

## Recommendations for various reforms to English-language education in China.

*Written: 2012/12/9 to 2015/3/19.*

**Introduction:** English as a foreign language has been taught in China for about 40 years. Over this time, it has evolved to meet the needs of different social conditions. At present, English education in China has reached a point of crisis. In short, there are many people in class today who just should not be studying English; they should be doing something else. Many people who are studying English are not benefiting from all their effort: why is this happening? (*Thesis statement: Effective implementation of nationwide EFL objectives has been compromised by a wide range of variables. This article aims to identify some of these variables, and make tentative policy recommendations. Although the problem variables and their solutions are presented in a fragmentary form, they work together to form unified final objectives for EFL reform in China.*) This article attempts to set out various recommendations for educational reform in China, especially in the private sector training schools (the “pei xun xue xiao”). It is hoped that this article will provide a catalyst for further discussion.

### Body:

*Brief summary of the author's English teaching work in China:* The author has taught English as a foreign language in China for about 15 years. Most of his experience has been at the college level (working at established, state-owned universities, in large cities), except for two years in a private kindergarten / weekend training school (in a remote city of 200,000 people). He has traveled very widely in China, and been a constant observer of general life. He has also participated in frequent evening “free-talks” with his students.

English education in China has reached a point of crisis. Something is now wrong with both the public and private systems, and in many areas of school and social life. What then is to be done? The author has decided to use a fragmentary approach to identifying problems and their possible solutions. It is hoped that this article will be a starting point, a catalyst for both grass-roots, “dan-wei”-level, and committee-level discussion. This article is to be considered as a “first draft”; it is not the “final word”. Each “problem” (P) will be paired with a possible “solution” (S).

**P:** Why are so many people out there learning English? Why has English become so important, that many people feel obliged to study it? **S:** Many people should be “released” from the burden of having to study English, which for them is really not necessary.

**P:** Some people just should not be learning English. They are in various English classes, and they should not be there. These people belong to all age groups, and can be found in all types of schools. They attended their class because their parents forced them to. They were assigned to the wrong class, usually because the school was considering class profitability, or class size, and not the student's best interests. **S:** In most cases, they should be removed from the class,

or “released” from the burden of learning English. In short, EFL learning should be for some, and not most of the general population.

**P:** There are two types of English learner: those who “look in”, and those who “look out”. Those who “look in” tend to be more ethnocentric; those who “look out” appear more comfortable with outside ideas. **S:** Generally speaking, those who “look out” are better suited to learning foreign languages. Those who “look in” are better suited to other areas of study. So, these two groups should be identified, separated, tracked, and then given suitable academic majors, with neither party attracting stigma. This is most important. There should be no misplacements due to “guan xi” or parental interference. Separation into two groups is possible, since the original “population pool” is so big. One should disregard the feelings of individuals who do not fit the “look in” or “look out” moulds; they are to be considered as “statistical out-riders”.

**P:** Learning English is a cultural and psychological problem, and not a linguistic problem. **S:** People should pay more attention to the cultural and psychological problems, remove them, and allow English education to develop as a linguistic endeavor.

**P:** The “pei xun xue xiao” have become money-making businesses, driving parents into decisions due to a fear of being “left behind”, “ware-housing” children for many weekends, and living primarily for profit. All of the parties involved in bringing a “pei xun xue xiao” together are responsible – the “pei xun xue xiao” themselves, the parents, the current social values, local policy, as well as certain publishing houses producing educational curriculum. **S:** The “pei xun xue xiao” should be closed (every one!), until suitable educational reforms have been discussed and implemented.

**P:** Many middle school students are hopeless at English, and given the local educational resources available, will always struggle with learning English.. Furthermore, their future life will never use English. **S:** All students in China should study English up to “Chu-3” (i.e. “zhong kao”), and then given the choice to continue English, or drop it forever.

**P:** English proficiency is one of the entrance requirements for attending graduate school. Many students, whose academic major does not really require English proficiency, are unfairly burdened. **S:** All graduate school students, whose academic major does not require English proficiency, should be exempted from the English proficiency requirement.

**P:** The government has lowered the age at which children begin their English study to XXXXX years. This act has greatly encouraged the proliferation of the “pei xun xue xiao”, and everything that goes along with it. **S:** The government should raise the age for beginning English study to XXXXX years.

**P:** College 3<sup>rd</sup> year students often use their classroom time to prepare for the CET-4 or CET-6 English exam. Students can often be seen in class, with a copy of their CET preparation book hiding under their textbook. This is a great distraction from their real studies. **S:** The CET exam should be held during the first week of the new semester. This will force all the

students to prepare for the CET exam during their holidays, and not during the term-time.

**P:** Many students consider class time to be a form of entertainment. As one student said, "We want to play, not study." The "pei xun xue xiao" treat the students as goods to be "warehoused", and not souls to be educated. Many parents send their children to "pei xun xue xiao" just to get them out of the house. **S:** All classroom activity is not about play, or business, or parental respite; it is about education, first and foremost.

**P:** Many students are afraid to speak out in "free-talk", since they are shy, or afraid of "losing face" in front of their peers. **S:** "Free-talks" should be held in small groups, in a darkened room, with the students sitting in groups that are looking outwards, and not inwards. "At night, all cats are black." This equalizes the students, and neutralizes all "face-losing" variables. It works.

**P:** Dormitory rooms in most universities are typically noisy places, where quiet study is not easy, or at times is impossible. The one possible refuge a student has from "noise pollution" is lost. **S:** Dormitory roommates should be assigned / chosen with quiet study compatibility in mind, not play, or maintaining the local "social inertia" in mind. University is for study / cultivating the mind, and for preparing for a job / career. It is not a "party house", or a "deep-freeze"! Dorms should become quiet places, and not social, noisy places! "Sleep and study inside, but play outside!"

**P:** There is really nowhere quiet for students to study. **S:** Schools (and even enterprising business-people) should encourage the construction of enclosed, sound-proof study cubicles ("xue ba"). These will look a little bit like the old "hua ba" telephone-cubicles that were popular in the 1990's, but they will be separate, sound-proofed structures, with a table, study-light, and door. They will be designed in such a way that only one sitting person can fit inside. They will have sufficient ventilation. Each classroom, each evening study-hall ("wan-zi xi") can have one. Perhaps the local shop-keepers, who have small businesses outside of a school or university can have one in their shop, at the back, available for a rent of one or two yuan per hour. Thus, the "diligent students can have a quiet place to study.

**P:** The roots of the problems of learning English in China today are not primarily linguistic, but psychological and cultural. They are psychological, in the sense that students are afraid of "losing face"; this severely constrains their risk-taking behavior. They are cultural, in the sense that there is a very active and destructive "culture-of-envy" among peers, which is focused on anyone who "stands out" or who stands up"; in addition, anyone or anything that is different from the socially-established and cultural norms is seen as deviant, and is quickly suppressed. **S:** Therefore, the solutions should address the psychological and cultural aspects of student non-performance, separate from (but also, in addition to) the linguistic aspects of language-learning.

**P:** Many students are in a constant "mill-race" (as in a water-powered mill) life-style throughout their educational career. From kindergarten to graduate school, they are constantly

pushed and forced to jump through the “hoops” that society expects them to jump through (like tigers in a circus). They never really have any time to rest, and “take stock” of where they were, and where they are going. Most people in China are against “gap-years”, as they are very afraid the child will be “left behind” the others in that particular peer-group. Usually, the only reason why some Chinese families have a “gap-year”, is because their child had a psychological “nervous breakdown”; thus, there is an additional layer of stigma against having a “gap-year”. S: The Chinese educational system should allow the introduction of “gap-years” (such as are common in Britain). Ideally, “gap years” should be whenever it is suitable for the child and the parents. At a minimum, there might be a “gap-year” (a) after the “Gao-3” exam, (b) at a certain point within university – probably after the second year, and (c) right after university. (The author has had many “gap-years”, for a variety of reasons; he is very happy he did them, even if he is now several years “behind” his own peers. Actually, he feels he is “ahead”!)

P: The university student does not get much “internship” experience with local or regional companies, while at university. Although there are many “work-experience” programs, where a whole class of students will be sent off to work at some arranged task for a few months (“shi xi”), many of these are little better than “warehousing” experiences, where the students work, and their university makes some financially advantageous arrangement with the company. S: The “shi xi” can be continued, but with some better arrangements in place. The universities should encourage student internships, at local / regional / national companies. It is understood that setting up such programs will be difficult, and will take many years to implement, but for now, they can be considered, and discussed.

P: Students are usually “locked into” one university, or within a department within a university, from start to finish. The author has often heard of cases of students who wanted to be English teachers (and thus study in the “English, for educators” section of the English department), but who were told to study in the “English, for business” section of the English department – or leave the university. Usually, the university’s reasons for doing this was because they wanted a certain number of students in one section, and a certain number of students in the other section, irrespective of student aspirations. This policy generates many unhappy students. Unsatisfied students have no choice but to stay put and be miserable, or quit altogether. S: Students should be able to transfer between universities more easily. However, what is *especially* important is the ability to transfer between departments within one’s university.

P: Only a few students will make a trek to another university, to attend a special lecture. There is a prevalent mindset among many students (and their administrators, too), that says, “Anything outside your class is a foreign country, and should be treated as such”. S: Students should be encouraged (under reasonable monitoring and supervision) to attend certain lectures at other universities. The author does not mean all lectures, but certain lectures. These lectures will not give “academic credit” to the visiting outside students – they attend the lectures out of mere interest. Perhaps there will be a small fee for attending the lecture, or perhaps the lecture will be free. In any event, the purpose of this affair is to encourage students to attend lectures in other universities, because they want to!

P: Many students would like to attend complete academic courses at another university, so as to make their "university experience" more complete. However, their "home" university will not allow this; moreover, there are no such programs in place. S: In time, it is hoped that some students will be able to attend certain courses at another university, pay the fee, and have the "academic credit" transferred back to their "home" university. This will take a long time to institute, but it is hoped that discussions about feasibility can begin soon.

P: Students cannot engage in an area of study that is of specific interest to themselves. They must follow all the courses assigned to them by the university. S: In time, it is hoped that "independent study" courses will be allowed, on a limited, vetted basis, to a few, approved students. Granted, there need to be certain safeguards put in place, to prevent abuse of the privilege by some students. However, when used responsibly, one of two "independent study courses" are a delightful addition to a university academic program.

P: Many students, once they have finished the rigors of the "Gao-3" exam, are rushed off the university right away. Once in university, what do many of them do during the first (freshman) year? They play! Moreover, they do not have sufficient study skills to make the most of their limited time at college. They only really settle down during their second (sophomore) year. Thus, one year is effectively wasted. S: The educational authorities should introduce a "Gao-4" year, for certain students. (Note: this is not the same thing as the "Gao-kao" re-take program for those students who did badly on their "Gao-3" exams!) This "Gao-4" program is to help certain upwardly-aspiring students to learn college-level study skills, to improve certain academic areas (especially their English!), and to develop better / clearer goals for what they want to do at university. This "Gao-4" program is especially useful for countryside / socially-disadvantaged students who are obviously "gifted-and-talented", and have been identified and "streamed" towards the famous universities in "inner-China" ("nei-di"). It should be noted here, that a sort-of similar program already exists for "min-kao-min", ethnic-minority students, who are going to university, but need one or two years of Chinese-language instruction, before they actually begin their university studies. This idea should be carefully discussed by the leaders; the author thinks it is very important.

P: Most of a student's university life is wasted, as he / she does not really know what the real purpose of "being at university" is! Here is what really happens. First year: play. Second year: wake up to reality, and study well. Third year: rob class-time, to study for the CET-4 exam; have a part-time job; chase boys / girls. Fourth year: worry about getting a job; fill out countless student demographic-related forms from the university. After all is said and done, how much time was spent for actual study? Not much! S: Why should one "go to university"? There are basically three reasons: (a) learn knowledge from books, lectures, and the teachers; (b) prepare for getting a job; and (c) to "cultivate one's mind". It is this third element the author wants to discuss here. What, really, does "to cultivate the mind" mean? It means to allow the mind to grow, become strong, flexible, and discerning. It means exposing the mind to a certain level of "cultural literacy". It means being able to appreciate and interpret art, literature, history, and philosophy. It means being able to "problem-solve", to make reasonable moral judgments, to sift material and come up with reasoned evaluations. Perhaps this is why the ancient Chinese in the

time of Liang Shan Bo and Zhu Ying Tai sent their gifted children to special schools, where they studied Chinese calligraphy, how to play classical musical instruments, and similar disciplines. In some ways, a “cultivated mind” is the real reason for going to university. (Today, most young people would disagree with this!)

**P:** Too many students finish their undergraduate (“ben ke”) studies, and go straight on into graduate school (“yan jiu xue xiao”). This is not always the best way, for many reasons. Today, there are so many people trying to get into graduate school. How to help those students who really should be admitted? **S:** The graduate school admissions offices should allow easier entry for those students who already have work / industry experience. The graduate schools should offer “deferred entry” privileges for those students who take off six months or one year to do volunteer work or community service. Many students would like to do some volunteer work, but are afraid to lose their “place” at graduate school; a deferred entry guarantee would solve this problem.

**P:** In many schools and universities, the library is quite noisy, as many students go there to socialize, and not be quiet and study. This is a serious problem. **S:** The schools and universities should rigorously enforce silence in their libraries. If possible, another big room (with many tables and chairs in it) can be designated as the “student socializing room”; here, the students can chat, and do their projects. The students should strictly respect the rules for each type of “big room”.

**P:** Many students cannot choose or change their academic major. They are under many constraints. Perhaps this is the biggest reason why many Chinese students today like to study overseas – they have more freedom to choose their academic destiny. **S:** This problem should be carefully examined to see if more student choice in what they study is possible. Some procedural controls by the university should be allowed.

**P:** Getting a student transcript (a printed record of what classes they took while at college, and the grades) is a real bureaucratic headache. **S:** Getting a transcript should become a relatively simple (and permitted) procedure. The leaders should study how other countries do this. Students should be able to request, and obtain (by mail, or by direct request at the university’s academic transcript office), as many copies of their academic transcript as they need. Of course, the students should pay a fee, per copy.

**P:** This problem concerns the special, “gifted-and-talented” classes. Wherever excellence forms, like a new galaxy, the elements of impurity (e.g., money, “guan xi”, back-door arrangements, and the like) usually gather, and ruin the potential of the new idea or new class. This problem happens all the time, all over the country, wherever pure excellence tries to establish itself. **S:** Classes of excellence should be for the excellent, only. No one else should “worm” their way in!

**P:** Children are being “warehoused” in the “pei xun xue xiao” by their busy or tired parents, who use the “pei xun xue xiao” as a kind of “respite center”, and not as a place of education.

Moreover, the “pei xun xue xiao”, sensing the opportunities afforded by the parents’ behavior, see the children first of all as a “unit of income”, and not as an individual to be educated. S: The parents are quite welcome to “send away” their children for a few hours, but they should consider another place to send their children to. What about a sports center, or dance class, or a training center that teaches something the child actually wants? (Most children despise being “sent” away to study English, which they do not care about at all.) Ask the children what they want!

P: Almost everyone in China today is irrationally terrified of their child being “left behind”. This is the universal “bogey-man”. There is a “climate of fear” of being “left behind”. Therefore, the parents drive their children hard, even harshly. They will do anything to avoid being “left behind”, or appearing to be “left behind”. The “pei xun xue xiao”, the educational book publishers, all kinds of salespersons and many others make huge profits by using “band-wagon” and “scare” tactics against the parents, to exploit them – and the parents all too often follow their lead. The problem is not really about being “left behind”, but about the fear of being left behind. S: The child psychology book written by David Elkind, “The Hurried Child” (or else, similar books written today) should be translated into Chinese, and made available to this generation of Chinese parents, as well as government and school leaders.

P: Many schools, especially the “pei xun xue xiao”, have ceased to be “a place of education”, and have become a “warehouse, for fee-paying individuals”. S: This needs to be stopped, and rooted out, forever.

P: This society incessantly tries to “re-engineer” outside language into a sort of Chinese-DNA “Chinglish”, as if were an original, organic part of Chinese culture. (This is not just about daily, spoken language alone; this tendency follows all levels of language and culture, as well as educational pedagogy). Thus, the final product appears “foreign” (or so the advertisements say), but they are really “Chinese wolves, with wolf-DNA, dressed up as foreign sheep”. S: It must be stated, again and again, that there are two language galaxies in the world, and not one (the Chinese) that eats up the others (the foreign) like an amoeba, tries to digest and re-constitute them into the Chinese orbit, but calls them “foreign”, for the sake of attracting the parents’ money. This approach is fine for copying / “reverse-engineering” transistor radios, or for security systems, but it is very bad for language learning! The author finds it interesting that this phenomenon appears less prevalent in French-language education than in English-language education (probably because the French guard their language and culture much more jealously than the English-speaking cultures). Therefore, this society must stop trying to “re-engineer” language into its own image: everything else, yes; language, no! This is a very, very controversial idea, but it is one of the root causes of language-learning difficulty in China. To learn language well, one must accept that the universe is composed of many different galaxies, and that it is all right to move about between them. Those who are paranoid about “internal security” cannot do this; they should go and study another major, and not foreign language.

P: There are two groups of students: (a) those who look inwards, and define everything through the Chinese cultural filter and mentality (“one brain, and one heart”); and (b) those who have a “two brains, and one heart” mentality, and are willing and able to cultivate separate

linguistic paradigms, and who are willing and able to live in and move back-and-forth between both worlds. (The classic example of this kind of person is the ethnic-minority, “min-kao-Han” student, who is consummately able to operate in a multi-language / multi-culture environment, since they already live it out day by day.) The problem is that these two groups of students are often mixed together in the classroom, and it is usually the inward-looking students who influence the intellectual climate of the classroom. S: Right at the beginning, all language-learning students should be separated into two groups – those who have a culturally “inward-looking” attitude towards life, and those who have a “two brains, one heart” approach to language-learning. These two groups should be taught separately, have different curriculums and teaching methodologies, and be sent out on very different career tracks. Inward-looking “children of guan-xi”, “fu er dai” and all others who try to short-circuit this idea should be ruthlessly excluded from the “two brains, one heart” group; there should be no exceptions! This idea will provoke bitter controversy, but it is the author’s opinion. Let the leaders think about it carefully!

P: There are many foreign films and songs available on the Internet today, but the quality of their spoken language is often very poor. The speakers speak too fast, or use inferior language, or use a limited (or sometimes, unfamiliar) vocabulary. S: Here are some ideas: (a) The government department responsible for introducing foreign films onto the Chinese Internet should consciously choose 100 English-language films noted for their clear speaking (and clean moral content), as well as their grammatically pure and accurate “sub-titles”, and publicly advertize them to the nation as “100 films guaranteed to improve your English listening ability”. These films should be posted on the Internet in an easy to find and download website. (All the other films must be posted elsewhere; there should be no “blending”.) (b) A special software should be developed, which will allow the listener to “slow down” the speed of the speaking. (c) Another special software should be developed, which will allow the listener to automatically re-play (and re-play, and re-play, and re-play again) the past five or ten seconds of the film’s running time. (Using the re-wind button manually is not time-effective.) In this way, difficult sentences from the film can be listened to again and again, and again, until the listener has completely understood it. (d) The Chinese often re-name a foreign film, but discard the original title! This must stop. From now on, all films must be listed with the original (foreign) title, and the direct translation of that title into Chinese, and the assigned Chinese title, and the year the film was produced, and the special identification number for the film (like a book’s ISBN number). In this way, any film can be readily researched. (e) A special web-site should be created for certain foreign “B”-movies. (This type of film is usually of low quality, with unknown actors; usually they are gangster movies and violent, and have a low moral content.) So, why watch “B”-movies? Ironically, some “B”-movies have very simple English language, and are thus good for listening practice. Of course, *which* movies are allowed onto this web-site has to be carefully controlled. Most “B”-movies are horrible, but a few are really good for English listening practice. Think about it.

P: There are not enough “double-language” books available in the bookstores. S: So far, the “Shu Chong” series, and the “double-language” books being produced by the Ji Lin Chu Ban Shi are good examples; however, more and more books need to be issued in “double-language” format. The author hopes this will happen more and more, as the market develops. It would also be good if “audio-book” CD’s could also accompany these “double-language” books, thus

giving the reader / listener three simultaneous language-input sources.

**P:** Although there are more and more English-language books available on the Internet, and in the bookstores, there are still some problems. Downloading issues are still a problem. Sometimes, the “book” advertized on the Internet is not the actual book, but something else – sort of “half-imitation, half-summary, shining like tinsel but without substance, and never complete”. Please! Give us the real book, or deny it outright! Many books are really textbooks, or exam-preparation manuals, and not “real” books (i.e., novels, short stories, etc.) **S:** The government department that governs the intellectual content of the Chinese Internet needs to decide (and tell the “netizens”) exactly what kind of books will become available, and then make sure they are provided. It is understood that such a process will take time, but at least, let the process move forward.

**P:** There are many foreign films available in China, but the majority of them are “dubbed” into Chinese. For the general movie-going public, this is fine, but for those who want to learn English, this is a problem. Once again, a piece of the “language environment” is systematically denied. **S:** A “two-track” approach to publically available films should be set up. One track represents the “dubbed” films, for the majority of the movie-going public that does not care about the English language. The other track should keep the films in their original language, with double-line (i.e., both Chinese and English) subtitles available. The same protocol should be set up for other foreign languages. The 21<sup>st</sup> Century will see a huge rise in Chinese involvement overseas, and a conceptual sensitivity and awareness of foreign languages among certain parts of the general public should be set up and encouraged. Ultimately, this issue is about the willingness of the leaders to allow their people to have either a mono-cultural / mono-lingual mindset, or an internationalist mindset. This underlying issue needs to be debated in the public forum.

**P:** It is very hard to find “audio-books” in China – either for a CD player, or a cell-phone. In some other countries, there is a very extensive network of “audio-books” available, mostly for people who are blind, or for older people who cannot leave their house easily, or for people who are driving their car. **S:** An “audio-book” network should be set up. Existing “audio-books” from other countries can be used (after consultation). New “audio-books” can be recorded in China from scratch (this has the advantage of bypassing legal issues). However, such “audio-books” should be recorded by native speakers (or-near-native speakers), and digitally mastered by suitable professionals. In other words, “hack-jobs” should be avoided. Most important of all, the finished product should be readily available on the Chinese Internet, the “cell-phone net”, and on CDs in the bookstores. The material should be real literature (either classic or contemporary), and not “self-help” or “get rich”-type materials.

**P:** For some reason, “audio perfectionism” is not a part of Chinese culture. Sloppy sound-tracks on films, poor loudspeakers in a public meeting, hard to hear public announcements in airports / on trains / on buses, and especially poor-quality microphones are quite a common occurrence in daily life. **S:** This needs to stop, and soon. The underlying cultural reasons for this deficiency need to be examined and understood, and a culture-wide solution implemented.

**P:** In English class, getting students to look up a word on their cell-phone dictionary is quite a task. Many students do not have dictionary software on their cell-phone; they try to find the word through Bai Du, on the internet. Also, the idea of using their cell-phone as an English-learning tool (and not as a social networking toy) is foreign and strange to many students. When asked to look up a word in class, they fluster, and get embarrassed, because they are not operationally fluent (or even familiar) with the procedure. **S:** Every student should have good English – Chinese and Chinese – English dictionary software on their cell-phone. The software should have good audio components, so they can hear a speaker saying the word. On many dictionary software packages, the speaker is not a native speaker, and the pronunciation quality is terrible; this is inexcusable. Students should know how to use their cell-phone dictionary, both during homework, and in the classroom. Furthermore, using one's cell-phone for English-language purposes (as well as for social networking) should be considered as a normal, common and daily behavior.

**P:** Most college students live in a dormitory of six, or eight beds. They live together, and develop social skills together. The same is also true of the English-major students. However, almost no student will use their dormitory time for using their English; it is socially and culturally unthinkable. Thus, four years of college pass by, with the dormitory not being used for speaking English. **S:** Here is an idea: let a foreigner live in each dormitory room, along with some students, and fulfill the role of “dorm-auntie” (for the women) / “dorm-uncle” (for the men). Consider this: (a) in China, there are many, many students who would like to use their dormitory room for a “7 + 1” purpose; there are many “semi-retired” foreign women or men (i.e., “getting older”, and almost retired, but not yet “medically complex”) who would like to live in China for a year. During the daytime, the semi-retired foreigner lives a quiet life in the neighborhood, and during the time that the students are in their dormitory, they are “on-call” for study-help, language exchange, and linguistic mentoring. Hopefully, a symbiotic relationship will develop. This “7 + 1” system needs to be carefully worked out, and only offered to certain students, who will be selected for the special “7 + 1” dormitory rooms. In other words, it is an elitist system, for special students. There must be “screening” of both foreigners, and students. The foreigners should not be trouble-makers, and the students should be those with an internationalist mindset (i.e., not overly ethno-centric). It is hoped this idea will be discussed in the public forum.

**P:** There are many, many students today who want to study overseas, but education costs and the trauma of getting a visa are major obstacles. Many do make it overseas, but there are many more that must stay behind. **S:** Why not establish a “language colony” in a medium-sized town in another country, and allow one of one's own medium-sized towns to become the “language colony” of certain foreign countries? (For example, Yantai in Shandong is ceded to another country for 50 years, and an equivalent town in that country is ceded to China for 50 years. The respective host country will hold all the legal advantages.) Obviously, this is a very controversial idea, given China's past experience with foreign occupation, but consider the following. You can have the experience of living in another country, complete with native speakers. That town becomes a foreign country, where one can study, do business, and more, but it is easier to visit – and without the visa. The “sending country” will make sure there are universities (with real, native professors, and not third-party stand-ins), real foreign citizens living

out their life (and not “stand-in actors”), and all the trappings of their nation – it will not be a “9-to-5” museum or theme park. It will be inhabited by real foreigners, living real lives – it will not be a sort of Disneyland. Perhaps this idea is way too far-fetched, but at least let it be a starting point. If you cannot go “there”, then why not bring “there”, here? Of course, there will be those who will say, “It isn’t the real thing! I want nothing to do with it.” However, for those who have no means to “go out” and learn the language, it is a possibility. Such an idea already exists “in embryo”, with Chinese students using Hawaii as a place to study (and not the U.S. mainland), and with Chinese tourists going to Cheju Island in South Korea (and not the South Korean mainland). Let someone brave think about it.

P: Many students can speak English tolerably well in class, but they will not use it outside the class. They could, but they will not. S: Try to unite “girl-talk”, shopping, and English to create a powerful combination. If female students use English, to discuss “girl-talk”, while shopping, their English level will improve quickly!

P: Many students want a foreign friend, but do not know how to find one. S: Have an “English-language, QQ friend”. Use English, on QQ, to communicate common / daily life.

P: Many people do not know what to do with their English, or what is possible. S: One should “use what you have, to do what you want”.

P: In many classes, uninterested or parent-forced students create a burden on the class. They exist, because the school sees them as a “unit of income”, or because their parents have some form of “guan-xi” with the school. S: This practice must stop. Such students should be sent home, and the tuition money returned. Education is about the child (and the other classmates); it is not about the parents, and their ego-agenda.

P: Many parents believe that a foreign teacher is better. This is not always true! S: Some children (perhaps, many children) would be better off with a Chinese teacher of English, than with a foreign teacher of English; this is especially true of beginning students. In the early stages of learning, new concepts are best explained in Chinese, with Chinese cultural sensitivities. The parents should think about this. The parents should not assign their child (or use their “guan-xi” to assign their child) to a class with a foreign teacher – there are so many other educational variables to consider! “Effectiveness in education” is about results, and not about ego, “face”, and “guan-xi”.

P: Many people study English for their own “cultural reasons”. These include exam results, “going overseas”, and prestige as the end of English education. When people behave this way, it greatly affects how the class looks, and what is learned (or not learned). S: One’s personal ambition, dreams and future vocation should be the reasons for studying English.

P: The parents want their children to do the things (i.e., study English, or play the piano) that the children are not suited for, or do not want to do. S: This way of thinking should be re-evaluated, as it is harmful to the children.

P: The “pei xun, xue xiao”, on a busy day, feel and sound more like a “rote-based madrasseh”, and not a school. What is going on? S: The “pei xun, xue xiao” need to completely re-evaluate their reasons for existence. Better still, the government should shut them all down, until serious reforms have been put into place.

**Conclusion:** This article was written as a result of working as an English teacher in China (seven work-units) over 15 years, and especially as a result of working at one particular “pei xun, xue xiao”. The author has enjoyed these years and work-units, and the majority opinion has been positive. Over these years, English proficiency in China has steadily improved, and will continue to improve. This article was written to focus attention on a few areas in need of discussion in the public forum. The author hopes that school leaders, government policy makers, and above all parents will consider these ideas, and generate a public debate that is centered on the best interests of the country, and of the rising generation of students, present and future. The author wishes to thank all students, colleagues and leaders who have provided a very meaningful and pleasing teaching experience.