (CH) • Teaching vs. research (workload) (CH) • Too theoretical (CR)

6. Findings

According to the findings of the study, the Chinese university teachers were reflecting on fifteen different themes in their learning journals (see Table 1). In Table 1, each theme is illustrated by a quote. The quotes are in their original form (as written in the learning journals), and the number after the quote (e.g. P1) refers to the number of the participant in our database.

In Table 1, the themes (targets for reflection) are sorted as “expected” or “unexpected” based on their anticipated sources of reflection. The three expected sources of reflection were the prompts, the substance matters of the workshop, and the activities during the workshop. The prompts had elicited reflection on such themes as teachers’ and students’ role in the workshop; feelings; challenges and critique; and applying learned issues in practice. The second expected source of reflection, substance of the workshop, had initiated reflection on the concept of

constructive alignment; student- vs. teacher-oriented approaches; and conceptions of a good university teacher and student. Third, the activities during the workshop had triggered reflection on teaching methods in general; group work and discussion; and collecting and giving feedback. However, five (out of fifteen) of the detected themes of reflection could not be grouped under any of the three expected sources of reflection. Thus, the remaining five themes were labelled as "unexpected" because they were not highlighted by the prompts or the educators during the workshop, nor were they among the activities or intended learning outcomes. These five themes included reflection on the Chinese context and comparison between the cultures; the physical and social learning environment; the English language; networking among the participants; and the educators' outer appearance and manners. The free-form feedback written for the HR department could be grouped under the same themes as the learning journals.

Regarding challenges or critique of the workshop, the learning journals included only a few remarks. These findings are shown in Table 2.

Based on the learning journals, the detected challenges included the English language, some particular teaching methods, and the uncertainty of being able to apply the learned issues in practice. The only critique found in the learning journals concerned some practical arrangements: there had been a misunderstanding concerning lunch arrangements and thus no common lunch was served during the workshops. However, a challenge for one participant may have been a positive experience for someone else, as is illustrated by the following quotes.

Regarding the English language:

I chose a seat away from platform afraid of my poor spoken English. (P15)

As time going on, I also find that it is not difficulty for me to catch what they said, on the contrary, I can grab their conceptions and actions very well in spite that I cannot catch every word they pronounced. It seems inconceivable, but it is the real case happened on me and other attendees. (P3)

Regarding a single teaching method:

Kirsi and Maija required us to express our ideas by different ways, some methods were difficult for us, such as to draw the ideal teacher in our mind. So it is a difficult class too! (P4)

As to the training, drawing a prototype of a good university teacher was very interesting, we discussed the image in all view-angle, clothing, the gesture and the glasses are all considered -- and finished the picture. All the team members were very satisfied with the work we done. (P2)

Regarding applying the learned issues in practice:

Since in China, the students amount, and the space and time limitation will bring forward new problems compared with western countries, we should combine the ideal situation in theory with the real situation in China. (P11)

I used to think that in China, big class with 40 students could not achieve ideal result by group discussion – I now realize that it is still possible to achieve good result by way of group discussion. The question is how to arrange time

scientifically. I tried this after the workshop and have achieved an ideal result.
(P5)

In the feedback gathered by the HR department, the reported challenges were similarly scarce and they touched on similar issues as mentioned in the learning journals, i.e. the English language, issues concerning the teaching methods, and applying the learned issues in the Chinese context.

7. Discussion

This study explored what issues the Chinese teachers reflected on after a Finnish university pedagogical workshop, and whether there were particularly challenging elements in the training. According to the findings, the Chinese participants reflected on fifteen different themes that were categorized as expected or unexpected. The expected responses stemmed from the substance and structures of the workshop, while the unexpected responses were related to themes that could not directly be traced to the intended learning outcomes or structures of the workshop. The unexpected responses included reflection on 1. differences between Finnish and Chinese (learning) cultures; 2. physical and social learning environment; 3. the Finnish educators' appearance and manners; 4. networking; and 5. English language. Upon closer examination, the first three themes include elements of comparison, and thus, they very likely stem from a positive "culture clash" caused by the Finnish educators and the unusual learning environment.

Overall, the Chinese teachers wrote very little about challenges associated with the workshop. Similarly, criticism towards the training was scarce both in the learning journals and the feedback collected by the Tongji HR department. The few expressed challenges were associated with the English language, some single teaching methods, and hesitation about applicability of the learned issues in the Chinese context. All these were mentioned both in learning journals and in feedback. However, the feedback nevertheless included more critical comments than the learning journals, and the experienced challenges were also explained in more detail. This may indicate that the Chinese teachers wanted to be polite to the Finnish educators and therefore refrained from negative comments in their learning journals.

It is worth highlighting that although learning journals and the concept of reflection were novel approaches to the Chinese participants, the quality of reflection in the learning journals was nevertheless adequate; in some cases, it could even be regarded as critical reflection (Mezirow 1990, 1991; see also, e.g. Kember et al. 2008, Clarkeburn and Kettula 2012). As argued earlier, being exposed to different perspectives may start a process of critical reflection that makes a person more aware of his or her own beliefs and hidden presumptions (Mezirow 1990). Hence, because of the mismatch between the Chinese teachers' expectations and the Finnish educators' way of training, it seems that the workshop had acted as an incentive to critical reflection.

There are also some limitations associated with the study. First, because the study was built on rather short learning journals and pieces of feedback, the amount of research material was quite limited. Second, in order to show courtesy, the Chinese teachers may have been tempted to only write about the positive outcomes of the training. On the other hand, the feedback gathered by the Tongji HR department supported the findings based on the learning journals. Third, the methods of analysis of the two data sets (learning journals and feedback) deviated from each other, and thus there may be a risk of a mismatch between the findings. In addition, the feedback data had to be translated from Chinese to English, and this may have affected the findings.

Because one aim of the collaboration was to lower educational/pedagogical boundaries between the two universities, further studies are needed on the reflections written by the Finnish participants. In order to enhance cultural and pedagogical understanding, future research is warranted to determine whether the Finnish and Chinese participants' reflections are similar or whether they differ from each other. In addition, it would be worthwhile to establish what impacts the cooperative nature of the Aalto-Tongji pedagogical collaboration may have had on transnational education.

8. Conclusions

The Chinese university teachers' reflective writings reveal that the Western (here Finnish) educational practices cannot be imported as such, but they have to be adapted to the Chinese context. Furthermore, in a multicultural training, the participants may face challenges that remain unrecognized by the educators. Similarly, the participants may expect the educators to behave in a manner that is unfamiliar to the educators. These findings are supported by several earlier studies (Watkins 2000, Nguen et al 2006, Hu 2010, Heffernan et al 2010, see also Dunn and Wallace 2004) indicating that in transnational education, there may be some prevailing traits in the receiving culture that should be taken into account when planning and conducting tuition. However, it is worth noting that in the current study, a certain amount of unfamiliarity – and even small culture clashes – seemed to have acted as a stimulus for reflection on teaching and learning in the Chinese context. As argued earlier, being exposed to different perspectives may trigger critical reflection on hidden presumptions or structures (e.g. own cultural background or learning culture) (Mezirow 1990). In the Aalto–Tongji pedagogical collaboration, the Chinese university teachers were in the position of “translating” the Western pedagogical solutions to their own classrooms. Thus, they most likely benefitted from critical reflection on the characteristics of the Chinese teaching tradition. When teachers became more aware of their own learning culture and the impact of cultural background on teaching and learning, they were better able to assess what can be built on the existing base, and what should possibly be changed in order to reach the wanted objectives. Thus, in the future transnational trainings,

it is worthwhile to deploy educational elements that trigger reflection. Furthermore, it may even be beneficial to retain some elements of unfamiliarity and diverse perspectives in order to further critical reflection.

The studied pedagogical workshop included several educational elements that were entirely novel to the Chinese participants. Interestingly, the Chinese teachers nevertheless regarded the concepts of constructive alignment (Biggs and Tang 2007) and student-centred/learning-oriented teaching approach (see e.g. Kember 1997) as applicable even after such a short training. This indicates that these concepts may be accessible in several different contexts. Similarly, reflection and learning journals were considered beneficial, although reflective writing was found difficult. However, as argued earlier, the learning journals written after the workshop were of adequate quality, which supports the view that structured reflection and guiding prompts can facilitate reflective writing although students were unfamiliar with learning journal method (see Nückles et al. 2010).

In conclusion, the findings of this study reveal that in order to further develop worthwhile tools for teaching and learning in the Chinese context, there is a need for a genuine collaboration between the educators and the participants. The findings have practical implications for higher education related to developing university pedagogical training in multicultural and multidisciplinary contexts. In particular, the study generates new information for pedagogical cooperation projects with Chinese universities and faculty. Furthermore, because the findings of the study add information on the Chinese university teachers' views on learning and teaching, the findings are also useful for Western teachers who collaborate and work with Chinese teachers and students.

Address:

Kirsi Kettula
Strategic Support for Research and Education
Aalto University
PO Box 11120, FI-00076 AALTO, Finland
Tel.: +358 50 3468875
E-mail: kirsi.kettula@gmail.com

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