

An Interpretive Study of Han Teachers' Beliefs on Teaching Urban Indigenous Students in Taiwan

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Abstract

This study examines the beliefs and attitudes of two Han Chinese teachers who were considered exemplary teachers of Indigenous students by the teacher educators, principals and administrators. It also explores related personal and contextual factors in order to better understand how teaching expertise was developed and was supported or impeded. Using qualitative research methods, I collected data via classroom observations, in-depth interviews, and reflection logs.

The data analysis identified three major themes in the teachers' beliefs and attitudes of urban Indigenous students: (a) education for urban Indigenous students, (b) beliefs about Indigenous students, and (c) beliefs about teaching. The findings also indicate that teachers' experiences with cultural diversity profoundly impact their teaching practice. The more that teachers experience their students' cultures, the better they would understand and appreciate cultural diversity. Based on the research findings, this study suggests that teacher educators should consider cultural contexts when preparing teachers to teach Indigenous students. Culturally relevant teaching might well be suitable for educators who teach Indigenous students.

Keywords: Indigenous education, teacher education, urban Indigenous

Introduction

Research suggests that teachers' perspectives on students significantly shape their expectations about student learning, their treatment of students, and what the students ultimately learn (Irvin, 1990; Pajares, 1993; Pang & Sablan, 1998; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Teachers with an *affirming perspective* are more apt to believe that students from nondominant groups are capable learners, even when those children enter school with ways of thinking, talking, and behaving that deviate from the dominant culture's norms (Delpit, 1995). On the other hand, teachers with limiting perspectives are more apt to make negative forecasts about such students' potential. Dubious about those students' ability to achieve, teachers are more likely to hold low academic expectations for them and ultimately to treat them in ways likely to stifle their learning (Nieto, 2000; Payne, 1994).

In this study I examined two Han Chinese teachers' beliefs and attitudes of Indigenous students and uncovered the factors that that believe potentially impede or promote the success of Indigenous students in Taiwanese urban schools. Such an analysis of educators' perspectives is critical to understanding teachers' beliefs and attitudes and has powerful implications for teacher efficacy and student achievement (McAllister & Irvin, 2002; Pajares, 1992). In particular, I hope to contribute towards a deeper understanding of the ways teachers perceive the education of Indigenous students.

Impetus for the Study

My interest in this topic is a natural extension of my Indigenous heritage

and experience, first, as a classroom teacher and then as a researcher in the field of teacher education. When I was eight years old, my family moved to Taipei, an exciting destination for an impressionable youth. My elementary school was jammed with over ten thousand students, and it was here where I first experienced any stigma for being an Aborigine, and the struggles inherent to that hostile environment. Mandarin was the only acceptable language in the classroom. My classmates frequently joked about my Indigenous accent. I worked tirelessly on my Mandarin and studied diligently to catch up with my Han classmates, hoping teachers and classmates would not discover my Indigenous identity. That experience led me to believe that what others thought about me, as an Aborigine, could have an overwhelming emotional and academic impact. Later, as a teacher, I became familiar with many different perspectives on Indigenous students, and realized that those viewpoints could have a tremendous impact on children. As an educational researcher, I have come to believe that it is important for teachers to examine their perspectives on students who come from other cultural backgrounds.

A substantial literature supports the thesis that teachers' beliefs and attitudes strongly influence their perception and behavior in the classroom (Byrnes, *et al.*, 1997; Clark & Peterson, 1986; Cross, 1993; Dillingham & Johnson, 1973; Kagan, 1992; Lewis, 1990; Nespor, 1987; Tabachnick & Zeichner, 1984; Villegas, 1992). While some believe that the macro-context is the most salient factor of urban Indigenous students' education, other researchers point to teachers' perspectives on Indigenous students as significant to student's success and therefore an important topic of study (Tatto, 1996).

The value and importance of understanding teachers' perspectives is becoming apparent. As Tatto (1996) stated, "Not only do teacher beliefs influence their teaching, these beliefs are relatively stable and resistant to

change” (p. 157). In order for teachers’ beliefs to be impacted by their training programs, Tatto recommended that

If teacher educators are striving to help teachers learn practices teachers do not value, it is likely that teacher education will not have much effect. These findings, combined with studies of the content of teacher education, make it clear that an important goal of many teacher education programs ought to be to alter teachers’ beliefs. (p. 157)

Teachers have preconceived ideas about issues of race, ethnicity, gender, and class. Like any other preconceptions, these beliefs and attitudes will play out in the actions and practices as teachers. It is, therefore, important to understand teacher’s beliefs and their relation to classroom practices.

Participants

Mike

Mike, a non-Indigenous six-grade teacher, was born in Lu-Kan Town, a small village in Western Taiwan. He graduated from National Taipei Junior Teachers College and began to teach in 1978. At the time this data was collected, he was at the end of his twenty-fifth year of teaching. He came to An-Shi Elementary School in 1998 to join his wife, who was a second grade teacher at An-Shi Elementary School. Mike taught Mandarin, art, and social studies in the sixth grade. His avocations were travel and photography, both of which he enjoyed during his summer breaks. Mike was pursuing a master’s degree in art education at the Taiwan Normal University.

Alice

Alice, a second generation of Chinese mainlander, was born in Tao-Yuan County, where she lived with her husband and a baby girl. Alice went through grade school, high school, and college in Tao-Yuan. After graduating from National Chu-Yang University, she took a one-year Teacher Certification Program at Taipei Teachers College. Alice began to teach in 1988. Then she taught for fifteen years in elementary school. At the time I interviewed her, she was teaching Mandarin, math, and social studies in the third grade at An-Shi Elementary School. Her colleagues knew her as a caring, warm and generous person.

Theoretical Frameworks: Ways of Thinking about Diversity

The theoretical framework for this research provides a perspective from which to examine both the issues of the education of Indigenous students, as well as specific issues involving teachers' perspectives about teaching Indigenous students. Here, a critical-theory view (Giroux, 1983; McLaren, 1988; Tierney, 1992) is adopted. Critical theory offers a critique of the institutions, policies, and practices that have historically served as disabling and disempowering forces against various groups of students. It also suggests mechanisms for transforming historical patterns of school failure.

Critical theory acknowledges the need to analyze the nature of domination and resistance as they relate to culture and power. Giroux (1983) states, "Teaching for social transformation means educating students to take risks and to struggle within ongoing relations of power in order to be able to alter the

grounds on which life is lived” (p. 30). The struggle suggested relates to power—power not only in the sense of ability to dominate, but also to act with effect. Tierney (1992) stresses the need for students to identify the practices that inhibit and constrain them and for educators to create conditions in which students can recognize and utilize the potential to empower themselves. Tierney states a rationale for a critical theory:

First, one key point of critical theory is that theory must be linked to action, so that the goal of such theory is the production, not merely of “conceptual thought,” but also of action that is meant to bring about change. Second, change should not be conceived as the sole possession of intellectuals or upper level administrators or any other group. All individuals have a role for protest and action in accord with “living within the truth.” Indeed, a key component of critical analysis is enabling the powerless to realize that they are not powerless and that they are able to change the social relations of their existence. Third, change is multifaceted, a “complex process.” It comes not only from dramatic reinorientations such an overthrow of a government, but also from more minute developments that an individual may utilize. (p. 23)

Critical theory works from the assumption that social scientists are embedded in the contexts and structures that they investigate; they are never free from the subjectivities and values that constitute their investigation. No one stands removed from the world he or she studies; in effect, no one is an objective observer. Given that perspective, researchers must reveal not only their sources, but their values and beliefs, as well. For critical theorists, those values and beliefs are related to understanding the oppressive aspects of society in order to transform those features that seek to constrain and silence the oppressed.

Researchers have often recommended that to challenge misconceptions

and change the status quo, teachers must engage in reflective practices (Milk, Mercado, and Spaiens, 1992). Encouraging teachers to examine their beliefs is important to help a reflective practitioner. When teachers engage in critical reflection, they gain insights that may assist their development as effective teachers. One way to address the marginalization of students in school is through a transformative pedagogy, which includes critical learning, action, and reflection and which provides teachers with the mechanism for self-actualization and empowerment (Freire, 1993, 1998). Given the significance of being a reflective practitioner in teaching, it is important to understand how teachers make sense of their experiences with Indigenous students. What roles do the teachers perceive they have in the students' lives? What do they think would influence the education of the students? How do they interpret their roles and responsibilities as teachers of Indigenous students in urban environments?

Methodology

This qualitative research uses an interpretive case study approach, which is an appropriate methodology when a holistic, in-depth investigation is needed (Feagin, *et al.*, 1991), to understand teachers' perspectives about urban Indigenous students. Yin (1984) points to several reasons for selecting the case study method: "case studies are the preferred strategy when how or why questions are being posed. When the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context" (p. 13). The case study is appropriate for this study, which seeks to delineate how teachers think about teaching Indigenous students and the meaning behind their statements. Tesch (1990) defines qualitative research as

“all research not concerned with variables and their measurements” (p. 46). Yet this definition names what qualitative is not, as opposed to what it is.

One of the major characteristics of this research design is that it captures the “meaning” of how teachers describe, in their own words, the personal-life experiences and events that shape their perspectives. In the research I scrupulously moved, via analytic induction, from two teachers’ stories and related experiences, the collected wisdom, to a systematic analysis of my data. After reading the two teachers’ interviews about their experiences with and perceptions of teaching Indigenous children, I identified the commonalities of their experiences and then in cross-case analysis looked across their experiences. This more inductive presentation is particularly effective in reporting research to teachers, prospective teachers, administrators, and teacher educators in multicultural societies.

Cross Case Analysis

Education for urban Indigenous students

Teacher education: Changing the system. Mike told me that teacher education in Taiwan has undergone significant change within the last decade in Taiwan. For example, “qualified teachers must have a bachelor’s degree. That means teachers’ educational qualifications have improved.” On the other hand, he added, “Too many universities and colleges have been allowed to create their own teacher education program. Some of the programs really ill-prepare their teacher candidates.” Mike believed that teachers should be prepared according to the local needs. He stated that “there were still a lot of problems in teacher education in Taiwan.” He believed that the system of teacher education in

Taiwan must be changed in order to improve the education in Indigenous schools. "The schools must employ more Indigenous teachers to teach students who also come from Indigenous backgrounds." Mike states that

Having Indigenous teachers in schools has many benefits. It eliminates racism; the teacher is likely to understand the students' social and cultural background; the teacher is able to be an identifiable role model for the students; relationship building is much easier; communication with the home is assured; and the teachers have experienced similar struggles in coming to terms with school culture.

Mike saw increased recruitment of Indigenous teachers as one solution to the problem of Indigenous education. Although he often visited Indigenous sites, he admitted that he was still not very knowledgeable about Indigenous cultures; therefore he might not be able to teach Indigenous students effectively. Alice agreed with this and told me that she had visited a friend of hers, who was an Indigenous teacher, in an Indigenous school in I-Lan County. She noted that her friend's teaching style and the way of managing her class were very different from hers. Her friend told her that she developed her teaching method by connecting the knowledge in the text book with the cultural life of the tribe. She told me:

My friend was a native of that community. She could speak the native language, and sometimes she would use both Mandarin and Indigenous language in the class. I found that students were more comfortable in the class, and they learned their language too. We came from the same teacher education program, but I know I wouldn't be capable of doing that, even if I wanted to.

On visiting her Indigenous friend's class, Alice decided that with a background similar to that of their students could create a curriculum and an

environment that would improve students' performance. Mike and Alice believed that teacher education programs must include content of relevance to Indigenous people, if there are Indigenous students in class. Unfortunately, neither Mike nor Alice has been offered any course or seminar in which Indigenous issues were discussed or considered. An alternative is that "the Indigenous issues should be offered in the programs of teacher professional development."

Preferential policy. Where the high school and college admission is concerned, the preferential policy is one of the strategies that have been mentioned the most. Substantial evidence suggests that Indigenous students show lesser interest in academic works, and do more poorly in school than their Han counterparts. Indigenous students are under represented at the secondary education levels. In order to create a more accessible education for Indigenous people, a preferential policy was developed which lowered the high school and college admission test scores for Indigenous students. Under this policy, more Indigenous students were able to enroll in highly selective schools, which were usually located in cities. Mike told me that the academic competition was the big huddle for Indigenous students in city schools. He was aware that the preferential policy was developed to help Indigenous students gain admission to high school and college.

Currently, high school and college enrollment exams were abolished. It would seem that students would be exempt from the pressure of testing. But no; schools are still giving tests, and there is more pressure on students. Preferential policy allows Indigenous students to get into high schools and colleges with special admission status. I think this is a nice idea, but in the long run, this is not going to help them ... you have to get them ready for the academic competition in schools ... Some of them

flunk out because they couldn't handle the overloaded of school work.

Alice told me that there were two Indigenous students in her advanced reading class in high school. She knew that these two students were admitted in her school by preferential policy, but "most of us didn't care because they're always behind." Like Mike, Alice believed that Indigenous students who came to high schools and colleges with special admission needed extra help with school work. More over, she expressed her concern that such students also have difficulty adjusting socially. She said:

We all knew that they [Indigenous students] were in with special treatment. But I don't think we cared that much because everybody only minded their own business. These two special students were far behind, but they seemed to be working hard everyday ... they were pretty withdrawn and less talkative. They seemed completely weighed down by the stress of examinations.

It is obvious that, as Mike and Alice mentioned, many Indigenous students encountered great difficulties in learning in a Han dominant class. Academic readiness and psychological distress were the main issues that Mike and Alice believed should be dealt with.

Assimilation. Mike told me that his Indigenous classmates were then teaching in the Indigenous schools. However, he noted, "They are teaching materials that were created from the Han perspectives." He was pretty pessimistic about the Indigenous education in Taiwan, and believes that if the educational system resists change, "minority people would lose their culture within a matter of years." Since traveling a few times to mainland China, he had come to realize these problems were difficult to solve.

The Nashi people in Mainland China are also struggling with the cultural

preservation. But their culture and language are losing so fast because the Han culture is so successful at dominating theirs. The young people don't like to learn about their history. The clothes they are wearing aren't the Indigenous styles. They have been changed. I don't know, maybe their language will disappear within the next two or three decades.

Mike saw some similarities in minority groups in Mainland China and Taiwan, but he believed that Indigenous people in Taiwan were not aware of the risk of cultural and languages extinction. He observed that they also found it difficult to preserve their cultures and languages. He gave an example, based on the practices, of this former classmates in teachers college:

My Indigenous classmates were a good example. They lived in city, married to Han Chinese girls. They lived in the Han community. You won't notice their difference if they don't speak their native languages. I don't think preserving native language is an issue to them.

Alice had similar feeling about Indigenous cultures. She believed that Indigenous teachers could have a difference, but the prescribed curriculum kept them from doing so. To preserve Indigenous cultures, Indigenous people needed to be aware of the cultural crisis they were facing.

Discrimination. In addition to the influence of teachers, another learning barrier for Indigenous students, in Alice and Mike's view, was discrimination. They found that Indigenous students were more likely to be discriminated against by their peers. Although discrimination was rare in Mike's class, he noted that part of the problem stemmed from the non-Indigenous students.

We are going to have a three-day field trip next week. All of us are pretty excited about that. I want to be fair so I let them pick their roommates. It turns out that some of the poor and quiet students have been cut off ...

They were pushed around, and I notice that two of them were my Indigenous students. They have no group to join ... some students have said to me in private that 'they're lazy and dirty, can't sleep with them' ... that's just not true.

For other teachers, that might have caused frustration. To Mike, it was a good opportunity to help his students "realize the importance of equity and justice." He explicitly expressed empathy with the poor students in front of his class, not giving them a chance to marginalize any one student. Mike told me that "I know how they [poor students] feel because my family used to be like that." His teachers failed to take advantage of opportunity to help him develop self-esteem when they could, but "I am not going to make the same mistakes."

Although two of the poor students in Mike's class were of Indigenous heritage, Mike did not think they were discriminated against solely because of their race. He believed that racial discrimination was then less prevalent in schools, since "we don't talk about that in school, it's an old story." He explained:

I think we have improved the handling of racial relationships in society. In school, I don't see any incidents that related to racial conflict or tension, or anything like that. I myself wouldn't discriminate against them [Indigenous students]. I just think many Indigenous people need help with a lot of things, like finance, education, politics and so on ... I did have some Indigenous students who I felt needed additional educational support but I won't let it [discrimination] happens in my class.

Mike repeatedly avowed that he never discriminated in favor of brighter or better off students. Instead, he paid more attention to those who came from poor and minority backgrounds. Similarly, Alice also said that she had never heard of any teacher discriminating against anyone in her school. She noted,

“Indigenous families liked to live together, staying closer.” Observing that most Indigenous families were poor, she doubted that they were able to afford their children’s education.

They [Indigenous people] have many relatives and friends. They work in the same construction site or factory. I don’t think I have heard that Han Chinese in the community disliked them. They [Indigenous people] seemed peaceful. Their only problem is that some of the families can’t afford their children’s tuition and lunch money.

Alice viewed the economic plight of Indigenous families as more of a problem in urban areas, and her travels to the Indigenous tribes reinforced that belief. She seemed sympathetic to Indigenous students and could not explain the cause of the economic plight of their families

Both Mike and Alice believed that racial discrimination was not a serious problem in school. The economic problems that Indigenous families were a concern, and needed to be paid more attention to. In Alice’s account, Indigenous people were described as unprepared for the city life, and those who acted and talked like Han Chinese were seen as *normal*.

Curriculum. Mike expressed his concern about the mandatory curriculum in school especially regarding issues related to historical and cultural issues. He believed in deepening students’ understanding of Taiwanese history and culture. He realized that “Taiwanese history and native cultural accounts are missing in school texts and curriculum.” Mike told me that he worried about Indigenous cultures, which had been ignored in school curricula. It was Mike’s belief that being able to speak one’s home language is a right, and he explicitly expressed that to his students. He said:

All my students can speak Mandarin, but their home languages are

different. We have Min-Nan, Hakka dialects and Native languages. When I was teaching them a vocabulary associated with the reading, I would call on students try it out in their home languages. At first, students felt stupid and didn't want to do it. I had to show my sincerity and tell them how grateful I was to have students able to speak so many languages.

Students' pride about their mother tongue was confirmed by my observation in Mike's class. Many students were eager to speak out when he asked for volunteers to say words or sentences in their home languages. The three Indigenous students were also encouraged to participate. Mike realized that his Indigenous students did not want to be singled out, but "whenever they volunteer to share something, I show my respect and appreciation to them so other students will do the same."

Likewise, Alice also noticed the Indigenous cultural texts are very scarce. She said, "The texts in third grade do introduce Indigenous customs and embroidery, but I don't think it would provide a depth of understanding among students." Alice, like Mike, would take her collection of artifacts and photos to show her students whenever they were studying a topic related to Indigenous people. While Alice believed that visiting Indigenous tribes led to a better understanding of Indigenous cultures, she did not think school policy allowed schools to do so:

Most Indigenous villages are too far to travel to. The transportation is a problem. I don't think that parents would pay for the transportation. And safety is another issue. It would be nice if you could have your students stay in tribes for a couple of days, you know, talking to people, playing with the Indigenous kids, and attending the ceremonies. But many teachers wouldn't take on the responsibility, and the field trip application involves a long process. Parents could do that, but I doubt they would.

Both Alice and Mike noted that the Indigenous cultures are underrepresented in school texts, leading to only a superficial understanding of these cultures. Although they managed to travel to the Indigenous sites and obtain some information for their classes, they felt that the extent to which they could pass on a deeper understanding was limited. They agreed that visiting Indigenous tribes and experiencing their culture in person is the best way of learning about the cultures. What differentiates Mike from Alice in practice was that he ensured that students' home languages valued and accepted in his classroom. In addition, he encouraged the Indigenous students, though small in number, to share their cultural knowledge, modeling his caring attitude toward minority students in class.

Cultural identity. In the previous section, Mike claimed that the racial identity of urban Indigenous students was a serious issue that needed to be dealt with in the school. Having students from diverse cultures, Mike came to realize the benefit of having students share their understanding of their own cultures. Mike stated that learning about one's own culture "allows you to move on and kind of accept people for who they are and not what they are or where they're from." The process of learning about others "helps one to become more aware of one's own culture," because one must be comfortable with and understand one's own heritage before beginning to understand or be empathetic towards another.

I didn't realize this would raise the level of respect and appreciation among students until I began to ask them to share and talk about their cultures. They seemed to gain more confidence in themselves, especially the Indigenous students. Now, my students know who can speak Min-Nan and Hakka dialects, and who can speak Indigenous languages ... I think this is the beginning of knowing each other, and knowing ourselves better.

Mike believed that in order to create a harmonious classroom with cultural diversity, students have to realize and be proud of their own cultural background. It is teacher's duty to create a safe environment in which students are willing to express themselves.

As a third grade teacher, Alice said, her students seemed too young to understand the difference between different ethnic groups. Difference in skin color were not that obvious, and no student in her class spoke a language other than Mandarin in class. Alice told me that the identity crisis was more likely to happen in the higher grades. "You have to be mature enough to understand this kind of thing." She turned from talking about her students to reveal her concern about her own cultural identity. She says:

I never thought about my own cultural identity. Not until the DPP¹ took over the political power from the KMT. People like us were shut out of the mainstream. People speaking Min-Nan dialect are actually the majority. I don't know the Min-Nan dialect. I feel that I'm in the minority. I'm a little bit worried ... sometimes I don't know where I belong....

Alice began to think about her cultural identity when she found out that most people around her spoke Min-Nan dialect, which was so exotic to her. The government was then run by the people who are mostly Min-Nan descendant, and promoting the native Taiwanese cultures. Although she was born in Taiwan, Alice was struggling with identifying her cultural belonging.

As Mike suggested earlier, one should understand oneself in order to understand others better. Mike practiced this belief by encouraging his students to talk about their cultures. He wanted students to understand the differences between diverse groups in class. By witnessing the overturning of political

¹ Democratic Progress Party, the political party in power.

power, Alice had begun to sense the differences between different groups in Taiwanese society. At the same time, she was aware of the fluctuations in her own identity.

Indigenous family. Both Mike and Alice believed that the family plays a critical role in the education of Indigenous students. Before Mike came to An Shi, he had taught in three different city schools for 15 years. He had had Indigenous students in his class every year, though the number was small. However, the Indigenous students in An Shi elementary school were different from his former pupils. He explained:

A lot of Indigenous parents are too busy at work, so they might not be able to take care of their children's home work, I mean, they don't know how to help their children with school stuff. But here, my three Indigenous students seem a little better off because all their parents have steady jobs. Sometimes they'll call me up, asking about their children's progress at school ... Two of the families were able to send their children to cram school, seeking extra help from paid tutors ... I was very impressed. Their families were much better than I thought!

Mike observed that Indigenous parents who had jobs could more easily support their children's education and were more likely to interact with teachers. Before he came to An Shi, many of the Indigenous parents he had known were unemployed and poor. It was because "they moved to the city currently." However, the three Indigenous students currently in his class were better off. But he had still another issue to deal with:

I just found out that Phil, an Indigenous student who transferred to my class two months ago, was of mixed blood. His father was an Amis and his mother was Indonesian. His father bought a house in our community, so I figured they must have been working in the city for a long time. But

Phil had difficulty in reading and writing, a lot of difficulty ... his mother can only speak a little Mandarin ... his father came to me saying he was going to send Phil to the after-school programs ... Phil made a lot of progress. I was glad that he could make it.

According to Mike, the length of time an Indigenous family stayed in the city made big difference. He added, "You'll find a lot of problems in those Indigenous families who have just moved to the city." He believed that Indigenous parents who own a house and had a stable job in the city, like Phil's father, were more likely to give high priority to their children's education.

Alice also has three Indigenous students in her class. She confronted a different issue from Mike's. Two of her Indigenous students were raised by single mothers, who were busy with their work and never consulted with her about their children's schoolwork. The other one's father drank excessively. Alice remembered that he once came drunk to a parent meeting. She was worried about how such parents could maintain an environment in which children could get help with their education.

The mothers [of Indigenous students] are working day and night. They have so many children to take care of. I don't think they consider education as a serious matter ... You can't blame them. They have to compete with Han Chinese workers. That's why so many Indigenous people drank too much alcohol ... I don't think this is good home environment for studying.

Indigenous people who migrated to the city for a better life, as Mike and Alice put it, varied in their ability to support their children, depending on how long they have lived in the city and how long their jobs lasted. From Mike and Alice's accounts, we realize that teachers need to deal with various issues pertinent to Indigenous families. Indigenous students in Mike's class seemed to

have a more supportive home environment but needed extra help to overcome their learning barriers. On the other hand, Alice noted that the Indigenous families suffered from the competitive culture in the city, many of them consuming excessive alcohol to stave off social and work-related depression.

Beliefs about the Learning of Indigenous Students

“I don’t believe that science will ever prove that Indigenous people are inferior to other ethnic groups,” Mike told me. He believed that we are different genetically but “it doesn’t matter.” As a teacher with many years of teaching experience, Mike had taught students who came from various cultural backgrounds, with different ways of learning and thinking. He had three Indigenous students in his class, two boys and one girl. “They are physically different.” He felt that it is good to have students from different cultural backgrounds in his class.

Alice also had three Indigenous students in her class, two girls and one boy. As I mentioned in the previous section, these students came from a poorer family, and needed extra help in academic work. What follows is the description of teachers’ perspectives about Indigenous students in their classes.

Self-esteem. Asked about his Indigenous students, Mike described them in details. He also reported other teachers’ opinions. He told me that teachers sometimes complained about the misbehaviors or slow learning pace of Indigenous students. One thing that set Mike apart from other teachers was that he saw strengths in those students. That was illustrated by his perceptions of Amy, who was doing poorly academically, appeared sullen and withdrawn in his classes, and was frequently disciplined by teachers. Mike told me:

Amy is very different. I mean different people see her in different ways.

She has a twin sister in another class, but her sister does very well in school work, gets a lot of rewards, and is very popular among teachers and peers. Amy is also a lot tinier than her sister. They actually are different in many ways. She is a good writer though. Sometimes she will write something that surprises you in its maturity. And I have figured out that she likes doing it. So I have her read whatever she does in writing class to classmates. She didn't know her writing was superbly good until I asked her to do so. She gained some self-esteem from that.

Amy's father had been in the armed forces and worked as a security guard in a big building. Mike told me that Amy's father often beat her. "That's why she shows a lot disobedience to her parents. But she is smart." Mike remembered that Amy often got into trouble during her first month in his class. He believed that increasing her self-esteem would improve her behavior. Sean, another Indigenous boy in Mike's class, was of Amis heritage. He was mediocre in academy but outstanding in all sports. Mike believed that Sean has gained self confidence through his athletic prowess.

Similarly, Alice also had three Indigenous students who are lagging in academic achievement. Alice did not set a high standard with them as with the other students. "I know their family can't afford the after school programs like other families can." She allowed them to turn in their home work late, but "they have to do their work on their own." Alice realized that their poor grades might make them feel inferior. However, their talents in art and sports offset their difficulties in class. She said:

They might not be able to beat other students academically, but they are really good at drawing and sports. Christine, one of my Indigenous students, can draw very well. She has real talent. Her paintings have won her many prizes. We like her, and the students liked her ... another student, Andrew, is an athletic hero in my class. He is extraordinary in

sports. He has been an all-around leader in sports in my class.

Both Mike and Alice have found that their Indigenous students had gifts that made them proud. For example, in Mike's class, Amy was good at writing, and Sean was good at sports. Mike believed that their talents could serve as a model for other students in class, and in turn increase the self-esteem of Indigenous students. Alice encouraged Christine to draw her best and won many school-wide and county-wide competitions. Andrew was a popular sport leader in Alice's class because of his athletic ability. Both Christine and Andrew have gained self-confidence from developing what they are good at.

Learning styles. People perceive the world in different ways, learn about the world in different ways, and demonstrate what they have learned in different ways. An individual's approach to learning and demonstration of what he or she has learned is influenced by the values, norms, and socialization practices of the culture in which that individual has been acculturated. Mike, in general, reaffirmed those beliefs in his interviews, and adjusted his teaching to accommodate various learning styles. In the classroom, he had found that Indigenous students differ from Han Chinese students in their learning style.

When I give an assignment, my Indigenous students are reluctant to finish quickly or to correct other peers' papers. My Han Chinese students are quick to jump into the task. The Indigenous students seem to need time to think about things before they take action on their assignment. It is almost like they have to make sure they can do it before they try.

Mike believed that "they [Indigenous students] are not incapable of performing; they are just been careful." He allowed them more time to do their assignments and called on them to speak up when they were ready. Mike has another example of the learning styles of Indigenous students. He had observed

them in their art and writing classes. He explained:

The Indigenous kids are image-driven. One of my kids is just a wonderful writer. Her writing is very evocative, imagery and pictures as opposed to abstract. Even her prose feels like poetry. She's good writer. She's a talented writer. Whereas, with Han kids, some of the best writers write poetry, but more theoretically. Something about that seems like there's a cultural difference there. Something about the way they see or experience.

When teaching art and reading, Mike was able to observe the various learning styles of his students. He concluded that the differences between Indigenous and Han students may be associated with their cultures. With over ten years of teaching experience, Alice, like Mike, confirmed the notion of "accommodating to student learning styles." She has found that Indigenous students are easily confused by abstract concepts, such as in mathematics:

The Indigenous students have a hard time understanding complex equations. Sometimes, I have to explain a few times to them ... you know, I have to make it concrete. When they are stuck, they don't know how to explain their difficulty ... during recess, I would have them come in and get help.

Giving students more practice was one of Alice's ways of helping students who had difficulty. Alice had been interested in and tried out many different ways of teaching Math. Realizing that her Indigenous students had different learning preferences, Alice described how she helped them by using visual and creative process:

I figured that drawing a picture was one way of doing math, so I used art to teach them simple math or reading ... I asked them to draw picture when they were trying to solve a math problem, so they could manage

the equation by seeing it rather than pondering it in their brains. It might take time, but I think it's more important to really grasp the math. Actually I wanted to do this, so that they would get a little bit of math and a little of reading.

Both Mike and Alice agreed that Indigenous students differed from the majority population in their learning styles. The Indigenous students in Mike's class seemed to be hesitant to point out other people's mistake, and skilled in using their visualizing ability to write or paint. Mike believed the difference in learning styles between Indigenous and Han Chinese students is connected with their cultural background. On the other hand, Alice had discovered that using pictures and drawings in her Math class had helped her Indigenous students to better understand abstract concept. She spent time during recess helping students with difficulties, and had her students who are better in math tutor her Indigenous students.

Peer relationship. Both Mike and Alice noted that peer relationship is a salient factor in Indigenous students' learning. The three Indigenous students do not "stick together" as Mike had thought they might. Instead, they were drawn to other groups of students. Sean, an Indigenous student with athletic talent, led a group of students who always played ball games during recess. He observed, "Other members of his group helped him with his school work." Mike believed that Sean identifies with his peers and benefited from the help of the other students who liked to play with him. On the other hand, Phil, a recently transferred Indigenous student, was very withdrawn when he came to Mike's class. Mike found that his academic progress was improving, along with his relationship with other students.

Phil was isolated in class. He lived in his own world, and rarely talked to

anybody. So I seated a girl, Nina, beside him. She was very diplomatic and outgoing, and most importantly, she was a model in academics and good at helping other people. Anyway, they became good friends, Nina helped him with his work and Phil began to make friends.

Alice agreed with Mike that “teenagers need identity; they need to be acknowledged by their close friends.” She remembered that, as a high school student, she “wasn’t really listening to my teachers.” Her close friends in junior high school had a much more immediate influence on her than the adults. She believed that adolescence was the most important period in the development of personal identity. Her third graders are still a few years away from that stage.

I think my students are still young to think about identity. They want to identify with teachers more than peers. Sometimes, teachers need to encourage them when they have a minor success, especially those who are less confident. I am not saying that they don’t have a need to associate with their peers; they do care what other students think about them. If they are called ‘stupid’ or ‘idiot’ by other students, that would be a real hurt.

There is no doubt that both teachers viewed peer relationships as an important aspect of thriving in a group. Phil’s case in Mike’s class illustrated that students made progress when they built positive relationships with other students. Mike helped Phil strengthen his relationships by allying him with students who were excellent in studies and behaved with understanding and kindness. Mike’s belief was echoed by Alice’s experience as a teenager. However, Alice believed it was not an issue for her third grade class. According to her observations, third graders were overly disturbed about their peers’ negative judgments, but were very concerned about what their teachers thought about their accomplishments.

Beliefs about Teaching

The grades: “Not a great concern in my class.” Mike was very critical of the existing curriculum and school texts. He believed that teachers should be allowed to create and develop curriculum that are more specific to the needs of the students. However, the curriculum was mandatory, and the evaluation of teachers’ instructional ability and efficiency was usually based on how well they delivered and conformed to the prescribed curriculum. He did not think the existing curriculum was of great benefit to Indigenous students. He put it this way:

I myself have a big question on the curriculum and school texts. Like I said, the Indigenous cultures are not represented in the curriculum and school textbooks. There’s no way to make them proud of their own cultures. To tell you the truth, I don’t really care about their academic works. I mean, I don’t think they have to get good grades to succeed in school or society. I want them learn something that is useful and meaningful for their lives.

Teaching in the same school as Mike, Alice felt the same pressure from parents and administrators. The school considered the academic achievement of students as a priority. There was also a competitive atmosphere among teachers; Teachers whose students achieve high average scores are seen as high quality educators, and rewarded publicly. Knowing that the high exam scores are often achieved by the result of corporal punishment, Alice has decided to take another route.

I think this only benefits students who are better off. It’s unfair to those who can’t afford to the private tutors. Think about it! If I was the one who emphasized achievement, Christine [Indigenous students] wouldn’t

have been so successful and self-confident. Some people have talents, but not in fields emphasized by the prescribed curriculum. So, I think a teacher's values are important. My colleagues give too much weight to academic achievement. I don't.

Mike and Alice had similar perspectives about student achievement in school, especially Indigenous students. To Mike, the curriculum and school texts were meaningful only if they adequately represent various cultures in Taiwan. He critiqued the existing curriculum, based on the Han perspectives, in which Indigenous knowledge was ignored and "seen as uncivilized." He was more pragmatic about the school knowledge, which the Indigenous students should be able to utilize in their daily lives. Alice believed that students potential was more likely to be overlooked if teachers' emphasis was only on academic achievement. She had decided to make this belief a tenet of her teaching career.

Believe in your students. Alice was sensitive to her students' needs. She reminded me repeatedly that one of her principles was "believing in your students." This was confirmed by my observing in her class, where she gave every student an opportunity to share what they had to say. She emphatically expressed her appreciation and encouragement to everyone who made a contribution to the discussion. Rather than giving directions consistently and an overload of details, Alice just briefly introduced assignments before handing them out.

Some people don't think kids can learn by themselves. That's not the case in my class. I mean, when I gave students permission to find out for themselves, they'd come up with something that really impressed me. That is what I saw in the replay of my third-graders. I am seeing that students do not develop concepts by having concepts explained. Telling

is not the best way to develop understanding. You've got to believe in your students, and help them only when they need you.

Alice's philosophy also caused her to have problems with traditional methods of evaluation. She did not believe in student grouping; instead, she allowed the children to help one another and work at their own level and pace. So, grading was difficult. Likewise, she did not favor the standardized tests that are required in the first grade. She said, "I don't believe that the achievement tests really test reading ... and I don't think it's accurate as to where they plug the kids in as far as grade level 'What is grade level anyway?'"

Instead, Alice relied on more personal measures. To her own evaluations, she observed students to see how they interacted with each other, she listened to the questions they asked, and she used non-standard assessments. She told me that she kept anecdotal records on their progress in academic as well as social areas, focusing on strengths rather than weaknesses. She was continually searching for appropriate and meaningful evaluation methods to use in her classroom.

The role of teacher. Most Indigenous students attend public school today and live with a sort of dissonance because the culture of their public schools is different from the culture of their homes and rural communities. This was well known by both Mike and Alice. Mike recognized that each student has his/her own unique characteristics, which "may have great impact on their learning." With that in mind he believed that a teacher should make an effort to understand students' family backgrounds:

You are an effective teacher because you know your students and students are individual rather than groups or racial stereotypes. There are huge differences amongst our Indigenous families in terms of their own

beliefs and relationships with one another, and it would be quite dangerous to stereotype families ... [W]hat I did was to review students' documents very carefully before the semester began so I was able to understand each student individually.

Mike wanted to show his students that he sincerely cared about who they were and where they came from. In order to be effective, he believed, a teacher should be able to create a safe environment where *all* students are willing and able to share their own perspectives. Another belief that Alice held was that school should be a positive experience for children. She felt that it is especially important for urban Indigenous students because often they come from environments where their "parents might not have had a positive experience in school" and probably have passed their negative feelings on to their children. She believed that all students are somewhat affected by their parents' attitude of their parents, some of whom could be understandably hesitant to participate in school activities. She wanted to change that pattern and said:

I think I can provide them with an experience at school where they not only learn to love school ... but also are able to make their own personal experience a truly positive one. I want to make them feel that learning is something that they feel comfortable doing and that is exciting to them. So I have added more hands-on work in class and more games that make teaching interesting. I have tried to do my best, not to pressure them. How much they've got it? I really can't control that.

Alice's philosophy was influenced by several beliefs about learning. One was that learning should be intrinsic. She said, "... if I'm pushing it and it's not motivated from within, you know, I really do believe though I'm not sure how to go about it, that the kids have to be responsible for their learning."

Alice believed that learning occurs naturally because children are always

learning and that “it doesn’t have to be poured into their brains, it just evolves developmentally.” She had gained support for this belief through her experience in the classroom. She said, “As I slowly but surely gained confidence that the kids would learn ... I relinquished control. And sometimes you’re afraid to do that because we see our roles as controllers.” Similarly, Mike’s view of a teacher’s role was crystallized by his belief that “each individual person has his or her unique personality.” Therefore, teacher’s duty is to understand his/her students individually.

Teaching Indigenous students. Mike described his philosophy of teaching as predominately Chinese in nature, and grounded in the subjects. He said, “I know what I am doing. I try to teach students to respect what they are doing and have faith in what they have achieved.” During the interview he described how that was accomplished:

Since my background is not the same as that of the Indigenous students, I have found that it has been very hard for me to create a link between my teaching abilities and the values of the Indigenous culture, but I do need to become more knowledgeable about Indigenous culture, so that I can make a stronger link between my values and those of Indigenous children.

To expand his own knowledge of pedagogy, Mike had recently begun a master’s degree in art education at the Taiwan Normal University. He was motivated to begin the program by his wish for intellectual stimulation. He said, “I need to be around people who have the big picture and ask the big questions, because too many of us get caught up in the little details that don’t amount to much.” The courses he had taken had helped him organize his classroom as it then was. He added, “I had to take those courses to get me started.”

Mike viewed the classroom as a place to learn, as well as a place to teach; a place where everyone grows and develops. He described an activity that had recently taken place in the classroom:

In this mask unit that we did, I was learning things. If you are doing something in which even the teacher is trying, being a risk taker, trying some new things, then everyone is learning. It is exciting for me. The students came up so many amazing ideas about art. I did learn a lot from them.

Although widely regarded as an accomplished teacher, Mike felt he still had much to learn professionally. He said, "I'd like to familiarize myself with journals that are out there – ones I feel I'm getting behind on – and I'd like to talk with more people and I'd like to do some different things." Mike admitted he has high expectations for himself, but he tried to treat his goals as "having something to strive for" not as putting pressure on himself.

Although the Indigenous student was a new face in Alice's class, she did not view her racial or cultural backgrounds as a primary factor that informs her pedagogy. When asked about some of the greatest needs to be addressed in her classroom, she responded with another layer of culture—youth culture:

The greatest need to meet is the needs of the person as an individual, not necessarily as Hakka, Fukien, or aborigine. If you meet them as an individual on their ability level, the grade level, the social skills level – I found that being concerned about their heritage would become second, or third to other requirements – just them as a person, as a youth today. I found that a lot of their social skills or their social problem or conflicts are universal, regardless of race.

In addition, she had personal goals that also reflected her desire to learn and change. She wanted to travel to mainland China, write a children's book

and write articles about some of the things that “drive her crazy” about the world.

In addition, Mike believed that adolescent issues such as gang violence, self-esteem, and home life were important concerns. He stated, “I truly believe many children do not feel good about themselves.” Mike always comforted students who showed little confidence in learning new things. He said:

My view is that all children deserve lots of time to ponder what is going on in their world and to celebrate what they are doing and can do. I want to help them find out and get a fuller picture of home and school. I want to help make sense of what is happening. Many of my students have many things to deal with in their young lives. What I can do to support them and, sometimes, protect them is an enormous responsibility and weight that I feel at times.

Likewise, respecting her children was the core of Alice’s philosophy of facilitating children’s development. She saw her students as capable, perceptive, intelligent people—certainly entitled to the privilege, experiences, care, and abundant materials with which to learn. Alice respected and believed in her students. In response, the children tried to live up to her expectations.

Students should be given problems to solve. All students are capable of learning, even though their learning styles may be different, and they may make some serious mistakes. As a teacher, my role is to accommodate the students’ various learning styles and to encourage them to use styles with which they may not be familiar. Most students today are visual learners; however, I encourage them to practice auditory learning because the visual may not always be available.

Both of Mike and Alice believed that all students were capable of learning although they may learn at different rates and through different styles. They

have designed various activities to accommodate those learning styles. From what they have told me, coming up with innovative strategies that met students' learning styles put them on the path to accomplishment.

They all have gifts and talents. While some teachers degraded the knowledge students brought to school, Mike used it as a basis for learning, conveying to students the value of their lives and experiences. That was clearly different from an academic environment in which some teachers see the students as deprived and deficient. In a world where test scores, academic tracking, an alienating curriculum, and exasperated teachers communicated that students are inferior, Mike consciously reinforced students' confidence in their own knowledge and the worth of their own life experience. He was impatient with a system that designated some children "gifted" and others as "regular." "They all have gifts and talents," he said. High academic expectations and high standards for all students is a hallmark of his teaching.

You'll see in my class the students talked a lot. Some teachers may think my class has a problem with discipline. Discipline is something that is unique to each teacher. What may be a discipline problem to some is not to others. I encourage my students to express themselves, at the proper moment, of course. But for some teachers that may be a discipline problem. But you have to give them an opportunity to express their creativity. You can't be so rigid.

Indeed, because of the rapport and mutual respect Mike established with his students, he rarely encountered the discipline problems so many teachers complained about. "I never send students to the office. That's not necessary here," he claims. Additionally, his teaching, which was much more intellectually engaging than was typical at this school, gave students an

opportunity to productively use their intellect and creativity. His approach acknowledged the temperament of lively and creative adolescents.

Conclusion

A central thread in this study is that teachers' perspectives are crucial to any and all efforts designed to improve the quality of learning and life in our schools. This is not to suggest that teachers' perspectives are the only valid voice or the primary perspective or the one that should determine what needs to change within our schools and classrooms. However, their perspectives are important in order to understand the education of urban Indigenous students. Moreover, if one wants to imagine that teachers play a more significant role in the education of urban Indigenous students, we need to uncover the beliefs of teachers who have worked with Indigenous students.

The study's participating teachers agreed that educators needed more exposure to the realities of Indigenous life and culture. Unfortunately, in Taiwan the social structure and the geographical separation of the Indigenous community are such that most Han Chinese teachers have had little or no direct exposure to Indigenous cultures. Even the teachers of Indigenous students are likely to have little direct exposure to life in the Indigenous community. Mike and Alice took advantage of summer vacations to visit Indigenous tribes, returning with helpful materials and experiences. However, they admitted that their understanding of Indigenous cultures was superficial because "I am an *outsider*," as Mike expressed it. They were raised and educated in predominantly Han communities. Their first-hand knowledge of Indigenous people, culture, and history was quite limited. The secondary sources they have received about Indigenous people from textbooks, media and friends and family

were often distorted by the negative, stereotypical attitudes that are so pervasive in Han Chinese culture.

The participants' accounts also suggest that teachers' experiences with cultural diversity profoundly impact their teaching practice. The more that teachers experience their students' cultures, the better they would understand and appreciate cultural diversity. However, teachers must not only be exposed to various cultural experiences, but also develop their understanding of the values and meaning they give to Indigenous cultures and be able to construct pedagogical practices that have relevance and meaning to the students, socially and culturally. Teachers therefore need to be engaged in a meaningful learning process, by which they are able to connect their teaching to students' life experiences. Without meaningful, direct, and positive experiences with diverse others, teacher's knowledge and beliefs about cultural diversity may be limited to media images or often-negative personal or second-hand information.

Educating all students well is a formidable challenge. While the institution of school, through policies and practices, plays an important role in the education of Indigenous students, teachers too have a significant impact upon the success of Indigenous students. Teachers' beliefs and attitudes continue to be an important focus of study for researchers in teacher-education. This particular study of two Han Chinese teachers' beliefs about Indigenous students reveals that beliefs are complex and need to be examined and understood in context. Researchers need to problematize the contexts in which they study. In addition, researchers need to examine the relationships between and among beliefs and attitudes. Because of the complex nature of beliefs, various research approaches, both quantitative and qualitative, may be useful in examining those different relationships.

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都市原住民學童教師之教學信念研究

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摘 要

本研究主要的目的在了解都市原住民學生的學校經驗，在諸多影響原住民教育成效的重要因素中抽取教師的態度與信念作為研究的焦點。研究對象是兩位經學校校長、主任及大學教授推薦的漢人教師，研究的主軸在檢視兩位漢人教師在面對原住民學童時的教學信念與態度，以及哪些因素有助於或阻礙教師們在課室中發揮他們的教學專業。研究的方法主要應用質性研究的取徑，分別對兩位教師進行深度訪談及課室觀察。

資料分析的結果圍繞在以下三個主題發展：(一) 原住民學生的教育(二) 對原住民學生的教學信念(三) 教學信念。研究結果發現，教師「文化差異」的經驗和理解，對他們的教學，尤其在面對原住民學生時，會有差異。如何創造這樣的經驗和理解，是師資培育的重要課題，因為不同地區的學校，會受地區文化的影響，教師必需了解、尊重並欣賞不同的文化，才能發展出適當的「文化相關教學」。

關鍵字：原住民教育、師資培育、都市原住民