

Chapter 2

Dinggang Internships at Green Middle School

Abstract This chapter provides needed information about the context and the participants of this study. Specifically, the urban–rural divide in Chinese society, the environment of the internship placement school, the tracking system in the school, and the *Dinggang* internship requirements are described. Profiles of the participant pre-service teachers are portrayed based on their family backgrounds, their expectations of the *Dinggang* internship, and their initial impression of the rural pupils.

Keywords Urban–rural divide • *Dinggang* internship • Teacher identity

On a sunny day in August 2009, eight interns and I took a bus to GMS to start the 4-month internship. It had rained the day before, and the road leading to Green County was very muddy. The bus bumped along the road to the school. Green crops were lavish and thriving along the way, and in between the green leaves, I saw the dark roofs of scattered houses. As the bus passed the main street of the little village lined with vegetable, meat, and fruit stalls, it was met with curious looks from local people walking in the mud with the ends of their trousers rolled up.

After about an hour, the bus meandered through an alley, surrounded by residences with gray walls, peeling paint, and scarred wooden gates, and stopped in front of an iron gate beside which a sign read “Green Middle School” in light green bricks. After we were admitted past the gate and drove onto the school grounds, I dragged my luggage down the bus and found myself in front of an old, three-story, scarlet brick building with green wooden doors. A red banner stating “Pursue the goal of being a whole person, a useful and successful person” (*li zhi cheng ren, cheng cai cheng gong*, 励志成人, 成才成功) was hanging in front of the school building. One of the classrooms was right beside the entrance, with its door open. A tall male teacher was passionately reading a piece of an article with his students in the local dialect, which I did not quite understand. On the south

side of the school building was a public lavatory with doors labeled “women’s” and “men’s.” In front of the lavatories was an open-air sink, with six water faucets and a broken edge. Bells rang for the break. Students ran out of their classroom. Some slowed their steps to look at the interns and me. Some rushed to the faucets and began to wash their hands or hair, with an eye peeking at us.

On the wall behind the faucets hung a board introducing the school. It prominently noted the outstanding academic performance of its graduates, the renovated and new teaching facilities, caring teachers, and the strict school management aiming at students’ all-around development. Beside this board was another one highlighting the “competition of the classes,” ranking classes in the categories of test achievement on the midterm and final-term examinations, discipline, and hygiene.

There was a hallway in the middle of the teaching building, which led us north to a small sports field surrounded by a newer, two-story teaching building with bright white ceramic tile further to the north, another teaching building under construction and a dining hall on the east, and a two-story student dormitory on the west. The new teaching building was split into two parts: Classrooms are in the west section, and the east section contained offices for the administrators and a few dormitories for teachers. *Dinggang* interns would live in these four-bed dorm rooms. A banner hanging in this newer building stated, “Serving for students’ lifelong development” (*wei xue sheng zhong shen fa zhan fu wu*, 为学生终身发展服务). As the noon break began, students purchased lunch in front of the sole window of the dining hall and leisurely squatted in the sports field beneath the banner, chatting and eating. There was only one dish for lunch and dinner. The lowest price that I could get for a lunch in Beijing was five *yuan*, but all I needed here was one *yuan*.

As I talked with the principal, Mr. Zhang Tong, I learned that there were about 500 students in the seventh through ninth grades combined, along with 38 teachers and staff members. GMS had been established as a public school in 1986, and Principal Zhang was very proud of the school’s achievements since he had taken over its leadership role in 2005. In the past few years, the school’s rates of graduation and admission into secondary high schools were the best of the three middle schools in the Green County. The school had been named “School of the Year” by the County Educational Bureau every year since 2005 because of the students’ high performance on the high school entrance examination.

GMS has two kinds of classes in each grade: Three classes are classified as *putongban* (普通班, general education classes) and two as *shiyban* (实验班, advanced classes) based on the students’ school entrance examination scores. In 2006, 46 students, almost half of the cohort, from the *shiyban* were admitted to the key secondary high school and more than a third of the students in *putongban* continued on to vocational school. This was a high level of performance that brought fame and pride to the school.

The Hierarchical Structure of Green Middle School: *Shiyanban* and *Putongban*

There were many reasons for Principal Zhang and his teachers to be proud of their achievements, especially the fact that GMS had the best graduation rates and academic scores in the county. Principal Zhang expressed his view that GMS's tracking system had contributed to these achievements, stating that "luckily the tracking system (*fen ban zhi*, 分班制) was implemented early so that we surpass our counterparts" (Principal Zhang, interview, August 26, 2009).

As my field notes recording the gymnastic exercises (described in the following excerpt) suggest, the hierarchical tracking structure of the classes is evident in every aspect of GMS's school life. The different kinds of exercises for different classes are analogous to what the students in different classes experience academically in the school.

After the second class in the morning, there is a twenty-minute period called "big break" when every student has to do some physical exercise. This is a very common requirement all over China, and a set of gymnastic exercises was designed for students nationwide.

The bell rings signaling the end of the second class at GMS. Marching music for the gymnastic exercises flows in the air. Students pour out of the classrooms. They quickly get into two big groups in the school's small playground. The playground was newly built in winter 2008, with the funding provided by the county government as the reward for GMS students' promising academic achievement in the previous two years. Cement steps separate the playground into two sections. *Putongban* students form a big circle in the lower section and the *shiyanban* students get together in rows in the upper section of the playground.

The marching music changes to a melodic rhythm for the gymnastic exercises. The *shiyanban* students begin to follow the rhythm and do the exercises, stretching their arms and legs, bending down, and jumping. It looks like dancing, and it is also a combination of carefully designed movements of major muscles and joints. Two supervising teachers stand beside the rows. *Shiyanban* students are supervised to do every movement properly so that they can fully exercise their tired bodies after bending behind the desks for almost two hours. Supervising teachers pull those students who look sloppy out of the rows. Today, one of the students pulled out is Li Zhi, a student who recently switched from *putongban* to *shiyanban* by means of his mother's connection with the school administrator. He is obviously not familiar with the movements, and he blushes as his teacher stares at him with a stern look. He cannot help looking at his former peers in *putongban* on the other side of the playground.

On the other section of the playground, the *putongban* students are jogging. Their steps are not following the rhythm of the gymnastic exercises since it keeps changing, while the students have to run in small steps at almost the same slow speed. Interns and most teachers are jogging with *putongban* students. For most teachers, the gymnastic exercises are quite new to them, since this type of exercise was adopted less than a year ago and are very different from what the teachers learned to do back in their own middle-school days. "It takes time to learn the complicated gymnastic exercises. And it looks strange to jump in front of your students. ... Running is easy and you can get some exercise, too," teacher Li Lan once told me when I asked why teachers did not join the *shiyanban* students to do the gymnastic exercises. One of the interns, Han Ming, complained that it is boring to run, and she still felt cold after running with the students in the



Fig. 2.1 Gymnastic exercises by *shiyban* and *putongban* students

winter. “You cannot really run. It is very slow ... slower than walking. I always worry that I may step on others’ shoes. And you eat a lot of dust.” (Field notes, October 9, 2009)

Students doing gymnastic exercises and those jogging with repeated small steps (see Fig. 2.1) metaphorically reflect a contrast between the two groups of students in GMS’s dual academic tracking system. High achievers on the school’s entrance examination go into the *shiyban* (classes 1 and 2), while those with lower-than-average scores are assigned to the *putongban* (classes 3, 4, and 5).

Teachers and students all know that classes 1 and 2 have better-equipped classrooms, more experienced teachers, and the most recently produced learning materials, enabling them to attain higher levels of academic achievement and a higher rate of enrollment in a key high school¹ upon graduation from GMS. Classes 3, 4, and 5 are general classes where students must do without multimedia equipment or current learning materials. Just as *shiyban* students do more complex gymnastic movements, they are also assigned more advanced academic tasks that require sophisticated thinking. In contrast, *putongban* students jog slowly with the same repetitive steps and are assigned easier learning tasks in their classrooms, with a stress on memorization.

¹ Secondary schools in China are categorized into “key” and “ordinary” schools. Key secondary schools (重点中学, *zhong dian zhong xue*) are schools distinguished from ordinary schools by their academic reputation, high rate of admission rates to universities and are generally allocated more resources by the government. It is usually a desired school choice for students and their parents.

Expectations for general classes are quite different from those for advanced classes at the school. As Mr. Sun, the Director of Teaching Affairs at GMS, said:

Fewer than 1 % of the students in general classes can get into the key high schools every year. Most of our students graduate and then do not pursue further education. Some students choose to drop out of our school before graduation. We work hard to improve their learning achievement. But that is all that they can finally achieve. In the past two years, about one-third of the advanced class students got into the key high school. Many of them can get into ordinary schools or vocational schools. We have to have certain numbers of graduates get into the key high school every year. If we could not meet the requirement for three consecutive years, our principal would be fired and the school would not be among those at the top of the funding list for the Education Bureau of Green County. Every year about 20 to 30 *shiyانبан* students can get into the key high schools in the town or the city. We have maintained a record [of graduates entering the key high school] that ranks among the top middle schools in Green County. Look at the new buildings and new playground. They were just built with our award funding from the education bureau in the past few years. And we get better students because we have this reputation of sending them on into key high schools.

Mr. Sun also told me that this tracking system exists due to its efficiency in yielding high academic achievement through investing the limited resources available in those students who are most likely to achieve at a high level. It also meets parents' needs:

This tracking system is not recommended, as you know. But it means a lot for parents and for the development of the school. Parents want their children to be classified with and to spend most of their time with "good students." If we do not have *shiyانبан*, they will opt to send their children to other schools that have *shiyانبан*. You know, we have to recruit students with good grades in elementary school, and we have to set up *shiyانبан* to attract their parents. (Mr. Sun, interview, August 27, 2009)

For GMS, the tracking system is vital for the school's development and its reputation. The pupils in *shiyانبан* have to study very hard, as this is to be the "crib for key high schools," as Mr. Sun put it in our interview. Their hard work may enable them to "go out of the rural village, get into the key high school in the urban town, hopefully follow the track to be a college student, and then obtain a decent job in the city" (Principal Zhang, interview, August 26, 2009). Hence, the *shiyانبан* seems to be the gatekeeper for rural students seeking to follow an academic track and pursue a better life in the city. However, academic success may not be the only way for students to get away from their rural hometown. Many students in *putongбан*, who are not expected to achieve well academically, still dream of moving to the city, according to Teacher Wang:

Putongбан students may not achieve very well in school. But they know that they can land a job in the city. You know, there are some fields of manual work in the city, such as construction, cleaning companies, restaurants, and so on, that recruit migrant workers from the rural areas. My students think that they can follow their relatives to hunt for such a job in the city. They envy those neighbors or relatives who come back from the city in pretty clothes and act like a big-city person. But they do not know how arduous the manual work can be. And those might be the only jobs that they could possibly get in the city without a high school diploma. (Teacher Wang, conversation, November 21, 2009)

When I was at GMS, I often heard teachers telling their *putongбан* students that they had to study hard and at least get into a general high school so as to

have a bright future. As Teacher Li Lan once reminded an absent-minded student in Class 5 of the seventh grade:

Look out of the window. Those workers are sweating in the hot sunshine [while working on the new teaching building under construction]. They make 30 yuan a day, less than 1,000 yuan a month, without health or retirement benefits. As a teacher, I can make 2,500 yuan a month with all the benefits. The difference is that I have a college education and they do not. Do you want to lay back now and get a construction job right after you graduate from middle school? It is not just about differences in jobs. It is about different ways of living, too. (Field notes on a math lesson taught by Teacher Li, September 8, 2009)

Teacher Li told me later that she wanted her students to understand that, although manual workers can live with dignity, they might have more job options for a better life if they had completed high school or even higher education. Many teachers in *putongban* told me similar stories. Still, there were quite a few drop-outs from *putongban*, and many *putongban* students remained unmotivated to learn as they got the message that the “chances for them to get into college were very slim.” This message was explicit in the tracking system, and the teachers and principal knew that the *putongban* students “are deeply hurt by the *fen ban zhi* [tracking system]” (Principal Zhang, interview, August 26, 2009).

The tracking system at GMS also defines interns’ teaching opportunities, how the interns view the nature of teacher–student interaction, and how they choose teaching techniques for different groups of students.

Upon arrival, most *dinggang* interns are assigned to general classes, *putongban*, so that they “would not interfere with the intense teaching speed of the advanced classes,” as Han Ming explained (interview, September 26, 2009). But Han Ming finally got an opportunity to teach advanced classes as well due to the lack of chemistry teachers in the school. Jin Lei was able to teach math in two advanced classes since her supervising teacher, Mr. Shan, was the lead math teacher for seventh-grade *shiyban* classes. But Jin Lei complained about the limited opportunity to teach compared to her intern peers as of the middle of the second month of her internship: “There are several kinds of classes, such as concept introduction classes, review classes, and exercise classes. Teacher Shan only allows me to teach the review classes and exercise classes. I have not taught a class that introduces new concepts yet.” At the time of this remark, Jin Lei had mostly observed Teacher Shan’s classes and taught only a few classes. Her peers had taken over the full teaching responsibility of teaching *putongban* for almost a month by then.

This arrangement might be part of GMS’s strategy to ensure high graduation rates and test scores. As already noted, the school was proud of its success in sending many of its graduates to the key high school in the city. High test scores on the high school entrance examination were the goal, as they guaranteed the school’s further development, continued funding from the educational bureaus, and favorable salaries or bonuses for the teachers. To ensure that every teacher was doing his or her best to enhance students’ academic achievement, GMS had a weekly teacher appraisal system. At the end of each week, the Director of Teaching recorded a score for every teacher in the following

areas: attendance, lesson planning, teaching, homework, tutoring, and testing. Ranking excellent in lesson planning, homework, tutoring, and teaching (based on random classroom observations by the Principal or the Director of Teaching) would add two points to the teacher's score; unsatisfying performances in these aspects would subtract two points. Ranking at the top in terms of students' average test scores (with separate comparisons for *putongban* and *shiyban*) on the major examinations (monthly examinations, midterms, and finals) could add up to five points. Ranking in last place on average test scores meant a loss of five points. The scores on each item and the overall scores were displayed on the blackboard at the front of the teachers' conference room where the principal convened all the teachers for weekly meetings. The scores were not directly tied to teachers' salaries, but "it is a matter of face and reputation," teacher Wang Hairong said, since everyone can see everyone else's scores during the teacher meeting.

The interns' names were added to the list of names on the evaluative blackboard. For them, it was not just a matter of saving face, because their teaching performance as interns had to be accepted and officially scored by the GMS mentors and the principal. They immediately felt the pressure of competing with each other through their students' average test scores on each examination, so they eagerly sought advice on how to achieve better results. They targeted the methods that they thought could help most of their students learn and get better test scores. For instance, Zhang Fang learned that she had to "pay much attention to teaching above-average students in *putongban* since they could enhance the average test score of the whole class. Teacher Yang Ke said that teaching *shiyban* is totally different and you have to attend to lower groups. Otherwise, these students would be likely to lower the average score." Other interns also indicated that they viewed average test scores as one of the most significant performance objectives, or even the only significant one, in their process of learning to teach. This mindset certainly directed and confined the cultural repertoire that the interns had access to and prioritized.

As I will show in Chaps. 3 and 4, pre-service teachers learned to differentiate the goals of *shiyban* students from those of *putongban* students, as well as comparing their own experiences with those of their students. In their experiences of learning to teach, they acquired and developed techniques in key teaching tasks, such as classroom assessment, and they applied these techniques differently to *shiyban* and *putongban* students. Thus, GMS and its tracking system framed to a large extent the *dinggang* experiences of the participating interns. Other situational factors also impacted the interns' understanding of themselves in relation to the people whom they encountered during their *Dinggang* internship.

In the remainder of this chapter, I introduce the required components of the *Dinggang* internship and explore how the interns' identities influenced their understanding of the internship over the first few weeks. The interns' identities described below were constantly under scrutiny and underwent molding and reshaping as the interns examined their positions as teachers in an unfamiliar setting.

The *Dinggang* Internship in the Han University

As a part of the pre-service teacher training program in the Han University (HU), the *Dinggang* internship corresponds to efforts by teacher education curriculum reform in China to (1) formulate a balance between academic and professional knowledge and (2) respond to new market demands (Mak 1999). However, the traditional view that “possession of subject content knowledge suffices in teaching” still prevails in teacher education (Song 2008). As Guo (2005, pp. 80–81) summarized, “current teacher education programs are narrowly designed, with rigid curriculum, excessive focus on subject training, and insufficient emphasis on teaching skills ... [and] many teachers arrive in the classroom with little teaching experiences.” The new teachers with “high academic knowledge, low professional abilities” (Li and He 2011, p. 53) are not well aligned with the new curriculum in the K-12 setting that requires teachers to have the ability to facilitate students’ active participation or enhance learners’ capacity to solve problems.

1. The Promise of *Dinggang* Internships

With the aim of training high-quality teachers in response to policy and practical requirements, the *Dinggang* internship orientation program has sent a strong message about the use of the internship to integrate theory and practice in the teacher education curriculum, make pre-service teachers marketable, and help rural education. University representatives cited their graduates’ increased employment rate, the letters of appreciation received from the rural schools, and personal stories told by the previous year’s *dinggang* interns. After the orientation, the *Dinggang* internship participants saw this assignment as a good way to acquire teaching skills and become a qualified teacher. This meant that the internship was not only helping underprivileged rural students but also helping young teachers to accumulate qualifications for them to find teaching positions. It is especially so for students from a *san ben* college (third-class college, 三本), which recruits students with relatively low scores in the National College Entrance Examination (*gaokao*, 高考) and charges high tuition. When I started my fieldwork, the teacher education students were all from Hope College, which is a *San Ben* college attached to HU. As Chen Leng said:

Going down to the rural school and teaching students with learning difficulties can challenge me to become a real teacher. We have learned all the bookish educational theories in Hope College, and now we have an authentic teaching setting to test our teaching abilities. The schoolteachers at GMS have rich teaching experiences that I can learn from. There is nothing new or difficult in their textbooks. Maybe it is that way because I have already learned all this knowledge. But my own clear understanding does not guarantee that I can explain the knowledge clearly to the students. I do not know much about rural children. Their teachers do. It is said in the orientations that veteran school teachers are experts with their students. I do find that some of their advice can help me convey the knowledge that I learned in the college to the middle-school classroom. (Chen Leng, interview, September 1, 2009)

Thus, by promising a better future in the market, the institutional arrangements of the *Dinggang* internship motivated Chen Leng to actively seek advice from

local teachers. He and other interns were encouraged to make use of local teaching resources to reduce the gap between their urban heritage and rural contexts.

2. Components of the *Dinggang* Internship

As institutional partnerships have gradually been established between HU and nearby rural schools, HU has developed a systematic process to prepare pre-service teachers for their *dinggang* teaching experience. Whether they are well prepared to take full responsibility as a classroom teacher depends on the expectations of the individual interns and the local schools. But HU has been striving for a supervisory system to guide the pre-service teachers by incorporating five elements into the internship along with explicit expectations, resources, and support for implementing each element. According to the official documents from the HU *Dinggang* Office, these five major elements of the HU *Dinggang* internship are orientation, observation, classroom instruction, class management, and reflection/research.

Orientation Activities

About one semester before the actual internship begins, a series of orientation activities takes place to get pre-service teachers geared toward the *dinggang* experience, helping them not only to acquire teaching skills but also to prepare themselves mentally. Looking at the schedule of these orientation activities, I was intrigued by the extent of the events. Lectures, school tours, panel discussions, and workshops are provided in each department to raise awareness of *dinggang*, ease fears about living and teaching in an unfamiliar setting, and equip these novices with skills and tips to deal with possible problems during the internship. For instance, I observed a lecture in the English department at which a highly respected veteran teacher from an elite middle school in the city talked about the new middle school curriculum and the teaching skills that she employed to implement this curriculum, which aims at enhancing creativity as well as a solid knowledge foundation. Experienced teachers from local schools are invited to talk about their methods of classroom management. A panel of interns from the previous year was also invited to speak to several departments. The experiences that these interns shared helped the newcomers to get a glimpse of the experiences that they could expect to have during the internship.

Individual teacher educators are also encouraged to incorporate modules in their classes to help their pre-service teachers to transition into their internship. For instance, Professor Lin Lan in the Chinese Department incorporated a “micro-classroom” in her pedagogy class. In her micro-classroom, Professor Lin had her pre-service teachers go through the teaching cycle by preparing lesson plans, delivering instruction, administering assessments, and engaging in reflection. She also proposed hypothetical problems that a teacher might encounter in the classroom and asked her students to solve them by performing a skit. Her students found this approach very helpful for dealing with the real problems that could arise in their student teaching.

After going through several months of orientation, the pre-service teachers are sent in groups to their internship placement. The first step when they reach their placement sites is to observe veteran teachers.

Observation (*jian xi*, 见习)

Pre-service teachers are required to spend the first few weeks meeting with veteran teachers in the placement school, observing classrooms, taking class notes, preparing lesson plans following the guidance of the mentor teachers, and getting to know school policies. This period is referred to as *jian xi* (见习), during which the pre-service teachers learn to teach by *jian* (looking at or observing experienced teachers). Some pre-service teachers may have just a few days of *jian xi*, since they are expected to teach almost immediately due to the lack of teachers in the rural schools. However, all of them must go through a short period of preparation for teaching. During the *jian xi* period, interns follow the instructions in the *Guide to Dinggang Internship*, a handbook provided by the HU Dinggang Office, on how to observe classes. They can record the class word by word, write a narrative, or draw illustrations, paying attention to content, teaching techniques, procedures, timing, and student-teacher interactions (Li 2008, pp. 55–57). They also note the highlights of the teacher's method, which may involve questions and key points, and talk with the teacher and his or her peers after class.

Classroom Instruction

Pre-service teachers start to take over teaching responsibilities after the *jian xi* period. When the interns take full responsibility for teaching, they indeed function as the real teacher in the classroom—drafting lesson plans, meeting with teacher colleagues to refine the lesson plans, classroom instruction, checking homework, composing examinations, giving feedback on students' examinations and daily performance, and so on.

Some pre-service teachers take on full responsibility of teaching if their subject has previously been taught by a substitute teacher, whose specialty may not be in that particular content area. As Chaps. 4 and 5 will show in further detail, all the interns are expected to learn from their own teaching experiences under the supervision of a mentor teacher at the school. During this process, they prepare lesson plans as a group with their peers who teach the same subject and/or in conjunction with their mentor teachers. Those who do not have assigned mentor teachers, either because no one else is teaching that subject in the school or because the assigned teacher is on maternity leave, are advised to seek support from whichever teachers feel able to help.

Class Management: Form Teacher (*Ban Zhu Ren*, 班主任)

In China, teaching does not happen only within a lesson; it extends to every aspect of a student's school life. Chinese students' activities are organized by class unit (*ban*, 班). The class is directed by a head teacher on a daily schedule. This form teacher, *ban zhu ren* (班主任), disciplines students, engages them in activities aimed at citizenship, and coordinates feedback from the subject teachers. *Ban zhu ren* are also responsible for extracurricular activities, working with the parents and school administrators to help students grow academically and personally (Paine et al. 2003). Being a *ban zhu ren* is deemed a very important part of teaching and requires extensive skill and experience. In order to help its pre-service teachers to acquire these skills and experiences, HU signs contracts with many *dinggang*

project partner schools that allow pre-service teachers to work as *ban zhu ren*. Schools that are insufficiently staffed especially welcome such arrangements.

However, at GMS, the pre-service teachers do not work as *ban zhu ren* during their internships. When I asked the principal of GMS, Mr. Zhang, about the opportunities for interns to work as *ban zhu ren*, he was quite ambivalent in his answers. As GMS was becoming one of the best rural schools in the county and sending an increasing number of graduates to key high schools, Mr. Zhang was very serious about maintaining teaching quality and students' high academic performance. "The university students are quite active," he said. "But they still need to learn a lot to become a mature *ban zhu ren* teacher. I would provide experienced teachers to guide them through teaching and working as *ban zhu ren* teachers." In the end, no one in the GMS intern team worked independently as or replaced a *ban zhu ren*, although some of them had a few experiences working as the assistant to *ban zhu ren* teachers. The opportunities for working as a *ban zhu ren* obviously depend on the school's needs as well as the Principal's (and the experienced teachers') judgments regarding the interns' ability to serve in this role.

Reflection and Research

The last main component of the *Dinggang* internship requires interns to conduct research on their own teaching. In the *Guide to the Dinggang Internship*, interns are asked to conduct at least one research project on their own teaching by means of conducting surveys or writing reflections on their teaching experiences. The teacher educators in each department also encourage their pre-service teachers to write reflections after every lesson that they teach. For the participant interns at GMS, this was a required daily routine, as the interns had to attach reflections to each lesson plan.

As the participants quickly find out, the support from the teacher education program continues even when they are in the field teaching. A teacher educator travels with these pre-service teachers to the rural county, living in one of the placement schools and supervising all the pre-service teachers in the schools within some area of the county. A student leader is appointed for the team of pre-service teachers in each school, and these leaders report to the supervising teacher educator of the county at the end of everyday by telephone. The supervising teacher educator from HU helps the pre-service teachers to solve problems that they encounter in their teaching, as well as in daily life in the rural school. He or she also maintains communication with local school principals. For instance, some interns in the neighboring county wanted to reduce their teaching load and did not know how to talk with the principal without appearing to frame the request as a complaint. They talked with their supervising teacher educator and had him communicate with the school principal. Supervising teacher educators also visit each school in the county periodically and observe lessons. Although these teacher educators can give some feedback to the pre-service teachers, they cannot give a great amount of advice due to their limited time at each site. Pre-service teachers mostly rely on their mentor teachers at the placement school to give them daily direction.

After a short period of observation in the veteran teacher's classes, most *dinggang* interns take on almost the full extent of a teacher's responsibilities during

their student teaching. They are expected to function as the equivalent of full-time teachers. The pre-service teachers may feel overwhelmed in the beginning. With support from their mentor teachers in the school and the teacher educators, it is hoped that they can adapt to their teaching roles after one or two months of the internship and begin to feel at ease in their own classrooms, according to the expectations of the HU teacher educators. As we will learn in later chapters, the pre-service teachers' teaching experiences varied as they constantly juggled many responsibilities at school. And they kept struggling to relate what they had already known about teaching with what they were facing in an unfamiliar setting at GMS. Their identities—how they saw themselves and why they were participating in such a special internship—shaped and were shaped by their understanding of their *dinggang* experiences.

Pre-service Teachers on the Journey: Identity of the Participants

Pre-service teachers' understanding of their *dinggang* immersion experiences is pertinent to their own identity formation since they are socialized to work with students from different backgrounds (Levine-Rasky 1998; Mauger 1983). Cultural sociologists argue that everyday practices are the essential means by which people (re)construct their own identities and impute identities to other people. These practices are also shaped by and influence the varying degree of access to valued resources and opportunities enjoyed by individuals from different social backgrounds (Anagnostopoulos 2006). Pre-service teachers' learning experiences in the *dinggang* teaching project involve learning about themselves via daily interaction with low-SES students, peer pre-service teachers, and mentor teachers. All of the interns at GMS are from Hope College, attached to HU. All students from Hope College do their internship during the fall semester of their junior year.

Many of the students at Hope College are from cities, which are relatively well-off areas, or from wealthy families in town and rural areas. When these teacher candidates encounter pupils in lower-income areas, the differences of social economic status can translate into cultural gaps. They are not accustomed to the cold classrooms in the chilly weather, are amazed to observe that their 13-year-old pupils have only two steamed buns and some stewed vegetables for lunch, and sometimes feel very well respected as college students in a rural town where less than 2 % of the population can go to college. As noted previously (see Table 1.1), eight interns were placed at GMS, five from cities and three from towns or economically advanced rural areas. When these pre-service teachers encountered low-SES pupils in the less developed rural areas, their formed identities were reenvisioned according to the difference that they perceived and enacted between themselves and their pupils.

Han Ming

Han Ming was the team leader among the GMS interns assigned by the HU *Dinggang* Office due to her prior experience as a student leader in a major student organization at the college. She is from a city of more than nine million people in the southern part of the province. As an only child who lost her father a couple years earlier, she was adored by her widowed mother and her grandparents. She thought that getting into Hope College was good for her since she “was not an excellent student in middle school with a below-average score, and Hope College has a good reputation in education.” However, she was anxious about her future job search due to the limited number of positions open to students from Hope College, which was a *san ben* (三本) college which recruits students with relatively low scores on the National College Entrance Examination. Moreover, she felt the burden of the high tuition cost of 20,000 yuan per year, for which her family had paid, placing heavy demands on her mother’s humble income and the retirement pension of her grandparents. She hoped to get a well-paid job after graduation so that she could support her family better. Han Ming stated, “If I cannot get a good job, I will take the postgraduate examination and get a master’s degree. A higher degree will help me to get a good job in a few years.” When asked where she would like to get a job, she said that she planned to “be a teacher in a good school or an education officer in the local government, which are stable positions and enable a comfortable life in my hometown or a big city.”

In order to fulfill her dream, Han Ming tried very hard to accumulate all the credentials and skills she could get: Taking part in the student organizations and becoming a student leader, taking computer tests and getting related certifications, trying to excel in all her courses, preparing for the postgraduate examination, and, of course, accepting the *Dinggang* internship, which would help her to “gain a lot of hands-on experiences of teaching and enrich the resume.” Before she took the *Dinggang* internship, she attended a two-week summer teaching project in a rural village near her home city. Her comment about the pupils in this teaching project was that “they do not want to study at all because they do not see any hope in doing it. Few of their friends and relatives get into college. They did not find any difference between themselves and those who came back to the farm after graduating from high school. If they themselves are not motivated to learn as I was in middle school, the teacher can do nothing to help. Well, maybe the first step for their teacher should be pushing them to learn and having them desire to learn” (interview, September 26, 2009).

Chen Leng

Chen Leng, the only male intern at GMS, was well-read and very articulate. Like Han Ming, he also comes from a big city, the capital city of the province. He could travel to his home from Hope College by bus within 20 min. He chose to study chemistry at the college because he was very tired of learning liberal arts such as the Chinese and English languages. Although he was in a key high school that featured a high quality of foreign language instruction, he felt that he was under great pressure to learn English, as all his in-school and extracurricular time was

consumed by English language learning activities arranged by his teachers and parents. Chemistry was not as hard as English or physics for him, and he became interested in it while in high school.

Coming to GMS was Chen Leng's first chance to get away from home and live in a rural area. Compared with his middle school peers at his key high school in the province's capital city, he felt that the students in the rural areas had simple lifestyles and did not have access to as much information, so they should be able to concentrate on learning without distraction. But he also felt that they might become unmotivated to learn because of the limited information available to them about what they could do with a good transcript and higher education degree. Chen Leng viewed parents as the most important factor in students' learning, partly because his own parents were "on top of everything" that he did in middle school. Although he thought that his parents had driven him too hard and almost caused him to have a negative reaction to learning, he believed, as a new teacher, that parents should guide students to realize that it is important to learn at school. According to his observation of GMS parents during the first week of his internship, some parents were "like my own parents," cooperating with the teachers and following their guidance as to how to supervise students' learning at home. These students were mostly in *shiyanban* and could usually achieve well academically. Chen Leng also thought that some parents in *putongban* did not respond to the teacher either because they worked in the city, leaving their children with grandparents, or did not see the value or benefit of sending their children to *putongban*.

For Chen Leng, taking part in the *Dinggang* internship was an experiment to test whether he was suitable for teaching. As the only son of a family with both parents working for a big company in the city, he knew quite well that many jobs for urban children exist in the social network that parents have built up over the years. But he wanted to earn his job by his own excellence in teaching if he was meant to be a teacher. "If I can teach a group of children in a rural school and help them mend their weak knowledge foundation," he stated, "this certainly adds something to my resume. I am not quite sure that I can teach urban children as well since they may be more demanding and challenging, but I can get a better sense of working with children from the *Dinggang* internship than from a general education internship," which lasts only one or two months with limited teaching opportunity (Chen Leng, interview, September 1, 2009). Planning to teach well at GMS and later to land a job at an urban school, Chen Leng sought all the information he could get to adjust himself to the internship—conversations (coupled with wine) with male teachers after school hours; advice from his mentor teacher, Ms. Ru; books that he had brought from home; and the Internet (He was the only intern to bring a laptop to GMS, making frequent visits to the only computer laboratory in the school to connect to the Internet).

Feng Lin

As a Chinese language major, Feng Lin had a talent for writing beautiful prose and often posted writings on her blog via her Internet-connected cell phone. Her father was a factory worker and her mother was a homemaker. She chose to study the

Chinese language not only because she loved it but also because there were many job openings for Chinese majors.

Being a quiet student in an advanced class at her urban high school, Feng found herself an outsider due to her below-average test scores in math and the aloofness of her teachers and peers. “Teachers attended more to students with excellent test scores or loud ones,” she said. “I did not act out or achieve well. So I was in my teachers’ blind spot. The only exception was my Chinese language teacher. Once she read my article to the class and highly praised it. I was so encouraged. I guess that this incident made me choose Chinese as my major and plan to become a Chinese language teacher.” She resented the emotional distance between peers in her high school: “Everyone was working hard to compete with each other. It was like a battlefield in the classroom, and test scores were the major topic during breaks. How horrible it was!” As she observed the happiness and friendliness among her students in Class 5 of the eighth grade at GMS, she could not help admiring it: “I am lucky to teach in *putongban*. I might get crazy if I were assigned to teach a *shiyban* class. It is suffocating to observe the children bending over the desk, doing nothing but writing on a test paper.” What she saw in the *shiyban* at GMS seemed to parallel what she had experienced in her high school, and she opted to invest all her energy in teaching and learning more about her “lovely” *putongban* students. As for her goals, Feng said that she did not really want to push her students to get outstanding grades and enter the key high schools in the city. In contrast, she wanted them to “grow happily with a healthy mind and body” (Feng Lin, interview, August 29, 2009).

Hao Jing

Hao Jing looked fashionable and was once told by a GMS teacher to wear plain clothes so as to “look like a teacher.” In her high-heeled shoes, shining earrings, and bright short skirt made with fine textiles, this metropolitan 19-year-old did not think that she looked unfit to teach: “As long as I can teach my lessons well and get my students to attend to the class, I am a good teacher.” As the only daughter of a working-class family, she had been very confident about her Chinese language talent, but her below-average scores in math and science on the College Entrance Examination sent her to Hope College, a *san ben* college. “Without pursuing a master’s degree, there is a slim chance for us to get a good job in the city. I plan to take the exam and enroll in the Department of Classic Chinese at HU. There are many people trying to get in and the entering score is usually very high. But it is worth trying,” she said.

As for her new role as a teaching intern, Hao Jing had a plan to support students who are not confident about their Chinese language learning. She said that she had negative experiences with her math teachers at middle school and high school who did not pay attention to her work. In her opinion, a teacher can help students learn if he or she believes in them, and she planned to encourage her GMS students to learn by giving attention to each individual student.

She was a little surprised by her GMS students, as she thought that students in the rural areas did not know much and would have simplistic personalities. “They

do know the outside world. My students in Class 5 of Grade 7 asked me about my hobbies and told me that they liked to surf on the Internet. They asked me to keep this a secret since their teachers do not allow them to go to the Internet bar. They also asked me about what it was like in the city. They are generally more polite and shier than children in the city, and they are quite at ease with us when talking about new things that they read in books or on the Internet” (Hao Jing, interview, August 31, 2009).

Li Min

Li Min was very energetic with a quick rate of speech and walking pace despite her small figure. As she stood in front of the classroom in her first demonstration class, her powerful voice immediately attracted her students and the observing teachers. She was the older of two children in her family, in a county close to a northern city in the province. She chose to study math, her favorite subject in Hope College, and hoped to find out if she could be a good teacher through the *Dinggang* internship. Although her parents wanted her to be like her sister-in-law and become a teacher, which in her hometown is commonly assumed to be a secure and stable career for a female, she herself was looking for something more challenging and better-paid. Thus, she was not only planning to excel in teaching, but also seeking opportunities to “interact with local people and teachers” so as to develop important social skills that would help her to get an ideal job in the future.

When asked for her of the GMS pupils, she disagreed with the practice of grouping them as “rural students” since “they differ from each other although they are distinct as a group from students in the city.” She had observed her relatives who lived in villages close to her hometown, as they often visited her parents on weekends. “Some villages have this culture of respecting knowledge,” Li Min explained, “and they have most students graduate from high school and even have one or two students go to top universities every year. By contrast, some areas value financial success in business and most of their children tend to drop out after middle school and become apprentices in local small businesses or migrant workers in the city. ... Families differ, too. Some parents put more pressure on students to study while others adopt a policy of *laissez-faire*. Some are divorced families and some parents seldom stay at home since they take jobs away in the city. These types of families produce different students. Of course, students are different individuals. Some students are even smarter, and many are even more diligent, than those in the city, while the rest are just lazy and less smart.” Seeking advice from her sister-in-law, an elementary teacher in her hometown, she stressed that it was important for the teacher to establish connections with the students and help them to learn “with heart.” Her specific goal for her *Dinggang* internship was “to be a teacher loved by all the students, with all the knowledge about the text and the students” (Li Min, interview, August 26, 2009).

Jin Lei

Having been a member of the varsity volleyball team in the Hope College Department of Mathematics, Jin Lei looked very active and athletic. She is an only child from a divorced family. She explicitly expressed her passion for teaching

and frequently quoted lines from books about great teachers and the textbooks of her education classes. “Middle school students have this resistant mentality,” she said. “As a teacher, I need to reflect upon my professional practice and creatively approach the students. For instance, I can visit students’ homes, have them write personal narratives, and write letters to students. In this way, I can know my students and have them take my classes seriously.”

Jin Lei had never left her home city. She was not quite sure about the characteristics of the students whom she would observe during the *Dinggang* internship. But she expressed the general idea that students in the rural areas should all study very hard because studying is the best route to a bright future. In addition, given their family burden, they would have to help with the family chores and also work diligently to study well with limited time. “By contrast, children in the city, like me, have more opportunities to get into colleges and we do not have to help much with the family chores. ... I remember that my mother told me that the sole task for me during middle school was to study and stay healthy.” Starting with this view of students in rural areas, she found most of her students in *shiyanban* at GMS fit her expectation. As for those *putongban* students who seemed not to study hard or achieve well, she thought that the main reason for their problem was “not using the heart” (*bu yong xin*, 不用心) to focus on studying. And this problem of “not using the heart,” she noted, can also occur with students in the city (Jin Lei, interview, August 26, 2009).

Zhang Fang

On the first day, when the interns got settled in at GMS, Zhang Fang sighed as she stood behind me to buy lunch in the dining hall, commenting, “It is so familiar. My middle school was so much like it here. We also had this small playground with a one-window dining hall in my middle school.” Later, during my interview with her, she told me that GMS made her miss her hometown since what she experienced in her middle school resembled what her pupils went through here.

Zhang Fang’s father worked as a carpenter in a northern village of the province. Her mother stayed at home, taking care of Zhang Fang, her younger brother, and all the house chores. The parents were very proud of Fang as she was the first college student ever in the family’s history. She even got into the Department of English, which was usually deemed very difficult for a student from a rural village with limited English language resources. She planned to make her parents even happier by earning a certificate as a professional translator. “Being a teacher will be my backup if I cannot get a job in translation,” she said. She also mentioned her brother, a dropout who followed his peers’ example. “There are quite a few students in rural areas like my brother. He did not want to go to school at all, saying that studying was useless and that it was more fun to hang out with friends. Now he is a carpenter apprentice supervised by my father. But being a carpenter is his only future and he will realize this.” Given the similar setting at GMS compared to her own middle school, she thought that her own experience as a rural child who got into college would help her in teaching GMS pupils (Zhang Fang, interview, August 27, 2009).

Wang Mei

Wang Mei was a very outgoing girl with a cheerful and loud voice. GMS teachers joked that “wherever Wang Mei is, there is laughter.” As a native of a town near GMS, she quickly became popular among her fellow interns since she helped them to learn the local dialect so that they could interact with the pupils. All the interns could understand the local dialect in conversation after 1 or 2 months, but it was still not easy for them to speak it accurately. When Wang Mei used the dialect to greet her students at the beginning of class, she saw their faces light up.

Wang Mei had worked as a substitute teacher during the previous summer in an art high school and loved to share her experiences of managing students. During their bedtime talks in the dormitory, other interns reported, Wang Mei gave them superb suggestions on how to deal with difficult students, drawing on her own prior teaching experience.

A fine arts major, Wang Mei, had considered seeking a job as a designer. Her parents, however, expected her to secure a stable teaching position since they themselves were tired of their own frequent travels while running the family business. Wang Mei took her parents’ advice and found herself very well suited for teaching, based on her successful summer teaching experience. Although her hometown was more like a city than a rural area, she was confident that she could relate to her students at GMS.

When asked about her impression of the students, Wang Mei often referred to the students whom she had taught as a part-time teacher in the art high school. She observed that the teacher’s authority had to be earned, as the students in that urban school were likely to challenge the teacher. At GMS, just being a teacher tended to establish one’s authority among the students. However, she also found that GMS students in her *putongban* seemed to lack the initiative to learn, whereas *shiyaban* students were more like her students in the city, able to take notes and raise questions without being pushed to do so. She also noticed that GMS students did not have many materials in art class. They could not afford to buy the special sketch paper or oil paint, for example. By contrast, her students in the city could have whatever materials they required (Wang Mei, interview, August 28, 2009).

From these descriptions, we can notice three major facets of the participants’ identities: They were all college student educated in an urban setting, students from Hope College specifically, and novice teachers. These facets of the participants’ identities intertwined to produce mixed feelings about their internship—a paradoxical combination of a sense of honor regarding the opportunity to teach needy rural students and uncertainty regarding their teaching efficiency. On one hand, they thought that, with their college education background and resources, they could help to mend these rural students’ weak knowledge foundations. On the other hand, as students from a *san ben* college and as novice teachers with plenty of book knowledge but limited teaching experience and only an emerging understanding of their own abilities, these interns were not quite sure if they could excel in teaching rural students. Nevertheless, they all desired to succeed, for the sake of their self-respect as well as to enhance their value in the job market.

1. Educated in the City: College Students

These interns were from different Chinese social classes, and their backgrounds influenced their perceptions about people from rural areas. Most of them came from the city, some were from locations between urban and rural areas, and only Zhang Fang was from a rural village. Regardless of these differences, they had one common experience that enormously impacted their understanding of rural students: All had attended college in the city. In addition, their prior experiences of interacting with rural people also influenced their perception of their rural students.

Five of the participants were from cities, but these five came from different social classes within the city. Chen Leng's parents worked in a big company in *Shijiazhuang* city and sent their son to an elite middle school; his family background placed him in a higher social class than any of his fellow interns. Chen often compared his elite middle school with GMS in such a way as to express a sense of superiority compared to rural students. Hao Jing and Feng Lin were the children of factory workers and had experiences in both *shiyban* and *putongban* in general middle schools, enabling them to show empathy toward *putongban* students at GMS. Han Ming and Jin Lei were from single-parent families in the city. They believed strongly in hard work and favored those pupils who were diligent and self-motivated. So did Zhang Fang, who had struggled to find her way out of a rural village and make it to college. Li Min and Wang Mei were from towns, or the middle areas between rural and urban settings, and had friends and relatives from both rural and urban areas. Their parents also did business in the town and in the city. They had more knowledge than their peers from the cities about the lives of rural people, but they also probably had more understanding than Zhang Fang of how material abundance helped urban students to learn. Among all the interns, Li Min and Wang Mei were the most flexible in drawing distinctions among their students as well as between themselves and their students. Although these interns' family background helped to shape their attitudes, in their interviews, they often mentioned how their interactions with people from different backgrounds had influenced their thinking.

The interns from the cities did not have much experience in interacting with children from rural areas. Of these five, only Han Ming had a short period of working with rural children before the *Dinggang* internship. When they talked about their understanding of GMS students, they usually referred to their peers and their own lives to draw comparisons. In their opinion, the GMS students and students in rural areas in general shared the characteristics of being hardworking, shouldering the family burden of chores, and being simple and limited in their knowledge about the city and larger world. As they began to interact with their students, they were sometimes surprised to observe that these children in the village were also interested in modern technology, such as the Internet, and quite knowledgeable about the outside world. They felt disappointed when they found that some GMS students, especially those in the *putongban*, were not working diligently. Given their presumptions and stereotypes about rural students, the

Dinggang internship offered a fresh perspective different from their preexisting perceptions; as later chapters about their internship experiences will suggest, the encounters provided opportunities for these pre-service teachers to continuously reconsider and modify their prior perceptions.

The interns from towns, Wang Mei and Li Min, had more prior interaction with and knowledge about rural students. In contrast to the general, blurred view about these pupils that their urban peers held, they learned to understand their students in specific contexts and illustrated this understanding with their own experiences.

Zhang Fang, the only intern raised in a rural village, found GMS similar to her own middle school and seemed to attribute the students' academic success or failure to individual factors. Having grown up in a similar context, she believed that individuals could achieve academic excellence if they wanted to and if they worked hard as she herself had done.

Thus, since these interns were from different socioeconomic backgrounds, we can see how their family experiences influenced their perceptions of their rural students. In Chap. 5, family influences will be further explored to examine how students' own social class identity shaped their boundary work. Although they had different family backgrounds, they had similar college experiences in the capital city of the province.

As all these interns had received their college education at an urban institution, they looked for the characteristics that were valued in their own school and university experiences, such as working hard, following the teacher's guidance without being pushed to do so, and demonstrating openness to student-teacher interaction. They tended to find these characteristics more in *shiyban* than in *putongban* students. Thus, they tended to view the *shiyban* students as having more desirable characteristics and as more likely to be admitted into the urban education system. Some of them, however, such as Feng Lin, took an opposite approach, taking lessons from their own demanding school experiences and preferring to enjoy a relaxed classroom atmosphere with their *putongban* students.

2. Career Aspirations of *San Ben* College Students

The participant interns are from Hope College, affiliated with HU, and they have a clear vision about their future careers based on their understanding of how valuable their Hope College degrees are in the job market. This vision influenced their expectations about the *Dinggang* internship and their perceptions of their students.

Hope College is a secondary college recruiting students with comparatively low scores on the National College Entrance Examination, so it is not seen as producing the highest-quality graduates. Dr. Cui, Head of Hope College, said:

Graduates of Hope College have a high rate of delaying their job search by taking exams to enter master's programs. It is difficult for them to land a good job immediately after graduation, since employers tend to think that graduates from a secondary college are not capable students and unlikely to be capable employers. ... But Hope College graduates have comparatively better employment opportunities compared to other secondary colleges in the province because Hope College is known for highly strict discipline and vigorous academic training. As you can tell from our students, many of them are quite good

kids. They just failed one exam, and they value the opportunities to learn at the college. They also know that their parents paid a lot of money for their tuition. They need to work hard to get a good score for good jobs in the future. (Dr. Cui, interview, June 19, 2009)

The students surely knew their own situations. On one hand, they were not very confident in their job search compared to their counterparts on the main HU campus. On the other hand, they were hopeful that they could put themselves in a better position in the job market by following the strict training at Hope College, getting all sorts of certificates (computer, translator, and so on), actively taking part in the *Dinggang* internship, and preparing for the postgraduate examinations. At the beginning of the *Dinggang* internship, all these pre-service teachers were highly motivated to learn from their teaching experiences and eager to add a good record of teaching to their resume. As part of their endeavor, they put much effort into trying to understand their pupils by drawing on their prior experiences.

Moreover, these Hope College students confessed that they were not top students in their middle schools. This fact seemed to enable them to sympathize with mediocre academic achievers in *putongban*, try to connect with them, and understand the pressures that these pupils faced. This was also an important reason why these pre-service teachers from Hope College desired to help *putongban* students to achieve better. Since they themselves had gotten into college, they wanted to help their *putongban* students to progress to higher education. In the meantime, they realized that situations in the rural areas, such as lack of materials and high-quality teachers, might make this plan even harder for their GMS students. Zhang Fang, Li Min, Wang Mei, and Han Ming, who had had direct interactions with rural students before they took the *Dinggang* internship, understood especially well the difficulties that these students faced.

3. New Teachers

The participants also reflected a common characteristic of new teachers, in that they understood teaching in large part from their own past experience as a student (Lortie 2002). During interviews, participants often referred to their school experiences and what they had observed in their own teachers to make sense of their own teaching. Those who had enjoyed positive experiences with teachers in middle school attempted to follow their own teachers' examples at the beginning of the internship and used what they had experienced as a norm in their teaching. If they had some negative experiences, they tended to choose approaches different from what their own teachers had used. For instance, Li Min said that she was motivated by her high school teacher to learn math when she was transferred from *putongban* to *shiyban*. Following her teacher's model, she stated that she would encourage her *putongban* students to learn no matter what difficulties they may encounter. Chen Leng observed that teachers in his elite middle school in *Shijiazhuang* city did not have to spend much time disciplining students. When he found, in his first day of teaching Class 5 (*putongban*) students in grade 8, that he had to ask the students sitting in the back of the classroom not to talk, he criticized these students as unable to regulate themselves and focus on learning. Feng Lin

was unhappy about the pressure to learn that her teachers placed on her while she was in *shiyban* at a key middle school. When she began to teach *putongban*, she decided to have her students learn in accordance with their interests and tried not to exert too much pressure upon them. As new teachers, these interns were also eager to prove that they could become effective teachers or to show that they intended to do so.

Overall, the participants felt that they could help their rural students by drawing on their college background and close observation of their own successful teachers, but most of them were not sure exactly how they could do that given their little knowledge about the rural context and their limited teaching experiences. They were eager to learn how to teach and to become more experienced in actual teaching during their *Dinggang* internship. However, given the low-ranked status of *sanben* college graduates, they were not sure if this internship could help them to get a decent job, preferably in the city. These mixed feelings seemed to shape their understanding of teaching and learning. For instance, Han Ming recalled having felt marginalized in her key middle school as a mediocre academic achiever and so felt connected with her *putongban* students. In the meantime, as a girl raised in the city, she hoped to push her students to learn well and later become urban residents, which was a sound life choice for herself. For Zhang Fang, who benefited from working hard in a rural school, however, she firmly believed in individual effort and frequent drills in learning.

As described in the next chapter, participants learned to use different assessment approaches to work with *shiyban* and *putongban* students. Their identities, as pre-service teachers from relatively well-off family backgrounds and education experiences in the city, seemed to play a significant role in shaping their ways of interacting with their students in this rural school. Specifically, as explained in Chap. 4, three sets of symbolic boundaries—intellectual, cultural, and moral—were constructed, enacted, and/or dissolved as the participants evaluated their students. In the placement school, GMS, the tracking system of *putongban* and *shiyban* provided a natural setting for interns from city backgrounds to find similarities between themselves and *shiyban* students. Generally speaking, they deemed *shiyban* students (as did many GMS teachers) to be smart, sophisticated in interpersonal interaction, and hardworking, characteristics that made them deserving of more advanced learning tasks, more interactive classroom activities, a faster pace and greater depth of learning, and instructional monitoring.

Learning to Teach with Assessment
A Student Teaching Experience in China

Jiang, H.

2015, XVIII, 124 p. 5 illus., Softcover

ISBN: 978-981-287-271-5