

Comparison of Chinese and British Primary School Music Teaching in Practical Teaching

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Abstract: In this paper, I investigate the practical application of primary music school teaching in classrooms in China and Britain, in order to compare and analyse the differences between music education in primary schools in the UK and China in practice, it is important to note the differences between the two countries. I drew on literature that examines the current state of music classrooms in the UK and China, relevant government policy requirements for music education, and official lesson plans from some schools. I concentrate in turn on pre-course preparation by the teachers; the warm-up session; the main content of the music lesson; expansion session (This board is a necessary part of the Chinese music classroom, aiming to further consolidate what has been learnt and broaden students' musical horizons.), and the summary session at the end of the lesson. This allowed me to compare and analyse the differences between the Chinese and English primary school music classrooms in terms of the basic flow of the music classroom.

Keywords: Music education, Pedagogical approaches, Lesson planning, Student engagement, Cultural emphasis.

1. Introduction

In this paper, I investigate the practical application of primary music school teaching in classrooms in China and Britain, In order to compare and analyse the differences between music education in primary schools in the UK and China in practice, it is important to note the differences between the two countries. I drew on literature that examines the current state of music classrooms in the UK and China, relevant government policy requirements for music education, and official lesson plans from some schools. I concentrate in turn on pre-course preparation by the teachers; the warm-up session; the main content of the music lesson; expansion session (This board is a necessary part of the Chinese music classroom, aiming to further consolidate what has been learnt and broaden students' musical horizons.), and the summary session at the end of the lesson. This allowed me to compare and analyse the differences between the Chinese and English primary school music classrooms in terms of the basic flow of the music classroom.

2. Pre-course Preparation Session

In China, primary school music teachers attach great importance to the preparation before the beginning of the class . Teachers are expected to study the National Curriculum for Music and the teaching materials in depth, define the overall objectives of the term and the contents of each unit, and make detailed teaching plans accordingly [1]. Lesson planning requires the writing of a lesson plan, such as Figure 2, which will contain the key points, objectives and difficulties of the lesson, the teaching board, the homework to be assigned, and the detailed teaching process. Teacher need to envisage the questions to be asked by the teacher and the answers of the students, these questions are often specific to the activities that will be arranged for the students at each time period of the lesson, and requires the teacher to make preparations for the skills. Sometimes teacher need to practice in advance for the modelling of the song, the accompaniment

and the conducting movements, etc. This thorough pre-class preparation ensures that the teaching of music lessons can follow the expected flow. Taking into account my own past experience teaching in primary schools and the experience of my friend A, who is teaching in a primary school in Shanghai, we find that we must prepare a detailed lesson plan and provide it to the school before each lesson. The plan can be implemented in the classroom only after the school has reviewed and approved it. In some classes with special content, such as Chinese opera classes, we even need to learn some classic Chinese opera choruses in advance so that we can present them in class. Generally speaking, Chinese music teachers' pre-class preparation will envisage and prepare in advance all the materials that may be used, as well as the possible situations that may arise. They also co-ordinate and arrange the teaching content in advance in strict accordance with the curriculum outlines, and prepare the teaching aids and the environment meticulously, so as to ensure the quality and efficiency of classroom teaching [2].

Category	Content
Lesson Title	(To Spring)
Core Literacy	Aesthetic appreciation: Appreciate arrival of spring and its colorful, vibrant scenes through listening to music.
Teaching Objectives	Artistic expression: Understand musical structure and the composer's intent, and the emotional expression in different sections. Cultural understanding: Appreciate the music and deepen their love for nature, through appreciation. Creative practice: Guide students to sing or move along with the music in simple rhythmic or bodily expressions.
Key Points	Understand the lyrical and peaceful mood in Grieg's To Spring and its creative background.
Difficult Points	Identify and distinguish different forms and expressions based on tempo and rhythm, and feel the emotional shift between sections.
Teaching Preparation	Teacher: multimedia courseware Students: textbook

I. Lesson Introduction

Teacher says:

Please use one word to describe what spring is like in your mind?

Composer Introduction:

Edvard Grieg was one of the most outstanding Norwegian composers and pianists of the late 19th century, and a representative of Norwegian nationalistic music.

Representative Works: Morning Mood, Norwegian Dance, etc.

Background of the Piece: Norway is located in the Northern Hemisphere. Winter is long, and dark, while spring always comes slowly. People eagerly anticipate the arrival of spring. Once spring arrives, people express great joy and affection. The piano piece To Spring vividly portrays the arrival of spring over the land.

Instrument Introduction – Piano

1. A typical representative of Western keyboard instruments; includes upright and grand pianos.

2. Wide range, pure tone, rich expressiveness, and excellent touch response; a "King of Instruments."

II. Exploring the Lesson

1. First Listening Experience

Figure 1. With translated version

Teaching Plan for "To Spring" - Continued Translation

The footsteps of spring are slowly approaching us. Can you hear the sound of spring's footsteps in the music?

2. Listen again

Use both hands to mimic piano playing to express the changes in pitch area.

When hearing melodies in the low pitch area: use the left hand to simulate playing rhythmically.

When hearing melodies in the high pitch area: use the right hand to simulate playing melodies.

You may also pat your thighs to express the heard timbres in the high and low registers: slap your palm lightly on the upper thigh for high pitch, and the lower thigh for low pitch.

3. Reflection

How many sections are in the music? Which parts share the same melody?

Students think and respond:

The music can be divided into 2 parts.

The first and third parts have the same melody.

Use different movements to represent different sections. The designed actions should be rhythmic and reflect the features of the melody.

4. Movement Design

Use different movements to express the different sections of the music. The designed movements should have a rhythmic feeling and reflect the directional flow of the melody.

5. Identifying the Main Theme

When the theme of the first section appears, sing along with the music.

How many times does the melody appear? (3 times)

Discussion:

How does the emotion change each time the melody appears?

Discuss your overall feeling about the music; then listen to the music again while performing the side-by-side improvisation.

Conclusion: The second section has the sound of spring's footsteps—never stopping—expressing people's joyful anticipation of spring's arrival.

The third section moves to a higher pitch, with wider range, richer harmonies, and more layered textures, showing vivid external scenery and stronger emotional expression.

III. Lesson Summary

Spring symbolizes beauty: spring symbolizes life. In this beautiful season of awakening, everything revives, and life thrives.

Figure 2. Teaching plan diagram

Teaching Plan for "To Spring" - Final Part Translation	
Assignment	Continue listening to 'To Spring' after class.
Blackboard Design	To Spring Composer Introduction Background of the Piece Instrument Introduction
Teaching Reflection	

Spring is a symbol of beauty and life. It has been the theme of many famous poems, paintings, and musical compositions. The piano piece 'To Spring' is precisely a hymn to spring composed by the Norwegian composer Edvard Grieg.

Figure 3. Teaching plan diagram

In the UK, preparation for primary music lessons is relatively flexible, but again centred around the curriculum objectives [3]. The National Curriculum for England sets out clear requirements for music in primary schools, such as enabling pupils to sing, listen to, compose and evaluate a wide range of styles of music, to learn about musical instruments and to understand basic musical concepts [4]. Accordingly, teachers need to select musical themes and activities for the lesson prior to the lesson to ensure that they are linked to the National Curriculum objectives. In the pre-class preparation stage, UK teachers usually prepare the instruments, playback equipment or audio materials needed for the class and conceptualise the flow of the main activities of the lesson [5]. My British friend D, who joined the programme with me, also said that the teacher would let him prepare the materials needed for the class in advance, such as paper, pens, musical instruments, etc. However, compared to the Chinese lesson plan, the lesson plan would be more flexible, for example, he would not specify the time needed for each session. Unlike China's focus on detailed lesson plans, British teachers place more emphasis on 'student activity-centred' lesson preparation [6]. Teachers broadly plan warm-ups, core activities and wrap-ups, but allow flexibility to adapt to classroom realities [7].

In short, China adopts a highly planned and professional approach to preparation. Professional music teachers prepare their lessons meticulously in accordance with the unified curriculum standards, with an emphasis on the pre-design of the teaching process and the preparation of their own skills [2]. This model ensures regularity and a high-quality starting point in the classroom, but it also means that the teaching process is relatively fixed and inflexible [8]. In the UK, a more flexible and teacher-directed approach to preparation is evident, with teachers designing activities in line with national curriculum objectives, but with a localised choice of teaching and learning resources, and with the preparation process allowing for improvisation and adaptation [9], demonstrating respect for teachers' creativity and mobility [10].

3. Warm-up Session

In China, the introductory section of the primary school music classroom is regarded as a key step in stimulating students' interest and introducing the topic of the new lesson [2]. Teachers often use a rich variety of introductory methods to capture students' attention, including showing short videos, telling stories, setting riddles or fun quizzes, and melodic listening [11]. Introductory activities are usually closely tied to the topic of the lesson and serve the needs of the content [2]. Many music teachers also like to make use of multimedia means of introduction [12]. However, in China, introductory activities are often teacher-driven [13], because of Chinese students' fear of presenting their musical ideas in public [14] as well as the high number of Chinese music classroom students as mentioned in the previous chapter [15]. A classroom that is student-driven will not be conducive to management and may make for an awkward atmosphere.

Generally speaking, in the pre-class introduction process of Chinese classrooms, teachers will generally deliberately create a relaxed and pleasant learning atmosphere, and lead students into the music class with interesting music talks or performances. The main person in the pre-class introduction process is still the teacher, and the pre-class introduction activities are mainly led by the teacher to the students for

music appreciation, or the teacher-led conversation [16]. The main purpose of this session is to make students interested in the content of this lesson, so that students can enter the class with a more relaxed and happy mind.

In UK primary music classrooms, introductory sessions usually take the form of a warm-up activity, focussing on getting pupils immediately involved in musical practice [17]. Teachers in the UK like to open with a short, fun musical game or exercise to help students transition from the previous lesson [18]. In the lower grades, teachers often use an upbeat nursery rhyme or greeting song as a warm-up, with the class singing and moving together; in the upper grades, a slightly more complex rhythmic solitaire or body percussion game might be used as a warm-up [19]. These types of introduction are centred on getting the pupils up to speed and getting them into the music quickly through singing, moving and playing, rather than starting with a narrative or theory [20]. This approach reflects the emphasis on practicality in primary music education in the UK, where the teacher's verbal explanations during the introduction are often short and to the point, and students are more likely to be involved in practical musical activities immediately. Through singing, rhythm and body percussion, students begin to 'think musically' in the introductory session. In addition, teachers in the UK sometimes choose an introduction activity in relation to the topic of the lesson, e.g. if the lesson will be about learning a new rhythmic pattern, the teacher might introduce it with a relevant rhythmic game to set the scene [19]. By the time the warm-up for the introduction is over, students are often focused and excited, ready for the main content to follow. All in all, the introduction to primary school music lessons in the UK is characterised by a short and active musical warm-up, which focuses on creating a relaxed and interesting classroom atmosphere, allowing students to concentrate and enter the learning state without realising it. In contrast, it is less reliant on storytelling or multimedia, and instead directly engages students in movement and singing, with the music itself leading the way.

In conclusion, music classes in China and the UK both focus on introduction, but the way of implementation is slightly different. Chinese introductions are often carefully planned, rich in context and storytelling, and dominated by teacher-led activities. Teachers may introduce the topic through stories, riddles, videos, etc., focusing on stimulating students' interest and emotions, and bringing them into the new lesson with a sense of curiosity. In contrast, British introductions emphasise immediate musical practice and a change of atmosphere: students are quickly put into a "musical frame of mind" through a short singing or playing activity [21], and the emphasis is on using the music itself to attract students' attention. However, in terms of implementation, the Chinese introduction is often led by the teacher to design a beautiful situation, while the British introduction allows students to become the main body of the activity.

4. Main Content

In the main teaching process of Chinese primary school music classes, the teaching content usually revolves around singing, music appreciation and basic music theory skills. Each lesson has a clear classification such as 'singing lesson' or 'appreciation lesson', and teachers cover the corresponding music knowledge and skills training in accordance with the requirements of the curriculum. Singing is the most important

part of primary school music classes [22]. Taking singing lessons as an example, teachers usually adopt the method of modeling and teaching by phrases: first, the teacher or the piano accompanist demonstrates the song in its entirety, so that the students can feel the melody and the emotion as a whole; then the song is divided into phrases, and the students are taught to sing phrase by phrase, correcting the pitch and rhythm, and helping the students to familiarise themselves with the melody. On the basis of learning the song, the teacher will instruct the students to add feelings and expressions to sing, and may guide students to add some body rhythms that conform to the melody independently, so that the students can better express the music [23]. During this period, teachers often interspersed with explanations of the meaning behind the lyrics or the background of the song's composition, and sometimes infiltrated moral education content, such as patriotism or traditional culture education, with the theme of the song. This approach combines music teaching with emotional education [24].

All in all, Chinese primary-school music lessons are tightly structured around singing and listening, with modeled, phrase-by-phrase teaching that blends skill training with cultural and moral themes.

In the UK, the main teaching component of music lessons is classroom practice. The main teaching activities of music lessons in UK primary schools are rich and varied, with an emphasis on allowing students to learn music through doing music [25]. They think a good music education should help students sing, evaluate, compose and listen to music works of different periods and styles, and help students learn to sing and use musical instruments, and understand the principles and elements of music creation [6]. For example, in a Thinking Music activity [26], the teacher asks students to place their hands on a pentatonic staff, treat the points where their hands intersect the staff as notes, and use those notes to create a melody. The teacher then translates the melody into tangible movements, such as moving a fluttering ribbon up and down or waving their arms, so students can feel the melody with their bodies as they create it. Music classes in the UK do not have a distinction between singing and appreciation, and they tend to combine singing, playing, improvisation and music appreciation within a single lesson [27].

Unlike in China, teachers in the UK usually do not teach singing phrase by phrase for long periods of time, but rather, through repetition and imitation, students master the song as a whole, and the teacher gives corrections and hints in the process [28]. A great deal of time in the classroom is spent on actual music making [29]. Group activities are a feature of the British music classroom: teachers often divide students into small groups and give them a musical task, for example, 'create an eight-bar rhythmic phrase using these four rhythmic patterns' or 'simulate the sound of rain using a percussion instrument at hand', and then let the groups discuss and experiment with each other to create their own musical works. Each group can then discuss and experiment with their own music [30]. In this process, students participate in the classroom as composers and performers, where they are free to explore sounds and understand musical structures and elements in their own experimentation and collaboration with group members. Teachers give fewer lectures and students spend most of their time engaging in hands-on music making and performance [31].

In summary, in terms of teaching the main content, China

and the UK reflect significant differences between teacher-led and student-led. Music lessons in Chinese primary schools are usually led by teachers who strictly follow the progression of the textbook, focusing on teaching the required knowledge and ensuring students' mastery through repeated practice. In this model, the teacher is the centre of control in the classroom, and students follow the teacher's demonstrations and instructions. Accordingly, classroom discipline and progress are more controlled, and there is a clear pedagogical intent for each session [32]. In contrast, the main thrust of primary music lessons in the UK is more about pupil initiative: pupils' hands-on practice and creativity permeate the classroom, and they learn about music through co-operation and exploration, with the teacher guiding them. This means that in a UK classroom, different groups may produce different styles of work, and the classroom process is somewhat open and unpredictable [33]. In terms of content, the Chinese curriculum emphasises the singing of classical songs and basic skills training, and the musical materials are often taken from outstanding children's songs or mainstream classics of the nation, with moral education as the underlying meaning [34]. The British curriculum places more emphasis on diversity, including the exploration of music from different cultures and students' original expression, and is less likely to use music lessons as a direct vehicle for moral education, focusing instead on the aesthetic value of music itself [35]. In terms of pedagogy, Chinese teachers tend to follow the path of 'lecture-demonstration-imitation-consolidation' [25]. However music teachers in the UK like to get the class into a cycle of doing-listening-discussing-sharing results [36]. It is worth noting that this difference is not absolute: China has also advocated in recent years the development of creativity in music lessons by allowing students to create simple compositions [37]. Overall, China emphasises systematicity and accuracy in the teaching of key content to ensure that each student meets uniform teaching requirements [25], while the UK emphasises creativity and personalisation, allowing students to achieve learning objectives in a variety of ways [6].

5. Expansion of the Extension

In Chinese primary school music classrooms, extension sessions are additional activities designed by teachers after the completion of the main teaching content to further consolidate what has been learnt and to broaden students' musical horizons [2]. This session is usually short and meaningful and provides an opportunity to develop students' creativity, with teachers sometimes organising improvisation. For instance, students can combine music with painting or theatre and create compositions based on music. For example, after learning the song in praise of the Yellow River, students are asked to draw what the Yellow River looks like in their minds [38]. Alternatively, children can use yarn or strips of paper to build the visual shape of a melody and then sing or play the line on the xylophone [40]. The purpose of such creative activities is to enable students to apply what they have learnt and to experience the joy of collaboration and creativity.

It is worth noting that the expansion and extension of the Chinese music class is short, but shoulders the role of consolidating the newly learned knowledge and expanding the ability. This link should be closely related to the content of the lesson [39]. In this session, the teacher's goal is no longer to lead students to consolidate only known knowledge

and skills, but also to broaden them moderately, so that the students have a more comprehensive grasp of the music and experience [40].

In the UK primary music classroom, there is not a distinct "deep enquiry" strand, as enquiry and creativity are often embedded in the main teaching and learning process [6]. However, if we draw an analogy with the Chinese model, we can think of those parts of the British music lesson that allow for further creativity, reflection and sharing as "deep enquiry". Improvisation and enquiry activities permeate British music lessons, where students are often given open-ended tasks that require them to explore sounds, structures and expressions on their own [41]. This inquiry at the main content stage actually fulfils the function of 'deeper inquiry'.

In this section, primary school music teaching in China and the UK has different ways of presentation. In China, a teacher-designed extension activity is usually arranged after the completion of the main content to reinforce and widen the scope of the lesson. This session is relatively short and teacher-led, ensuring that it is closely related to the lesson [42], with the advantage that there is a clear pedagogical intention and students can be guided by the teacher to further understand what they have learnt. However, its limitation was that due to the short duration and prescribed format, students' room for independent exploration was relatively limited [44]. In the UK, there is no fixed in-class extension component, as the spirit of enquiry is embedded throughout the classroom. Students engage in a great deal of self-directed creative and experimental activities at the main content stage, and they have in fact experienced a deepening and broadening of their knowledge in the process of completing tasks, presenting their work, and discussing and giving feedback [43]. This means that "deeper enquiry" in the UK is more implicitly embedded in the classroom: pupils may not realise that they are "expanding", but their understanding of the elements of the music has deepened considerably through composition and reflection.

6. Post-lesson Summary

At the end of a Chinese primary school music class, teachers usually give a short class summary to help students sort out what they have learnt in the lesson and strengthen their memory [25]. Post-lesson summaries are often teacher-led, leading students to recall the songs, rhythms, or points learnt in the lesson and re-emphasising the objectives of the lesson, either by asking questions or by generalising [44]. This summarisation ensures that each student knows exactly what they have learnt from the lesson [45].

Subsequently, teachers often assign post-lesson exercises or homework to consolidate skills. In music lessons, this kind of homework is not necessarily written, but more practical. Take 'Bright Fire Worm', the first volume of Hunan Education Edition Primary School Grade 1, as an example. The teaching objective of this lesson is to sing correctly, play instruments according to the rhythm of the song, and express musical feelings naturally and emotionally. In the homework design, the teacher can enhance communication and co-operation with parents and invite parents and students to use common objects in daily life, such as triangles and sand hammers. Teachers would then send audio recordings of the musical rhythm of the song Bright Fire Worm to parents and instruct them to help students perform and rule percussion on their instruments to the rhythm. Finally, for the next music lesson, the teacher will have the students bring their

homemade instruments to school so that the students can complete their music assignments by percussing their homemade instruments [46]. In addition, for students with certain musical skills or strong interests, teachers will also propose more challenging extension tasks, such as encouraging them to look up the background stories of the relevant songs after class, or try to notate the melody in short form to deepen their understanding of the music [47].

Towards the end of a primary school music class in the UK, there is usually a short summarising session, but its format is different from that in China. Teachers in the UK tend to involve students in the summarising process, rather than having the teacher unilaterally list knowledge points [48]. As an example, at the Thinking music event I attended, it was common practice for Thinking music teachers to ask a few students to share, "What was your favourite part of class today? What new thing did you learn?" Or have the class go over the highlights of the piece they just created. For example, the teacher might say, 'Who would like to talk about what you liked best about your group's work?' Drawing on students' responses, the teacher then comments and summarises further. This way of summarising focuses on students' self-expression and self-assessment of their learning, and develops their awareness of their own learning outcomes. As music lessons in the UK are more activity- and experience-based [49], end-of-lesson summaries tend not to repeat theoretical knowledge line by line, but rather focus on reinforcing musical experiences and feelings. For example, at the end of a music lesson on thinking music, the teacher may ask the students to play the new rhythmic patterns they learnt in the lesson together again to end the lesson with the sound of the music instead of a verbal summary.

All in all, at school level, both Chinese and British schools offer music activities to organise music learning after school, but the focus is different in the two countries. In China, the focus is more on clarification and practice: teachers ask questions to help students review what they have learnt in the lesson, and often set specific practice tasks, such as memorising songs and practising instrumental music, to ensure that students consolidate their skills. In the UK, the end-of-lesson session places more emphasis on student experience and participation: students are guided to summarise what they have learnt through sharing and discussion. In other words, the UK is more concerned with cultivating a sustained interest in music, whereas China focuses on ensuring basic mastery, but also on pushing students to progress through appropriate mandatory requirements.

7. Conclusion

This essay offers a comparative analysis of primary school music teaching practices in China and the UK. There is a relatively systematic music teaching method in primary school classrooms in China and the UK. But Chinese teachers emphasize detailed lesson planning, aligned strictly with curriculum standards, ensuring systematic delivery. In contrast, UK teachers follow curriculum goals but adopt a more flexible, activity-centered approach that allows room for improvisation.

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