

ESTABLISHING A NEW PARADIGM FOR MUSIC EDUCATION IN CHINA: FROM A  
CONSTRUCTIVIST PERSPECTIVE

by

JIEYING JI

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Approved by:

Major Professor  
Jana Fallin

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JIEYING JI

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## **Abstract**

This report presents a feasibility study of operating constructivism in Chinese music education. Major problems have been discussed in each chapter, including the historical background of music education in China, and a philosophical rethinking of current situations in China. Questions have arisen: what is constructivism? Why would it be a new changing point for Chinese music education? What needs to be done to apply constructivism in China?

China has a strong background of behavior-focused education. Because of that, music education falls into a teacher directed model, and often loses its impact in public schools for students. But as the development of economy in a worldwide context and a collaboration of multi-cultural environments, music should be recognized as an important role for promoting active learning and cultural understanding. Therefore, music educators in China need to start exploring in new directions for development of music education.

Constructivism, as a learning theory provides an understanding of how students learn. Based on constructivism, students would develop their own understanding of knowledge, and build their independent learning skills. Constructivism presents how students truly learn, and it could lead to a new paradigm of music education in China.

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# CHAPTER 1 - Music Education in China

## Background of Education in China

In the long history of China, education was not always equal for everyone. From Sui Dynasty (607) (Table 1), the imperial examination system had been the key way for selecting talented persons and for upward social mobility for people. It allowed everyone to have the opportunity for being selected and to work for the country. There was no public institution for education then. People who loved to learn or wanted to take the imperial examination would go to “private schools” for learning. This mode of education had existed for more than 1300 years in China, which was ended at the end of Qing Dynasty (1906) (Table 1). Since then, an influence from western culture has occurred. Public schools started to appear from elementary level to college. New ideas of public education along with the new thoughts of democracy, started to change the whole country. During World War II (By 1945) and the Civil War (By 1949), the whole focus of the country was the war, and thus the educational development stopped.

**Table 1: Brief History of China**

	Year	Dynasty		YEAR	Dynasty
	ANCIENT			618-907	Tang
BC	2100-1600	Xia		907-960	Five Dynasties & Ten Kingdoms
	1600-1046	Shang		907-1125	Liao
	1046-221	Zhou		960-1279	Song
	IMPERIAL			1271-1368	Yuan
	221-206	Qin		1368-1644	Ming
	206(BC)-220(AD)	Han		1644-1911	<b>Qing</b>
AD	220-280	Three Kingdoms		MODERN	
	265-420	Jin		1911-1949	Minguo
	420-589	Southern & Northern		1949-Now	<b>People's Republic of China</b>
	<b>581-618</b>	<b>Sui (Imperial Examination System)</b>			<b>1978: Opening-Up Policy</b> <b>1985: Nine-Year Compulsory Education</b>

The current education system in China started from 1949 (Zhang, Chengxian, 2009), the year when People’s Republic of China was established. But 10 years of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) stopped the developmental educational procedure again. In the year 1978, the Reform and Opening-up Policy has been passed which is a turning point in China's history and also in China’s education (People’s Daily, 1978). Since then, Economic Modernization became the goal of the whole country. Education has been developed deeply in order to cultivate experts for modernization. The governors started to make decisions on reforming the educational system.

In the year 1985, Decision on the Reform of the Educational Structure has been passed by the Central Committee of the Eleventh National Party Congress (Zhang, Tianbao, 2009). It started the development of a Nine-Year Compulsory Education in China, which became the most important policy in China’s education system. One year later, the Law on Nine-Year Compulsory Education has been published, which established requirements and deadlines for attaining universal education and also guaranteeing school-age children the right to receive at least nine years of basic education. The Nine-Year Compulsory Education reflects what Chinese educators believe: that education is equal for everyone. Every child should go to school at certain age, and everyone has the right to be educated.

**Table 2: School System in China**

<b>Years</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>School Level</b>	
3	3-5	Kindergarten	
6	6-12	Elementary School	<b><u>Nine-year Compulsory Education</u></b>
3	13-15	Middle School/Junior High	
3	16-18	High School	
4/5	19-22	College/University	Undergraduate
3-5		Graduate Program	Master/Doctoral

In recent educational systems of China, the College Entrance Exam is the most important part. It is an annual examination in June. The core subjects to be tested are Chinese Language, Math, and English. According to the requirement of different universities or districts, other subjects may also be tested in the examination, which might include physics, chemistry, biology, history, geography, and political science. This standard test based examination system became the changing point of many people's lives. Some people even treat it as the only way that leads them to a better life. Under this pressure, the main goal of students who go to school is to get a high score on the test, which could help them enter a good college, and start a great future.

### **Music Education in School Education of China**

According to National Standards for Music Curriculum in China, the main goal of music education is aesthetic awareness (National Standards for Music Curriculum, 2011). Music, as an important role for students to learn beauty of the world, has been valued much more than ever before. Music class is mandatory in elementary and junior high classes. Music class in high school is one year mandatory. It is optional for students to attend choir or band, and is considered extra curricula of the school. In Chinese culture, there is no emphasis on performance groups (like choir or band) in school, so the general music class is the major process for students to achieve music education (except for individuals who take private lessons). Even though, the whole focus of students and their families is still the college entrance exam. Disciplines that will be tested in the exam are the most important ones. Music class is still treated as an escape from hard work of other classes.

Music class in China stands more in a behavior mode, although the educators in China don't label the paradigm of teaching by using the term behaviorism. The essence of music education in ancient China was ritual music-ceremony education, and its value was in morality and politics and its position was an appendage of the ceremony. Confucius' esthetics is that of ceremonial rites and music. Music was always related to ritual, which basically means music is the best way to control people's behavior. Kang, Youwei (Chinese Educator, 1858-1927) used to say: "Children like to sing, so we should write songs about wisdom, and make them learn, and then that would help them develop their behavior and personality." (Wu, Yongyi, 2011)

Nowadays, although people are not so convinced of those old sayings, the impact from history still exists.

Most classroom settings still follow the behavior model, with teachers standing in front, and students sitting in rows facing the teacher. Teaching is lecture-type based, and mostly is knowledge transfer. A text book is required for every student, and teachers will teach the content in the text books. Generally, music teachers in one school will have a faculty meeting frequently. During that meeting they will design lesson plans for the school year, and most things they plan to teach are from the text book, which is recommended by the Education Bureau of the district. Teachers are still the center of music class rather than the students, even though some new ideas have been applied in some schools.

**Figure 1.1: Typical Music Classroom Setting in China**



## **CHAPTER 2 - Rethinking Music Education in China**

There are many aspects to education, and music education is one part of the whole. In order to develop our education system in China, we as educators should always think what is best for students. We ask ourselves: “how should we promote our education system? Should music continue to be taught in the current way of teacher led, lecture-based classes, which allows less interaction in the classroom? Should this practice be rethought?”

Some questions need to be clarified. It should start with a philosophical understanding.

### **Purpose of Education: A Philosophical Perspective**

#### *Purpose of Education*

The purpose of education is self-cultivation. It is the process of finding out who we are from inside ourselves, and making relationships between our inside world (the individual’s mind) and outside world (the environment in which we live and the people with whom we share the environment). Those are the two domains of education. Individuals donate to the outside world, and also are influenced by that. Therefore, human education should emphasize on recognition of individuals and the ability of social interaction.

Everyone is born with talent. The purpose of education is to help everyone find their own talent and learn to use the talent to survive, and furthermore, to be successful in their future life. Everyone lives in society, no one can live separately. Education is to help everyone achieve the knowledge about the world in which we live (naturally and culturally), and to use this knowledge to promote a positive living environment. Education also has the goal of having individuals gain the ability to communicate with other individuals and in order to work collaboratively to develop a better environment and life. Education is closely related to our daily life. It is never separated from human society. Education must involve the learning of one’s self, knowing of the environment and understanding of people around us.

### ***Purpose of School Education***

School is a small society. It provides a social context for students to experience. Because of the purpose of education, school becomes the best form to educate people to know who they are, what kind of person they want to be, and how to collaborate with the environment and people around them. Therefore, the primary purpose of school education is not to pass the knowledge, or to teach people how to behave, but to help them recognize who they are. We work with people, live with people, and help each one become real persons. This should be the first thing to do as an educator.

Because of the large population in China, public schools made the broadest acceptance of formal education in China. The standardized education has led Chinese educators for many years. During those times, it was the most efficient way for China to go through the development of education and prepare talented people to contribute to modernization. But also, it led the education to a direction which is product based, lacking an awareness of humanity. Students know science better than they know themselves. They can read and understand everything written, rather than understand themselves and people around them. There is news about Chinese students winning international competitions in lots of areas. You could also hear a lot of teachers speaking about the lacking creativity and team-working ability among their students. It is hard to make one simple conclusion that the education in China is good or not, but the major problem is very clear. Students value scores more than things they learned. The lacking of collaboration in schools leads them to the low level of social ability. The neglect of asking “why” makes them instruction follower rather than a decision maker.

Since the emergence of globalization and cultural exchange, we Chinese educators should ask: who exactly are we? Is the standardized education still the best way to define education in China? What is the essential purpose of education?

### **Purpose of Music Education in China**

The purpose of Music Education in China is declared as aesthetic awareness in recent years. It is also the ultimate goal for all fine arts. Music is one of the approaches to help students achieve the goal of aesthetic awareness. But what is the purpose of Music Education before getting to the aesthetic point?

First, learning music is for music's sake. This doesn't refer to the knowledge about music, but the ability of thinking in music. People learn music for musical thinking. Listening, reading, performing techniques are the tools for achieving music thinking. Some people define music as the art of sound. But, like Gordon said, "Sound itself is not music. Sound becomes music through audiation when, as with language, we translate sounds in our mind and give them meaning." (Gordon, 2012) Music is sound with meaning. The ability of translating, giving meaning to sound is audiation, which means thinking in music. Audiation happens in every aspects of music. It helps people listen to music, read music, perform well, and create music. Therefore, the purpose for music education for music's sake is to have the capability of musical thinking, audiation.

Second, music learning has a cognitive domain. What it constructs is the feeling that we know from within through music. The "learning from knowing within" includes the realm of emotion and feeling, while music helps to educate the emotion from within. Through music experience, more feelings can be experienced, which help students be aware of different feelings and be able to label them. When the emotion happens later in their life, they would be able to recognize it and know how to react to it. That is exploring discriminations from the emotional aspect of music. We share emotions and feelings with others. Learning emotions and feelings through music also helps people to know more about themselves, and how others feel when you interact with them. This allows students to know each other better, and understand each other better. This is one of the purposes for music education in developing social ability.

Achieving musical thinking ability and the cognition of emotion are the two purposes of music education lead to aesthetic awareness in music. We learn music not only because of the mastery of it, but also for the awareness of the beauty of the sound and the beauty of the world. The capacity to discover musical meaning is much more important than knowing music elements. The students will learn not only the beauty of sound, but also the love of people around them, the care from others, and to be thankful for the natural world. This aesthetic education helps students to build up a healthy and positive view of the world they live in and help them live a better life.

On the other hand, music is one of the representatives of a culture. Through musical learning, students would recognize their own culture, and be able to explore differences with other cultures. That relates to a very important aspect in the philosophy of education: recognizing who we are. We need to know who we are as an individual, what kind of person I am, and what

kind of person I want to be. We also need to know who we are as a group, what is the background of our culture, how does the culture influence us through the development of a person, and what do we contribute to the culture as individuals.

### **How Does a Student Learn Music?**

If education is to help students know about themselves, to learn the environment, and define the people around them, so how does learning occur? It is the follow-up question we should ask as educators. Does what we taught reflect what the student learned, or does learning only occur inside of an individual? Teacher, who has been seen as the authority, lead the class, and student follows the instruction directly given by the teachers. Those are evidences that show the behaviorism nature of education in China. But is this the best way to help learning occur?

Since the emergence of neuroscience, brain research has influenced the education world rapidly. Much research tells us how our brain works. The brain-based study shows how learning relates to how the brain works. When the new stimuli made a synapse with the neurons which have already existed in your brain, and the synapse has been reinforced strongly enough, then learning can occur. In another words, learning happens when the new knowledge makes connection with prior experiences. Therefore, learning should be different for each individual, because of the uniqueness of each brain. Learning is individual, and only happens inside individuals. Learning highly relates to teaching, but is not the same as teaching.

Based on current brain research and learning theory, students learn music individually. Music learning for everyone is different, and music learning occurs in multiple modalities.

### **What is the Role of the Student and the Teacher?**

If learning needs to be developed individually, what is the role of the student in learning? What is our role as a teacher?

In China, the role of the teacher is always as the authority in a classroom. In the process of learning, teachers are the ones who decide what students should learn, and how they will learn it. The typical classroom is lecture-based where the same information will be provided to

different students. Teachers usually consider the learning ability of each student by their scores, and they rarely apply several assessment tools to measure students' achievement.

A traditional music classroom in China usually follows the same model as other disciplines. Rote singing applies most when teaching a song to the class. In a music history class, the information will be given to students directly by the teacher. When starting to learn an instrument, knowledge such as the position, gesture, and fingering will be told by the teacher, rather than having students explore the instrument first.

Students are the ones who are learning, and processing knowledge in their own mind. From this perspective, students are the center of learning, and the center of the classroom. Students should be more involved in deciding what they are going to learn, and how they are going to learn.

Based on that, the teacher should not be the only authority in a classroom. Teachers cannot decide the process of students' learning. Teachers cannot teach all students in one way, and guarantee that they all learn at the same level. Therefore, the teacher is not the one who decides how students learn, and how well they learn it. Furthermore, the teacher should not be seen as the center of learning. The teacher should be a guide to students, making them comfortable to achieve learning differently. The teacher could also be a mentor to help students find their own efficient way of learning, rather than give them instruction directly.

Therefore, in a music classroom, the teacher first needs to know their students well, guide them through setting up goals for music class, find out the best ways to achieve the goals, and help them solve the problems that occurred along with music learning.

In China, people often compare teachers to gardeners. Gardeners cannot decide what kind of trees they are going to be, but they will irrigate, weed, prune, and help trees grow better. Teachers cannot decide what students truly learn, or how they learn it, but teachers can use different tools, methods to guide students to better learning, and better life.

## **CHAPTER 3 - Apply Constructivism to Music Education in China**

According to the rethinking of education in China, changes should be made in music education as well. The theory which could be of great help is constructivism. It could be the new shift of music education in China.

### **What is Constructivism?**

Constructivism is a theory of learning and an approach to education that lays emphasis on the ways that people create meaning of the world through a series of individual constructs. Von Glasersfeld describes constructivism as, “a theory of knowledge with roots in philosophy, psychology, and cybernetics” (Glasersfeld, 1989). It doesn't deal with how we teach. It stands at the learner's point, and discusses how we learn.

Constructivism is student-centered and allows students to construct their own understanding of the content. Constructivists believe that learning only occurs when the students learn naturally. It only happens from inside of the individual. The role of the teacher in a constructive classroom should not be the authority but rather the guide, helping students construct their own knowledge based on their former and current experiences as well as understanding.

### **Why Constructivism in Chinese Music Education?**

#### ***Behaviorism in the History***

In the history of education in China, music has always been seen as a tool to educate people to have good manners. Music is highly related to ritual which shows respect to our ancestors and the nature. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, influence from western culture started to occur. Educators who received the new idea from other countries started to write new

standards for music education of children. Even though, they still believed that music is a tool to make children become well-mannered citizens.

Furthermore, they saw music as a tool of governing the country. Examples from War time are the most significant. Patriotic songs were written during the war, and everyone was taught to sing those songs. Traditional folk operas had been rewritten with new lyrics talking about stories of battles. Even few decades after the war, this kind of music was still the dominant content in the textbooks for students, although the students were born years after the war.

There is no doubt that music, more or less, has been the powerful tool for political purposes. Education as an approach of governing followed that purpose as well. However, times have changed. Students from the 21<sup>st</sup> century are different. They don't have many experiences with the war. They live in a fast growing world. This is an era of information explosion, the students deal more with technology, information exchange, and worldwide collaboration. Music to them is also different from before. Music education should be different as well.

But the current situation is that most music educators in China still follow the traditional pattern of teaching. Music class is teacher directed. Students learn music by being told what to do. They are less engaged in musical activities, more in the model of passive musical knowledge and skill training. The results of that are: the content of music class is out of date. Students are not interested in the materials. The music class is highly structured, and the teaching methods are limited. Music class in China is mandatory, so you will not see the drop rate in music classes. What you could see are students doing homework from other classes, falling asleep, or talking with classmates. These phenomena are more obvious in high schools, because of the emphasis on listening, music appreciation class is the only class type they have with a lecture-based teaching methods. Content of traditional music has been increased in the textbook, but students still will not listen to that music out of class. How could students recognize our culture in the stream of world's cultures bombarding them on the MP3 or iPods or on iTunes? How could they recognize themselves among the information exchange and worldwide collaboration? What is the major point of education, or music education specifically? One aspect of music education should be to teach and recognize one's own culture.

Behaviorism is a term came from western culture. No one defines the way of teaching in music classrooms in China as from a behaviorist perspective. However, we could not deny the

nature of behaviorism in music classrooms in China. Is this the way music class should be? The core question should be how students learn, how students learn music.

### ***Why Constructivism as a New Direction for Music Education in China?***

In Chapter 2 we discussed how students construct their knowledge from the individual's mind. Knowledge is formed as part of the learner's active interaction with the world, and that knowledge exists less as abstract entities outside of the learner but constructed anew through action (Webster, 2011). Knowledge is different to every individual, because it can only be actively constructed by the individual.

This is the key point of constructivism, and this, we believe, is how learning happens. If we believe this is learning, it should be applied in music class to make active learning occur.

On the other hand, constructivism reflects our philosophy.

*Constructivists believe that learning is a social act where students interpret new understandings of their worlds in relation to previous knowledge and experience. When viewed from this perspective, the classroom becomes a community of individuals working collaboratively towards shared goals. Participants contribute to the group from their own levels of ability, and students help each other to achieve goals all members view as important within the given discipline. (Scott, Sheila, 2006)*

According to this statement, a constructive music classroom provides learning for oneself, in a real life environment, and includes collaboration with others. Those are the three aspects of our philosophy. Therefore, constructivism is a proper way to practice the goal of music education.

### **How to Apply Constructivism?**

From a constructivist perspective, music class should be fun and should provide students the opportunities to explore music in their own way. The educators must consider, "will this approach chosen to teach align with the way students learn? If not, the learning might not occur. Therefore, how should we apply constructivism into music education in China? In what area could the changes started to happen?"

### ***Create a Safe Environment for Students in a Music Classroom***

Music is something to enjoy, music is something we have in our daily life. So, music class should be enjoyable, and students should be motivated to learn music. Music class first should be a safe environment for students to experience, explore, and understand. The students learn when they are actively engaged in learning.

Allowing students to experience the sound should be the most important thing for music class. In China, the class size is very large. Some music teachers are afraid of having fifty students create sounds at the same time. So, they would choose to not have them experience it by themselves, rather play it for them. It is a good way to reduce noise, and control class, but it is also a way to reduce the connection of sound and instruments in students' mind. The fear of making sound also makes music class have less movement, less talk, and less engagement.

Allowing students to ask questions when they want to is also important for them to learn. Because of the traditional way of teaching, teachers in China always prepare questions for testing students. What they want is the right answer, but questions from students are not paid much attention. There's not enough time that is planned for students to ask questions, and get answers from the teacher during class time. Teachers are so focused on the lesson plan, and structure of a class, while losing feedback from students immediately. Questions of students show their problems or concerns of learning. The sooner one solves the problem, thus allowing student questions, the better the learning outcome will be. Less time for questions does not allow students to adjust their learning immediately, and that would affect learning in a long run.

This could be the first step of making change: provide a safe environment for students to enjoy music class by changing the classroom setting, allowing the making of sound in music classroom. The use of rhythm instruments and Orff instruments in a well-planned music class is a wonderful experience for the students.

### ***Reduce the Reliance on Textbooks***

Textbooks are very important resources for teachers and students to have an effective learning process. It is a helper of a music class, but not a music class itself. Many music teachers in China use textbooks as the only material in music class. They rely on the textbook so much, while forgetting what more should be included in a music class.

The textbooks we are using now have the content in singing songs, listening materials, classroom activities, and performing material (class instruments). Those contain children's songs, music from traditional Chinese music, and also music from other cultures. However, only a few are related to what the students listen in their daily life, what they know outside the music class. From a constructivist perspective, students learn new knowledge from making connections to what they know already. Only when the connection has been made, can the understanding of something new truly happen. That makes the learning occur. Therefore, depending too much on the textbook does not help students make connections from what they already know, and also would not help students build their own schema, which means the learning would not occur.

In a constructive music class, textbooks could be one of the resources to help students achieve learning, but it would never be the only one. In this case, the music material should be chosen widely. The materials should not be limited to the textbook, and students should also be allowed to have input in what they want to learn.

### ***Increase Assessment through Learning***

A good music class should be so interesting that students are eager to learn. It also needs to be flexible, which is adjustable and depends on how well the students learn, and how well they perceive the knowledge. How can we measure that? The only way is assessment.

Assessment is an essential part of constructive learning. It does not have to be a formal test to measure students' learning with scores. It is the feedback from every student after every step of learning. It could be a few questions after class, or an informal talk with students before class. It could be classroom activities, music games etc. It happens along with the learning procedure. Assessment allows teachers get to know the students better, and to see the readiness for deeper learning. Furthermore, it helps the teachers adjust the teaching method, and make it best for students to learn.

In China, under the standard-test educational environment, there is no emphasis on assessment in music classroom. Assessment for some educators only means formal texts with scores on it. Sometimes, other ways of assessment are ignored by the teacher. For example, in a music class, when students are asked to perform a song or instrumental piece as a group or individual, teachers would simply give a score for their performance, but rarely asking questions

such as why do you perform in this way, or what do you think about the performance by other groups. In fact, those questions can be easily applied to music class, and have students to show their understanding of the things they learn in music class.

True learning is accompanied by changing of behavior, but changing behavior can not represent the happening of learning. The product could be exactly the same, but the process and the goal of learning are different. Therefore, how can we measure if learning occurs and how well it goes? There might be multiple ways, but measuring by behaviors would never be the only way. Therefore, how well students performed in one test would never be the only way to see how well the students learned. Assessment could easily be applied in the teaching procedure, and the respond from students is more important than the question itself. The response from students is the thing that teachers need to pay attention to, and it prepares for further learning.

### ***Redesign the Music Curriculum for Elementary and Secondary Level***

Six years of elementary and four years of secondary music curriculum are all mandatory in China, and are all in the form of general music class. This is a good way to apply “teaching music as a whole” (Reimer), but the curriculum needs to be redesigned.

First, the music curriculum needs to represent sequential learning for students. Current Music Curriculum in China does not provide a clear scope and sequence of music learning. In reality, students learn through sequences. Bloom’s Taxonomy defines how we learn sequentially. Gordon also provided a classification of types and stages of preparatory audiation in early childhood music education. Therefore, the music curriculum has to show the building of complexity, difficulty, and higher level thinking in music all through the ten-year school music education.

Second, the music curriculum needs to be redesigned toward a skill-based curriculum. The current musical curriculum which is used in China is a content-based curriculum. The National Standards of Music Curriculum in China provides what kind of music students should learn, and how many pieces they will learn at certain grade level. Most of the school districts follow this plan. As a result, there is no clear statement of what musical skills students need to achieve at certain time. The focus of music class is what music they listen to, what piece they can sing/play, rather than how well they understand the music, what musical skills they need to improve their performance and help them become better at understanding music.

Third, there needs to be an increase in project-based learning in music class. Music class in China seldom has a project-based learning process. Students will not have a chance to “own” the music, and they do not feel an ownership of the music classroom. Project-based learning allows working in groups, interacting with peers, and “owning” the music they are learning. This process would also help students developing the independent musicianship through learning.

Fourth, in China, we need to provide more opportunities for performance. Performance in music education in China is not the focus. There might be only one performance group in one school or in one district. This greatly limits the number of students engaged in performing experiences. Adding more performance opportunities for extra curriculum would provide more choices for students to choose what they like to do, and make the music curriculum into a mode of multiple perspectives.

Fifth, Chinese music education needs to allow diversity in designing the music curriculum. Unity is an important concept in Chinese culture. Seeking sameness guides people in different areas. Consequentially, ignorance of diversity has occurred. The same situation happens in music education as well. Although schools from different provinces use different versions of music textbooks, the materials are nearly the same. Little music in the classrooms represents the local culture. As a result, students can hardly recognize their own culture, much less be able to respect others'. Therefore, by allowing more diversity in music classes, we would provide more opportunities for students to learn from multiple perspectives, and be respectful of other cultures in a multi-cultural environment. As 21th century students, this skill is very useful in the process of globalization.

By applying constructivism into music class, students are allowed to be engaged in every aspect of the music learning process. The class could be fully student-centered, and student would have the ownership of learning in music.

## **CHAPTER 4 - Apply Constructivism in Teacher Training**

We often teach in the way that we have been taught. This is the human nature that the synapses in our brain had been made in a certain way. But time is moving forward. Generations are different from each other, and the current society is different from the former situations. Therefore, we must prepare future music educators to teach in a new way. This is the most important part of music education for the future. In order to make this happen, applying constructivism in teacher training is necessary.

### **Recent Teacher Training in China**

The undergraduate teacher preparation programs are often operated in normal universities in China. It is a four-year program with a certificate in music teaching for elementary and secondary levels. The current programs are mainly based on music literacy and performing technique. Those programs often offer music history classes (one semester of western music history and one semester of Chinese music history), music theory classes (including general theory class, harmony, and style analysis), private lessons (instrumental or vocal), choral conducting, and music teaching skills.

Undergraduate training follows the traditional way of teaching. Even the music teaching class follows the model of “teacher as authority”, one gives instruction directly. Students only know the general information of Orff, Kodaly, without knowing how one would apply it in their future music classrooms. The connections are missing from what the future educators learn in college and what they will teach later. Some new teachers say that they still don’t know how to teach after four-years of education. If the teacher doesn’t know how to teach, how would the students learn successfully?

## **Operate Constructivism in Teacher Training Programs**

To apply constructivism into music education, teacher training should also follow the constructivist point of view. Just as Wiggins said, “undergraduate teacher preparation programs must also operate in constructive ways if we want to improve music teaching.” (Wiggin, 2007)

Operating constructivism in teacher training programs allows educators better understanding of a constructive perspective of music learning, and experience constructive learning before they teach in this way. That would also help the teachers to be ready for the change of roles in the music classroom. They would be comfortable switching their role to a guide in class, and know how to help students construct their own music understanding. For this purpose, constructivism must be applied to teacher training programs which refer to two aspects. The first is in undergraduate teacher preparation program, and the other is in continuous training or professional development for the in-service music teachers.

### ***For Future Music Teachers***

Operating constructivism in training for future music teachers is necessary to bring about the needed changes. Teachers know how to operate this education theory only after they are trained in this process, and have personally constructed their own understanding of constructivism. They would then be able to apply it to their music classrooms. More project-based learning could be applied in college level courses. Students learn more through doing it, and learn the most through teaching it. The project-based learning allows the future educators to learn what they are going to teach through doing it. Sharing project results allows them to experience teaching it beforehand. This is not only for current study, but also contributing to their future.

Through constructive learning, students become the center of the class, and they would understand how people learn constructively. This would help them understand learning in a learner’s perspective, and then would be able to teach through this process in the future.

### ***For In-Service Music Teachers***

An important aspect to bring changes, also a necessity is to introduce constructivism to current music teachers in China. For some of them, constructivism may not be an absolutely new

word. It had been introduced in China for years. However, the authentic understanding of constructivism has not occurred broadly. Many music teachers are applying more music activities into music classrooms, they are changing the content of music class, but still, the courses are teacher directed. Students are passively taught, rather than actively learn. This is what Scott called, *pseudo-constructivism* (Scott, 2006). It is still a teacher-dominated environment. For these current music educators, further understanding of constructivism should be achieved. For those in-service music teachers who have not heard of constructivism, it is the thing they need to learn for themselves.

In-service music teachers are the ones who work directly with the students. They are the ones who know when learning occurs, and how well the process goes. They have the advantage of putting theory into practice at the first time. Therefore, introducing constructivism to in-service music teachers allows the application of constructivism happens right away. This process could also help to measure if the idea of constructivism is growing well in the land of China, and how to make adjustments of that.

### **Collaborate with Music Educators in and out of Our Culture**

Cognitive dissonance tells us that learning happens through the process of being aware of dissonance and resolving it. Education is also a way to provide discriminations and build up understanding. Many learning theories also work in social context and help learning.

There are plenty of teachers' associations in China, which provides many opportunities for music educators to share teaching experiences with colleagues, exchange information about teaching and learning, and work together to find out what is the best way for students to learn music. All the music teachers should take advantage of the collaboration with others and promote their understanding of music education.

For music educators in China, collaboration does not only refer to work with music teachers from other schools, other districts, but also means they can learn from teachers in other countries.

Since globalization, collaboration with other cultures becomes unavoidable. Under collaboration, more new theories could be introduced to China, and help educators develop their way of teaching. This could also allow educators from China to provide their successes in front

of others in the world. But one thing we should be careful about is: learning from others does not mean replanting the theory directly. Those theories should be put into cultural context, which means something needs to be justified. One example is the material that we are going to use. Students learn from within, which is knowledge they already have, understandings that they have already built. Materials from other cultures might not be suitable for Chinese students. Finding the proper content for Chinese students is what we educators need to do. We should provide knowledge with which students can easily make connections. This process motivates them to learn.

## **CHAPTER 5 - New Paradigm for Music Education in China**

Establishing a new paradigm based on constructivism for music education in China is an ongoing challenge to which we still need to apply great effort. The essential questions that lead us to the reformation are: Where are we? What do we do right now? What do we want in the future? According to this new understanding, how should music education be? By answering these questions, a new paradigm could be designed for music education in China.

### **Start with: What do We Have? What are We Doing?**

Planting a new idea does not mean abandoning all that we have. Actually, it is the opposite. Recognizing what we have, then building upon what we are doing is the first step of planting the seeds of constructivism. In fact, there are some significant aspects in music education in China on which we can build.

### ***Great Tools from Traditional Music Background***

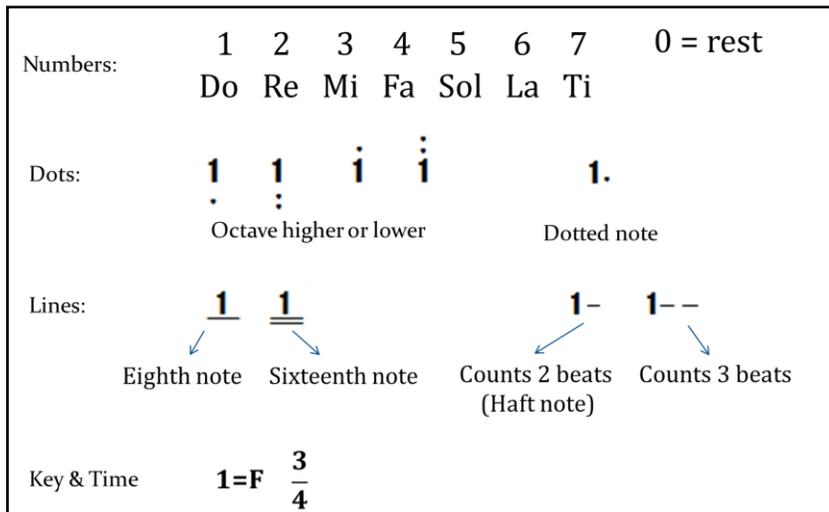
The long history of China and its unique culture has brought us abundant resources. Folk songs, traditional instruments are great materials to use in music classrooms, as long as the materials are properly chosen. For instance, the collection of children's rhymes could be widely used to develop rhythm understanding. Guzheng (Chinese Zither, plucked string instrument), because of its pentatonic nature and easy learning aspects, could be used in a music class to help building the concept of musical scales.

The traditional music provides us a good foundation of music education. Students are familiar with it, and they can quickly make connections to the music. The traditional music represents our culture, and using more materials from that could also help students better understand their own culture.

### *Nationwide Use of Simple Numbered Notation System*

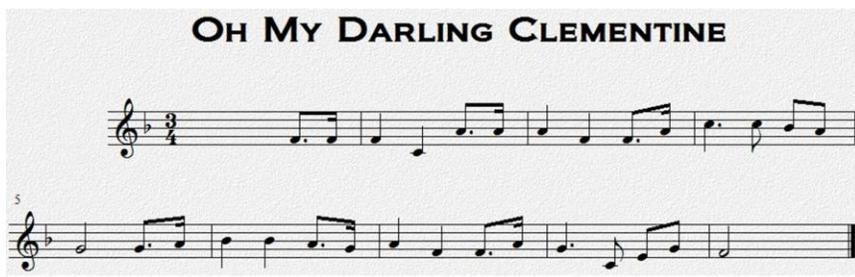
In China, teachers do not teach the staff at the beginning of elementary education. Instead, what is used to help children read and sing the music is called “Simple Numbered Musical Notation” or “Simplified Notation”. The simple numbered notation uses the numbers 1-7 to represent solfege “do-re-mi-fa-sol-la-ti”. The dot under or above the number means certain numbers of octave lower or higher, and how many dots reflect how many octaves. The number 0 stands for a rest. Lines in numbered musical notation are applied to duration. Numbers without line under them are quarter notes, one line under them are eighth notes, two lines, sixteenth note, etc. The short line next to the note stands for how many beats for playing the note. For example, a half note “mi” will be written as “3 -”, a whole note “ti” will be written as “7 - - -”. A dot next to a note has the same meaning as it is in staff notation. The tonality and meter are written at the beginning of the notation. Figure 5.2 shows it is in F major, and 3/4 meter. The following figures give examples about all the rules of Simple Numbered Notation.

**Figure 5.1: Simple Numbered Notation System**



**Figure 5.2: Oh My Darling Clementine Written in Simple Numbered Notation**

**OH MY DARLING CLEMENTINE**



1 = F  $\frac{3}{4}$

1. 1 | 1 5̣ 3. 3 | 3 1 1. 3 | 5. 5 4 3 | 2 - 2. 3 |  
 | 4 4 3. 2 | 3 1 1. 3 | 2. 5̣ 7̣ 2̣ | 1 - ||

Under the influence of western culture, some of the music teachers in China started to abandon the Simple Numbered Notation, and instead using Kodaly Hand Signs to establish the concept of high and low, and preparing students for staff notation. But the Simple Numbered Notation is a great way to apply musical concepts. Student can easily recognize the note by seeing it. In addition, the Simple Numbered Notation has already been used nationwide, and everyone knows it in the schools. It has been used for notation of both Chinese traditional music and western music. So, why not take advantage of that and make it an efficient tool for music class, and a bridge to different learning methods.

### *Reform toward a Positive Future*

The Nine-Year Compulsory Education policy guarantees everyone the right of being educated. It also provides a great tradition on which to establish a solid music program. Because of the public school system, and the increasing focus on art education, music education is undergoing a positive direction for the future. It is supported by the government, and the financial budget is increasing, thus, helping education. In addition, a growing need of teacher positions also shows the bright future of music education.

As a result, music educators have more opportunities to make changes, to practice new ideas, and to improve education. Meanwhile, it is also a challenge for educators as well: to redefine music education, and to make decisions for the future.

## **Build upon What We Have**

Based on the learning theory of constructivism, students cannot learn from something that did not exist before. The same applies to using constructivism in Chinese music education. The theory cannot be transplanted and teachers expect instant success. The best way to make constructivism work in Chinese music education is to build upon who we are and what we have.

Because of that, the new paradigm of music education in China should stand on the current background of music education, and absorb new information from other perspectives. Music knowledge could be taught by using the content from the music students listen to after school, from Chinese traditional music, and also from other cultures. Musical skills should be built not only from listening, music appreciation class, but also from more opportunities of performance, and expand the types of performances.

The understanding of aesthetic awareness should be adjusted. Music educators in China sometimes misunderstand aesthetic awareness as the same definition of listening skills. They think the purpose of music education in China is aesthetic awareness, so the way to approach that goal is teaching through listening. In fact, students achieve aesthetic awareness through multiple ways. Students learn aesthetic understanding of music by performing, creating, and responding. So, when building the new paradigm, the balance between each approach should be found. Scope and Sequence, Vertical-a strong curriculum and Horizontal-a broader view of music education should all be considered. Teaching music as a whole provides students with the integral concept of musical understanding.

Establishing a new paradigm of music education in China from a constructive perspective is still at the early stages. A bright future is in front of us, as long as we believe this is how students truly learn. The direction of music education is clearly defined to the music educators in China. What we should do is to broaden our view, and be brave to make changes.

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## **Appendix A - National Standards of Music Curriculum in China**

### 1. Experience & Appreciation

- 1) Music elements
- 2) Emotions of Music
- 3) Music Genre and Form
- 4) Musical Style

### 2. Performance

- 1) Singing
- 2) Playing
- 3) Integrated Performance
- 4) Music Reading

### 3. Creativity:

- 1) Explore sounds and music
- 2) Improvisation
- 3) Composition

### 4. Culture Understanding:

- 1) Music and social life
- 2) Music and other arts
- 3) Music and other subjects outside arts