

**Ethnic Minority and Immigrant Students' Experience of
Language, Culture and Identity Development in
U.S.A. Canada and Hong Kong
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**Cross-cultural Experience of Ethnic Minority Students
in Hong Kong Schools**

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Abstract

This study inquires the constructs of cross-cultural experience of ethnic minority students in Hong Kong secondary schools. Ethnic minority students and teachers in both contexts encounter teaching and learning challenges arising from students' cultural and linguistic differences. This study examines the types of social and cognitive interactions that occur between teachers and students, and among students. This is a combination of phenomenological and grounded theory study using narrative inquiry for data collection.

Background

In Hong Kong, its sovereignty was returned to China from Britain in July 1997, terminating British colonial rule (1840-1997) over the city. Despite this, British colonization still impacts on Hong Kong in various ways, such as the adoption of the British system of education and the strong emphasis on English language. It is suggested that Hong Kong is vastly different from British societies in many ways. This partially explains why immigrant students have experienced difficulties in adapting into the local Chinese community and schools in Hong Kong. Since 1997, the number of immigrant students from SE Asia countries and Mainland China who have enrolled into Hong Kong schools has been growing. For example, according to the data released by the Government, starting from 1995, each day an average of 150 newly arrived Mainland Chinese have been granted residency in Hong Kong, of which nearly half are aged under 15 years (Education Department, 1997; Sham Shui Po District Board, 1996). In 1996 there were about 169,319 immigrants from Mainland China (Hong Kong Government,

there were about 169,319 immigrants from Mainland China (Hong Kong Government, 1996). By 2001, the number had climbed to 266,577. In 1996, 48% of these immigrants were aged 19 or below. In 2001, this percentage dropped slightly to 36% (Statistics Section, Education Department, 2003). Consequently, many schools have acknowledged that catering for the diverse needs of these students has become an educational challenge to school managers and teachers. They have asserted the urgent need to readdress the issue of diversity, aimed at promoting an inclusive culture and ensuring that every student is treated equally and receives equal opportunities to learn.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is first to examine the social and cognitive interactions of learners in Hong Kong secondary schools to develop a cross-cultural theory. In as much as there is a cross-cultural identity development, understanding the interactions that contribute to that development and how they influence learning is crucial. Research suggests “that identity formation is a complex, multi-layered process that may be self-determined through our interactions with others. Cultural, religious, economic, and political forces, and our relationships with each other are the primary drivers that shape our identity, acting on us to influence our sense of ourselves...”(Norquay, 2004)

The next objective is to find out how in the school contexts the ethnic minority students see their learner role in the context of the cross cultural experiences they encounter and how they manage the differences they experience. In finding the underlying cross cultural differences experience during social and cognitive aspects of learning this study would underscore how or if the second language learners negotiate their identity in the interactions in the stories they narrate. This is critical to this study because both these groups of learners face a new language frontier and it is essential to find out how they maneuver their environments to negotiate their sense of who they are and figure out how best they could learn. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What cross cultural experiences do ethnic minority students have when they interact with their peers and teachers inside and outside the classroom?

2. How do they talk about the differences of their learning in the school environments?
3. What are the similarities and differences among different groups of ethnic minority students in their background, in learning English and functioning in the school?

Theoretical Framework

In order to unpack the experiences of the immigrant students with an identity theoretical framework Gee (2001) provides four ways of viewing identity. This theory distinctly sees new identity formation as a continuum and with four distinct phases. They are 1. Nature-identity: a state 2. Institution-identity: a position 3. Discourse-identity: an individual trait and 4. Affinity-identity: experiences. This lens helps to define the type of identities these learners experience and underscores their ways of negotiating their personal identities and transitioning from one to the other. .

Next, the perspective of social constructs of reality suggested by Berger and Luckmann (1973) is another lens to look at construction of their own meaning of reality which he says is dependent not only to their self, but also the external world where they live and interact with others. This frame provides the structure to analyze the stories.

Research Methodology

This is a combination of phenomenological and grounded theory study using narrative inquiry which is interchangeably the design of phenomenon. It also serves as an inquiry methodology and framework for writing the human experience of the immigrant students illuminating the complexities involved in the process of identity formation as individual stories. Data collection is mainly done through interviews and field notes from observations. Ethnic minority students and teachers from Hong Kong schools were invited for interviews.

First the students and the teachers were invited to have an unstructured personal interviews for 60 minutes each. Hong Kong interview was conducted in English or Cantonese. The interviewees had the freedom to talk about the issues concerned and tell

stories of their immigrant experience. Whenever they had something to say about their cross cultural experience, they were allowed to express their concerns and explore the issues, dilemmas or tension they faced. In addition to narrating their experiences and stories, they were also observed in the classroom and a large amount of observation data was gained to help answer the research questions.

Contributions to the Field: The study's significance lies in contributions to: (1) an exploration of new ways of researching, interpreting, and representing immigrant students' experience of language and identity development in international contexts; 2) developing cross-cultural methods to capture the complex and changing quality of cross-cultural experience little explored in existing literature; 3) turning the focus from an elaboration of theory to an examination of lived experience as a source of understanding immigrants' language, culture, and identity development in international contexts; and 4) grounding data in experience and close observation to link language, culture, and identity development (experience) to theory (research) to contribute to the creation of developing forms of scholarship in cross-cultural research literature.

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Ethnic Minority and Immigrant Students' Experience of Language, Culture and Identity Development in U. S. A., Canada and Hong Kong, China

Session Format: Interactive Symposium

Discussants: Freema Elbaz-Luwisch, Professor, University of Haifa, Israel
Christine Halse, University of Western Sydney

Panel Members: Kerry Kennedy, Hong Kong Institute of Education
Ming Tak Hue, Hong Kong Institute of Education
JoAnn Phillion, Purdue University
Betty C. Eng, City University of Hong Kong
Elaine Chan, University of Nebraska, Lincoln
Ming Fang He, Georgia Southern University

Introduction: In this interactive symposium a group of international scholars discuss five programs of research in which cross-cultural inquiry methods were used to explore ethnic minority students' experience of language, culture and identity development in international contexts (Hong Kong, Canada and the U.S.). We engage the audience in discussion of research on ethnic minority and immigrant students' experience at levels of policies, schools, communities and families. Researchers present demographic information on ethnic minority and immigrant students in each country, research programs, inquiry methods, and outcomes.

Purpose: The purpose of this interactive symposium is to share and describe characteristics and examples of cross-cultural research programs on ethnic minority and immigrant students, and the power of these research programs to mobilize teachers, principals, educators, educational policy makers, and educational researchers to understand and improve the education of ethnic minority and immigrant students in a global society. The five programs explored: (1) the implementation of policies on the promotion of ethnic minority education from an international perspective ; (2) language, culture, and identity development of ethnic minority students in Hong Kong schools; (3) the language, culture, and identity development of middle school students living in immigrant Chinese families and attending a Canadian school; and (4) the language, culture, and identity development of Chinese immigrant children in Southern U. S. schools and communities.

Context: The world landscape is becoming increasingly multicultural and multilingual as international migration rates grow each year (UNESCO, 2003). UNESCO reported that in 2000, 6,809 languages were in use, including 114 sign languages, in 228 countries. Approximately 185 million people worldwide live outside their countries of birth. In 2000, the foreign-born population of the United States (31.1 million) represented 11.1 % of the total population (281.4 million) (U. S. Census Bureau, 2002). In Canada as of 2001, 5.4 million people, or 18.4% of the total population (30.01 million), were born outside the country. From 1970 to 1995, the number of immigrant children aged 5 to 20 living in the United States grew from 3.5 to 8.6 million. This number will increase to 9 million by the year 2010 to represent 22% of the school-aged population. Currently one in 15 schoolchildren is born outside of the United States, and one in seven speaks a language other than English at home (Ruiz-de-Velasco, Fix, & Clewell, 2000). In Canada from 1991 to 2001, there were 310,000 school children between the ages of 5 and 16 among the 1.8 million immigrants. For many of these children, the first language learned and used at home is neither English nor French (the two official languages in Canada). In Hong Kong

from 1998 to 2004, the total population grew from 6, 543,700 to 6, 882, 600 (Information Services Department, HKSAR, 2005). From 1998 to 2004, there were 358,662 new arrivals from Mainland China. There were 131, 557 newly arrived children from Mainland in Hong Kong schools (Home Affairs Department & Immigration Department, 2006).

Of 31.1 million immigrants in the United States by 2000 [11.1 % of the total population (281.4 million)], 26% were Asian (11.9 million). Five groups--Asian Indian, Chinese, Filipino, Korean, and Vietnamese--made up approximately 80 % of the Asian population. Chinese was the largest group, representing approximately 24% of the Asian population (U. S. Census Bureau, 2002). In Canada, there has been a substantial increase in the number of immigrants from Asia since 1991. Of 1.8 million immigrants who arrived between 1991 and 2001 (6.2% of the total population in 2001), 58% came from Asia. Immigrants from Asia represented 47% of immigrants during the 1980s, 33% during the 1970s, and 3% before 1961. The People's Republic of China was the leading country of birth among immigrants in the 1990s, followed by immigrants from India, the Philippines, the Special Administrative Region of Hong Kong, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Taiwan. These seven Asian countries alone accounted for over 40% of all immigrants who came to Canada in the past decade. Chinese is the largest visible minority group, surpassing one million in 2001 (Minister of Industry, 2003). In 2003, 95% of the total population of 6, 803, 100 in Hong Kong were predominantly of Chinese descent; 523, 880 were foreign passport-holders (Information Services Department, HKSAR, 2003).

Unprecedented numbers of Asian immigrants came to the United States and Canada in the past two decades (U. S. Census Bureau, 2002; Statistics Canada, 2002). Since 1997, increasing numbers of Mainlanders have migrated to Hong Kong. These immigrants and their children brought language, cultural, and ethnic diversity to communities, schools, and classrooms. The linguistic heritage, cultural knowledge, and experience they bring to schools, however, are often ignored or overlooked. This relative absence from discourse in educational policy and practice, despite their growing presence in schools and society, are major reasons for featuring studies on Chinese immigrant students in this symposium.

Significance: The ethnic and cultural diversity which has resulted from the growing number of ethnic minority students is reflected in the diversity of student populations in elementary and secondary schools in the U. S., Canada and Hong Kong. Learning about the educational needs of ethnic minority and immigrant students has become more urgent, and research on issues of diversity in schooling has become of paramount importance in the past two decades. Although there is a wide array of literature on minority and immigrant students in the United States and Canada, there is less literature focused on their school experience. Further, there is little literature on the comparison of the impact of policy contexts on the education of ethnic minority and immigrant students in different countries. There is a need for more research examining the discrepancy between the policy making and its implementation, and ways in which schooling shapes cultural and ethnic identity and sense of belonging in schools and communities; ways in which achieving academic success is a challenge for these students as they balance affiliation to home cultures and participation in schools and communities (Lee, 1994; Rolon-Dow, 2004; Smith-Hefner, 1993); and ways in which academic performance is challenged by differences in expectations, behaviors, and practices between school educators and families of immigrant and minority students of color (Li, G., 2002; Valdés, 1996).

There is a developing literature on school experiences of Asian students (Goto, 1997; Lee, 1994, 2001; Kim & Chun, 1994; Pang, 1995; Lew, 2004); some highlights diversity between different Asian groups (Smith-Hefner, 1990, 1993) and within group differences (Lee, 1994). Research on the experience in schools and communities of specific Asian groups such as Cambodian (Hornberger & Skilton-Sylvester, 2000), Hmong (Goldstein, 1985; Lee, 2001, 2005),

and Vietnamese (Zhou & Bankston III, 1998) is growing. Research on the experience of other groups, however, such as Khmer (Smith-Hefner, 1993) and Tibetans (Phuntsog, 2000), is relatively sparse. Despite this growing body of literature focused on ethnic groups in the United States and Canada, and on immigrants and migrants in Hong Kong (Yuen, 2002), there remains much we do not know about ethnic minority students' experience of language, culture, and identity development in schools in the U. S., Canada, and Hong Kong, China.

Modes of Inquiry/Data Sources/Data Analysis: There is a demand for new methodologies for a holistic study of ethnic minority students' experience of language and identity development in international contexts. Language and identity are interconnected in ethnic minority students' life in schools, families, and communities. In our research programs, cross-cultural narrative inquiry, an approach that focuses on contextualized, historicized, placed experience, has been developed as a means of understanding experience across linguistic, cultural, educational, and social boundaries (He, 2003, 2002a, b, c; Phillion, 2002, a, b, c, d). Cross-cultural narrative as research phenomena, as a form of inquiry, and as a method of representing understandings of inquiry is being developed to capture the subtle, every-day, on-going quality of the way cross-cultural life was lived out, expressed, and addressed in international contexts.

Primary data collection methods include: archival research, document analysis, life history, narrative, and focus group interviews, informal conversations, participant observations, reflective journals, and autobiographical writings. Data analysis is intertwined with secondary data collection: 1) finding research puzzles, generating research themes and patterns from data collected; 2) follow-up interviews and further participant observations; 3) developing emergent understandings and making meaning out of data in relationship with participants (e.g. sharing research writing with participants and representing agreement and disagreement in research writing); and 4) drawing educational implications for social, cultural, and linguistic change.

Session Format: Through interaction with one another, the discussants, and the audience, panel members will explore the use of cross-cultural inquiries to study ethnic minority and immigrant students' language, culture, and identity development in diverse contexts (U. S. A., Canada, and Hong Kong). Panel members will also discuss the capacity of such inquiries to enable the audience to arrive at deep understandings of international educational issues, contexts, multiculturalism, and curricula. Experienced discussants will facilitate the session and encourage the audience to interact with presenters.

In the first program (Kerry), researchers explored the education provision for ethnic minority students in Hong Kong schools, at the two levels of educational policy and school practices. At the policy level, the current development of policy on the education of ethnic minority students in different societies, such as, the U.S., Australia, the U.K. and Hong Kong, were compared. Particular attention was paid to the examination of how these policies dealt with issues on racial discrimination, social justices and equity. It was intended to developing international and comparative perspectives for examining the current educational provision of supporting the diverse learning needs of these students, in a global context. At the school level, researchers worked with students, teachers, principals and school counselors in an elementary and secondary schools in the context of Hong Kong society, and looked at how relevant polices on ethnic minority education were implemented in practice. The preliminary finding have shown that ethnic minority students experienced some difficulty in learning Chinese language and adjusting to the Cantonese spoken in classrooms, as opposed to their home dialect, such as Pakistan and Indian. The Chinese language, a language they had not studied in their home countries, however, posed a greater obstacle to the entry of any universities in Hong Kong. The findings demonstrate that catering for diverse needs of ethnic minority students posed challenges

for teachers and school managers as Hong Kong schools. While the study is contextualized for the ethnic minority in Hong Kong, their experience has implications for the promotion of education of all ethnically and culturally diverse student populations in international contexts.

In the second program (Ming Tak), the researcher examined the cross-cultural experience of ethnic minority in Hong Kong secondary schools and how teachers responded to the issue of diversity at the curriculum level. Personal experience methods (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) were employed to explore what ethnic minority students used to discuss their experience in three dimensions: (1) the change of “space” from Mainland to Hong Kong schools; (2) the “place” in Hong Kong schools where they have been enrolled; and (3) the “time” in Mainland and Hong Kong schools. The preliminary finding has shown that teachers formed unfavorable opinions of these students, often based on their ethnicity background, their perceived level of effort in learning the Chinese language, their parents’ sources of income (often government assistance), and societal prejudice about them. Low self-esteem, lack of sense of belonging, low academic achievement, dropping out of school, and joining gangs were issues faced by student participants in the study. This study has also shown that these students have struggled for the transformation of their self-identity in three dimensions: academic, social, and ethnic selves. The study contributes to a developing research literature on ethnic minority students in Hong Kong and calls for addressing the needs of immigrant students in school curriculum in Hong Kong.

In the third program of research (JoAnn and Betty), the researchers explored some of the challenges that Mainland Chinese students and mothers encountered as they negotiated a sense of ethnic identity and belonging in Hong Kong schools through six months of intensive research in a variety of Hong Kong elementary/primary schools. Researchers worked primarily in one school in a low-income area with a small number of such students. Researchers share their review of documents obtained from the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB), the government body responsible for educational planning and the small body of research that focused on the school experience of this group of students (e.g. Chong, 2004; Yuen, 2002). They share some of their field notes and research journal entries made following classroom observations, participation in the classroom and school, and conversations with the students, their parents, their teachers, and other school personnel. They also share their analyses of government documents for relevant material related to demographic information, programs in place for these students and funding for programs. The findings demonstrate that catering for diverse needs of immigrant students from Mainland China posed challenges for teachers and school managers as Hong Kong schools accommodated unprecedented numbers of migrant students from the Mainland. Low self-esteem, lack of sense of belonging, low academic achievement, dropping out of school, and joining gangs were issues faced by student participants in the study. In addition, parents, in particular mothers, experienced feelings of isolation and loneliness as well as frustration in how to deal with the problems their children experienced in school. Through such a detailed and intimate study on the newly arrival students’ experience in the school, their parents’ perceptions of education in Hong Kong, and school-wide and teacher responses to these students, researchers call for teachers, parents, policy makers, administrators to work together to create equitable education opportunities for all students to achieve in Hong Kong schools.

In the fourth program of research (Elaine), the researcher examined the ethnic identity development of four middle-school students growing up in immigrant Chinese families and attending a Canadian school. The researcher examined the students’ schooling experiences to identify ways in which participation in the curriculum and interaction with peers and teachers in their school context contributed to shaping their sense of identity as Chinese-Canadians. Using a

cross-cultural narrative inquiry approach, stories of the students' experiences were gathered through long-term participant-observation at their culturally-diverse, urban school. The researcher focused in particular on challenges faced by the students as they attempted to balance affiliation to their home culture through maternal language maintenance and adherence to Chinese traditions and practices, and affiliation to Canadian culture through participation in school and community events. This study highlighted ways in which immigration and settlement continue to shape the ethnic identity of children of immigrant families years, and even generations, after the families originally immigrated.

In the fourth program of research (Ming Fang), the researcher explored the language, culture, and identity development of Chinese immigrant children as they struggle for identities in-between Black and White tensions in Southern U. S. schools. The researcher created a portrait of Chinese immigrant families and communities in Georgia and detailed profiles of five Chinese immigrant families and their children. This study provided some explanations for the academic achievement of Chinese immigrant students. The researcher analyzed the ways in which language, culture, and identity had impacted Chinese immigrant students' school success. She examined the Chinese community's effort towards and influences on students' education such as community-based heritage schools and, more broadly the survival of Chinese culture in the U. S. South. The study employed a cross-cultural narrative inquiry method which involved archive research, newspaper clippings and document collection, participant observation, in-depth interviews, and informal conversations at Chinese restaurants, fish markets, tea stores, grocery stores, Chinese language schools, and community centers. The researcher found that Chinese community heritage schools are not only an academic entity of language maintenance for Chinese students, but also fulfill the community's desire to foster the students' linguistic and cultural identity. The community-based schools, that share similar educational attributes with public schools, provide linguistic and cultural continuity that is complementary to the Chinese students' education in the public school system. This study opens new areas of inquiry for the comparative approach to implications of language, culture, and identity for the education of immigrant and minority students in international contexts.

Contributions to the Field: The studies' significance lies in contributions to: (1) an exploration of new ways of researching, interpreting, and representing ethnic minority students' experience of language and identity development in international contexts; 2) developing cross-cultural methods to capture the complex and changing quality of cross-cultural experience little explored in existing literature; 3) turning the focus from an elaboration of theory to an examination of lived experience as a source of understanding immigrants' language, culture, and identity development in international contexts; and 4) grounding data in experience and close observation to link language, culture, and identity development (experience) to theory (research) to contribute to the creation of developing forms of scholarship in cross-cultural research literature.

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