Co-Teaching Chinese Classes: Collaboration between University of Missouri Confucius Institute and Columbia Public Schools

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Introduction
The collaboration between the University of Missouri Confucius Institute (MUCI) and the Columbia Public Schools (CPS) of Missouri is by way of co-teaching Chinese classes in six middle schools and two high schools during the 2016-2017 academic year.

During the Spring 2017 semester, Dr. Ze Wang, an associate professor of education from the University of Missouri (MU) conducted interviews with MUCI volunteer teachers and CPS teachers who were co-teaching Chinese courses. In addition, Dr. Wang collected survey data from students in these Chinese classes. In this report, aggregated interview data as well as results from student surveys are included.

Brief History of the Collaboration
As an important component of its mission, MUCI partners with CPS to bring Mandarin (the official Chinese language) to CPS schools. The partnership began in 2011. At CPS, all 6th graders take three weeks of Spanish, three weeks of French and three weeks of Chinese for a total of nine weeks of Exploratory Language. Each curriculum includes basic vocabulary, such as numbers and days of the week, and short phrases and questions that allow students to give and receive information about themselves and their peers.

Starting in the 7th grade, in selected middle schools and high schools, students can choose to take Chinese classes. Chinese 1A, the basic level of Chinese, was taught in six middle schools in the 2016-2017 academic year. Across all the six middle schools, there were 74 students taking Chinese 1A during the 2016-2017 academic year. Chinese 1, which includes Chinese 1A and Chinese 1B, first taught in one high school in the 2014-2015 academic year, was also offered in another high school in the 2016-2017 academic year. In addition, Chinese 2 and Chinese 3, the next levels after Chinese 1, were offered in the high school where Chinese 1 had been first taught. Due to the small number of students who took Chinese 2 and Chinese 3, the two classes were combined. The number of high school students who signed up for Chinese during the 2016-2017 academic year was 44. Chinese 1A, Chinese 1, Chinese 2, and Chinese 3 were all academic year-long courses. Students took the class every day or every other day, depending on the schedules set by specific schools.

A co-teaching model (Heck & Bacharach, 2014) was adopted for Chinese classes at CPS: there is a CPS teacher and a Chinese teacher in the same classroom. The Chinese teachers are from MUCI and are native speakers of Chinese. They have never taught in an American classroom before coming to Columbia, Missouri. The CPS teachers are experienced teachers of CPS’ World Languages program.
There were six pairs of co-teachers for Chinese 1A for middle schools, each pair with a different MUCI teacher and a different CPS teacher. There was one pair of co-teachers for Chinese 1 for both high schools and one pair of co-teachers for the combined Chinese 2/3 in the high school where the course was offered. These two pairs had two different MUCI teachers but the same CPS teacher. Therefore, altogether, there were eight MUCI teachers and seven CPS teachers involved in teaching Chinese 1A, Chinese 1, or Chinese 2/3. Most of the MUCI teachers also co-taught the three-week long Exploratory Language of Chinese for 6th-graders, often with different co-teachers from CPS than the ones for higher grades. One MUCI teacher only co-taught 6th-grade and was not involved in teaching academic-year long Chinese courses at higher grades.

**Brief Description of Data Collection**

Dr. Ze Wang interviewed nine MUCI teachers and six CPS teachers. The interviews focused on co-teachers’ past teaching experiences, previous trainings, interactions with students and co-teachers, perceived obstacles, and suggestions for improvement in the future. MUCI teachers were also asked to compare the American classroom with the Chinese classroom. Each interview lasted from 30 to 75 minutes. Interviews were conducted in Chinese with MUCI teachers and in English with CPS teachers. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed and translated into English if necessary.

In addition, an online survey was filled out by students who took Chinese 1A, Chinese 1, or Chinese 2/3. The online survey asked questions regarding motivation and engagement in the Chinese classes. Two open-ended questions were also asked. The first was “Why do you want to learn Chinese?” The next question asked students if they liked to have two teachers in the Chinese class (Yes, No, Does not matter). If a student chose either Yes or No, another open-ended question would be asked: “Why do you like having two teachers in the Chinese class?” or “Why do you not like to have two teachers in the Chinese class?” A total of 55 students consented and filled out the online survey.

The project was approved by MU’s Institutional Review Board and by the CPS’ Psychological Services and Research Request Committee and was funded by a University of Missouri Richard Wallace Faculty Incentive Grant that was awarded to Dr. Ze Wang. For interviews, written consent was obtained from teachers. For student survey, written consent was obtained from students aged 18 years or older and from both parents and students if the student was younger than 18.

**Results of Interviews with MUCI Teachers**

The nine MUCI teachers interviewed were all female and all had a bachelor’s degree in arts majors. Six of them were enrolled in graduate programs at Chinese universities pursuing master’s degrees. Eight of them had studied or were studying languages (English, Chinese, or German). They had diverse teaching experience of less than 3 years in China (e.g., tutoring, part-time teaching). One MUCI teacher had taught Chinese for over two years and another had taught English for two years. Previous teaching experiences of the others were more sporadic including occasionally tutoring and short-term/non-professional language teaching. Their motivations to volunteer for Confucius Institute included putting what they had learned from college into practice, going overseas to experience foreign cultures, promoting the Chinese culture, and opportunities to practice oral English. They all went through a rigorous selection process before joining MUCI.
Trainings Received
All interviewees indicated that they received three types of training, by Hanban, MUCI and CPS, respectively. All interviewees participated in most parts of the trainings and indicated that Hanban’s training was most formal and covered a variety of topics including educational theories, teaching practices, cultural promotion, cultural background of the destination country (in this case, the U.S.), and general safety issues.

Interviewees all agreed that comprehensive training by Hanban was necessary. It covered almost every aspect of working and living in the U.S. and information provided was relevant and important. When asked about the most helpful part of Hanban’s training, every interviewee responded that simulated teaching sessions and case studies were very useful. One interviewee said: “In simulated teaching sessions, we prepared lectures using required materials and then taught for 10-15 minutes to our classmates, who pretended to be the students. After my teaching, my classmates would give me some suggestions about my lecture, so I could make changes and improve for my next simulated teaching.” Quoted from another interviewee: “The most useful part was [the training about] classroom management. In terms of teaching…I think we probably have very similar amount of experience. However, teachers’ ability level is mostly reflected by their classroom management skills. If one has better ability in classroom management than others, he or she would create an ordered and harmonious atmosphere in the classroom and every student would feel respected. And, he or she would attract every student to participate in classroom activities. Even a student with limited Chinese foundations could make progress.”

Two of the interviewees also mentioned that previous volunteers were invited to share their experiences during Hanban’s training; and they thought that part was very useful as they were able to learn from these previous volunteers.

The most useful part of Hanban’s training was also the component that interviewees thought should be improved. Although four interviewees thought Hanban’s training was great and did not provide suggestions for improvement, four out of the other five thought simulated teaching sessions and case studies should be expanded to be a major proportion of Hanban’s training. Two interviewees commented that the theory learning part of Hanban’s training was too long. For example, one said: “I have a linguistic background, so those theories about languages were not new for me; but they still wanted [people like me] to relearn the theories. On the other hand, for students in other majors, I think those sessions were too theoretical. Hanban should focus on practical teaching that we can directly use in our future teaching.” Other interviewees made suggestions for Hanban to improve its training. One interviewee responded, “I know there are a lot of American or Canadian students studying in China, particularly in Beijing. If Hanban could invite them to be our ‘guest students’ and ask their opinions about our teaching practices, we could learn more about the differences between Chinese and American classroom teaching.” Another interviewee pointed out that if Hanban had known the background of the students they were going to teach, and could group volunteers according to students’ background (e.g., grade levels), the training would be more targeted.

Another “big” training was a conference in Kentucky organized by Confucius Institutes in the U.S. during the school year. At this conference, Confucius Institute teachers from all over the U.S. gathered together and shared their teaching methods, activities and other teaching-related
ideas. Interviewees in general had very favorable experience at this conference. Three interviewees mentioned that it would be better if more trainings/conferences like this were offered and if the training were longer.

Locally, the trainings by MUCI and the CPS were more like seminars and discussion sessions. Such trainings include safety issue information within a specific city area and specific instructions of classroom teaching at the very beginning of the academic year. CPS organized meetings for all World Languages teachers and MUCI teachers are invited to these meetings, which were held weekly or monthly, depending on the specific schools. For CPS’ trainings, one interviewee mentioned that she was the only MUCI teacher in her high school who participated – the other MUCI teachers taught at middle school levels; so it was difficult to get something that was very useful from other teachers. She hoped that more high school teachers could get together and share experiences. Another interviewee thought the materials CPS used for Chinese classes in the 6th grade were outdated. One interviewee specifically talked about her experience with her co-teacher. She hoped that CPS’ training could create opportunities for her and her co-teacher to get familiar with each other ahead of time and to agree on responsibilities in the classroom.

Based on this information, the MUCI teachers would like their training, whether provided by Hanban, or locally, to be very practical and to provide instructional skills they could readily use.

**Perceptions of Co-Teaching Model**

**CPS co-teacher’s role in the classroom.** All the interviewees stated that their co-teachers were mainly responsible for classroom management and they themselves mainly focused on teaching the content. Five out of the nine MUCI teachers talked about how their co-teachers gave advice and suggestions on their teaching including how to design cultural activities that were appropriate for their students. One mentioned that her co-teacher took charge of the brief warm-up before every class; another mentioned that her co-teacher was responsible for a small portion of teaching the content. When asked about student assessment, five out of the nine interviewees responded that their co-teachers were responsible for part of the students’ grading and evaluation. When asked about communication with co-teachers after class, seven indicated that they communicated with their co-teachers about teaching and students after class.

**Expectations of co-teacher.** Two interviewees talked about their occasional dilemmas working with an over-enthusiastic co-teacher. Their co-teachers would sometimes interrupt the regular teaching flow or give different instruction to a student even if the MUCI teachers had provided instruction. Thus, the two interviewees thought the responsibilities for MUCI and CPS co-teachers should be clearly specified at the very beginning of the academic year. Because most MUCI co-teachers were only expected to serve one year as volunteers, they thought they did not have enough time to develop facilitating collaborative relationships with their CPS co-teachers if expectations were not set beforehand. They thought it would be better if experienced CPS co-teachers could specify how the co-teachers should work together with MUCI teachers.

**Teaching Practices**

**Prepare teaching materials.** For teaching 6th grade, all interviewees indicated that they did not have a textbook, and they adopted a workbook developed by CPS. This workbook included ten topics, and each teacher could choose what to use and created their own PowerPoint slides. For
7th and 8th grade teaching, a textbook called *Experiencing Chinese 1A* was used (the class level is called Chinese 1A). All MUCI teachers teaching Chinese 1A used the same teaching outline set by MUCI, and they held weekly meetings with their supervisor, Dan Li (Chinese director of MUCI) to go over their teaching content for that week. During their weekly meetings, they would also brainstorm specific teaching activities. Each MUCI teacher created their own PowerPoint slides and other teaching materials. However, the topics to be covered and the teaching pace were consistent across all Chinese 1A classes.

**Assessing student learning.** For 6th graders, there was no formal and written assessment to evaluate students’ learning because the goal was to introduce the Chinese language and culture to the students. For Chinese 1A classes, the majority of the interviewees stated that the assessment was made up with three parts: (a) students’ classroom behavior (e.g., participation, answering questions), (b) students’ grades on assignments, and (c) students’ test grades. Interviewees indicated that MUCI teachers worked together to create assignments and tests. For grades, some MUCI teachers were solely responsible for assigning and entering grades in the school system, while others mentioned that they worked with their co-teachers to assign grades.

**Challenges and barriers faced as co-teacher in the American classroom.** Of the nine interviewees, six pointed out one challenge in the American classroom was related to classroom management: Students in the classroom were very hard to control; some students were not interested in learning Chinese, and some chatted about things irrelevant to class. At times, students even skipped the class without any advance notice. Another challenge mentioned by one interviewee was that students’ had great difficulty in learning Chinese vowels and the tones. At the same time, interviewees indicated that they had limited knowledge about American culture, and they did not know how to engage young American students. Two interviewees stated that they had limited background knowledge about Chinese culture and that they lacked academic background in the grammar and structure of Chinese language. Two interviewees indicated that they had difficulty using English to teach the Chinese language. Some quotes from the interviews:

“For example, it is not possible to teach lessons all the time. Sometimes, I may need to chat with students. I do not know what American students’ hobbies and interests are. I do not know what TV series or cartoons they are watching, or what movies they are watching. Therefore, I find it is very hard to connect with them.”

“One student was distracted from class and also disrupted my classroom teaching. Later, I told my American co-teacher, and we two met the vice school principle to ask for help.”

“It is hard to control and manage the class. My authority as a teacher is very hard to develop among American students.”

**Perceptions of American Students**

**Effort by students.** When asked, “Do you think your students study hard enough? (e.g., do they spend enough time learning Chinese?),” three interviewees responded that the majority of their students studied hard. On the other hand, three interviewees responded that their students did not spend enough time on learning Chinese and thought they should have studied harder. The rest
three interviewees thought that some of their students studied hard and other students needed more guidance and more push from teachers.

**Motivation to learn Chinese.** Five interviewees indicated that the reason students were motivated to learn Chinese was their interest in Chinese culture: Their students think Chinese culture (e.g., Chinese history) is very interesting and they want to visit China sometime in the future. Another three interviewees indicated that their students believed China is getting stronger and learning Chinese can make them more prepared for the competitive job market.

**Differences between Chinese and American students.** Eight of the nine interviewees shared the impression that American students were more active than Chinese students in terms of classroom behaviors: American students are more willing to ask and answer questions and to discuss with fellow students. At times, American students may be overactive, and they may disrupt the teachers’ teaching plan. Some students may not finish their homework on time. Chinese students, in contrast, are quiet in class and they listen to the teachers’ instructions very attentively. Chinese students are usually shy and do not always take the initiative to answer the teachers’ questions. In terms of class performance, four interviewees indicated that American students are more creative and that they learn Chinese because they have personal interest in learning the language. American students have more freedom to choose what they want to learn, and they are more independent in making decisions. They focus more on developing their interests and exploring what they want to learn, whereas Chinese students may focus more on earning good grades. Quotes from two interviewees:

“American students are more willing to answer my questions, but they are also very easily distracted by other things. So, I need to think about how to maintain their interest level and how to make them feel excited.”

“Chinese students are shy. American students are more active, and they can just walk around during class period and eat food and snacks whenever they want. Some students are so active that they disrupted my classroom.”

**Life Experience in Midwest U.S.**
The interviewees indicated that they enjoyed life in the college town of Columbia, Missouri. Six of them mentioned that local people here were very nice and friendly. At the same time, all of them talked about the public transportation system and thought it was not convenient and that it was outdated. Two interviewees thought there were only limited entertainments in town.

**Suggestions by Interviewees**
Two interviewees thought the one-year program for volunteers was too short. One said: “When you come to a new place, you need some time to get familiar with every aspect of life there. This process normally takes three to six months. We only have one year here, after we get familiar with things, we don’t have much time left.” The other one said: “Students have new Chinese teachers every year. It’s better if we can have another year to teach; and for students, they don’t have to get familiar with new teachers every year.”
One suggested that MUCI should provide specific responsibilities and set boundaries in the future. For example, sometimes when there were some specific problems or issues to deal with, they did not know whom to ask for help.

**Results of Interviews with CPS Teachers**

A total of six CPS teachers were interviewed. They were all female and had master’s degrees in languages or education. Five of them co-taught Chinese in middle schools, and one co-taught at the high school level. All of them had four to twenty years of language teaching experience. Four had co-taught Chinese prior to the 2016-2017 academic year. All of them had professional development trainings on language teaching by way of attending conferences and workshops on general teaching skills, technology support and/or classroom management. Three participated in trainings specifically focusing on Chinese language teaching: One attended a Chinese camp for four days and took Chinese classes for four semesters; one was in her second year of Chinese-learning; and the third traveled to China to receive Chinese language training for seven weeks.

**Perceptions of Co-Teaching Model**

**CPS co-teacher’s role in the classroom.** Consistent with results from interviews with Chinese co-teachers, CPS co-teachers indicated their role in the Chinese classes was mainly classroom management. CPS co-teachers mainly helped Chinese co-teachers to facilitate the class and assisted Chinese co-teachers since they were not familiar with the American classroom and students.

All six interviewees mentioned that they were mainly responsible for classroom management so that their Chinese co-teachers could focus on teaching the content. Three of them mentioned that they were partially involved in teaching. One teacher indicated that she worked with her Chinese co-teacher to develop teaching plans and classroom activities. Another teacher stated that she took charge of warm-up activities at the beginning of every class while the third helped her Chinese co-teacher to plan class activities.

One interviewee stated, “My role as a co-teacher is the American side of it. I know the American classroom, and so I know how an American classroom is run and student behaviors and the rules for the building and the procedures to follow, and so that’s my role.” She also said, “It’s my job to help my co-teacher understand how to set up lessons that work well, that students can follow and that we can make a logical progression and get them to learn the material so that they can use it in the classroom. That’s my role.”

Another interviewee shared similar experience, “The [Chinese] co-teacher has been the one presenting the curriculum, but the American co-teacher has been the one taking care of classroom management such as behavior issues, attendance, any discipline that needs to happen. And also we help each other on games... We work together side by side but each person knows what their strong area is and they teach out of their strength.”

In some cases, it took some time for the co-teachers to try things out before they can work collaboratively. For example, one interviewee mentioned that she tried to step in at first to give supplementary instructions when she thought the Chinese co-teacher did not make the concepts clear. “I wanted to help the volunteer teachers, but I felt like they were acting like – [they were]
being really interrupted. I felt like maybe they didn’t want me to step in and add more explanations or restate what they said.” After consulting with the coordinator of the program, this interviewee indicated that she mainly focused on classroom management later. She said, “Since then, most of the time I just sit and observe. My main focus is classroom management because it's new things for them.”

Another interviewee indicated that she tried to balance her classroom management and the Chinese co-teacher’s authority because she did not want students to think that she was the only one taking charge of students’ behaviors and classroom management. She said, “You know, it’s easier to deal with if one student’s not making good choices, but if the whole class is kind of off topic, then that’s a challenge for how do I try to handle that without interfering with her authority in the classroom. She’s really grown in that a lot, really grown in being able to notice when a particular student’s getting off topic or a group of students is getting off topic and saying, ‘Hey, you need to get back on track, please,’ and just kind of gently redirecting them so that they are able to participate, you know, productively without it kind of growing and escalating into something where it’s now they’re really off topic and things are, you know, things are headed in the wrong direction and I have to step in and say, ‘Hey, this is bad.’ Yeah, I think she’s really grown in that. I would say by the end of the school year, yes, the students definitely viewed her as an authority figure.”

Five CPS teachers indicated that they had communicated with their Chinese co-teachers after class, by talking with their co-teachers in person, or sending E-mail or text messages. The communication was mainly about the Chinese classes and several mentioned that they sometimes talked about other things. One mentioned that she had developed a good friendship with her Chinese co-teachers through these conversations. She stated, “We have talked so much and we're now developing a friendship. We just really like to work together harmoniously, and work out the relationship as we go along.” Another interviewee said she helped her Chinese co-teacher with personal issues such as giving her a ride home. Four interviewees thought their communications with Chinese teachers were in general good and smooth.

**Expectations of co-teacher.** Two interviewees expressed that they had expected a more collaborative teaching style rather than just being “helpers or facilitators” in the classroom. Both mentioned that they would prefer that Chinese co-teachers send them course materials such as Power Point Slides before class so they could get familiar with the content in advance; they said the Chinese co-teachers did not share course materials with them.

One interviewee thought it was part of her job as a CPS co-teacher to be a mentor of her Chinese co-teachers, and she would like to share her teaching experience to help co-teachers learn. She said, “Well, right now, I think the CPS teachers are just supported [sic] roles, usually, most of the time, and behind the scene. They focus on classroom management, but I think the CPS teachers should take the role of guidance [of the Chinese co-teachers].” She also mentioned that teaching time should be rescheduled so that she could help the Chinese co-teachers to clarify instructional responsibilities that were not previously stated clearly. This teacher thought these problems were due to the co-teaching roles being unclear from the beginning, “I don't think it's clear…..I just assume that they don't understand exactly because there's no such thing in China as co-teaching and two teachers in one class. In America too, there are a lot of different styles; it's not just one
style of co-teaching.” She thought the co-teaching model should work like this: “I’m going to clearly tell them this is co-teaching, but this is my class, too.”

Four interviewees were satisfied with their cooperating style with their Chinese co-teachers. One mentioned that she and her Chinese co-teacher made an agreement at the beginning on how to work together, and they worked together to adjust their co-teaching approach throughout the year. She said, “Over the year, we’ve adjusted things or grown together, make different arrangements based on our relationship and on our understanding between each other. I think we’ve done both.”

Teaching Practices

Prepare teaching materials. Four interviewees directly responded to the question on preparation of teaching materials. Of the two interviewees who only co-taught in the 6th grade, one mentioned that they used a lot of iPad games but she did not know who created them; the other stated that she used a book called Exploring Chinese. Of the four interviewees who co-taught Chinese 1A, Chinese 1, and Chinese 2/3, two indicated that they used a book called Experiencing Chinese. CPS teachers worked with their Chinese co-teachers to develop supplemental course materials, such as quizzes, iPad games, worksheets, warm-ups, etc.

Assessing student learning. The five interviewees who co-taught Chinese 1A, Chinese 1, and Chinese 2/3 shared similar ways to assess students’ learning. Specifically, students’ grades were based on quizzes and unit exams taken in class, as well as homework completed after class. One CPS teacher indicated that she also assigned eight to ten warm-up questions for each lesson and asked students to turn in five of them. For 6th grade Chinese classes, there was no formal assessment because the class only lasted three weeks and the main purpose of the class was to introduce the language and culture to students. students’ performance was evaluated solely based on class participation.

Challenges and barriers faced as co-teacher. There were different challenges and barriers. One challenge was related to the co-teaching relationship between the CPS co-teacher and the Chinese co-teacher. One interviewee indicated that she felt a little bit embarrassed when facing with her Chinese co-teacher because they shared every moment together. She felt that her behaviors were observed by the Chinese co-teacher all the time. She expressed, “Yeah, the main challenge for me is sometimes I feel a little embarrassed in front of my co-teacher because the co-teachers see me when I’m at my best, but they also see me when I’m at my worst ‘cause in teaching, sometimes we get extremely tired or frustrated with our students or we’re not always, every moment is not wonderful stellar teaching, so because you share a classroom with someone and you invite them to be with you the whole day, they see you when you’re tired, they see you when you’re frustrated or angry, they see you at all your worst moments as well as knowing you when you’re at your best.”

Another challenge was regarding teaching philosophy. One interviewee thought that the Chinese co-teachers teaching at 6th grade needed to realize that students only had three weeks to learn this language; and that the teachers should make sure students were not overwhelmed. She also believed that teaching should be fun so that students would think that Chinese is interesting. She said, “We’re only here for three weeks, what is it that you wanted to leave with? They’re not
gonna be fluent because it’s only three weeks so you have to have them love the language so by that, they have to get to know you, they have to understand the connection between you and the language and you have to make it simple, but give them the concepts that they really need to learn so that they want to take it for seventh and eighth grade because if you lose them now, they’re not gonna take those classes. So that was a challenge.”

Another challenge was related to the Chinese language itself. Two CPS co-teachers stated that Chinese was very hard to learn. How to teach students the sound and the characters was challenging for CPS and Chinese co-teachers. For example, one interviewee said, “when I come to reading the characters that’s more challenging.” Another said that the biggest challenge was “Definitely Chinese characters, [they’re] really hard.”

**Best part of the co-teaching experience.** Two CPS teachers stated that they enjoyed teaching, and they loved seeing students make progress. Three CPS teachers indicated that they loved learning the cultural part of the Chinese class and building the bridge of communication. Another CPS teacher indicated that she enjoyed making connections with the Chinese co-teachers. Some quotes from the interviews are:

“Gosh. I just enjoy teaching. I enjoy the relationships with my kiddos. I enjoy when they enjoy the learning, and when they get it for the first time, and there’s a little light that goes on, you know? That, yeah. That’s what keeps me coming back to the classroom.”

“I love to see the kids, one of my favorite part of teaching is I love to see how quickly they learn…I love culture. I love the culture. I think with their group age level, to be able to keep our kids interested in that hard part of the language, we need to get them involved with the cultural part of it. The music, the food, the cities, the families, the culture part.”

“I would say the best part is making friends with the co-teachers because I love the idea that we’re getting to know each other across cultures. I enjoy finding out about their life and seeing pictures of their hometown or their family, and then I enjoy the idea of keeping connection with them.”

**Perceptions of American Students**

**Effort by students.** Four of the six interviewees believed that most of their students were hard-working and were doing great while the other two interviewees thought it depended on the individual students: some students studied really hard whereas the others did not.

One interviewee said, “The group of students I have, I have never had a group of students like this before. They, for the most part, they are all motivated. They are all A students. A, B students. They’re all very well-behaved. They can get along. And I just have two exceptions, and one is because he just – I don’t even know how to describe it. It’s just, he doesn’t remember. He’s, you know. He’s just a boy.”

Another interviewee provided similar comments: “Yeah, I think they do. They’re doing great…. Yeah, I think they’re doing a wonderful job.”
Another one commented, “Some, but you have a mix of all students. You have some that will really love it. I had one kid that wrote Chinese all over his arm, and they did just answering, raising their hand and then we had some that they don’t want to do anything. So it’s just a different variety of students, diverse group of students, I should say.”

**Motivation to learn Chinese.** CPS teachers indicated that students had different types of motivation to take the Chinese classes. Some students were truly interested in the language and culture (i.e., intrinsic motivation). For some, it may be because their parents suggested that they learn Chinese (because of their heritage), their friends were taking the Chinese class, or they just wanted to get good grades (i.e., extrinsic motivation). Some students believed that learning Chinese could help them find a job in the future or that they may go to China for visits and job hunting.

One interviewee said, “Well, first of all, interest in the subject. They’re interested, and in any language, they want to be able to go out in the hallway and speak it. But then, in addition to that, you’ve got the straight-A students that that is extremely important to them. Their grades are extremely important to them and if they slip to an A-, they will come and ask what they can do to get it back up and did they turn that in and all of that stuff. Grades is a great motivator. So those would be the three: the interest, the being able to go out there and say something to someone and not being understood. And their grades.”

One interviewee commented on heritage students, “We have one young lady that is Chinese that was adopted. And so that’s her interest. Then we have one young man, his family is Chinese and speaks Chinese at home. But he can’t speak it. He can understand it, but he can’t speak it. And he’s learning to write it. That’s his interest. That’s a family interest.”

Some took the Chinese class because they wanted to master something that not many others could. From one interviewee, “…the other piece is it’s different from what everybody else is doing. So there’s Spanish that half of the students in the district take. Then there’s French that’s too common. This is new, so I’m gonna take that.”

Another interviewee comment, “The culture activity. Yeah, I think if we provide many, many fun culture activities then they think Chinese is exciting then that motivates them to learn the pinyin and the characters.”

Another one commented that “[Students] are very motivated to learn and they want to go to China. Actually, two students, two seniors [are] going to China to study abroad.”

Another interviewee indicated that students’ motivation to learn Chinese could involve a combination of reasons. She said, “Sometimes it’s the parents, parents will tell the student….You need to take this language. Sometimes, the student will say, ‘Well, I’m taking French.’ They end up taking Spanish because I don’t know how that happens. But sometimes it’s because the school has a large number maybe in one language and they moved them to a different language. If they put their first choice being this language, and it’s full of surprise putting them in their second or the third choices, I think it’s a combination of different things.”
Cultural differences between U.S. and China (in the classroom and in general). Five interviewees expressed their opinions from different perspectives. One interviewee thought that Chinese students were more independent than American students because Chinese teachers do not provide students with a lot of supportive materials such as class notes or formative assessments. She thought that Chinese students may take notes all by themselves, “So I needed to help [my Chinese co-teacher] understand that we need to have something to give to the students to guide their note taking, and to guide their studies at home.”

Another interviewee pointed out that sometimes the Chinese co-teachers did not realize that there were some taboos in the U.S., such as, asking people’s salary or judging people’s outlook, which might be appropriate to talk about in China. She said: “There’s many, many topics where we might be more open or closed in different societies so sometimes there’s a little bit of awkwardness in the classroom if we have those little issues coming up.” However, she also thought things went well in her class, “even if they need to apologize to the class or if the class needs to apologize to the [Chinese] teacher, we always make sure that it’s smooth and harmonious at the end of the discussion,” because they were all learning, there was understanding.

One interviewee stated that Chinese co-teachers focused on lecturing and occasionally arranged vocabulary activities and they seldom used supplemental techniques (e.g., language labs) to help students’ learn. She said “Chinese teachers, I think, are more comfortable just lecturing.” She thought that this might be the major teaching style in China, and that for the American students, the supportive activities should be used more often to enhance students’ learning. “In the Language Lab, students can listen to the CD, educational CD that comes with the textbook, and then do listening practice, or they can speak to other students and then practice speaking. Where the students or teacher can talk to students and then do speaking tests. Also, they can use computers, so they can do research about the culture, or they can do vocabulary activities… [my Chinese co-teacher] didn't want students to use typing… [The students] did not have any experience typing Chinese. I thought that's a little weird. I didn't understand why the [Chinese co-teacher] didn't want them to [type Chinese].”

Another interviewee thought that the Chinese co-teachers preferred to following authority’s suggestions (e.g., their director from CPS or supervisors from MUCI) rather than their CPS co-teachers. She said: “I thought we’re sort of on the same level and when I make some suggestions, it doesn’t always happen, but if it comes from [the CPS director], it absolutely happens.” She assumed that this was due to cultural differences.

Another interviewee shared her experience of what she had viewed as a language barrier was actually a cultural difference. She said, “In American culture, we kind of value take charge and, you know, listen to me and that kind of an attitude from teachers. At first, I was a little concerned that it was her English skills that were kind of creating that barrier, and then as she got more comfortable, I realized she can speak English great. It’s just a question of, you know, she needs to feel comfortable and confident saying, ‘This is my classroom and I’m talking and you need to be quiet,’ you know, to the students. Yeah, I don’t think it was a language barrier ever. It was just my perception that it was a language barrier.”
Suggestions by Interviewees

Suggestions to MUCI. Four of the six interviewees suggested that MUCI should provide more guidance to help those Chinese co-teachers get familiar with the American culture. One mentioned that MUCI should bring the Chinese co-teachers to the U.S. earlier so that they would have some time to learn the American culture before starting teaching. The other three suggested that MUCI should provide more information about what exactly American classrooms would be like, such as how the students would behave.

One interviewee said, “If CI could provide more training for their teachers on this is what to expect from an American classroom, these are the behaviors that you may see students exhibiting, and then some more ways not only to respond to that but also sort of to role play and to really act out, okay, if the student does this, here’s what I’m going to do in response, [it would be better].”

Another interviewee made suggestions regarding selection criteria of Chinese co-teachers. She found that not all volunteers had Chinese teaching background before coming to the U.S., so “I think that’s ideal getting those volunteers or the students who want to come who also have the education background.”

Another interviewee thought rotating co-teachers might be a good idea so that they could see different things and explore different possibilities.

Suggestions to the whole program. Two interviewees suggested that CPS should offer more Chinese classes. Another two mentioned that the public transportation in town was not convenient, and this had caused some difficulties for Chinese co-teachers because they did not have cars.

One interviewee noticed that some Chinese co-teachers got homesick, so CPS could provide them with a list of events happening in Columbia to enrich their life experience in town. She stated, “Giving them a schedule of events going on in Columbia so that they can attend. I took one young lady to one of the Fall Festivals, and she really like it, but I don’t think they know that all these activities are happening so that they can be, get more involved and not get so homesick.”

Another interviewee suggested that teachers needed to communicate more with the guidance department in CPS so they could get a clear idea about which Chinese classes they could offer every semester. This would allow students to enroll in these classes more easily. She commented, “Yeah, I think one area where we could have some growth would be communicating with the guidance department at our school and also at other schools because sometimes there’s confusion over which classes we can offer. For example, I heard that at some of the other middle schools the 8th graders are allowed to take Chinese 1A, but at our school our guidance counselors were not signing [8th graders] up for Chinese 1A, so I don’t understand why my school would be different from the other schools. I think there seems like some confusion over which classes we should offer and how to get our students enrolled.”
Students’ Perceptions

Motivation to learn Chinese. Of the 55 students who filled out the student survey, 54 answered the question “Why do you want to learn Chinese?” Consistent with responses from their teachers, students’ motivation to learn Chinese can be categorized as:

(a) Interest in the language and culture itself. For example, one student responded, “I want to learn Chinese because it has a very interesting history, and I want to learn more about it. Also, I know a lot of Chinese, and I want to further expand my Chinese vocabulary.”

(b) Chinese heritage. One responded, “Half of my family is Chinese. I would like to learn what my family knows.”

(c) Friends who speak Chinese. According to one student, “My friend always spoke Chinese in her house, and I always wanted to understand her.”

(d) Being different from others/Taking on a challenging task. For example, one student answered, “I want to learn [sic] Chinese cause not everyone takes Chinese and I want to be different from the rest.”

(e) Utility value of the language (for future jobs, being able to communicate with Chinese-speaking people). One responded: “I wanted to learn Chinese because of business when I grow up I can find better jobs if I can speak two langue and China is rising and one day be bigger and better then [sic] the U.S. that’s why I took Chinese.”

Students’ perceptions of co-teaching. Of the 55 students who filled out the student survey, 22 responded that they liked to have two teachers in the Chinese class, 8 responded that they did not like to have two teachers in the class, and 25 responded that it did not matter. The reasons that students liked having two teachers can be categorized into: (a) better classroom management; (b) more availability of teachers; and (c) different perspectives/help from language expert teachers for better understanding. Below are some example responses:

One can focus on the teaching while the other handles disruptive students so the first teacher can still teach.

Because one teacher can work individually with students who are having trouble, while the other continues the lesson for the rest of the class.

I like having two teachers in the Chinese class, because then I get to learn more about two teachers and I have two aspects and two sides of everything.

It helps to have our beloved Chinese teacher that does the actual Chinese teaching, but it is necessary to have an English speaking helper teacher to help us understand our Chinese teacher when it is difficult to understand her (which doesn't happen often).

There were two major reasons that students did not like having two teachers in the Chinese classroom: (a) The two teachers sometimes conflict with each other; and (b) The language expert teacher’s role may be minor and therefore not necessary. Below are some example responses:
Because it confuses me, and they both give us two different directions.

Their ideas contradict each other, and they do not work well together.

Because my Chinese teacher. The Chinese one allows us to get work done both individually and dependently when need be, but I can't say that about my American teacher.

Quantitative Data of Student Motivation and Classroom Engagement

The descriptive statistics of students’ motivational and classroom engagement measures are in Table 1. The reliability of the nine constructs, based on data from the current study, ranged from .727 to .926, suggesting high internal consistent among items for each construct. Students’ motivational beliefs were high. Specifically, they had high perceived confidence and confidence in performance of class work (i.e., self-efficacy), high perceived importance of course work and preference for challenge and mastery goals (i.e., intrinsic value) and low worry about and cognitive interference on tests (i.e., test anxiety).

In addition, students had relatively high Chinese language motivation (mean of 3.01 on a 1-4 point scale), suggesting that students were interested in and making efforts to learn in the Chinese class.

Classroom engagement, referring to a student’s active involvement in classroom learning activities (e.g., Skinner, Kindermann, & Furrer, 2009), has affective, behavioral, and cognitive components. Students in the present study had high affective and behavioral engagement and relatively low disengagement, although their cognitive engagement was not high, especially compared to Behavioral Engagement – Compliance. This suggests that deep thinking involving mental effort, such as meaningful processing, strategy use, concentration, and metacognition may have not been established among the students. In other words, students taking the Chinese courses may have positive emotions and exert favorable behaviors in the class; however, there may be a need to invoke deeper thinking skills.

The correlations between motivational and classroom engagement constructs ranged from statistically nonsignificant to moderately high (see Table 2). All correlations have the expected signs. For example, test anxiety had negative correlations with the other constructs except for disengagement. The highest correlation was between Affective Engagement and Behavioral Engagement- Effortful Class Participation ($r=.779$); this high correlation was consistent with previous research (they correlated at .90 in Wang, Bergin, and Bergin, 2014).

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics of Construct Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th># Items</th>
<th>Reliability (Cronbach's Alpha)</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-efficacy (a)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>.926</td>
<td>5.66</td>
<td>1.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrinsic Value (a)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>.889</td>
<td>5.53</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test Anxiety (a)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.860</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>1.65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 Correlations Among Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Self Efficacy</th>
<th>Intrinsic Value</th>
<th>Test Anxiety</th>
<th>Chinese Language Motivation</th>
<th>Affective Engagement</th>
<th>Compliance</th>
<th>Effortful Participation</th>
<th>Cognitive Engagement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intrinsic Value</td>
<td>.582**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test Anxiety</td>
<td>-.455**</td>
<td>-.220</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese Language Motivation</td>
<td>.473**</td>
<td>.664**</td>
<td>-.265</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective Engagement</td>
<td>.474**</td>
<td>.723**</td>
<td>-.436**</td>
<td>.555**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compliance</td>
<td>.405**</td>
<td>.480**</td>
<td>-.348**</td>
<td>.586**</td>
<td>.560**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Effortful Participation</td>
<td>.464**</td>
<td>.718**</td>
<td>-.337*</td>
<td>.601**</td>
<td>.779**</td>
<td>.452**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Cognitive Engagement</td>
<td>.409**</td>
<td>.571**</td>
<td>-.188</td>
<td>.658**</td>
<td>.418**</td>
<td>.521**</td>
<td>.626**</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Disengagement</td>
<td>-.181</td>
<td>-.338*</td>
<td>.195</td>
<td>-.544**</td>
<td>-.296*</td>
<td>-.433**</td>
<td>-.181</td>
<td>-.190</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N=55; *p<.05, **p<.01

**Recommendations**

This report summarized interview data collected from 15 teachers who co-taught Chinese classes at CPS, as well as data from their students. Based on the results, I have the following recommendations.

**Recommendations regarding Hanban training.** Interviews with Chinese teachers suggested that Hanban could incorporate more simulated teaching sessions and case studies as part of its training. Given that Hanban’s training is provided right before the volunteers come to the U.S. to teach, it is recommended that the training be focused on practical teaching skills instead of theories. If possible, Hanban could invite foreign students in China to provide feedback on teaching and differences between Chinese and American classroom teaching. The current training could also be improved by targeting future students that are to be taught by the volunteers. The last can be a concerted endeavor between Hanban and MUCI. For example, it is possible to know in advance which Chinese classes are offered at CPS, how many students have signed up for the classes and the general demographics of the students. Such information could be provided during the Hanban training to the volunteers who are joining MUCI, or could be used during the process of selecting volunteer teachers.
**Recommendations to MUCI.** More systematic trainings would help the volunteers get familiar with the American classroom and the American culture more quickly. Some trainings could be collaborative efforts between MUCI and CPS. For example, general introduction to the history of American education, typical student behaviors, major differences between a Chinese classroom and an American classroom, common misconceptions regarding the American classroom, etc. can all be topics that would help the volunteers quickly understand what they are going to face once they begin to teach at CPS.

Another recommendation is that MUCI ask volunteers to write/blog their thoughts about teaching at CPS. These writings based on first-hand experiences can help future volunteers adapt more easily. Alternatively, MUCI could ask volunteers to share their experiences and document by way of, for example, meeting minutes. When doing so, it is important that the documentation reflects the genuine thoughts of the teachers and is constructive with the goal for improvement.

The responsibilities between MUCI and CPS co-teachers should be clarified and communicated to everybody involved in the program. The current co-teaching approach is that the MUCI co-teacher is responsible for teaching the content, and the CPS co-teacher is mainly responsible for classroom management. If this approach is to be continued, it is essential that both co-teaches acknowledge and follow their divided roles. At the same time, I recommend that other co-teaching approaches be explored so that the co-teaching experiences can be great professional growth opportunities for MUCI teachers to be better at classroom management and for CPS teachers to have a chance to participate in teaching the content. Ideally, the co-teaching model would include co-planning, co-instructing, and co-assessing the students. At an initial step, the co-teachers may set aside time to co-plan course materials and class activities. However, the choice of a specific co-teaching approach depends on multiple factors including co-teachers’ experiences, logistics, and personalities. Pairs of co-teachers may explore these approaches and choose the one that best suits them. It is also possible that different co-teaching approaches are used at different stages of co-teaching. In my opinion, the most important thing is to let the co-teachers work together and figure out what is the best for them and for their students.

MUCI could also consider rotating co-teachers so that the same Chinese co-teacher would have opportunities to work with different CPS teachers and vice versa. This would allow more growth opportunities for all co-teachers. Nevertheless, the logistics of rotating teachers may be challenging. All teachers would need to spend more time to get familiar with multiple co-teachers. One way that may help alleviate the problem is for MUCI to provide a central resource location, especially for course materials such as Powerpoint slides, so that not every teacher would have to prepare teaching materials from scratch. This way, MUCI volunteers could save time on course material preparation and spend more time on improving co-teaching and other professional development skills.

Related to this, several MUCI teachers wanted more training on the American culture and wanted to know how to establish authority the classroom. It would be a good idea to ask all teachers, either from MUCI or CPS, to identify their goals that they would like to achieve at the end of co-teaching. Also, if the CPS teachers’ role could be set up as mentors, instead of mere helpers and facilitators in the classroom, it may be more beneficial for MUCI teachers to get
advice and suggestions from their CPS co-teachers. Of course, expectations on the mentor and the mentee could and should be laid out at the beginning.

Currently, MUCI teachers use public transportation to go to their offices at the North campus of MU and to the schools where they teach. Public transportation is not great in Columbia, Missouri. MUCI might want to consider finding a better transportation method. However, this may be challenging given that there is no budget set aside for transportation by MUCI.

MUCI could also help its volunteers to get more involved in the local community. Several MUCI teachers mentioned that the life at Columbia, Missouri is not exciting because of lack of entertainment. This could be a cultural difference because different people tend to attend different types of activities. At a minimum, MUCI could provide a list of events and activities that are happening in town, so that the volunteers could be aware of them and may choose to attend some.

The majority of volunteers stay in the program for only one year, which may be too short. In addition, every year, students would have to get used to a new Chinese teacher. If possible, MUCI and Hanban may want to retain some volunteers so that they can serve for two years. This would help the co-teaching program to transit from one academic year to the next.

It is noteworthy to see that MUCI has begun to organize more trainings for its volunteers at the beginning and during the academic year. In addition, MUCI has begun to implement clear written policies regarding different aspects of teaching and living in Columbia, Missouri.

References


