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The Dinggang Internship:

Training Pre-service Teachers for Rural Schools in China

United Nations
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for Rural Education

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The Dinggang Internship: Training Pre-service Teachers for Rural Schools in China[1]

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Abstract

Overcoming inequality has become one of the most important goals of teacher education and educational reforms in general in China. Since the economic benefits of development have been realized more in urban areas than in rural areas, the Chinese government has spent the last decade introducing social and educational reforms in cities and rural areas in an effort to provide more opportunities for disadvantaged social groups. Supported by the Chinese government, teacher education programs have been engaged in preparing teachers to serve students in low-socioeconomic rural areas. In this report, the author examines the initiatives of these teacher education reforms in China, which are implemented throughout the pipeline of teacher education: pre-service teacher education, student teaching, new teacher recruitment, and in-service teacher professional development. Among these reform initiatives, dinggang internship is introduced and examined empirically to delineate how this reform prepare teachers over time and support them in learning to teach for social equity goals. In the meantime, challenges emerged from the implementation of this initiative are also revealed. This report argues that transformation in teachers' beliefs about social equity (as well as its negative counterpart, inequity) should be central to the discussion of teacher education curriculum and the current teacher educational reforms at large.

Keywords: Dinggang Internship, Teacher Education Reform, Rural Schools, Teacher Education Curriculum

1.0 Introduction

A key question in the field of teacher education research worldwide is how to provide high-quality teachers for all students, especially those presently underserved by the educational system, including students from low-SES backgrounds (Hollins & Guzman, 2005). This problem is shared by Chinese teacher educators as the social-economic gap in Chinese society continues to grow. This report examines the teacher education reform for social equity in the past decade in China, with the focus on one of the reform initiatives for training pre-service teachers at rural schools. This particular initiative, dinggang internship, sends pre-service teachers at the city-based teacher training universities to conduct their practicum for a semester in nearby rural schools. It is intended to help pre-service teacher get an experience in working with rural school children and prepare them to work at insufficiently-staffed rural schools upon graduation. In this report, the context of this reform initiative will be introduced, followed by the findings from a qualitative research on how a group of dinggang interns make sense of their practicum experiences and how these experiences are shaped by their cultural beliefs and various contextual factors. Implications for the policy and research are drawn in relevance to the teacher education curriculum for social equity and justice.

2.0 The Context of Social Class and Teacher Education Reform in China

The reconfiguration of modernization and globalization in China tends to intensify inequalities in wealth, power, ideas, and information. The agricultural and nonagricultural sectors (commonly termed the urban-rural divide) are divided by the socialist residence registration system hukou, the most important determinant of differential privileges in China (Wu & Treiman, 2004). The ten-strata model depicting the hierarchy of social status in contemporary China was developed by researchers from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) (Lu, 2002). The CASS ten-strata model categorizes Chinese society by ten levels based on occupation. Their classification criteria reflect Wright's (1985) class theory,

that is, the ownership and control of three productive assets: organizational resources, economic resources, and cultural repertoire (defined as skills and knowledge as recognized through certification). Among the three resources, organizational resources are considered to be the determining resources, because the ruling party and the government control the most important and largest number of them in the society. Based on these criteria, Chinese society is subdivided into the ten social strata shown in Table 1, ranked in descending class order. Rural areas are at the bottom of the ranking. Lu also accounts hukou, employment, and urban/rural divide systems as the reasons for constraining the transition of agricultural workers into higher social strata (Lu, 2002). In 2005, it was reported that the average income of urban residents was six times that of rural residents (Jiang, 2005).

Table 1 China's Ten Strata According to CASS Studies

	SOCIAL STRATUM	COMPOSITION (%)
1	Government administrators	2.1
2	Managers	1.6
3	Private business owners	1
4	Specialized technicians/Professionals	4.6
5	Clerks	7.2
6	Self-employed entrepreneurs and businessmen	7.1
7	Business and service industry workers	11.2
8	Industrial workers	17.5
9	Agricultural laborers	42.9
10	Rural and urban unemployed and semi-unemployed	4.8

Researchers both inside and outside China have found that many social classes have been emerging, both in rural areas (Bian, 1996; Lu, 1989; Lu, 2002) and in urban areas (Bian, 2002; Xie, 2004; Zhang, 2000) since the 1980s, fueled by the growing differences in income, social status, education level, and lifestyle. In fact, the regional economic inequalities between the cities and the rural areas have in many ways shaped socioeconomic development and educational stratification in China (Bian, 2002; Li, Liu, & Li, 2007; Yang, Huang, & Li, 2009; Zhang, Huan, & Li, 2007). Researchers have also shown that the "enduring significance of geography" has become an "educational stratifier" in China (Hannum, 2006).

The inequalities, manifested in schools, have become one of the major problems in maintaining and enhancing the quality of education. There are drastic disparities in the resources between city schools and rural schools in China, as well as inequalities in teacher salaries, benefits, and social welfare. This inequality is deemed a hurdle for the overall development of China as a nation. In 2007, the Chinese President, Hu Jintao, delivered the Report of the Seventeenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China. He raised the issue of "social equity and justice" and strengthened the cause by asserting that "Education is the cornerstone of national rejuvenation, and equal access to education provides an important underpinning for social equity" (Hu, 2007). Thus, it has been a recurring theme around equity issues in recent educational reforms in general in China. In 2010, the Chinese State Council published the National Medium and Long-Term Educational Reform and Development Outline (2010–2020) and pointed out that promoting equity is the fundamental national education policy.

Teacher education is regarded as a vital means to produce a quality teaching workforce for both city and rural areas and for educating all children in order to sustain the desired socioeconomic development in China(Xu, Jin, & Yan, 2005; Zhu & Han, 2006). With support from the central and local governments, teacher education programs have been engaged in training pre-service teachers for students in low-SES rural areas (Chen & Guo, 2007; Dai & Cheng, 2007). The tendency to view teacher education in this way—that is, as much about preparing teachers for equity as training teachers for economic priorities—has been stimulated by both ethical considerations and by concerns about the increasing social inequalities in the process of modernization and socioeconomic development in China.

There are four main components along the pipeline of teacher education and development in China—pre-service teacher education, internship, new teacher recruitment, and in-service teacher professional development—that targets training teachers for disadvantaged rural areas. Along this pipeline, four reform initiatives are implemented in the past decade: free teacher education (Mian Fei Shi Fan Sheng Jiao Yu, 免费师范生教育), dinggang internship (Ding Gang Shi Xi, 顶岗实习), special teaching positions (Te Gang Jiao Shi, 特岗教师), and national professional development programs for rural teachers (Guo Pei Ji Hua, 国培计划). It is noted that, currently, much effort has been put into restructuring the institutional arrangements of the teacher education system. Growing interest and concern, both in policy documents and research literature, have been directed at considering the individual

participants' recognition of social diversity and democratic interactions in the classroom. As follows, I will introduce the implementation of dinggang internship in general before exploring the lived experiences of the dinggang pre-service teachers during their practicum.

3.0 Outlook of the Dinggang Internship (Ding Gang Shi Xi, 顶岗实习) in China

Dinggang literally means to "replace the person in the positions". The idea of the dinggang internship is that interns take over the responsibility of the classroom teachers and the teachers are freed from their daily teaching routine to take professional workshops coordinated by teacher training institutions. Given the unequal educational opportunities for rural and urban children briefly described above, the dinggang internship has a dual purpose, as readers can tell from its full name: "dinggang internship and assistance to improve teaching"— (ding gang shi xi zhi jiao, 顶岗实习支教). The name implies that the teacher training institutions help local rural communities to improve their basic education by training in-service teachers for the rural school and sending pre-service teachers to teach in the lowly-staffed rural schools. At the same time, the teacher training institutions are supported by the local rural community to train its student teachers because, unlike the urban schools, rural schools are more willing to open their doors to these interns and allow them to have a lot of teaching practice.

The gap of educational quality between rural and urban schools created the need for Dinggang project. Initially, this project took the form of summer social service activities, in which universities sent volunteer students to teach in poor areas. Teachers in many of these areas may not have obtained an education beyond middle school. Some schools are seriously under-staffed. One teacher may teach all the subjects for a grade or for the whole school. It was believed that college students bring updated teaching techniques, comprehensive knowledge, and wider horizons for local school teachers and children, even when they only stay for a couple weeks tutoring students during summer break. Such experiments were also intended to get college students out of the Ivory Tower, to learn about social contexts, and to extend services to areas where they are most needed.

This “assistance to improve teaching” project began to be combined with the internship in Xinzhou Normal College[3] in ShanXi Province in 1997, when they could not find enough placements for their intern teachers in local urban schools. Teacher educators at Xinzhou Normal College had found that student teaching quality was limited by a traditional, one-month internship, and this negatively affected the employment rate of its graduates. In addition, the rural schools around Xinzhou City seriously lacked teachers. Xinzhou Normal College worked with several rural counties in Shanxi Province to create a dinggang internship, which sent over 5,800 student teachers to practice teaching in more than 369 rural middle schools, between 1997 and 2007 (Li, S., 2007). Student teachers were reported to learn well from teaching practice that lasted a semester or a half year. Xinzhou Normal College reported that the dinggang project was very successful in increasing the employment rate of its graduates to over 91%. Over 85% of its teacher education graduates served in rural schools in Shanxi Province (Li, 2007). In this way, the dinggang project fulfilled its mission of supporting rural schools and hence obtained financial and administrative support from local education bureaus to sustain the project. The dinggang project in Xinzhou Normal College was highly encouraged by the Ministry of Education, and it began to be adopted by many teacher training institutions, including Nanjing Xiaozhuang Normal College, Southwest University, and Fuzhou Normal College. Many of these institutions are housed in middle-sized cities around which there are vast rural areas, so that they were able to send their interns to rural schools nearby.

Hebei Normal University joined this trend when it realized that it encountered similar difficulties in finding intern placement schools in the city, and when it detected an opportunity to collaborate with local rural schools. In 2006, the HNU established the Dinggang Zhijiao Office and started to implement the dinggang project. Student teachers are sent to elementary, middle, and high schools in rural counties in Hebei Province for one semester to teach for--“replace”-- some teachers in rural schools. Or, in insufficiently staffed rural schools, the student teachers from HNU continuously fill in the teaching position for those classes that no teacher was originally assigned to teach. HNU not only sends their student

[3] In China, the secondary-level schools and universities specialized in teacher training are called “Normal Schools” and “Normal Universities”. From the 1990’s, the teacher education reforms promoted by the Ministry of Education removed secondary-level normal schools, making them expand into colleges or merge into other colleges and comprehensive universities.

teachers to local rural schools, it also provides teacher training workshops in Shijiazhuang for "replaced" rural school teachers to attend so as to further support rural basic education as well as obtain solid support from local educational bureaus.

Upon completion of the dinggang internship, pre-service teachers are expected to have obtained rich experiences in teaching because the internship involves full teaching responsibility in a longer period than a traditional one-month internship. This makes the graduates more appealing in the job market after graduation. Some interns get hired by the placement school due to their outstanding teaching performances. Hebei Normal University uses this fact to encourage student teachers to participate in the dinggang internship in order to obtain an advantage in job hunting.

As the dinggang internship meets the need of placements for student teaching, provides temporary teachers (for free) in low quality and insufficiently staffed rural schools, and leads to more job opportunities for pre-service teachers, everyone involved in this project seems satisfied. (Of course, there are a lot of difficulties and problems which occur at the individual level, as I found out later in the field.) It has been suggested that a "mutual beneficial relationship" can be set up between the teacher training institutions and local rural schools by means of the dinggang internship.

Because of its assumed and observed effectiveness in training pre-service teachers for low-income rural areas, this model of internship has been implemented by many teacher education programs across the country in the past few years (Chen & Guo, 2007; Li, 2007; Ran & Bao, 2006). In 2007, the Chinese Ministry of Education recommended the dinggang internship to teacher-training institutions nationwide because of the government's recent interest in solving social inequality through education (Li et al., 2007).

In spite of this project's success in providing opportunities for teacher candidates to practice teaching in a challenging environment, there remains the problem of how to scaffold student teaching without reinforcing deficit perspectives about pupils in rural areas. When these teacher candidates from cities, which are relatively well-off areas, encounter pupils in low-income areas, the differences in socioeconomic status can translate into cultural gaps. These cultural gaps can present as differences in ways of speaking, perceptions of

the teachers' and students' roles, ways of understanding what to learn and how to learn, different approaches to classroom interaction, and so forth (Barry & Lechner, 1995; Dolby, 2000; Garmon, 2004; McAllister & Irvine, 2002). In the face of unsettled and unfamiliar surroundings, student teachers need strong support from teacher education programs and mentoring teachers in the placement schools to understand the institutional inequality of the local community and to acquire effective teaching skills and positive attitudes toward working with students in rural schools (Chen & Guo, 2007; Li, 2007; Liu & Li, 2007; Liu et al., 2010). In her ethnographic study on dinggang internships, Jiang (2012) found that, in spite of the intense training sessions at the teacher-education institution aimed at preparing student teachers academically, pedagogically, and psychologically for their dinggang internships, student teachers resorted to their prior beliefs, personal experiences, and advice from significant others to seek solutions when encountering difficulties teaching in a rural school. Simply putting them in a rural setting does not guarantee an internalized mission of teaching for social equity and social justice. The observed student teachers, in Jiang's study, actively appropriated different "cultural resources" to make sense of their learn-to-teach experiences and to try to understand their rural students. Among these cultural resources, the "direct interaction with rural students and explicit discussion with professional peers and experienced mentors" (Jiang, 2012, p. 37) is the most influential factor in pushing student teachers to reflect upon their perceptions of teaching and their pupils. This finding agrees with other studies claiming that it is vital to integrate student teachers into the local setting as well as involve them in reflective practices in their internship with substantive support from school principals and schoolteachers (Liu et al., 2010; Zheng & Chen, 2012).

In short, there exists a professional knowledge base for working with disadvantaged students and teaching for social equity in the placement school. The arrangement of dinggang internships seems to build an effective mentorship system and school-university partnership into a well-conceived teacher education program. In this way, teacher candidates may be able to reflect upon their own perceptions about teaching underserved students in practice, with the models that advocate social equity and justice in the classrooms. In the following section, I am going to use the findings from a qualitative research to illustrate how a group of dinggang pre-service teachers experience the challenges during the process as well as learn how to work with children from low socio-economic rural background.

4.0 Focus of a Group of Pre-service Teachers' Dinggang Internship

The locus of this research is Han University (HU)[4], a key university in North China, specialized in training middle-school teachers. In 2006, Han University started the "dinggang" project (顶岗计划), which sends juniors to conduct their student teaching in less developed areas for at least three months. "ding" means "replace" and "gang" means "position". A "dinggang" project brings interns to schools in low income areas, where they "replace" a few schoolteachers and engage fully in all teacher-related functions of the school, with the assistance of mentors both in the local school and from HU (Liu & Li, 2007). The idea is to get these pre-service teachers immersed in a low-SES setting. These interns live in the school dormitories[5], observe mentor teachers' teaching, prepare lessons together, teach classes every day, learn to work as class advisors (ban zhu ren[6], 班主任), and get involved in local community activities (she hui shi jian, "social practices", 社会实践 , such as surveying local social economic settings, taking part in "life enhancement" projects, and so forth) (Dai & Cheng, 2007; Liang & Chen, 2007). Those schoolteachers for whom the HU interns substitute get the opportunity to attend the in-service professional development program jointly sponsored by HU and local educational bureaus.

When I started my fieldwork, the teacher education students were all from the Hope College attached to Han University. This college recruits students with relatively lower scores in the College Entrance Examination (gaokao, 高考) and charges high tuitions. Many of the students at Hope College are from cities, which are relatively more well-off areas, and from

[4] I use pseudonyms for the university, the practicum school, and the participants.

[5] Usually, the dormitories were built by the placement schools for the interns. The schoolteachers and students live near the school. The supervising teachers from Han University do not live with interns.

[6] Ban zhu ren is the lead teacher for each class, who is responsible for classroom discipline, meeting with parents, and working with subject matter teachers to solve any problems in the class. A ban zhu ren usually also teaches one subject area.

wealthy families in town and rural areas. When these teacher candidates encounter pupils in low-income areas, the differences of social economic status can translate into cultural gaps. Hence, the dinggang internship at Han University in China provides an informative case for examining pre-service teachers' perceptions about low SES students as different others.

I shadowed eight dinggang interns in one rural middle school throughout their four-month student-teaching period. I engaged in participant selection after the Office of dinggang Internship (ODI) in Han University assigned the interns randomly to their placements. One rural school in an economically underdeveloped county, Green Middle School (GMS), consented to take part in this study. All eight interns assigned to GMS agreed to participate in the study. As Table 2 shows, five of the participants were from well-off urban areas, and three were from economically developed rural areas. Two of them taught Chinese, two taught mathematics, two taught chemistry, one taught English, and one taught fine arts. Only one of them was a male, and this represented the general gender ratio of Han University as a teacher training institute.

Table 2. Participants

Names	Chen	Feng	Han	Hao	Jin	Li	Wang	Zhang
Subject areas	Chemistry	Chinese	Chemistry	Chinese	Math	Math	Fine arts	English
Family background	Urban areas					Economically developed rural areas		
Gender	male	Female						

The main data sources for this study included participant observations, in-depth interviews, and written documents. In summer 2009, I participated in the training sessions for the dinggang interns and their supervising teachers at Han University. During this pre-data collection stage, I observed the training sessions, collected documents about the dinggang internship, piloted the entry interview with randomly selected interns, and modified the interview protocol. At the end of August, 2009, I went to Green Middle School with the eight focal participants. I conducted fieldwork until the end of December, 2009.

All transcripts of the interviews and the observation data, along with other qualitative data including pre-service teacher reflections and official documents, were entered into N-Vivo 7 qualitative data organizing software, allowing me to code responses, create thematic categories, and examine relationships between the categories. Upon completion of each observation and transcription of each interview, I wrote analytic memos that contained methodological decision-making and initial impressions of the data provided by the participants, and described themes that emerged throughout the conversations/observations.

I analyzed the data using the "key incident" approach, in which important events (usually recurrent events, events that have sustaining influence) are identified from the observation notes and placed in relation to other incidents, events, or theoretical constructs (Wilcox, 1982). Further, I classified all the transcripts thematically in order to perform a systematic analysis of all the important themes (nodes in N-Vivo7) that appeared in the interviews, observations, and written documents, approaching these data against which my research questions could be examined. All the interview and observation activities were conducted in Chinese. The observation transcripts were in Chinese to record the raw data. Finally, I went back to the literature and compared the themes I found with the studies of other researchers. At the writing stage, representative quotes from the observation transcripts and other qualitative data were translated into English.

In the following sections, I am going to tease out the internal factors, the cultural beliefs, and the external contextual factors that influenced the pre-service teachers' learn-to-teach experiences during their dinggang internship. Both sets of the factors shape each other as the individual pre-service teachers make sense of their own experiences.

4.1 Cultural beliefs that influenced pre-service teachers in their dinggang internship

It is found that the cultural beliefs that the participant teachers hold have an important influence upon how they understand their students, their learn-to-teach experiences, and themselves. By identifying the cultural beliefs the participant interns hold, I draw attention to the symbolic boundaries, intellectual, cultural, and moral boundaries, that the interns constructed and learned to understand their dinggang experiences. I also find that the interns

used these symbolic boundaries to guide their teaching, and they learned to reshape these boundaries in a professional supportive setting.

Social Class Differences and Symbolic Boundaries

In the placement school, Green Middle School, the tracking system of putongban (普通班 , general education classes) and the shiyanban (实验班，experimental or advanced classes) laid a natural setting for me to examine how pre-service teachers evaluate different groups of rural students by identifying who "are more like us" as well as how they generally understand the students from social economic backgrounds different from their own. While learning to teach, the intern participants had goodwill and meant to adapt teaching to their students. However, without careful reflection or guidance, interns often relied on unexamined symbolic boundaries —intellectual, cultural, and moral boundaries--to evaluate their students.

Symbolic boundaries are conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people, practices, and even time and space (Lamont, 2000). They are tools for individuals and groups to make symbolic distinctions between themselves and "others" in their daily lives (Lamont & Molnar, 2002). People do not use only one single symbolic boundary, but employ a set of such tools available in their accessible cultural repertoire. Social boundaries are objectified forms of social class differences. They are revealed in social inequality in getting resources and social opportunities, and they are translated into patterns of social exclusion and segregation (Logan, Alba, & Leung, 1996). At the inter-subjective level, symbolic boundaries can be solidified into social boundaries (Lamont & Molnar, 2002), such as the different social status of people from different classes. Symbolic boundaries and enacted social boundaries can help us understand how people think of the social class differences in their daily encounters, what hinders people from proactive interaction with each other, and how such boundaries could be reinforced or crossed (Lacy, 2002; Lamont, 1992; 2000). In this report, the specific symbolic boundaries, that is, intellectual, cultural and moral boundaries were constructed, enacted, and/or dissolved by the participants to evaluate the rural students based on the daily interactions with their students, their mentors, other schoolteachers, and their intern peers.

Intellectual boundaries are drawn on the basis of cognitive quality, such as competence to analyse and solve learning problems, having a solid knowledge foundation, and organized

learning habits that ensure clear ways of thinking. For instance, as the vignette 1 shown below, Li Xin stressed that qian li (潜 力) — a latent competence of analytical thoughts in using knowledge points to solve problems—was an important criterion to identify whether students were worth teachers' extra time and attention.

Vignette 1:

Chen Xiaofei, a shy boy in grey, walked into Li Xin's office. He handed in a piece of paper with a few problem-solving procedures and asked for extra exercises. Li reached for a reference book in her desk drawer, Preparing for the High School Entrance Exam in Math, scanned it, checked two problems, and lent it to Chen. "Come with your answers to these two (problems) tomorrow. I will talk with you about your last piece of work this afternoon," she said. Then she turned to me and pointed to Chen, "He is one of my seed students. He has the qian li to achieve very well. " She said that she did not have much time and energy to pay attention to every student in this class of forty. A student without qian li may 'memorize problems' correctly, but s/he rarely solves the 'exploratory problems' correctly unless they master the method of solving these kinds of problems. They simply do not get the point." (Field notes taken in Li Xin's office and interview with Li afterwards, October 2, 2009)

Moral boundaries are drawn based on such qualities as diligence, steadiness, honesty, discipline, and ambition. Diligence （qin fen, 勤 奋 ）is the key word that permeated most moral characteristics the interns described. For example, in the vignette 2 below, Zhang Rui valued the characteristics of honesty and steadiness since these traits reflected and ensured hard work.

Vignette 2:

Sitting beside a high stack of exam papers, Zhang Rui looked frustrated about what some of her students had presented in their latest exam. She said: "They simply do not work. You can tell that they did not spend time memorizing the spelling or the conventions. These students are not stupid. If you work hard, learning English should not be difficult. It is certainly more difficult for rural students than it is for city kids. Rural children do not have access to native English speakers or even a recorder that can show how to pronounce the words correctly. But this does not hinder them from achieving high scores in English exams. Speaking and listening are only small parts of English learning. I am from a rural village. My middle school teacher led me through English learning and now I am an English major in college". (Interview with Zhang Rui, September 27, 2009)

Cultural boundaries are drawn on the basis of manners, language, and appearances. For example, Chen Bing in vignette 3, describing his own classmates in middle school as more sophisticated and confident, drew cultural boundaries. Language, postures, and dressings, were also used as labels to signal differences.

Vignette 3:

Looking downstairs, Chen Bing pointed to several students walking in the playground. "I did not wear my glasses today. But I can tell those are my students in putongban. They have this sloppy way of walking. My shiyanban students do not walk in this way… They are more upright, steady. They appear totally different. " Graduated from one of the best middle schools, the No. 43 Middle School in his city, Chen Bing also liked to compare what he remembered about his experiences in his Alma Mater with what he observed in GMS: "I have to say that the putongban students in the No. 43 Middle School are better academic achievers than shiyanban students in Green [Middle School]. They not only have a more solid knowledge foundation and more learning resources, but also a wide horizon to ensure a sophisticated character. You know, city kids dare to challenge what the teacher is teaching. We Google online and get whatever we want to know. We are not intimidated by the teacher. When I think about my classmates, they look quite different from children here…they appear active, sophisticated, and much more confident [than my GMS students]. Yet, my GMS students are more polite. It makes me feel like a teacher here [laughing]." (Interview with Chen Bing, September 21, 2009)

These three sets of symbolic boundaries influenced how the interns understand rural students as the boundaries enabled or constrained interaction between the interns and the students. They also manifested what the valuable characteristics the interns expected in their students who were worthy of attention and teaching resources. To be more specific, they used intellectual boundaries to differentiate students with or without intellectual potential. For students with the potential, pre-service teachers were willing to assign more advanced learning tasks. For students without the potential, pre-service teachers tended to assign simple learning tasks and gave less attention than those with the potential. This distinction resided both between putongban and shiyanban, as well as within these classes. When the intellectual boundary was considered along with the moral boundaries, pre-service teachers tended to re-chart their boundary drawing. For instance, Cao Lin, the student regarded as having minimum intellectual potential, demonstrated a strong work ethic. This moral quality of hard work invited his intern teachers to provide extra attention and effort to help him improve academically.

For some interns, cultural boundaries seemed to signal the intellectual potential of students. As Chen Bing and Hao Ying pointed out, a "sophisticated" "urban-like" student appeared more intellectually refined and confident. This cultural boundary making could be dissolved quickly; however, as Li Xin found that a "simple" rural student could solve advanced learning problems after s/he mastered the key to tackle this type of learning problem.

Therefore, the symbolic boundaries provided criteria for interns to evaluate their students and mark distinctions among their students: putongban students versus shiyanban students, good students versus bad students. The interns made these symbolic distinctions among their students and followed up with differentiated teaching practices. The interns tended to give complex learning tasks, use interactive learning activities, and employ instructional monitoring to work with students on the preferable side of the symbolic boundaries, that is, students who appeared smart, interactive, and hardworking. By contrast, interns provided easy learning tasks, used direct instruction, and attempted supervisory monitoring in teaching students on the other side of the symbolic boundaries. For instance, Chen Bing set teaching expectations lower for his putongban students than those for his shiyanban students because he worried that:

> *(S)peaking too much and making too many connections in the class [putongban] may confuse them before they even got an idea of what chemistry is. If I do not push them to start from these basics, they do not even care to memorize the knowledge points. However, in Class 1[shiyanban], students are quick to understand the basics and giving more responses to the teacher so that I am confident—and comfortable—enough to give them more instruction on how to explore using the experiments to test hypotheses. Also it's easier for these students [in shiyanban] to understand if I teach them how to make connections among the knowledge point and solve the problem. (Observation and follow-up interview with Chen Bing, November 6, 2009)*

In sum, it seems that Chen adapted his teaching to different groups of students based on what he thought about his students. Intellectual boundaries ("quick"), cultural boundaries ("giving more responses to teachers"), and moral boundaries ("not even care to memorize the knowledge points") were manifested in his understanding of different groups of students and influenced what and how he presented in the class. He thought that his teaching met different needs and current levels of his students in shiyanban and putongban, and that his different approaches of teaching could benefit both groups. He was not alone in making his

decisions in teaching based on symbolic boundaries. Almost all the participants, at some point of their internship, demonstrated how these boundaries impacted their decision-making in the name of “adapting teaching to students’ levels”. The result is that the favored students have better opportunities to learn and excel in the tests which will eventually lead them into key high schools in the city. By contrast, those students categorized on the less favored side of the symbolic boundaries have limited chances to get into the key high schools let alone to later become residents in the city.

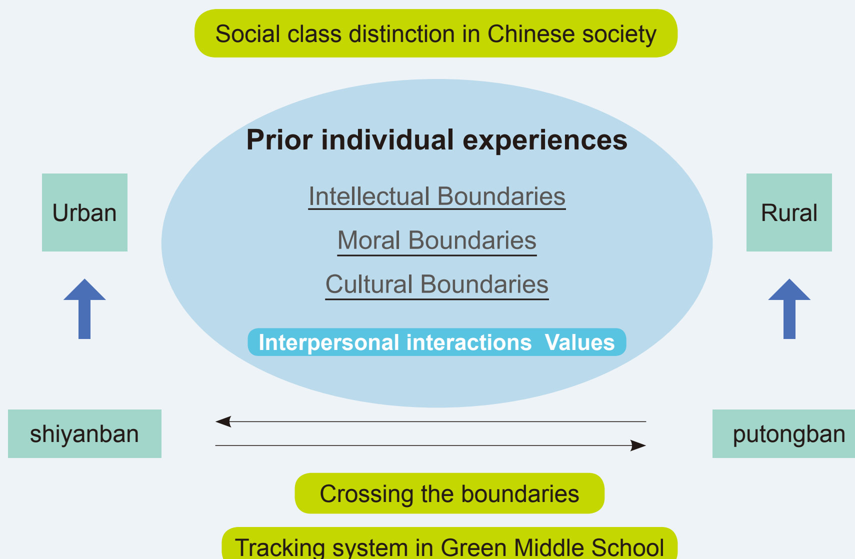
Hence, as it is illustrated in the Figure 1, in the context of the social class distinctions between rural and urban areas in China, the symbolic boundaries the interns marked among their students could be translated back to the social class boundaries between rural and urban residents, and then reproduced the social class distinctions between the rural and the urban. Generally speaking, shiyanban students were deemed by the interns “similar like us”: smart, sophisticated in interpersonal interaction, and aspirational, which made them deserve more advanced learning tasks, more interactive classroom activities, a faster pace of learning deeply, and instructional monitoring. They were expected, and in many ways supported, to excel academically, later to get into a key high school in the city, and eventually to become college students or even employers and residents in the city. In other words, for some interns from the city, shiyanban students would become one of “us”, people in the city. The interns from cities may have found affinity in the “urban identity” they ascribed to the future urban residents, the shiyanban students[7].

By contrast, putongban students were described by the interns as “typical” in demonstrating assumed common characteristics of rural children, hardworking but not competitive, simple, and less confident than their shiyanban peers. They were not expected to excel in learning or later to get into a key high school in the city. Generally, the schoolteachers and interns predicted that most putongban students would work after graduating from middle school, on the farm or would become migrant workers in the city who are not legitimate urban residents .

[7] Because of the “hukou” policy in China, it is very difficult for the migrant workers from rural areas to get a “hukou” and become a resident in the city.

Both groups of students were boxed into different social identities and taught according to their presumed characteristics, which seemed to predetermine their future. The distinction between them started from that once-for-all entrance examination scores, got elaborated into symbolic boundaries, and eventually became reinforced or challenged by teachers' differentiated teaching. For example, some interns were limited to their own sense of honor as someone from the cities (as with Han Mei's and Chen Bing's cases) or confined by their mentors' negative comments against the lower achieving rural students (as with Jin Lin's and Zhang Rui's case). These interns learned to relegate putongban students or lower achievers in shiyanban to lower demand and restricted learning tasks. In this sense, they might have played the role to reproduce the life cycle of the lower achieving rural students and hold these students back from more educational opportunities

Figure 1. Social Class Differences in China and Symbolic Boundaries GMS Interns Made



Although symbolic boundaries were made as criteria for some interns to stick with when they evaluated their students, some interns were able to cross the symbolic boundaries they themselves previously made and to provide support to all students. For instance, Feng Ming used to withdraw her attention from students who "did not learn to be good (bu xue hao, 不学好)" in her class. She drew a moral boundary between these students and their peers,

followed by practices such as ignoring them. After several conversations with her peers and mentor teachers, she changed her perception about these students and learned to observe that "their nature is not bad and they deserve attention from the teachers, too." Thus, moral boundaries that were once defined by the behaviour (acting out in class and hanging out with gang members) were later re-defined as the quality and nature underneath these behaviors. Thus, the symbolic boundaries and the follow-up social boundaries were not static, but fluid in some circumstances. In the next section, I am going to illustrate how the interns learn to either reinforce or cross the boundaries.

In summary, social class differences were not simply revealed as differences in socio-economic status only, but implicitly existed in student teachers' perceptions about their rural students in the form of symbolic boundaries. For the interns, the varied levels of students' academic achievement were attributed to these distinctions in intelligence, culture and morality, which in turn led some students to cultivate an "urban identity", get higher education in the city, and eventually become mainstreamed in the urban areas.

4.2 Impact of contextual cultural resources upon the internship experiences

It is found that a reservoir of cultural resources (e.g. conceptual distinctions, interpretive strategies, cultural traditions) in the context plays a key role in "creating, maintaining, contesting, even dissolving institutionalized social class difference (e.g., class, gender, race, territorial inequality)" (Lamont & Molnar, 2002, p. 168) during interpersonal interactions in daily lives (Jackson, 2001). During my field work in GMS, I learned that dinggang intern participants actively used multiple cultural repertoires available at different levels to draw or dissolve two sets of symbolic boundaries: the ones they made among their students and the ones they made between themselves and their students. Among these cultural repertoires, there are three layers, as Figure 1 above showed: individual life experiences in the past, interpersonal encounters in the current internship setting, and institutional societal factors. The first layer centres on the individual intern's personal experiences in family and school. This proximate layer is situated in interpersonal and societal features. As Lamont (1992) and others pointed out, "individuals do not exclusively draw boundaries out of their own experience: they borrow from the general cultural repertoires supplied to them by the

society in which they live, relying on general definitions of valued traits that take on a rule-like status" (Lamont, 1992, p.6). The second layer of interpersonal resources the interns drew on involves people and interactions at the school and the teacher education program. Mentors in GMS, pupils, intern peers, and teacher educators all exerted influence upon my participants' boundary work. The third layer consists of a larger cultural repertoire to trace the resources contributing to dinggang interns' boundary drawing. I use "repertoire" instead of "maps" or "scripts" [8] because the latter metaphors imply a rigid set of rules for teaching practice. As Charles Frake writes, "Culture does not provide a cognitive map, but rather a set of principles for map-making and navigation" (1977, p.45). Accordingly, I define this layer as the shared cultural meanings underlying what is seen by an intern as common senses. In the following, I am going to discuss the first two layers—individual experiences and interpersonal interactions—as they were more mostly often referred to by the participants.

The following Tables 3 and 4 represent patterns in the frequency of mentioning the cultural repertoires during the interviews about the differences the interns perceived in students. The data comes from the participants' responses to the interview question "When you try to understand your students and adjust your teaching, what source of information do you use and how? Please specify." This question was asked in each of the three rounds of individual interviews with eight interns. When the interviewees mentioned a source of the information, for instance, the internet, I coded it as "institutional/cultural-internet" and then coded the intellectual, cultural, and moral boundaries in the follow-up examples that they used to specify how this source of information helped them understand their specific groups of students in GMS. When the internet was referred to as a source that contributed to making cultural boundaries among pupils, I marked M-CB (Making cultural boundaries). If it was mentioned for changes in thinking about drawing intellectual boundaries, I marked C-IB (Crossing intellectual boundaries). These sets of codes were mapped together using the query-matrices function in N-Vivo7 to produce two tables that include the frequencies of mentioning cultural resources when talking about making or crossing boundaries. I made minor adjustments to group these resources into three categories—prior individual experiences, interpersonal interactions, and institutional, societal, and cultural values—and made the following Table 3 and Table 4.

[8] Some cross-cultural studies on teachers' instructional practice view teaching and teacher's work as culturally scripted (Hiebert & Stigler, 2000).

Table 3 How Many Times The Cultural Repertoire Factors Were Mentioned When Talking About Making Boundaries?

	Prior individual experiences			Interpersonal interactions			Institutional, societal and cultural values				
	Family	School	Encountering different others	Pupils	Intern peers	GMS mentors	HU teacher educators	GMS school	ding-gang internship	Internet/ TV/ books	National policy & Cultural values
Intellectual boundaries	0	3	2	6	9	12	1	2	0	2	1
Cultural boundaries	2	2	5	6	7	6	0	0	3	3	0
Moral boundaries	5	7	2	9	5	11	3	3	2	2	3

The interns had many cultural resources for boundary work. It is found that GMS mentors and intern peers were the most frequently mentioned information resources especially when the interns were using moral boundaries as the evaluative criteria. HU teacher educators were among the least frequently mentioned resources, almost comparable to the remote resources as institutions and policies. Prior individual experiences, especially the interns' schooling experiences, served as fair cultural repertoire for interns to make boundaries. Surprisingly, encountering rural pupils before and during dinggang internship could be used to reinforce the boundaries they draw between rural and urban students as well as among rural students.

One set of cultural repertoire may contribute to making one kind of boundary, and at the same time help to dissolve other boundaries interns had made. For instance, as Table 3 and 4 both show, the HU teacher educators were used as a resource to strengthen the moral boundaries interns made, but seemed to have been utilized by the interns as a resource to dissolve intellectual boundaries they set. Different individuals had their own approaches to jigsaw various cultural repertoire and develop a unique combination of evaluative criteria for their own use in teaching.

Table 4 How Many Times The Cultural Repertoire Factors Were Mentioned When Talking About Crossing/Resolving Boundaries?

	Prior individual experiences			Interpersonal interactions					Institutional, societal and cultural values		
	Family	School	Encountering different others	Pupils	Intern peers	GMS mentors	HU teacher educators	GMS school	ding-gang internship	nternet/ TV/ books	National policy & Cultural values
Intellectual boundaries	1	2	4	9	12	11	4	1	1	5	2
Cultural boundaries	3	0	2	6	9	5	1	1	2	3	1
Moral boundaries	5	0	5	11	12	13	3	1	2	9	1

Among these cultural resources, personal experiences prior to the internship and the interpersonal interactions during the internship were the most frequently mentioned. The first prior personal experiences were often referred to by the participant interns in order to confirm their initial perceptions about rural students. Young people from comparatively affluent urban areas, Chen Bing, Han Mei, Jin Lin, and Hao Ying expected their students to appear like their urban counterparts, being confident, audacious, and refined in their manners. The appearance seemed to ease their interaction with these rural students as well as signal these students' competitiveness and brightness. For them, shiyanban students demonstrated these desirable characteristics, which ensured the access for them to get into a key high school in the city and eventually become urban residents if they could make it to college. In contrast, most putongban students were not like these urban pre-service teachers. The putongban students seem to be typical simple rural children who were carefree without worrying about competition to get into a key high school in the city, and instead lying back without hard work. For Li Xin and Zhang Rui, who were from a similar background to their rural students (small town and rural village), they tend to emphasize the moral boundaries, especially hard work. They themselves strived to leave their rural hometown and enter a distinguished college in

the city by hard work. They expected that their rural students, no matter how they appeared or whether they were very smart, to study hard. Hence, the moral boundaries for Li and Zhang seemed firmer than other boundaries for them. The only exception was the intellectual boundary—if a student could not get the point no matter how hard s/he worked, this student was largely excluded from the group that could move upward academically. Both groups of pre-service teachers, with either rural or urban backgrounds, tried to understand their rural pupils out of their own experiences but ended up with various perceptions.

In addition, the data also shows that mentoring from the schoolteachers and peer interactions were deemed important by the pre-service teacher. However, it does not necessarily support pre-service teachers' effort to become aware of or even shift the boundaries they made among their students. Direct interaction with rural students and explicit discussion with professional peers and experienced mentors could increase such awareness and provide alternative thoughts to modify the symbolic boundaries if the interns did not believe that these boundaries were fixed, and if their peers and mentors presented open attitudes towards low academic achievers among rural students.

Therefore, interpersonal interaction not only increases people's awareness of the symbolic boundaries, but also has the potential to countervail these symbolic boundaries in action. As this study shows, some interns, such as Feng Ming and Li Xin, learned from their peers and mentors to challenge their precepts about rural students, and they eventually came to actively seek teaching techniques to help their putongban students learn. However, not every intern made such a move. How the interns constructed their own understanding out of multiple information resources is hard to portray. As DiMaggio (1997) argued over a decade ago, much remains unknown about how influences stemming from disparate experiences, relationships, ideologies, and situations together work to shape belief and action. This study shows that boundary work is contingent on a professional supportive setting, which in this study involved teaching in a disadvantaged rural school under the guidance of veteran schoolteachers. Boundary work is continuously in the making and getting crossed in such a professional supportive setting where actors directly address encounters with people different from themselves and deliberately seek understanding. As rural pupils changed Han Mei's perception of students' inability, and Wang Chen and Hao Ying changed Li Xin's bias towards students with behavioral problems, interns were exposed to enriched life stories and different

perceptions. Teacher Shan, Teacher Li, Teacher Wang, Teacher Ru, and Teacher Xu guided Hao Ying, Li Xin, Feng Ming, and Chen Bing to go through the process of explicit discussion about teaching and students.

During the process of explicit discussion about their students, the interns communicated their student-related perceptions with their peer interns and mentor teachers. As a result, they were reflecting upon their use of symbolic boundaries and chose to either reinforce or change their original thoughts about their students. For instance, Li Xin said that she learned from her Mentor, Teacher Li, to challenge her prior assumptions about the pupils and adapt her instruction for students' educational readiness:

She [Teacher Li] is always very patient with her students, helping them to figure out a way to solve the problem. You know that it is really hard to get some putongban students motivated to learn math. But she said that she taught her students in a way she would like to teach her own child. Her students in class 5 of the 8th grade [a putongban] are very active participants in her math lessons. I go to observe her class whenever I can and her students surprised me at their interest in solving math problems. They are also making progress in monthly math tests. When some students got 50 compared to prior test score of 20, she sincerely praised them. She told me that even gaining 5 points is a progress worth highlighting. She also told her students that "not being able to learn well is only an excuse for not learning". This is striking to me since I thought that some students could not learn well because they were not smart. If I can get them to study hard, all of them should be able to make progress. I used to scold my students, saying "How come you make such mistakes on simple questions like this!" Now I learned from Teacher Li and begin to tell my students, "It is OK to make mistakes if you already learn from them. Then you will make fewer mistakes next time. " Then I go to details of explaining the problems in a way that makes sense to them. (Conversation with Li Xin after a math class, September 18, 2009)

Li was later able to learn how to make her math class accessible to her putongban students, and successfully made her students improve their learning outcomes. However, some interns' judgments against putongban students were strengthened by their mentors. For instance, ever since the first month of the internship, Zhang Rui began to feel helpless with Teacher Yang's passive view against putongban students.

[Teacher Yang] is quite persuasive. She is correct that many putongban students do not want to learn. But some of her words seem too harsh. She said that putongban students are stupid or something like that. Teach them like teaching morons and speak with repetition in a slow pace, she said. Some students might be very slow, but I found some are quite smart. They just do not work hard enough, as my brother did in his middle school. The methods she suggested me to do in the class seemed to work sometimes. Well, working to some extent as long as they increase their test scores. But I feel myself unhappy and anxious when I heard myself repeating single words for ten times in a class and having the students copy the correct answer to the test items. Some of the good students get bored as I do, while those students lacking interest in English get even further aloof from it. Why don't they just study hard? (Conversation with Zhang after her English class, September 9th, 2009)

Zhang was trying to figure out how she could best work with her students based on Teacher Yang's views about the students as well as her feedback on Zhang's teaching. However, given Teacher Yang's opinion of putongban students, Zhang could not think beyond the boundaries drawn on students' intellectual and moral qualities. She combined the intellect attributes Teacher Yang made with the moral boundaries based on her family experiences, especially how her brother had failed school due to lack of effort.

Thus, explicit discussion among peers and between mentor and mentees may help pre-service teachers to reflect upon their evaluative criteria for their students and possibly led to changes or no changes in using the criteria. During this process, the interns learned to view these distinctions either as fixed or as fluid and changeable. In the former case, the interns would use discriminative teaching to reinforce the boundaries they started with. In the latter case, the interns would learn how to attend to students' learning needs, and therefore to challenge the static boundaries and devise pedagogical techniques to suit students' different needs. And in this latter case, a professional supportive setting matters and may meaningfully influence student teachers' boundary work and understanding of students from different backgrounds. This idea of boundary work in the making within a professional supportive setting is helpful for expanding Lamont's (1992, 2000) theory of boundary work, which has yet to explicitly consider the issue of boundary work in action and in change.

5.0 The Challenges of Dinggang Internship

As revisiting the symbolic boundaries that the pre-service teachers draw and rely on to understand their students, the teaching experiences, and themselves, it becomes clear that there are three sets of gaps present to form challenges that hinder their actions of crossing over these symbolic boundaries. Firstly, there is a dichotomy of educational theories they have learned in the teacher education curriculum and current teaching practice. They learned that the rural students need encouragement. But they do not know what words are suitable for encouraging individual child, how often should the encouragement be placed, and what if their encouragement does not work immediately. It takes time and practice to know their students before they understand how to transfer the theories they have learned to the real teaching.

Secondly, there is a gap between the rural and urban contexts in the reality as well as in the pre-service teachers' perceptions. Placing pre-service teachers in a rural school does not necessarily mean that they will automatically become effective teachers after this immersion. Differences exist in the social realities in the rural and urban areas. The image of these social differences can be essentialized into biases against the disadvantaged population. Biases do exist when the participants actively engage the symbolic boundaries to understand their rural students both before and after the dinggang internship. Rural students are labelled as hardworking or lazy, shy, unmotivated, and lack of sophistication, and these stereotypes can hinder the pre-service teachers' sound judgment of student learning and how they can work with these students. With several intensive pre-practicum workshops about what rural schools can be and how to work with rural school children, the participant pre-service teachers are still short of understanding of the contexts and people they are going to interact with when they start the internship. During the process of the internship, some stereotypes are cleared up for some of the interns. For instance, Li Xin became more thoughtful when approaching her students after she learned much from Teacher Li, who treated her individual students with respect and taught them "in a way she would like to teach her own child". Stereotypes can also be reinforced if the pre-service teacher, such as Zhang Rui, is guided by a mentor teacher with a stigmatized view upon the students.

Thirdly, there is a need to bridge the dual identity of the pre-service teacher as being both a student and a teacher. In addition to seeking advice from their mentors and peers, these student teachers also resort to their own schoolteachers' instruction as they observed in the past. This "apprenticeship of observation" (Lorti, 2002) is especially useful when what they observed from their teachers' instruction had positive impact upon their own learning. Chen Bing, Zhang Rui, and Li Min all talked about what they understood from the observation of their own teachers when they tried to come up with solutions for the problems they encountered in the classroom. However, they only observed how teachers appeared to be in control, kept a perfect pace of lessons, managed a disciplined class, handed out organized notes and worksheet, and tackled a difficult test item. All the backstage acts—how the teachers planned the lessons, mapped the key concepts in the curriculum, examined the students' background, and studied the test papers—were invisible to them. The pre-service teachers may not be able to model after these efforts until there is a chance to explicitly discuss the specific teaching tasks with the practicing teachers.

Given these challenges, we draw further implications for the teacher education curriculum and the teacher education reform in China in the following section.

6.0 Implications for the Teacher Education Curriculum for Training Teachers for Rural Schools

In China, pre-service teachers' beliefs and teaching about social class diversity issues are seldom addressed, although a few researchers have empirically examined teachers' beliefs about different learners in terms of ability, interests, and knowledge (Correa, et al., 2008; Liang & Chen, 2007; Semmel & Gao, 1992). In the United States, many teaching strategies and methods have been proposed for preparing pre-service teachers to teach diverse disadvantaged learners (Garmon, 2004; Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Sleeter, 2008; Mansah, 2009). However, many of these strategies have not explored the crucial interplay between teachers' beliefs and actions regarding social equity (Goodman, 1998), nor do these studies address beliefs of student diversity and teacher education curriculum.

This report provides a possible pedagogical choice for the “learning question” (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009) , which refers to “how in general teachers learn to teach for diversity and what, in particular, are the pedagogies of teacher preparation (e.g., coursework assignments, readings, discussion) that make this learning possible” (pp. 39–40). It seems that current theory-based teacher education curriculum is of limited help for training teachers before they start teaching the students from low socio-economic background. In contrast, the real teaching tasks and the related explicit discussion revolving between the mentor teacher and the pre-service teachers, as well as those among the pre-service teachers, can help the participants to challenge their prior beliefs and adapt their teaching practices. Such a discussion is especially meaningful when it is revolving around a key teaching task that the teachers often use in the classrooms. For instance, the frequent discussions among the participants at the Green Middle School on organizing “typical” test items stand out in this study. These discussions can identify the common misconceptions that students have, and relating these test items to the curriculum in explaining these items during “test exercise lessons” could help interns develop knowledge of students’ learning readiness and learn how to present the curriculum with the application in the tests.

This focused explicit discussion on specific teaching tasks in practice may contribute to Chinese teachers’ profound conceptual understanding of the content knowledge. Ma (1999) found that some Chinese teachers had what she calls Profound Understanding of Fundamental Mathematics; none of the American teachers participating in her study had this. With it, she says, teachers understand the connectedness of underlying concepts. In my study, interns learned from the experienced teachers to use “typical” test items to re-chart their framework of curriculum and establish connections among knowledge points. By doing a lot of typical test items themselves, teachers learned to recognize problem types in particular knowledge domains, retrieve relevant knowledge fluently from the curriculum, deepen their understanding in application to solve the problems raised by the test items, identify the common misconceptions students may have, and later model their thoughts in problem-solving during the process of explaining the test items to their students. During this process, my hunch is, the interns learned to develop their “profound understanding of fundamental knowledge” in the subject matter they taught, which intertwine the knowledge, the understanding of the students and the teaching skills.

It is implied that teacher education curriculum can consider involving carefully selected real teaching cases to engage the pre-service teachers' discussion on how to work with students from the background different from their own urban upbringings. During these discussions, pre-service teachers need to be guided by an experienced classroom teacher with a positive attitude toward diverse students and a teacher educator who is knowledgeable with the array of alternative educational theories and pedagogies. The pre-service teachers need to actively look for the resources and support from mentors and teaching colleagues, like Li Xin did, to solve the identified problem in practicing the teaching tasks. Micro-teaching, case-based teaching analysis, and multimedia-based teaching cases could be helpful to provide the platform for analysing the teaching tasks and initiating the explicit discussion. The intention is not only looking into the teaching strategies, but also challenging the cultural and teaching beliefs the pre-service teachers embrace for so long and having them to view their students' capability in a different light.

7.0 Conclusion

Although the findings of this study are of interest in a Chinese context, they can also raise questions as well as offer implications for teacher education practices in many countries since this study addressed the common concern of how to prepare pre-service teachers to teach underprivileged students. The findings may not be directly transferable to a different national and cultural context, but they may provide alternatives to understand pre-service teachers as resourceful learners in a professional supportive setting.

Lowenstein (2009) pointed out that there is an unexamined conception in the US suggesting that most white teacher candidates are deficient learners who lack resources for learning about diversity. She claimed that "just as we want teacher candidates to view their K–12 students as bringing resources to their learning, teacher educators must also view teacher candidates as bringing resources to teacher preparation" (Lowenstein, 2009, p.165). Following Lowenstein's work, the results of this study challenge the assumption of pre-service teachers as monolithically insensitive to the disadvantaged pupils' learning needs. It demonstrates that interns can mobilize multiple symbolic evaluation criteria based on various

cultural repertoires to understand their students in a rural middle school. Their learn-to-teach experiences in the field are rich, meaningful, and carefully interpreted by themselves.

Further, simply exposing interns to the field experiences may not necessarily lead them to reflectively use their cultural repertoire to understand and teach students different from themselves. All these participants conducted their internship in the same school. However, only a few of them developed the specific understanding and skills to work with rural students expected by the teacher education program. These interns' experiences of learn-to-teach were mediated by intern teachers' sense-making during classroom teaching and were filtered through their collegial interactions. Meaningful mentorship and deliberate discussion among interns in the professional setting functioned as the catalyst for some to activate the use of cultural repertoire for teacher candidates to better understand and teach their rural students.

In addition, I also noted that not all mentorship and discussion among peers were helpful in forming a fuller understanding of rural students. For instance, Zhang Rui was not satisfied by her mentor, Teacher Yang's, biased view against the putongban students, and she felt trapped in Yang's negative perspectives. Researchers in the US have already found that a mentoring relationship could become a conservative force that helps reproduce the existing culture and practice of teaching instead of transforming it (Cochran-Smith, 2010). This implies that mentors in a school may need to be trained or selected prior to guiding interns. The specific ways of supervising the interns and providing the scaffolding to student teaching should be carefully designed. In addition, Li Xin's approach to learn from many schoolteachers shows the possibilities in a supervising practice that includes a few mentor teachers for one intern.

The teacher educator's role in mentoring was not salient in this study. It might be that the remote rural areas were difficult for the teacher educators to visit and observe student teaching. But the teacher educators may have to consider how to modify the teacher education curriculum to meet the practical needs of the student teaching in the rural areas as well as providing necessary theoretical resources.

Several limitations of this study and implications for future research must also be mentioned. Firstly, building from the findings of the current study, questions for further investigation

should focus on how teacher education programs can devise a carefully guided and mentored field teaching experience for pre-service teachers to better understand and teach disadvantaged students. What kind of mentor should be selected for pre-service teachers? What are effective mentoring schemes? What is the influence of intern's gender influence his or her boundary work? Limited data in this study does not fully show how teacher educators from the university might have played a mentoring role during the dinggang internship. In addition, the partnership between the teacher educators and the mentor teachers in the school was not fully explored. For instance, some interns mentioned that the teacher education curriculum was somewhat helpful, but it is not clear how such help could be implemented systematically along with the internship.

Secondly, going beyond the immediate empirical concerns of this study, future work is needed to extend the idea of how different cultural sources together shape symbolic boundaries. Following DiMaggio's (1997) perspective, a key challenge is to explain "the interaction between two distributions—of the schemata that constitute people's cultural toolkits [e.g., value system to draw from], and of external cultural primers that act as frames to evoke (and, in evoking, exerting selection pressures upon) these schemata" (p.274). What happens when information from different cultural repertoire stand in opposition to one another? What social conditions make participants choose one instead of another? Although this report found that positive mentoring and peer collegiality could elicit changes in interns' thoughts about rural students, how they reacted differently in sorting and choosing from competing ideas remains unknown.

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