English Education in China: Articulation between Elementary and Middle Schools

Yuanyuan Hu

For my SAIF project entitled “English Education in China: Articulation between Elementary and Middle Schools,” I have accomplished the following:

• Gained approval from the UW-Platteville Institutional Review Board (IRB) in May 2010 for data collection;
• Collected data through: 1) reviewing documents, including English Curriculum Standards for Grades 3 through 12, mainstream elementary English textbooks, and mainstream middle school English textbooks; 2) interviewing English teachers from four public middle schools of different types (i.e., School A, School B, School C, and School D) located in one county, specifically, three teachers in School A, one teacher in School B, two teachers in School C, and three teachers in School D;
• Analyzed the collected data and submitted a proposal titled “English Education in China: Articulation between Primary and Middle Schools” to the American Association for Applied Linguistics 2011 Conference;
• Presented my project on UWP’s 2011 Research/Poster day (see presentation slides for details);
• Requested a continuation of my approved IRB protocol for additional data collection;
• Reexamined and reanalyzed the collected data and submitted a proposal titled “Articulation between Primary and Middle School English Education in China” in June 2011 to the 2012 Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages Convention and Exhibit, which is currently under review.
5/13/11

Yuanyuan Hu  
Humanities Department  
UW-Platteville

RE: Continuation of IRB Protocol #2009-10-69

Project Title: English Education in China: Articulation between Primary and Middle Schools

Original Approval Date: 6/01/2010  
Original Expiration Date: 5/31/2011

The continuation of your project has been approved by the Chair of the University of Wisconsin-Platteville IRB. The new dates for approval of this protocol are:

New Approval Date: 6/01/2011  
New Expiration Date: 5/31/2012

If data collection for this project will extend beyond the new expiration date, you will need to file a new continuation request before the expiration date. If these dates are not followed, then a new complete protocol will need to be filled out and submitted to the IRB.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB chair at the address below. Include your protocol # on all correspondence.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Dr. Barb Barnet  
Institutional Review Board Chair  
Professor, Mathematics Department  
Gardner 451  
University of Wisconsin-Platteville  
(608) 342-1942  
barnetb@uwplatt.edu
English Education in China: Articulation between Elementary and Middle Schools

Yuanyuan Hu
Department of Humanities
UW-Platteville Research/Poster Day
March 22, 2011
In the context of the global spread of English, many countries have recently started teaching English as a foreign language to elementary school students (McCloskey, Orr, & Dolitsky, 2006).

Whether students can benefit from an early start or not, however, depends to a large extent on favorable conditions, one of them being a well-articulated English language curriculum (Tucker, 2001).
Background (II)

On January 18, 2001, China’s Ministry of Education issued a foreign language education policy mandating that students start to learn English as a compulsory subject in third grade. Prior to the release of the policy, English had been introduced to the majority of students in seventh grade – the first year of middle school.

The policy is thus a landmark in China’s English education in that it has affected English education at the middle school level and beyond as well as a large population given China being the world’s most populated country.
Background (III)

Education System in China and English in the System:

• Compulsory Education
  ➢ Elementary Education: Grades 1-6
    ➢ English: Compulsory (Grades 3-6)
  ➢ Middle School Education: Grades 7-9
    ➢ English: Compulsory

• High School Education: Grades 10-12
  ➢ English: Compulsory

• Higher Education
  ➢ non-English majors: normally two-years of English
Background (IV)

With regard to China’s elementary English education, researchers have identified two major issues:

1) constraints to offering a high quality elementary English education, including the teacher shortage problem (e.g., Hu, 2005; Li, 2007), low average teacher qualifications (e.g., Hu, 2005; Li, 2007), limited educational resources (e.g., Li, 2007) exemplified by large class sizes (e.g., Lee, 2007) and poorly furnished classrooms in underdeveloped regions, and China’s examination-oriented education system (Deng & Carless, 2010);

2) students’ unequal access to a high quality elementary English education due to the urban-rural divide, regional differences, and socio-economic disparities in China (e.g., Feng, 2009; Hu, 2008; Peng & Zhang, 2009).
Research Questions

- How has the teaching of English in elementary schools impacted middle school English education in China?
- How has China’s elementary English education been articulated with its middle school English education?
- What challenges have arisen in English education in seventh grade – the transitional grade?
Methodology: Data Collection

- Data were mainly collected through:
  1) reviewing documents, including English Curriculum Standards for Grades 3 through 12, mainstream elementary English textbooks, and mainstream middle school English textbooks;
  2) interviewing English teachers from four public middle schools of different types located in one county.

- Additional data will be collected through finishing interviews with additional middle school English teachers.
## Data Analysis (I)

### Table 1: An Overview of the Four Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School A</td>
<td>Town X</td>
<td>county-level top school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>different districts in the county</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School B</td>
<td>Town X</td>
<td>rural school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>local district and migrant families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School C</td>
<td>Town Y</td>
<td>town-level school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>local district and neighboring districts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School D</td>
<td>Town Z</td>
<td>town-level school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>local district and neighboring districts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Data Analysis (II)

Table 2: An Overview of the Interviewed Middle School English Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Years of teaching</th>
<th>Year(s) of teaching 7\textsuperscript{th} grade since 2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Findings (I)

- English Textbooks
  Elementary School: *PEP Primary English*
  Middle School: *Go for it!*
- The seventh grade textbooks extensively overlap with the elementary English textbooks, which suggests that seventh graders may not be able to achieve significant progress due to the extensive overlap between the textbooks. The interviewed teachers confirmed that some seventh graders who did not receive elementary English education did catch up with their counterparts by the end of seventh grade.
Findings (II)

Table 3: The Interviewed Teachers’ Familiarity with Elementary School English

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Textbooks</th>
<th>Teaching</th>
<th>Communication with elementary English teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TA1</td>
<td>not very familiar</td>
<td>not familiar</td>
<td>her son’s teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TA2</td>
<td>not very familiar</td>
<td>not familiar</td>
<td>no opportunity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TA3</td>
<td>not very familiar</td>
<td>not familiar</td>
<td>no opportunity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TB</td>
<td>read through</td>
<td>observed several classes</td>
<td>her daughter’s teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TC1</td>
<td>read through</td>
<td>not familiar</td>
<td>occasionally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TC2</td>
<td>familiar</td>
<td>not familiar</td>
<td>her son’s teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TD1</td>
<td>not very familiar</td>
<td>observed several classes</td>
<td>occasionally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TD2</td>
<td>read through</td>
<td>not familiar</td>
<td>occasionally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TD3</td>
<td>read through</td>
<td>not familiar</td>
<td>one opportunity only</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings (II Cont’d)

- The Interviewed Teachers’ Familiarity with Elementary English Textbooks:
  - 1/9: familiar
  - 4/9: read through the textbooks
  - 4/9: not very familiar

- The Interviewed Teachers’ Familiarity with Elementary English Language Teaching:
  - 7/9: not familiar
  - 2/9: observed several elementary English classes

- Opportunities to Communicate with Elementary English Teachers:
  - 3/9: occasionally
  - 3/9: only with their child’s teacher
  - 1/9: one opportunity only
  - 2/9: no opportunity
Findings (III)

Challenges of Middle School English Teachers

According to the interviewed teachers, there has been some improvement over the past five years in the English proficiency of entering students; however, challenges largely attributable to the teaching of English in elementary schools remain, including addressing disparities among seventh graders, remedying their bad learning habits, and sustaining student interest.
Findings (III Cont’d)

TA1:
“... disparities among incoming students, especially in terms of their English proficiency. Some students (in my class) were pretty good and had attained Level 2 of English Curriculum Standards; some students had never learned English before.”
“In fall 2005, the disparity issue was very serious among my students. Five students had never had English classes before.”
“In fall 2008, all my students had English classes before, but they differed greatly in their proficiency.”

TC1:
“... students developed a negative attitude toward learning English while they were in elementary schools. This presented greater challenges to middle school English teachers. Four or five out of thirty students (in my class) could not do well in the English subject. They could not understand the subject or participate in class. We all felt helpless.”
Conclusions

- Greater efforts are needed to enhance articulation between primary and middle school English education in China.
- The articulation could be enhanced through:
  - improving the quality of elementary English education
  - offering opportunities for elementary and middle school English teachers to communicate with each other
References