

**HuaiYin University to Sam Houston State University: Embedding Culture into a
Curriculum**

James W. Hynes, PhD

Department of Curriculum & Instruction

Director of the Center for International Education

Sam Houston State University

Huntsville, TX.

jwh009@shsu.edu

Andrey Koptelov, PhD

Department of Curriculum & Instruction

Sam Houston State University

Huntsville, TX.

Key words – Culture, China, Mali, Uganda and Amish

Abstract

This qualitative study examined the best way to embed the American culture into an EC-6 certificate program for undergraduate students from the People's Republic of China. Three previous studies were examined to determine ways culture was embedded in the curriculum in Mali, Uganda and Amish communities in the U.S. It was determined that a combination of face-to-face classroom activities coupled with the selected uses of technology would produce the desired results.

Introduction

Educational praxis in countries as diverse as Mali, Uganda, People's Republic of China and the U.S. frequently have common content in most subjects including the social sciences. While the delivery of the lessons, the quality of the teaching materials and the depths of the complexities addressed will vary from country to country, university to university or teacher to teacher, the one constant has always been the beliefs and customs (culture) through which the lessons are delivered are a country's own.

When Sam Houston State University (SHSU) signed a Memorandum of Understanding with HuaiYin University (HU) to study in the United States, the researchers at SHSU inquired what specific outcomes were expected for the students from HU. They were told the students needed to learn the curriculum and instructional designs used by elementary education teacher candidates at SHSU. The administrators from HU emphasized the Chinese students needed to learn the culture of the U.S. SHSU was asked to teach EC-6 teacher candidates to be independent thinkers, innovative and self-directed. HU wanted them to experience many of the positives of our culture through the curriculum.

While we felt comfortable with the task of teaching curriculum and instructional methodology to the students, deciding how to ensure embedding the U.S. culture into the curriculum felt as if it might present more of a challenge to our faculty. What instructional design would best enable SHSU to fulfill its' promise to imbed the American culture of independent thinking and innovation with a focus on self-directed learning into the curriculum?

This qualitative study examined the steps taken to determine the best way to embed American culture into a curriculum for undergraduate EC-6 Chinese students from the People's Republic of China. By examining how other cultures were embedded in the instructional designs in Mali, a Muslim country, Uganda, a Christian country, as well as the Amish (an Anabaptist Christian community in the United States), a template for use in this project was developed.

Literature Review

Snowman and McCown quoting Banks, Gollnick & Chinn wrote, “Culture is a term that describes how a group of people perceives the world; formulates beliefs; evaluates objects, ideas, and experiences; and behaves. It can be thought of as a blueprint that guides the ways in which individuals within a group do such important things as communicate with others (both verbally and nonverbally), handle time and space, express emotions, and approach work and play. The concept of culture typically includes ethnic groups but can also encompass religious beliefs and socioeconomic status (Banks, 2009; Gollnick & Chinn, 2013)” (p. 151). Senechal (2010) noted that “curriculum is an outline of what should be taught” (p. 25). Bello & Bn Ibrahim (2015) discussed the role of higher education and culture in developing a country that is sound financially. Yang (2015) stated the following

Higher education is deeply rooted in culture, Human civilizations of diverse regions of the world have had their various higher learning traditions. The most fundamental challenge for China’s higher education is cultural.

Methodology

We began by examining previous studies we had done looking at how culture played a role in the educational process. The education systems examined were both formal and informal. Vocational training was also reviewed since we had noted the similarities of desired measurable outcomes in all educational environments. The participants of these studies were educators, educational administrators, government officials and business men in Mali, Uganda and selected Amish communities in Ohio and Indiana. The primary data collection strategy was through face to face interviews with follow-up examination of selected text books and photographs from Mali, Uganda and the Amish. All of the participants were part of a series of projects that focused on sustainable educational and agricultural development.

Since 2004, the lead author has worked in international settings helping to establish procedures primarily for developing educational capacity and sustainable food production techniques using Modernized Relic Technology developed by the Amish communities in North America. This ongoing work has taken place from central Asia to sub-Sahara Africa. During this time, he frequently interacted with faculty and administrators from universities as well as teachers and principals in elementary and secondary schools. His work in the Amish communities has been ongoing for several decades.

Instrument

These qualitative studies relied on face to face interviews conducted on site in the countries of Mali and Uganda as well as in Amish communities in Ohio and Indiana, U.S.A. The interview questions were developed through literature reviews, trial interviews and focus group meetings. The interviews questions were semi-structured, semi-structured and open ended. A

sample of the questions can be found in Appendix A. In the section below, the findings of those studies have provided a basis to develop a program to ensure embedding our American culture into the curriculum for the Chinese students.

Findings

Mali

The participants included the governmental ministers, university administrators at the University of Bamako, university department chairs, faculty and elementary/secondary teachers in the Bamako/Segou region – 32 people. All were males with the exception of 2 females. They ranged in age from 30 to 55 years old. While all of the elementary and secondary teachers received their formal training in Mali, most of the participants earned their terminal degrees outside of Mali, primarily in France, selected west African nations and Russia.

In Mali the elementary and secondary curriculums and the lessons were determined, developed and supervised by the Minister of Education. On any given day the Minister could look at a master synopsis of the schedule of courses and classes that had to be taught that particular day. The curriculum was primarily modeled after the French system. There was a scarcity of qualified educators. All teachers dealt with limited supplies, textbooks, desks, chairs, electricity and even chalk and a blackboard in the classrooms. This was particularly true in rural impoverished districts. All teachers relied on memorization by the students as the primary means for learning.

With the Ministry of Education controlling what was to be taught every day and resources available to the teachers limited, culture and values were acquired by students through art (painting, sculpture and music) Appendix B. Students and parents alike listened to the ubiquitous radio stations throughout the country for information that they deemed important.

Many of the stations had a very limited broadcasting radius (20 to 25 miles). The stations had scheduled programs, often giving extension type lessons such as programs detailing how to store food (85% of the country is involved in agriculture), health and sanitation, women empowerment and the education of girls.

In the classrooms, teachers often taught the norms and values of the Malian society via posters. The following 3 posters were hung in a thatched roof 1 room school house with a mud floor north of Segue, Mali.

1. In our school girls and boys are truly treated as equals.

2. What is a school that is friendly to children, friendly to girls? It's a school where children's rights are well respected.

3. The school must be a place that
 1. Protects children's health.
 2. Helps a child to succeed
 3. Welcomes and protects all children.
 4. Assures equality between girls and boys.
 5. Allows families, communities, and the children to be involved and participate.

Uganda

There were 38 participants from Uganda. 22 were elementary/secondary teachers and administrators. 16 taught at the university level or were active administrators in the National Teachers Union. 18 of the participants were female. Through the interviews and school visits, it was determined the embedding of culture in the curriculum was constant whether in an elementary school or a tertiary institution. The elementary and secondary schools had often been originally begun by missionaries – 85% of the country is Christian. The Christian names were not changed even when the schools became public institutions. Many of the schools, particularly in rural areas, consisted of buildings for instruction and farms to grow food for the teachers. While there is a standard curriculum for the country, the regional differences in instructional design and learning outcomes were quite stark. Private schools are available for those who can afford it.

There are efforts underway to change the make-up of the teaching community. The norm has been for elementary teachers in the townships to be female while in rural schools they are males. While there are 52 major languages in Uganda the language of instruction has been English but now the local language must be used whenever possible.

Culture was embedded by including multi-discipline lessons plans that allowed the teachers to include health, nutrition and food production (primary concerns in Uganda) into almost every lesson. This was observed in classrooms with 115 students (3rd. grade). Once again charts were used throughout schools as well as painted messages on buildings. The schools often did not have formal instructional materials or even electricity. Teachers had to create their instructional materials by hand. After suffering through a devastating 25-year civil war, the often

cultural origin of that strife had to be and was addressed. Healing began with knowing who you are. For example, one's name told the history, community and tribal origins. Appendix C.

A sample of the posters trying to embed cultural norms among the students are shared below.

1. Relating with Others in an Acceptable Way

2. Interacting, Exploring, Knowing and Using my Environment

3. Taking Care of Myself for Proper Growth and Development

4. Thematic Curriculum – Appendix D

Amish

Twelve male Amish educators, school board members, businessmen and administrators were interviewed. They ranged in age from 27 to 74 years old. The Amish have communities throughout North and South America. They are Anabaptists originally from Switzerland. They live in communities located primarily in rural countryside areas. While they were originally farmers, most now work in the service and construction industries. They do not have electricity in their homes and use horses as their primary means of transportation and farming.

In many communities an advisory committee will suggest the curriculum and then a school board will formally approve the programs. Amish formal education ends at age 14. The 3 pillars of their society are religion, family and work. The Amish cultural values are embedded into a child at home, their formal education, and reinforced in their daily work and social lives. The following quotes are from business men, school board members and teachers.

Training for future employment begins when a child starts to walk and learns to understand the concepts of yes and no. These along with work ethic and discipline should be learned from the mother at home. Culture is important.

The formal education a child receives is designed to make them workforce ready for a community that values a very strong work ethic.

Employees are usually hired at 10 to 16 years of age. Light work and learning the culture and processes of the workplace are important. Place them where they are most likely to succeed.

Teachers should use a curriculum that allows one to be a better communicator/person.

Needs of the community are very important in determining if additional curriculum should be taught (i.e., reading a measuring tape or working a calculator.)

In addition to their religion, families and work ethic, the Amish possess a strong sense of community and practice self-directed learning to maintain their economic and social fabric. This cultural attribute was confirmed by interviewing several teachers and former teachers.

Learn enough to teach yourself. What we learn at home and working together as a community makes us successful.

Learning takes place in an environment that is friendly to our culture

Procedures

These 3 studies followed procedures set forth by Lincoln and Guba (1985), Erlandson, Harris, Skipper and Allen (1993), Merriam (1998), and Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (2012) and applied trustworthiness quality criteria. The field notes were organized and transcribed using the procedures outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Member checks (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012) were used to confirm the veracity of the information provided by the participants. This was accomplished by reading back to the participants the information they provided at the end of

the interviews as well as calling them on the telephone or communicating with them via email or Skype after the interviews were analyzed.

Validity and reliability were enhanced by using triangulation – three interviews for developing the set of questions used in the study (focus group), participant interviews, and observation in classrooms, office meetings, manufacturing plants and workshops. This study was delimited by samples in major population regions of Mali and Uganda as well as the Amish communities located in Ohio and Indiana. The limitations of the study come from its sources of information as well as the lead researcher's own experience working in sub-Saharan Africa and his long standing relationships with several Amish men who participated in his meetings.

All interviews were conducted face-to-face. This requirement allowed for a certain level of comfort to be felt by the participants. The interviews were scheduled and confirmed by telephone and or email 2 weeks prior to the actual meetings. In some cases, the appointments were set months in advance or (in Africa) the day they were held. The interviews lasted 30 min to 2 hours. Emerging themes were identified using the protocols outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985). If participants voiced a point 4 or more times, it was considered an emerging theme.

Trustworthiness was assured by credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability as proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Credibility was enhanced by the similar responses of the participants to the questions in the study regardless if they lived in Mali, Uganda or in an Amish community. Transferability maybe limited to only the HU students. Dependability was possible by asking rephrased questions when necessary. Confirmability was achieved by reading back to the respondents their answers and allowing them to correct their responses or add to them. Appendix A is a list of the questions used in this study.

Choosing an approach

After reviewing the aforementioned studies, it was determined the best way to embed American culture into SHSU's curriculum for the Chinese students into the EC-6 program would be to borrow from the findings of the studies in Mali, Uganda and the Amish communities. It was decided that face-to-face instruction in China using technology to engage the students would be the best way to move the students towards the outcomes we all sought since it would allow the Chinese students to become familiar with American classroom educators as well as the American instructional design.

Six faculty members taught (in English) 2 courses each over a 2 week period in face to face classrooms. After the initial trip, the subsequent faculty teaching assignments included 1 person who had taught there previously. Some of the approaches that were taken in the classroom are noted below.

- Smart phones were used to teach Erickson's Theory of Human Development. Appendix E
- Learning Erickson's Stages of Human Development. The students had never worked in groups or with posters before this exercise. Appendix F
- The students were introduced to project based learning techniques. They reviewed each other's papers. Appendix G
- Appendix H shows a Chinese gallery walk where students wrote opinions
- Appendix J – blending 2 cultures by using a Chinese paper game to explain Piaget

From an initial cohort of 39 students, 10 students were found to be sufficiently proficient in English to attend SHSU. Remedial English programs were offered to the students who needed additional help with “education English” in the summer of 2016. In the fall of 2016, they will begin classes for a certificate in Elementary Education.

Discussion

It is still too early to determine if the program SHSU designed will accomplish all it has been charged to do. The Chinese students will begin their formal classes in late August.

Using technology in the classroom immediately caught the eye of the Chinese students. This helped offset the initial reluctance the part of the students to interact with their American teachers. When classes first began, it took time for the students to become comfortable with asking questions of the SHSU faculty. Their reluctance to speaking in front of the class was almost painful to observe (all of the lessons delivered by the teams were taped). The students hesitated when informed they should ask questions. When the American faculty wanted to move the desks in the classroom to promote teamwork and interactions between faculty and students, the initial reaction on the part of the Chinese was shock. They told the faculty it was forbidden – it actually wasn't.

Once the students overcame the culture shock of working with the American faculty, there was a real eagerness to move forward. The classes took on the feel of excitement and expectation on the part of both the students and the faculty. The students daily had dozens of questions about life in America and in particular life of their peers in the U.S. They eagerly looked forward to their studies in the U.S.

The impact of this program on the faculty at SHSU and the U.S. students has been quite profound. When the project got underway, it was difficult to find faculty who wanted to teach in China. There were very few student volunteers who wanted to act in a hosting/entertainment capacity when the Chinese came to America. That has all changed. Now, there is a waiting list to teach the next cohort in China. There are several service organizations and a sorority who have committed to bringing the Chinese into the “culture of Sam”!

Implications/Conclusions

Thus far this program has been very successful for the Chinese students and the College of Education. At SHSU, we have sought to internationalize our program and this has certainly been a positive beginning. The Center for International Education began 3 years ago with 6 Advisory Board members. This year we will have 20 members half of whom are first time participants. The faculty at HU are using this opportunity to come to SHSU as visiting scholars. We already have completed joint publications and conference presentations.

Using the approach taken with HU has helped with winning grants and writing MOU’s for further collaboration with universities in Russia, South Africa, Costa Rica and Australia. Our expectations call for spreading of the international cooperation we have enjoyed across the campus at SHSU. We now have engaged with 2 additional Colleges to further our efforts as a university with a globalization interest.

References

- Bello, Muhammad Ibrahim., & Bn Ibrahim, Muhammad. (2015). Organisational capability in internalising quality culture in higher institution. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 6(29). Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1081278.pdf>
- Erlandson, D.A., Harris, E.L., Skipper, B.L., & Allen, D. (1993). *Doing naturalistic inquiry*. London, England: Sage Publications.
- Fitch, F. (2003). Inclusion, exclusion, and ideology: Special education students' changing sense of self. *The Urban Review*, 35(3), 233-252. doi: 10.1023/A:1025733719935
- Fraenkel, J. R., Wallen, N. E., & Hyun, H. H. (2012). *How to design and evaluate research in education*. New York, New York: McGraw Hill.
- Lincoln, Y.S. & Guba, E.G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- McMillan, J. H., & Schumacher, S. (2010). *Research in education: Evidence based inquiry* (7th ed.). Boston: Pearson
- Merriam, S. B., (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Snowman, J. & McCown, R. (2015). *Psychology applied to teaching*. Stamford: Cengage.
- Senechal, D. (2010). The spark of specifics: How a strong curriculum enlivens classroom and school culture. *American Educator*, 34(4), 24-29. Retrieved from http://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/periodicals/Senechal_2.pdf
- Yang, R., (2015). Reassessing China's higher education development: a focus on academic culture. *Asia Pacific Educational Review*, 16, 527-535. doi: 10.1007/s12564-015-9397-2

Appendix A

Interview Questions

At what age do students begin their formal education?

What is the typical length of a school day?

Please share the subjects covered in the curriculums for elementary and secondary schools.

Are there differences in the curriculums in the various regions (states) of the country?

Are special education programs available for those who need it?

What are the formal educational requirements to become an instructor in the elementary, secondary and tertiary institutions in your country?

Do you measure student satisfaction with the programs in your schools?

Please list your concerns as a teacher in order of most to least important.

Who ensures the curriculum taught is the curriculum sought by the stakeholders?

What are the requirements to be employed as a teacher in your country, community?

Do you address culture in your educational programs?

How is your need to maintain your (nations', community's) culture addressed?

Do you seeking self-directed learning opportunities for your students?

How do you raise their self-efficacy to enable them to become self-directed in their learning?

Discuss the professional development opportunities for your teachers.

Appendix B



Appendix C



Appendix D

THEMATIC CURRICULUM

What?

The thematic curriculum is a theme based curriculum designed around the learners' experiences

Why?

To enhance the development of literacy numeracy and life skills

How?

Use of familiar/local language
Through development of

learning outcomes and competences.

Using continuous assessment

Using class teacher system

T - Teachers

H - Have

E - Every

M - Mandate to enhance

A - And use the

T - Themes approach to

I - Inspire

C - Children's learning.

Appendix E

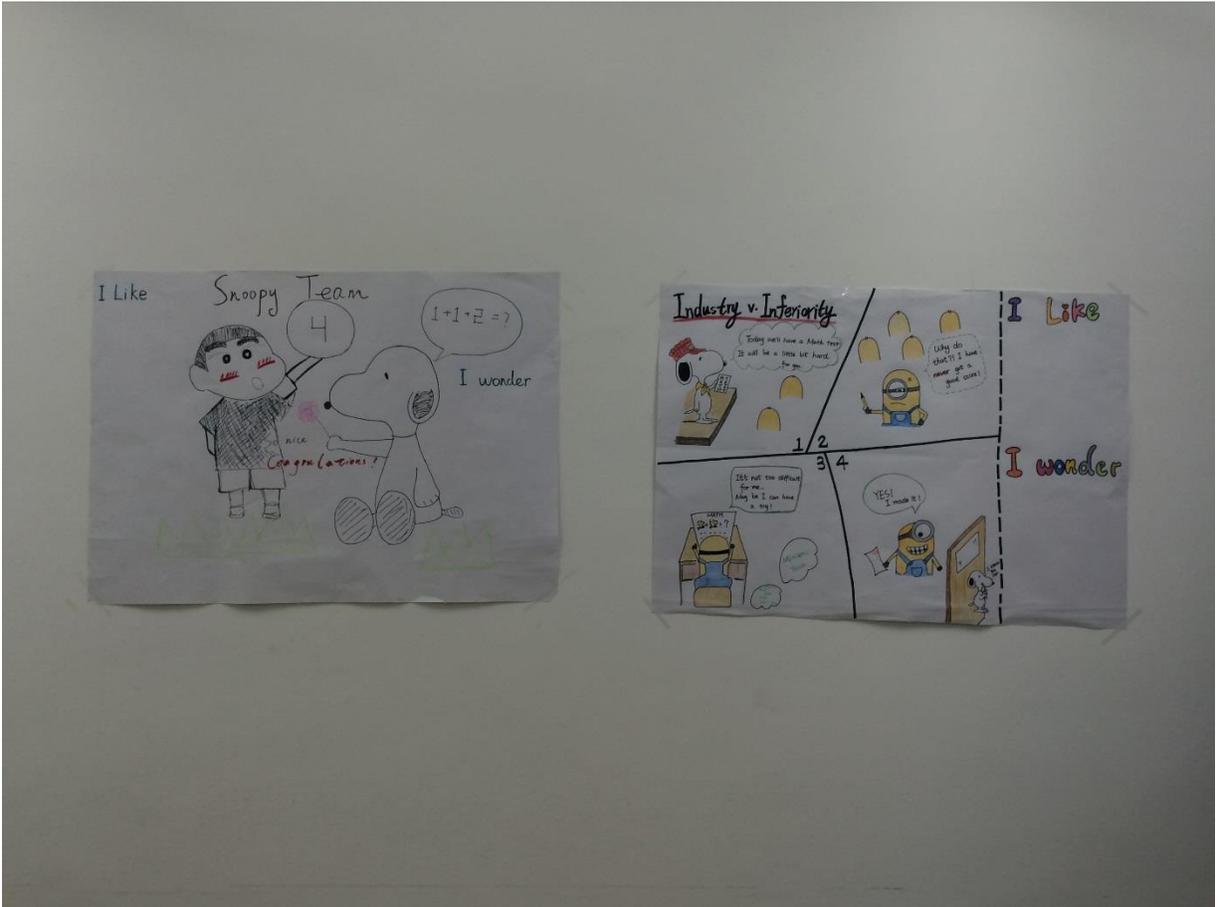
Learning about Erickson's Theory of Human Development using smart phones



Appendix F

Erickson's Stages of Human Development

The students had never worked in groups or with posters



Appendix G

Project based learning – I like and I wonder about Reviewed everyone's poster

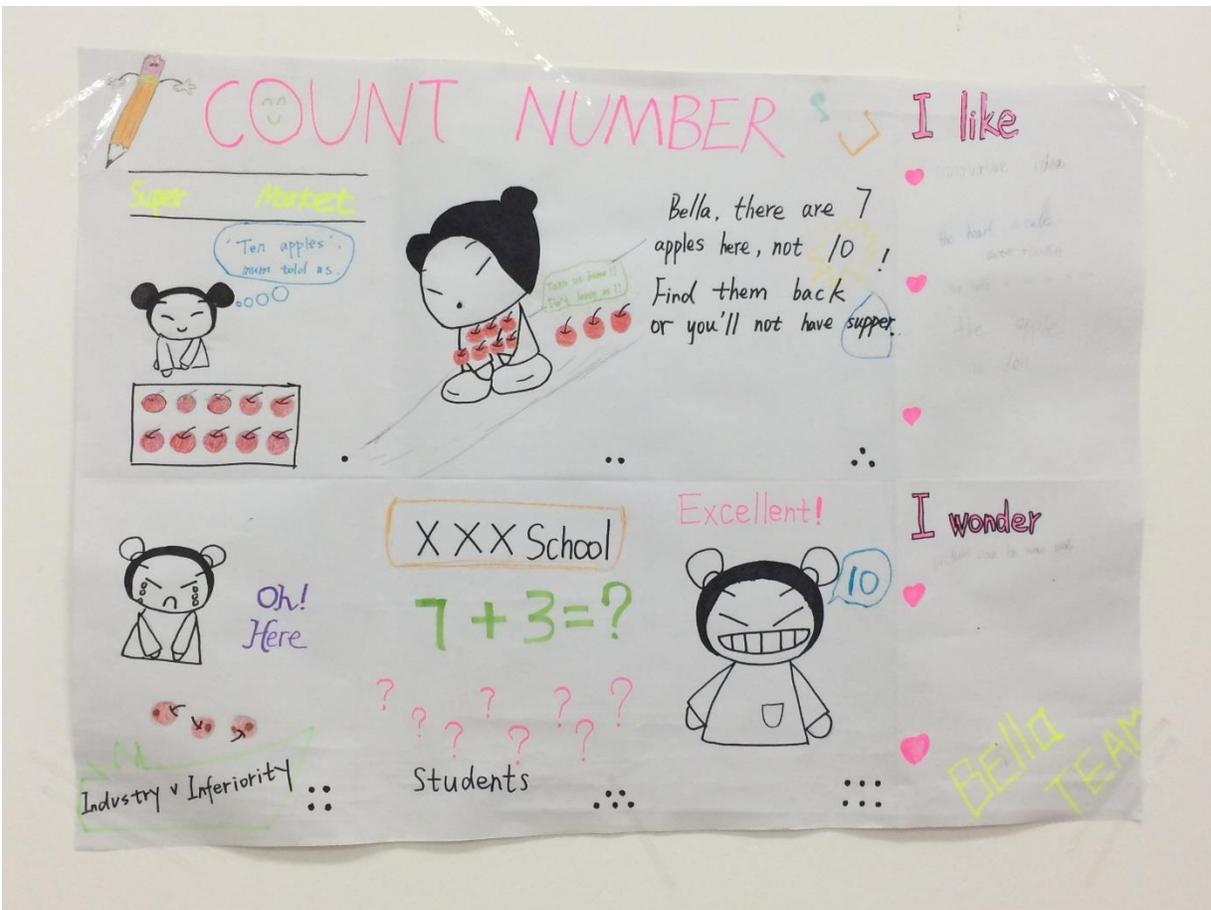


Appendix H

Project based learning

Chinese gallery walk

Students wrote opinions



Appendix J

Blending 2 cultures into a curriculum

Chinese paper game to explain Piaget

