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Title

Teachers' narratives of the ethnic identity of ethnic minority students in two Hong Kong secondary schools

Abstract

Many schools concern about the growing number of ethnic minority students in Hong Kong. It is asserted that they have academic, personal and social difficulties. When they are enrolled into Hong Kong schools, how the school caters for the diversity of students' needs become very critical. The paper looks at this area. It aims to examine how teachers and students construct the identity and needs of ethnic minority students, who came from India, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, and Thailand. The qualitative data were collected from interview, through which the views of twenty students and twenty teachers from two primary schools explored. Further, field notes which the author kept when conducting the study in these two schools were used as a supplementary source of data. It showed that the behaviour and needs of Chinese and non-Chinese students and their parents were constructed differently, in terms of social behaviour, cultural practices, gender identities, languages, and educational aspiration, and that the school, home and community were disconnected. This paper argues that to implement the ethos of caring, it is not only necessary for the school and government to develop culturally responsive approaches to catering for the needs of students, but equally important to develop a connected schooling ecology where ethnic minority students and parents can be consistently supported in classroom, in school, at home and in community.

A Background and Objectives

Background

Pastoral care, or known as school guidance and counseling in Hong Kong, has a crucial role to play in supporting the diverse needs of ethnic minority students, while its ultimate goal is set to promote the whole person growth of all students (Best, Ribbins, Jarvis & Oddy, 1983; Hamblin, 1978; Marland, 1974; McGuiness, 1989; Watkins, 2001; Watkins & Wagner, 1987, 2000). It also aims to encourage their self-esteem and the development of various aspects of their 'self', including personal, moral and social dimensions. It has been suggested that it be made an integral part of any educational programs (Best, Jarvis & Ribbins, 1977; Marland, 1974; Miller, Fruchling & Lewis, 1978; Watkins, 1992, 1995), which could include the educational provision for ethnic minority students. In the context of Hong Kong schools, all teachers are expected to have a role in caring and helping students in needs, even though they are not equipped with basic counseling skills. At the school level, guidance is promoted by a team of teachers. The guidance team, which is also known as the counseling team, is responsible for offering a counseling service for students in need and organising programmes for enhancing the whole person growth of all students (Education Department, 1986).

One of the educational issues which many Hong Kong schools are deeply concerned is the education of ethnic minority students and how they could be supported within the current school's caring system. It is alarming to see that the number of ethnic minority has been growing in our society while their needs and rights have not been properly addressed. According to the official figure of population census, in 1996, the number of ethnic minority people from Asian countries, such as Filipino, Indian, Thai, Nepalese, Indonesian, and Pakistani, was 157,678. It constituted 2.5% of the total population in Hong Kong (Census and Statistics Department, 1997). In 2001, the number raised by 58% to 249,516 which represented 3.8% of the total population (Census and Statistics Department, 2002). Although the number of ethnic minority students enrolled into Hong Kong schools has not been released to the public, based upon these population figures, it can be inferred that the number of these students has been growing and that there is an urgent need for schools and policy makers to address diverse students' need and support their academic success.

In response to the growing number of ethnic minority student populations in Hong Kong, there is a developing body of literature in the education of these students. Loper (2004) conducted an extensive review of educational provision for ethnic

minority students and found that many non-Chinese ethnic minority students such as Indian, Pakistani, Nepalese and Filipino were excluded from Hong Kong schools either by admissions procedures or lack of information on services available to support them. Some other studies into this area have been done by non-government agencies (Ku, Chan, & Sandhu, 2005; Loper, 2004; Yang Memorial Methodist Social Service, 2000, 2002). Stories of ethnic minority students' experience of difficulties and struggles in Hong Kong schools and communities have also appeared in Hong Kong newspapers (Lau, 2005; *Hong Kong Youth*, 2005; *Over 6% South Asian Students*, 2005). For various reasons, public perceptions of the educational provision for ethnic community students are overwhelmingly negative.

The education of ethnic minority students becomes issues of great concern in Hong Kong schools as in the U.S. schools. There is abundant research literature in multiculturalism and other diversity issues which are central to mainstream schooling (e.g. Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994) with a literature on school practice (e.g. Dentler & Hafner, 1997; Phillion, 2002); families, schools and communities (e.g. Carger, 1996; Soto, 1997); language, culture, and identity in education (He 2002a, b, c; Toohey, 2000); and race, gender and class issues (e.g. Grant & Slecter, 1986). There has been, however, little explicitly narrative work done in this area. In particular, no studies into the context of Hong Kong primary schools have been done so far. What is missing are accounts of how ethnic minority students' language, culture and identity developments are shaped by the constructs of their cross-cultural experience in mainstream schools; how an understanding of such experiences helps make connections among schools, families and different ethnic cultural groups; how such an understanding helps develop culturally relevant approaches for pastoral care and improving students' academic performance; and how knowledge of these students' experience in the families, communities, and schools informs administrators and policy makers to create inclusive school environments and policies to support their school success.

Objectives

This paper examines the construct of the cross-cultural experience of ethnic minority students in Hong Kong primary schools. It intends to examine how teachers and students, constructed the cross cultural experience of ethnic minority students in terms of their cross-cultural experience. Understanding of what schooling experience they have and what challenges and difficulties these students has been dealing in relation to cultural, social, and psychological changes is one of the ways to help school practitioners   rethink about caring and their roles in supporting the education of these

students and optimize individual student's potential regardless of ability, ethnicity and socio-cultural background.

B Literature Review

A person's sense of self, an idea of oneself as a unique being, developed out of the various roles and associations of all experience one has got at different stages of life. In Cuypers' view (2001), the two processes of exteriorization and interiorization involve when the self identity of an individual is formed. Briefly, the form refers to how one interacts with the external change within a social order, whereas the latter refers to the internal change happens when individuals identify themselves with the self.

For the ethnic minority students, the development of self-identity is a complex issue as they experience more changes than those who have never had the cross-cultural experience. The changes may include the move from place to place, the adaptation of the second culture to the first culture, and the change from language to language. It is particularly complicated for ethnic minority adolescents as they have to face an extra problem with identity when they merge into both an ethnic or racial group and the mainstream culture. Despite the fact that this usually cause extra stress and intensify the existing conflict of adolescent self-identity, all these changes would lead them to rethink about their role and identity by making meaning from the cross-cultural experience (Carr 1986, Phillion and He 2001).

Many authors have described the development of cross-cultural identity as a fluid, ongoing, complex and dynamic process. For instance, Berry (1994) suggests that ethnic minority group of students are involved in a renewal process of the cultural, linguistic religious heritage of their home countries. Rogler (1994) uses a metaphor of 'rebirth' to describe such processes. He argues that some have to put effort in uprooting themselves, settle and adjust to their new home. Unlike Berry and Rogler, Rosenthal et al. (1994) suggest that the development of cross-cultural identity is a process of transformation and affirmation.

In particular, Berry (1980, 1984) intends to build a model in theorizing the transformation of cross-cultural identity. She describes such processes as acculturation. It refers to the contact between autonomous cultural groups and to the attempts of the visitor group to maintain its identity. Further, two acculturation strategies are suggested with respect to the interest of this paper. The first issue pertains to cultural maintenance, the importance of cultural identity and characteristics and the

individual's effort and willingness to maintain them. The other issue pertains to the extent of contact with and participation in other cultural groups (Berry, 1994).

However, Berry's view has been criticized for being unable to see the dynamic nature of the process of redefinition of ethnic identity as one of the processes underlying acculturative changes (Horenczyk, 1997, Schonpflug, 1997). Further, Phinney and Devich-Navarro (1997) pinpoint that Berry has been fail to consider how ethnic members actually understand and express their sense of cross-cultural experience.

To fill this gap, Phinney (1989, 1990) advocates that the process of exploration of ethnic identity of ethnic members is dynamic, taking place and changing over time and context. This can be elaborated by a three stage progression she proposed. At the first stage, individuals' ethnic identity is unexamined or diffuse. This stage is thought to continue until they acknowledge that they are members of two cultures and have an ethnic identity. The result of this experience leads them to become aware of their ethnicity. In the final stage of the process, an achieved or internalized ethnic identity is formed. In Phinney's model, the meaning of ethnic identity and cross-cultural experience differ from one to another because of their particular historical and migrational experiences. Further, being a member of two cultures does not mean being between two cultures. Rather, it means being part of both cultures to varying degree.

Phinney's model seems to support the view that there is no consistent pattern of behaviour performed when the migrants react to the culture of new environment. In answering this, SNNCD (2004) turns to examine the ways ethnic group of people perceive their own identity, and argues that those who have a 'strong' identity tend to be more able to accept and appreciate the identity of others than those who have negative identity. They gain a stronger sense of self-confidence and practice values of tolerance and inclusion. Conversely, those who have negative identity tend to exclude others and tend to withdraw establishing relationship with other. It may end up in isolation and hatred. In a sense, identity is recognized as a matter of building relationship with others. The affirmation of one's identity can be a positive psycho-cultural process essential for emancipation of a group and a person.

Although many studies have held a changing and dynamics view upon ones' cross-cultural experience, some studies have led us to see that there are some cultural elements in ones' lives which is hardly to be changed in the process of cross-cultural experience. For instance, a study into the changing pattern of life of Chilean Mapuche

people (SNNCD, 2004) supports this view, and showed that the Mapuche people adopted new elements from foreign culture to their life and make it become their own reality. Consequently, part of their ancient identity was changed. Despite this, no matter whatever they were changed, one thing which remained unchanged was their strong sense of collective identity.

C Research Methods

The study was qualitative in nature. The data was collected from two sources, i.e. interview data and field notes. The interview data was collected from the interview study. Twenty teachers and twenty students from two primary schools were invited to have an unstructured interview. They were conducted in Cantonese and English. Each lasted about 30 minutes and was tape-recorded for analysis. Throughout the interviews, I intended to provide the interviewees with substantial freedom to talk about the issues concerned and to tell the stories of their migrant experience. Whenever they had something to say about their cross cultural experience, I would allow them to express their concerns in order to explore the issues, dilemmas or tension with them.

This paper adopted the methodology of narrative inquiry for data collection. I intended to capture the self-identity by examining the talk about the experience of the participants. According to Anderson (1991), the telling and retelling of how ones narrates their experience can lead us to understand their identity. In addition to narrating their experience and stories, I examined what constructs the participants used when talking about their identity. In doing this, the perspective of social constructs of reality suggested by Berger and Luckmann, (1973) was taken, as they stressed that individuals have the ability to construct their own meaning of reality not only to their self, but also the external world where they live and interact with others.

To examine how ones narrate and construct their self-identity, the type of interview adopted for this study is an active interview, proposed by Holstein and Gubrium (1995). As suggested, the process of this interview is interactive and dynamic. Both the interviewer and interviewee play significant roles in constructing a conversation, and are simultaneously involved in explaining any ambiguities, in correcting any misperceptions, and in probing for clarification.

Another supplementary source of the data was the field notes I kept when conducting the study in the two primary schools. Since I conducted this study, I kept field notes about school participants' interaction inside and beyond the classroom, school

documents on pastoral care, structural arrangements for supporting ethnic minority students and any features I spotted when visiting the schools, and the experience I got from interacting with teachers and students from the two schools. The field notes recorded the data about how I conversed with them about the construct of ethnicity and the cross-cultural experience of ethnic minority students.

To find out how the cross-cultural experience of students is constructed, specifically, the following three questions were addressed.

- How did ethnic minority students talk about their changing identities and changing lives?
- What were impacts of the construct of ethnicity and the cross-cultural experience on the self-identity of ethnic minority students and the development of caring within the school?
- How did the ethnic minority students re-learn and re-evaluate the first culture they inherited in their home countries?

All data collected were further processes. The analytic procedure was like a cycle of constant comparisons, in which I needed to move in and out of the data, to read for meaning of the data. At last, the main themes were extracted in relation to the foci of this paper.

D Some Initial Findings

Classroom-home disconnection

Learning difficulties in Chinese and Mathematics lessons

Most of the students liked to study in Hong Kong schools. When talking about what they liked most, they compared the schooling experience with those in their home countries and highlighted something good in Hong Kong schools, i.e. the good facilities of the schools, an adoption of an activity-based approach to teaching, use of no corporal punishment and the humanistic style of teachers. They had difficulties in learning Chinese language and Mathematics. As teachers explained, most students were able to cope with one of the two languages well, either Chinese or English. It was rarely for them to be good at both.

Even though most teachers realized that it was very crucial for them to cope with the Chinese language if they lived in Hong Kong, the students apparently did not share the same thought as their teacher did. Because of this, teachers felt necessary to constantly rationalize students about the importance of mastering Chinese language, but as they realized that the effort they put in reasoning was not effectively enough to

get them motivated to learn to speak Cantonese and to write and read Chinese.

While students experienced difficulties in learning Chinese language and Mathematics, teachers tried to work with their parents to help their children. However, disappointedly it could not be achieved, because teachers found that the parenting of Chinese parents was so different from the ethnic minority. Unlike Chinese parents, the parents of ethnic minority students were not enthusiastic with the education of their children and participating in any school events and activities. Also, they were not keen on knowing how their children behaved in school and showed very little interests to work with teachers to improve their children's learning. Only very few of them were able to work with teachers to supervise students' homework strictly, check their handbook, and take the school circulars seriously as teachers requested them to do.

For example, parents of ethnic minority students were rarely able to supervise students' homework. Partially because of this, almost 70% of ethnic minority students were unable to submit the homework assigned. Having called up parents and explained the matter to them, they answered positively and agreed to give more supervision. However, the situation was the same.

Different Rationale underlying behaviour management stragegies
In addition to the students' academic work, teachers found hard to work with parents to improve their children's classroom behaviour. Many teachers and students admitted that some students would never learn a lesson. They repeatedly committed offends even they were disciplined, with the exercise of punishment. Habitually, they ignored teachers' reasoning and discipline.

One of the reasons for explaining this was that the discipline implemented at home was very different from those at home, mosques or sheik temples, schools in their home countries, where corporal punishment was strictly and excessively exercised. If they misbehaved, they could be slapped and hit seriously, such as palm hit with a ruler; and various forms of physical punishment could be exercised as well, such as running around in playground. The different rationale underlying the different approaches to discipline let ethnic minority students get inconsistent message. The discipline which they got from local Hong Kong was regarded as very mild and something that could be ignored, as compared with those serve form of discipline exercised upon them at home, at Mosque and at the home from their home country.

School-Home Disconnection

Ineffective communication

When looking for explanation of the classroom and home disconnection, their lack of interests of their children education was closely related to their religious practices and socio-economic background. Most of the students from Pakistan and India were muslin. They needed to attend the mosque service not only in weekend, but also during weekend, to worship and study the Koran. Many students had to go to mosques school. The Mosque service and Koran study group normally finished by 7:00pm. While students went back home, they were normally too tired to study and complete their homework.

Difference vision of aspiration of children's education

Regarding socio-economic background, the majority was working class, and lived in rent flats, or in public housing, rather than in private apartments. Most of them had a big family of six to eight people and lived altogether in a small flat, where children did not have a study desk; and no setting of study was spared out for children. In some cases, the whole family only had one dinning table; and children even did not have a proper desk to study and do their homework.

The parents from Pakistan and India were not keen on the education of their children. It closely linked to the aspiration of their children's future. Most of them did not have any long-term plan for children's education and career development. Seemingly, children were sent to school merely because it was what the law required. Once their children completed their primary and secondary education, they could be introduced by their relatives and friends to join in the careers or business run by them, most of which were the types of larbouring work, such as working in construction site, loading and unloading goods, and working in restaurants as waiters or waitresses. They were expected to start working as soon as they completed their study so as to earn a living to support the family. Apart from this, parents and their children were unable to foresee any other alternative for the future, in terms of education and career development.

Living with the unfair central allocation system

School practitioners of teachers, students and parents felt that ethnic minority students were marginalized within the central allocation system, through which the placement of secondary schools were allocated to primary school students. Both parents and students felt being treated differently from local Chinese students, as they realized that there were very limited numbers of secondary schools which they could choose

after primary education. They found almost impossible to choose 30 schools out of list, where over hundred schools were given. As they clearly knew, only seven to eight schools which had a tradition to serve ethnic minority students could be chosen. Among these small numbers, some were identified as schools which were infamous in accommodating difficult students and low academic achievement students. Many ethnic minority students expressed concerned about being assigned to study in these schools, whereas parents raised an issue of fairness to the school and admitted that the current practices of school allocation was very unfair to their children.

Home-Community disconnection
Being marginalized in local community
Parents of ethnic minority students lived in a community of their own race, rather than merging into local Hong Kong community. It was one of the reasons why ethnic minority students could hardly learn Chinese language and integrated themselves into local community. It was certain that language was one of factors hindering ethnic minority students and their parents from building a connection to the local community. For most of them, the mother tongue was neither English nor Cantonese. They could not communicate as effectively as they expected with teachers. It was suggested as a key reason why they rarely took the initiative to contact the school. In some schools where teaching assistant with ethnic minority background were recruited, it made a difference. Parents felt more comfortable and open to talk to them, compared with the local Chinese teachers.

Even for those parents who could speak Cantonese, they spent most of the time at home, and showed a very weak connection to the community and local Hong Kong Chinese who lived just next to their door. In the culture which they belonged, females were encouraged staying at home and not going out to establish their own circle of friends, especially with males. Hence, whenever they went out, it was mainly for religious reasons or visiting their friends who had the same ethnicity. Many of children's mothers had no idea of how to get to their children's school. It suggested that they merely knew the area where they lived and did not know how to use the public transport system.

Being excluded in the community
In a community, ethnic minority students spent most of the time with those who had the same ethnic background as they did in school. It became clear that their involvement in the local community was low, though there were more NGOs offering service to the ethnic minority people as a way to help them merge into Hong Kong

society. From time to time, they felted being discriminated in the community, which they never experienced within school. For example, students held a belief that they were considered by some Chinese as 'more dirty' and 'more wild'. Some students shared experience of being discriminated when playing in a park. They were shouted by the local Chinese children for no reason, "Get out! Go back home!" It made them feel excluded.

E Conclusion and Implication

The aim of this study was to explore the construct of the cross-cultural experience of ethnic minority students, and find out how they related themselves to others, the school, and community how they made sense of their schooling experience and how they wished they would become in future. Since this study was limited to two primary schools at a specific point in time, the findings from this study were not meant to be generalized to other populations. It is believed however that some findings were gleaned which have implications to the following two areas: provision of a new direction of the theoretical writing, and the promotion of culturally responsive caring.

Promotion of culturally responsive caring

The enrollment of ethnic minority students into Hong Kong schools has made the school and classroom even more diverse as they are used to be. Is it the things school participants should celebrate? The answer to this question depends very much on whether the diverse needs of these students are fulfilled, and whether individual student's potential can be optimized regardless of ability, ethnicity, socio-cultural background, and exciting their interest in learning in diverse classroom contexts.

Some initial findings have shown that regarding the cross-culture experience of students, there is a disconnection between the school, home and community. This paper argues that to better promote the atmosphere of culturally responsive caring in schooling, it is necessary for school managers and teachers to help ethnic minority students and their parents to link themselves up to the school and community. In doing this, they have a crucial role to play in ensuring that every individual student be treated equally and receive equal opportunity to learn and be cared in schools.

When looking for ways to put such a notion into practices, we may go back to the constructs of the cross-cultural experience of ethnic minority students revealed in this study. This is because they provide us a frame of reference to understanding the needs of these students. Briefly, some suggestions are given below for building up a well-connected school where the culturally responsive caring will be more effectively

put through at various levels of schooling; and, hence, the needs of the ethnic minority students are better fulfilled.

- Teachers should enrich their knowledge about the culture and religion of ethnic minority students.
- Ethnic minority students and parents should be helped to understand the culture and practices of teaching and learning in Hong Kong schools, as well as the social expectation of Chinese students' roles and learning behaviour where are held by teachers and the school.
- Pastoral care has a crucial role in fulfilling the diverse need of ethnic minority students through building up a connection between school and parents; and parents and community.
- A pastoral care system should be established, on the basis of understanding and respecting the various cultures of ethnicities and their practices of parenting, schooling and religion.
- Curricular on school subjects (especially on languages and mathematics), classroom management, school discipline and instructional design should be modified and developed further in relation to the social, academic and affection development of ethnic minority students' self-identity.
- There is a need to provide ethnic minority students with some programmes, aimed at offering them strategies for coping with all difficulties they encounter with in the school and the host society of Hong Kong and helping them and their parents integrate into local community, and building up an aspiration of their education and future careers in the host society or where else they want to be.
- There is a need to offer additional language classes in Cantonese and English to support the learning of ethnic minority students and to help them practice their daily life in the host society.

Contribution to the theoretical writing
Many educators have advocated that the research on the ethnic identity apparently lags far behind the theoretical writing (Jasinskaja-Lahti & Liebkind, 1999; Kinket & Verkuyten, 1997). The finding of this study will help fulfill this gap by enhancing our understanding of the transformation of ones' cross cultural identity, and offer an empirical view upon this issue.

Nguyen et al. (1999) pinpoint that there is a need to address the theoretical comparison the constructs of acculturation and ethnic identity, and that attentions needs to be paid not only to conceptualization of acculturation but also to the

operationalisation of adjustment. In relation to this, the study leads us to take another perspective to review the models of acculturation suggested by Berry (1994, 1997) and Phinney (1989, 1990). Some initial finding has indicated that the transformation of the self identity of ethnic minority is a fluid, on-going and dynamic process. There is no a final stage as described by Berry and Phinney. More realistically, it takes the whole life of individual students to search for their identity and making new meanings from their cross cultural experience.

Catering for the diversity is an educational challenge for teachers and school managers. It is also the crucial aim of pastoral care. The strategies suggested above may not be the only ways to cater the diverse needs of students By adopting a culturally responsive and school-based approach, it would be more possible for the school to find out effective strategies for putting through the notion of pastoral care. And it is believed to be one of the ways to create a just and fair society. Teachers and school managers have an important role to play if this important goal is to be achieved.

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