

# Teaching and Learning Centre



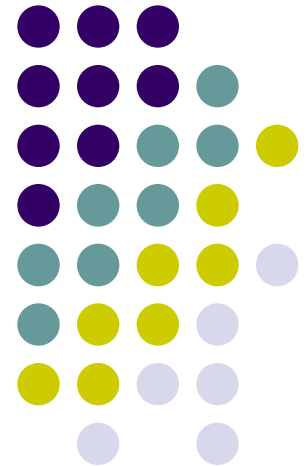
INSTITUTE of  
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## Cultural Diversity in the Classroom Supporting Non – EU International Students

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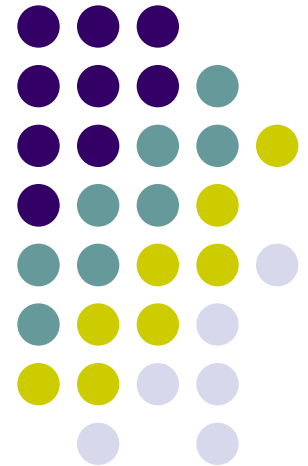
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# New challenges, new methodologies

**Cultural Diversity in the Classroom**  
**Supporting Non – EU International**  
**Students**

**CARLOW IT**  
2006





# Background Information

- **Ireland started hosting Chinese students in the late nineties. Numbers started off in the hundreds and, by 2002, the number of Chinese students studying in Irish schools reached 30,000 (Chinese Embassy: Dublin, 2002)**
- **Most EFL teachers/lecturers had no previous experience of teaching Chinese students and knew very little about Chinese learning styles.**
- **Most teachers felt that being sensitive to students' needs would be enough to make their classes successful. Lecturers felt they could continue as normal once students had English competency. Feedback from Chinese students proved that this was not the case.**



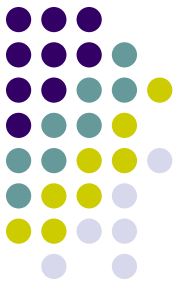
# Research Background

- Undertaken to facilitate easier access to teaching methodologies & learning styles in English-medium countries for Chinese students.
- To assist Western TEFL teachers/lecturers, most of whom were unfamiliar with teaching predominantly Chinese classes, to overcome some of the challenges they were experiencing with their teaching methods in class.



# Initial findings

- A mismatch between Chinese students' expectations of their teachers and Western teachers' expectations of their Chinese students.
- Mismatch was found to be based not only in language, but also in cultural issues.
- Lack of mutual intercultural communication competence was causing de-moralisation and 'stale-mate' situations in both groups.



**A look at this mismatch as  
reported by Western teachers  
and Chinese students.**



# Challenges reported by teachers in Chinese classes (direct quotations)

<b>Chinese students are passive in class. They do not answer questions and are non-responsive</b>	<b>Chinese students are addicted to their electronic dictionaries</b>	<b>Chinese students ask for more complex grammar when they cannot use the simple structures in front of them</b>	<b>Chinese students look on English as a series of rules and not as a communication system</b>	<b>Chinese students resist pair and group work</b>
<b>Chinese students have no opinions</b>	<b>Chinese students fall asleep in class</b>	<b>Chinese students take no responsibility for their learning.</b>	<b>Chinese students plagiarise</b>	<b>Chinese students are sometimes disrespectful to teachers</b>



## What Chinese students say about Irish/Western TEFL teachers (interviewed in Chinese)

<b>Irish teachers are only good for the oral model. Chinese teachers teach systematically.</b>	<b>They ask us if we understand. How can we say no?!</b>	<b>Irish teachers often say they 'there is no 'right' answer. Chinese teachers always know the right answer.</b>	<b>Irish teachers are lazy and do not want to teach. Chinese teachers are hard-working.</b>
<b>Irish teachers disappear after class. Chinese teachers answer questions after class and give guidance.</b>	<b>Irish teachers insist on pair work. We can only learn errors from peers.</b>	<b>Irish teachers ask us what we need to learn. How do we know?! That's their job!</b>	<b>Irish teachers waste too much time in class playing games and reading newspapers, working in groups.</b>





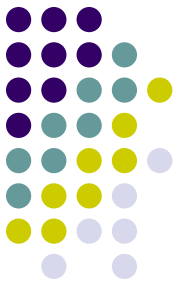
## What TEFL teachers say about their classes:

- Our classes promote the exchange of *ideas*
- Our classes encourage *communication*
- Our classes are *enjoyable* and instructive
- Our classes work on *developing students' skills*

## What Chinese students say about our classes:



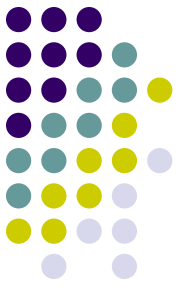
- There is no 'structure'.
- Students move around all the time.
- Students interrupt the teacher.
- The teachers won't talk. They tell us to talk.
- Students argue with each other.
- Students challenge the teacher.
- Teachers have no control. This is not a serious learning environment.



# What Irish lecturers expect:

- Students have passed relevant English competency exams and should be able to cope in English-medium classes
- Students should ask questions & voice opinions
- Students must take responsibility for their own learning
- Students must work effectively in groups

# What Chinese students expect:

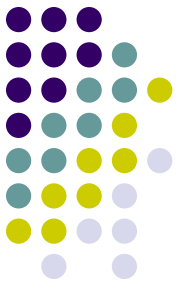


- Lecturers do not give enough handouts
- Lecturers expect us to listen *and* take notes
- Lecturers won't talk, they expect us to talk
- Lecturers don't tell us *how* to act in groups
- Lecturers want us to criticise experts!
- Lecturers don't appreciate our writing style
- Lecturers accuse us of plagiarism!!



# What is going on?

- **Why do Western teachers feel so disappointed with their classroom experiences in the Chinese context?**
- **Why do Chinese students feel so disappointed with their classroom experience?**



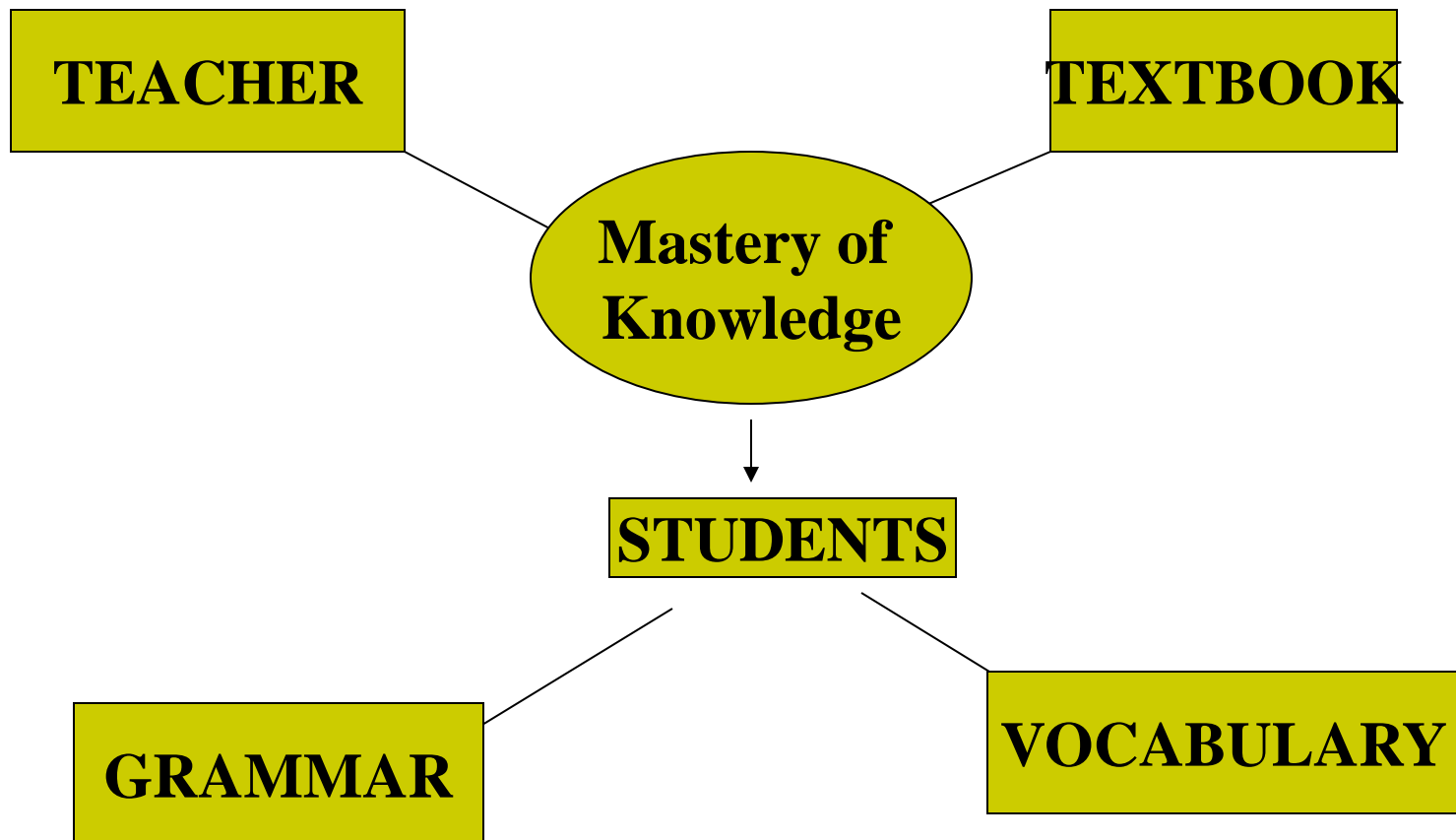
**Western teachers' expectations are rooted in their training and their previous classroom experience. *This has moulded their teaching style***

**Chinese students' expectations are rooted in their previous learning style in China. *This has moulded their expectations of how they should be taught.***

# Chinese classroom model (Jin & Cortazzi:1998)



- **Transmission model**

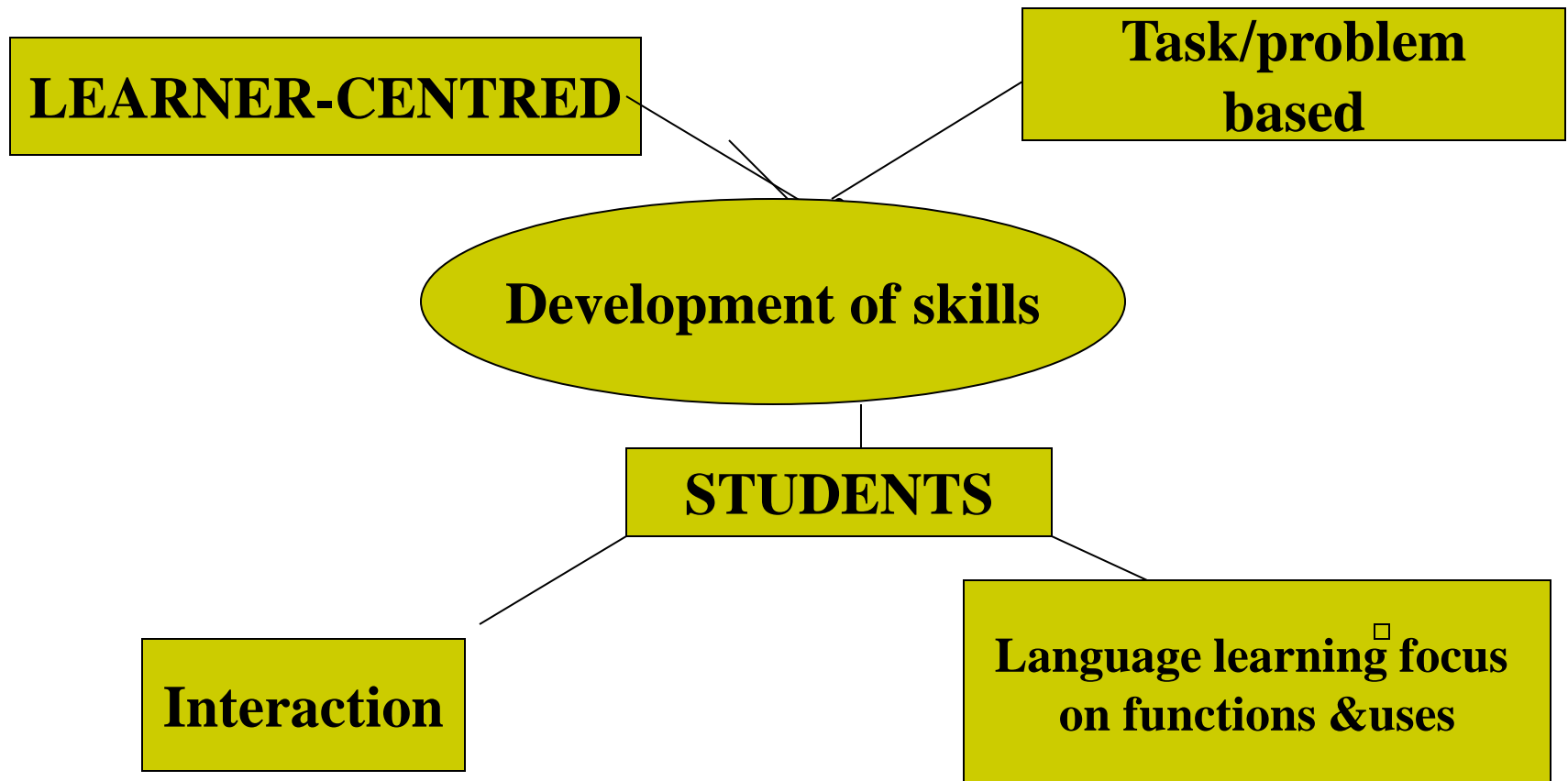


# Western(\*Acquisition) cultural model of foreign language learning

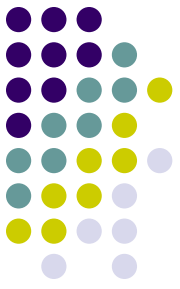
(\*Jin &  
Cortazzi: 1998)



- **Acquisition Model**







# Contrasting teaching models

- 'Transmission Model'

**Teacher & Book are authoritative sources of learning.**

- **Teacher centred (preparation for exams, systematic increasing of knowledge)**

- **Teacher as mentor**

- 'Acquisition' Model

Learning through listening & doing

Group and pair work is valued

'Own' ideas are shared

Teacher as facilitator/sounding board

# Other influencing factors...

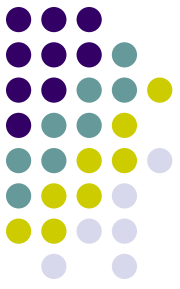


- **In response to the challenges faced by Irish EFL schools with Chinese students, many schools decided to recruit native teachers who had recently returned from teaching in China. Universities took on Chinese advisors.**
- **This had limited success as the impact of Culture Shock had not been considered.**



# Culture Shock (Oberg 1960)

- 1. Stage One: Euphoria- period of excitement over the newness of surroundings**
- 2. Stage Two: Culture Shock emerges as student feels intrusion of cultural differences into his own image of self & security**
- 3. Stage Three: Gradual, tentative recovery. Starts to accept the differences in thinking and feeling that surround him**
- 4. Stage Four: Near or full recovery: Acceptance of new culture and self-confidence in the 'new' person within themselves**



## Second influencing factor...

- 'Face' considerations influenced how Chinese students behaved in class. Students were nervous about answering questions in case the answer was wrong. Whereas this had limited effect on European students, Chinese students felt that a loss of 'face' was involved. Therefore, they preferred to remain silent. Irish teachers were unaware of this and were baffled by the silence.



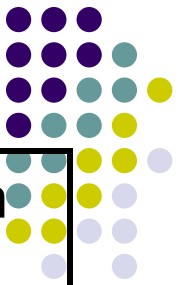
# The concept of 'guanxi'...

- ... the network of mutual obligations that bind people together. Relationships founded on family ties, ties of shared experience and ties of friendship [which] involve an obligation to help family members or friends if and when called upon to do so.

# The impact of guanxi on schools



- **Colleges found that young Chinese were under pressure to succeed in Ireland. Their friends, already in schools, tried to help them to pass entry tests or would do homework for them.**
- **Colleges now understand that Chinese students feel obliged to help family and friends and that the concept of friendship is culturally based; this understanding should inform policy.**



## Recommendations

**We suggest ‘bridging strategies’ between Transmission & Acquisition models (Jin & Cortazzi:1998) in the initial period. A structured approach (see handout)**

**Memorisation should be seen as a strength not a weakness and should be used as a tool.**

**The Library system needs to be explained and then small groups should be set tasks to use the system.**

**Chinese students are used to periodic testing. It helps them to feel safe and to get constant feedback.**

**A ‘road map’ including module titles, lecturers’ names, deadlines and marking system should be supplied at the start to allow students to prepare.**



# Keep in mind...

- When cultural learning and teaching styles interface, it is an opportunity for self development on both sides of the interface. If this process can be looked on as a journey of mutual exploration, then a successful outcome is in sight.



# Thank you

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