

Why Did You Choose to Become a Teacher?

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In this chapter, the author shares her experience teaching Chinese English teachers in China for four weeks. At the beginning of the training program she asked, “Why did you choose to be a teacher?” The question had no purpose other than to start a conversation that might give some insight into the Chinese teachers’ motivation to teach so she might find some common ground with them. She was quite surprised by their answers; they uniformly replied that they had not chosen the teaching profession. In fact, several expressed dissatisfaction with the profession and wished they could choose another one. Their responses caused the author to ask herself what it meant to have no voice in choices about profession, future goals, or even having children. What part did cultural norms and social structures have in self-determination? How did cultural norms and social practices impact a sense of purpose? How have our own cultural experiences influenced our perceptions of and reactions to their responses? Her reflections on this experience are the basis for this case study.

GLOBAL COMPETENCIES

Global competencies addressed in this chapter include:

Core Concepts:

- One’s own culture and history is key to understanding one’s relationship to others.

Values and Attitudes:

- Self-awareness of identity and culture & sensitivity and respect for differences.
- Valuing multiple perspectives.

Skills:

- Is fluent in 21st century digital technology.
- Recognizes, articulates, and applies an understanding of different perspectives (including his/her own)

Educators are invited to use the processes, ideas, and methods from this case study to begin their own journey into global education.

CASE BACKGROUND

To understand my perspective on the experience in China, it is helpful to know my background, including my family, upbringing, education, profession, and travel experience. These pieces help provide a framework from which I viewed my work in China, the Chinese teachers and their responses to my questions, their experiences, and how they differed from my own. As the youngest of six children raised in southern Mississippi, I knew I could choose any profession I wanted as my career. I could pursue higher education to help me reach my career goals since my parents were educated and valued education. My father was an industrial engineer who spent most of his career working for NASA contractors, and my mother was a nurse in the local hospital. In my family, education was so valued that everyone of us got at least one college degree with five getting two or more. There was no emphasis on professions of status, such as doctor or lawyer, because a prestigious career was not emphasized. Instead, our mother encouraged us to find a career where we could support ourselves financially and where we could find joy in the work. Consequently, my siblings and I had freedom to choose. Each of us, including my parents, changed careers at least once. This illustrates the freedom we felt to change our mind about our professions. Education was the key to reaching our professional goals and bettering ourselves.

Like most American children, I am a product of the public education system. I started elementary school in a small town before switching to a county school when I was in the middle of fourth grade. I graduated from high school and because my parents were so supportive of higher education, I continued in my studies, earning bachelor's and master's degrees at a medium-sized public university in southern Mississippi. I was fortunate in that my parents paid for those two degrees, but the choice of what to pursue was always mine, just as it was for each of my siblings.

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