

China Connections *continued*

A philosophy from the trenches – University of Nottingham Ningbo

James Mirrione

PLATO ONCE REMARKED that the origins of education were in the activity of play. As a theatre and drama specialist I have endeavored not to lose sight of that axiom. Throughout forty-five years of teaching, I have never known a student to praise me for following the syllabus. Instead, I treat the syllabus as a clock to run against. I drag my students to any detour deemed more important than the pre-conceived path. I also force my students to stay with a difficult piece of literature, because the joy of discovery is what I believe lies at the core of true education.

I have constantly straddled the worlds of art and education and I have found these ruminations to be especially relevant to my teaching experience in China and with Chinese university students; although, they could just as easily be applied to any setting or population. However, in China there is a need to remind students that you, the teacher, are a living human being. Very often, I have found myself in a class that has me competing with laptops, cell phones, iPads and electronic dictionaries. This has occasioned me to blurt out such non-sequiturs as “Two guys walk into a bar...” The Chinese students then have the following reactions: (a) Do I take notes? (b) Do I download this and, if so, what is the link? (c) Bar? Did two men hit their heads? (d) Who are you and where is the teacher? Technology has threatened all professors who make their livings by being animated human beings; and, China has moved farther down the not-so-golden-avatar brick road. Therefore, may these axioms serve as possible palliatives to the above dilemma and, as a primer as to what I do as a teacher.

1. Get out from behind the desk

You are on stage whether you like it or not. Students want to see the whole of your corporeal essence when you start to teach, not some disembodied head that constantly looks down

at your dog-eared copy of the text that you read from, quoting your pearls of wisdom from the margins. Unless you are Stephen Hawking, this is a losing strategy; and, by the way, he is not shy at showing himself in full view so what's your excuse?

2. If students could, they would steal your book and then you would become irrelevant

You are not Moses reading from some elevated tome that has all the answers that students think they need, because all you do is read to them from it. Use the text as jumping off point; spin that verse, explore that image, wrestle that metaphor to the ground and be happy to get your fingers burned whenever an incendiary idea or concept reveals itself in the writing. If you do your students' work for them they will treat you to this version of a singing waiter: “*I could read the menu, but I will just let this guy drone on and decide for me in the hope that he shuts up.*”

3. When you do read, make it dramatic

You don't have to stand on the desk (although that might help) but put some life into it! If professors were judged on how intriguing, beguiling, riveting, motivated and passionate they were about the given subject matter, and its delivery, then we might have a more accurate determinant as to their 'mastery of the material'. It certainly would become a challenging approach to what now passes for erudition, which is only that same misguided notion that has ruined Shakespeare, Beowulf, Milton, Dante (the list is long), for countless students who have had to endure only an anemic rendering of the words. Just because many of these authors are dead doesn't mean you have to be. Make them read with you; let them be a character who is in opposition to your character; and, if you are doing a play, cast your students in as many roles as possible. You will be surprised to discover some latent thespians just waiting to take center stage.

4. The unexamined student is not worth your living with them for the period of the class

I always tell my students that they might not always understand me or agree with me but, they will never be bored. The classroom in the Bunsen burner to

set fire to the cobwebs of sloppy logic, to the lazy-boy-recliner of easily spouted prejudices and to the presumed flame retardant natures of religious, social and political propaganda. If all you are is a parrot then students might as well buy the real aviary version of the creature. You were hired to be a gadfly whether the institution knows it or not and even if it never lists that as a learning objective.

5. Strive for humor, not some academic version of Draco

It was Horace who said it best: “... drama is the form of forms: there is no power to equal the dramatist's art for moving the mind and mirroring the magical vision of art.” For me, this is a summation of my belief in the efficacy of my approach to use drama and theatre as a teaching tool; and, to treat education as an opportunity to create drama and theatre. This is where the classroom changes from a room to a stage and a stage into a platform for ideas. However, the challenges of teaching in China put to the test all of these prescriptions. This is due to the complexities of language and the lack of familiarity with critical thinking. There is still an extreme learning curve for students to comprehend that to be critical is not akin to heresy; nor is it disrespectful to believe that teachers are not infallible. Finally, these adages have been submitted, as well, to inject some reality into the rhetoric of cross-cultural learning that so many of our intuitions of higher learning traffic in whenever they are proposing joint Sino-Western educational ventures.

James Mirrione is a Visiting Professor of Theatre at the University of Nottingham Ningbo (James.P.Mirrione@nottingham.edu.cn).

A global supply chain of teaching and learning – Duke Kunshan University

Andrew Field

I HAVE BEEN Associate Dean of Undergraduate Programs at Duke Kunshan University for nearly two years now. Until our undergraduate degree program starts in Fall 2018, my main role is overseeing our Global Learning Semester (GLS). This program has offered many challenges and opportunities for the advancement of higher learning in China and for providing an international and China-focused educational experience to both faculty and students from all over the world. The semester-long GLS program brings undergraduate students from over 20 partner universities in China, together with international students, in a liberal-arts style program at DKU. In addition to our Duke faculty who come to Kunshan to teach, we have a small team of DKU faculty who teach language and writing courses. Most of our Chinese students choose our Academic Writing course, which involves intensive training in US-style academic writing.

The first challenge that I faced when starting as Associate Dean, was to ensure that the processes of selecting courses and faculty, approving syllabi, and orienting our faculty all go smoothly. All the courses and syllabi for our GLS program are vetted and pre-approved by a committee of Duke faculty and are added to the Duke course catalog. Since our courses

involve teaching many students for whom English is a foreign language, we have to ensure that the courses for our GLS program account for the different learning environment at DKU (opposed to Duke), while still maintaining the high quality of Duke courses, especially because our GLS program courses are awarded Duke credits.

In addition to running a Duke-quality program, taught mainly by Duke faculty in Kunshan, we also face the challenge of attracting students from Duke and other universities. Attracting more American students is challenging for several reasons: Duke students have to meet their major course requirements and other distribution requirements; and US students have the choice of many programs in China, some that are located in more well-known cities than Kunshan. Instituting a Kunshan Innovation Scholarship starting in spring 2017 has helped to attract more students from the USA, including students from liberal arts colleges that do not have China-based programs of their own. Word of mouth has also been helpful, since most of our American students have greatly enjoyed the experience of living and studying with a largely Chinese student body in an international university setting with top-quality facilities and faculty. One of the great values of the GLS program for Chinese students is that it serves as a powerful springboard for students wishing to do graduate work abroad. Studying in an English-language Duke-quality liberal arts program greatly enhances their reading, writing, speaking and critical thinking skills, and they receive much assistance in applying to graduate schools abroad.

Despite the challenges, the GLS program has been a great success in terms of providing a high-quality academic and extracurricular educational experience for



Andrew Field with his Shanghai History students and special guest Betty Barr Wang, who spoke about her experience in a Japanese internment camp in Shanghai in the 1940s. Courtesy: Duke Kunshan University

all involved. Over 300 students have completed this program already, and we will run it for one more year before launching our 4-year degree program in fall 2018. Running this program has taught us a great deal as an institution, and this program's success has at least partially vindicated the model of providing a liberal arts higher education to a largely Chinese yet also international student body. I am very proud of our work and pleased to have helped to bring this ambitious goal to fruition.

Andrew Field is Associate Dean of Undergraduate Programs at Duke Kunshan University (andrew.field@dukekunshan.edu.cn).

A student's experience of multi-cultural immersion

Xuehan (Shirley) Zhao

I COULD SPEND YEARS telling you how much I appreciate my decision to come to NYU Shanghai, but here I will share with you one aspect of my experience: multi-cultural immersion, and how it contributed to my understanding of global education. I am a Chinese national, born and raised on the Mainland, educated in key-point (*zhongdian*) public schools until Gaokao (Chinese College Entrance Exam). By studying and living with professors and fellow students from over 70 countries and even more cultural backgrounds from around the globe, I've been motivated to see things through a new lens.

Some things that I take for granted may appear novel to my non-Chinese friends. For example, I once mentioned the

legal duty of Chinese people to take care of our parents, only to be unexpectedly interrupted by an exaggerated “What?” from my non-Chinese friend. “*You break the law* if you don't support your parents? No way!” I could tell how surprised she was, and, to be honest, so was I. I didn't know how to respond to her reaction because... you know... “why would you *not* take care of your parents?” We ended up having a vigorous discussion about parent-child relationships, exchanging experiences in our own countries and bringing in various texts we had read in class on moral philosophy. Such occasions happen to me often. They surprise, excite, and inspire me and make me reexamine my world from various angles.

Being immersed in a multi-cultural environment also means being confronted with more serious differences. Sometimes my friends and I hold opposite opinions that can only be resolved by suspending the debate with “let's go and get some

food”; sometimes we joke about and mock one another's living habits. Be it a casual chat or formal discussion, we don't seek to convince others; instead, we acknowledge, understand and respect the unique positions and views that each of us holds.

I consider ‘multi-cultural immersion’ to be an essential part of a global education. For my education to be truly global, I'm not satisfied with knowing about, or touching upon, something non-Chinese. I want an immersion of variety, where I spend day and night with people of diverse backgrounds, worldviews and living styles. I'm eager to embrace the world, and am equipped with the ability and confidence to do so. Wherever on this globe I end up, I know I can and will thrive!

Xuehan (Shirley) Zhao is a sophomore majoring in Global China Studies at NYU Shanghai (shirleyzhao@nyu.edu).