

## **Cross-Cultural Experiences of Immigrant Students: Mainland Chinese in Hong Kong and Mexicans in California**

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### **Abstract**

This article examines the cross-cultural experience of immigrant students in Hong Kong and the U.S. state of California and the role of their cultural capital in the cross-cultural identity process. It begins with a review of studies on the challenges of immigrant students in schools. A theoretical framework is then established to examine the cross-cultural experience of these students based on the evidence obtained from the literature. The article concludes with a discussion of the study's implications for educational provision to immigrant students.

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There has been a proliferation of research on the globalization of education in the recent years. Many of these studies seek to increase the understanding of racial, cultural, and linguistic differences and their links to multicultural education. The experience of immigrant students is particularly an important theme to this cause and would benefit from studies adopting a cross-cultural perspective. At present, we know little about the lived experience of individual immigrant students in cross-cultural contexts or how such experience affects identity development.

Appadurai's theory of globalization suggests to educational researchers that there are powerful "global resources in the immigrant stores of knowledge and experience" (Anyon, 2009, p. 17). Immigrant groups can be seen as agents of globalization and the immigrant experience, reflecting the integration of common human characteristics and differences, and they thus constitute an excellent cohort of informants for in-depth enquiry. This article presents the narratives and cross-cultural experience of four immigrant students living in two very different societies: Hong Kong and the United States. They had immigrated to their new homes from Mainland China and Mexico, respectively. Since 1997, the year British colonial rule (1840-1997) over Hong Kong came to an end; the number of immigrant students from Mainland China enrolled in Hong Kong schools has grown steadily. Since 1995, many newly arrived mainland

Chinese, mostly below the age of 15, have been granted residency in Hong Kong each day (Education Department, 1997, Sham Shui Po District Board, 1996). By 2001, the number of new such residents 19 and below had gone up. (Statistics, Education Department, 2003). Another group of new immigrant children had recently become a burning issue in Hong Kong, namely, those born in Hong Kong, but at least one of whose parents was not a Hong Kong permanent resident. The number of live births of such children has also increased. All of them were granted the right to receive an education and reside in Hong Kong, and their parents were eager to enroll them in Hong Kong schools. (Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau of the HKSAR, 2013). Although immigrants still account for a small percentage of the Hong Kong student population, the number of school-aged children from mainland China is large enough to require action. Consequently, many schools have acknowledged catering for the cultural diversity of immigrant students and promoting an inclusive and multicultural school environment as significant educational challenges.

In the United States, a large number of immigrant students from different ethnic backgrounds enroll in the nation's public schools every year, the majority from Mexico according to 2012 immigration statistics (Census Report, 2012). Mexican immigration into the United States has continued uninterrupted for the past 100+ years and historically the number of immigrants who cross the Mexican borders into the US keeps increasing year after year. (Jiménez, 2007)

Among the Mexican immigrant population are many adult students who enter U.S. universities every year like the immigrant students from mainland China in Hong Kong, "all newcomers to the United States face adjustment challenges with regard to a new language, customs, laws, and lifestyles. Immigrant children and youth face immediate decisions about who they will become," with Mexican immigrants facing particular adjustment and adaptation challenges in these areas (Tong, Huang, & McIntyre, 2006, p. 203).

## **Literature Review**

### **Immigrant Students in Hong Kong and the United States**

The United States has a long history of integrating immigrants into its mainstream culture. However at the school immigrant students face many adaptation challenges posed by lack of English knowledge and cultural differences. They may also face academic, physical, emotional, and social development challenges associated with economic insecurity, exacerbated by the language barrier and acculturation difficulties and limited access to social welfare programs (Ruiz-de-Velasco, Fix, & Clemwell, 2000). In fact many of their families struggle with economic insecurity or even poverty (Cummins, 2000, 2001). The difficulties in adaptations have been associated with the dominance of the mainstream culture assuming it to be superior while minority cultures are seen as subordinate and inferior. Schools have a tendency to reflect the values and attitudes of the mainstream culture (Ogbu, 1992; Cummins, 2001).

Besides, the linguistic heritage and cultural knowledge that immigrants bring to schools are often overlooked or even dismissed owing to the dominance of the mainstream culture (He, Phillion, Chan, & Xu, 2008; Ogbu, 1992; Park, Goodman, & Lee, 2003). On the whole, the situation that immigrant students face in the school "is marked by severe social and economic stratification and drastically unequal opportunity structures" (Anyon, 2009, p. 31). It can be

logically inferred that the negative view and disadvantageous situation of Mexican immigrants have negative effects on the formulation of their cross-cultural identity.

As in the United States, many schools in Hong Kong have become aware of the needs of immigrant students, albeit students from mainland China in Hong Kong's case (Aberdeen Kai-fong Welfare Association Social Service Centre, 1999; Berry, 2003; Cheung & Hui, 2003; Chong, 2004; Ho, 1999; YWCA, 1997). Studies of the Hong Kong situation provide a broad picture of the diverse needs of these students and of the difficulties they encounter at school. For example, Chong (2004) and the YWCA (1997) both reported that students from mainland China face difficulties in speaking the Cantonese dialect of Chinese spoken in Hong Kong and in understanding English. Similarly, Ho (1999) pointed out that these students experience a range of other difficulties, such as admission delays and forced enrollment into lower grades.

The education of immigrant students has become an issue of great concern in both U.S. and Hong Kong schools. There is an abundant body of research on multiculturalism and other diversity-related issues central to mainstream schooling (Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994), including studies on school practice (Dentler & Hafner, 1997; Phillion, 2002); families, schools, and communities (Carger, 1996; Soto, 1997); educational policy (Nieto, 2000; Salili & Hoosain, 2001); language, culture, and identity in education (He, 2002a, 2002b, 2002c, 2003; Toohey, 2000); and race, gender, and class issues (Grant & Sleeter, 1986). These studies cover a wide variety of topics related to the education of immigrant students, but there has been little explicitly narrative work done in this area. What is missing are accounts of how immigrant students' language, culture, and identity develop, what factors shape their cross-cultural experience, and how that experience informs school administrators and policymakers as they set out to create a cross-cultural environment and develop policies that support the learning of this growing student population.

### **Cross-Cultural Identity of Immigrant Students**

Having reviewed the relevant U.S. and Hong Kong literature, we now turn to the development of immigrant students' cross-cultural identity based on the evidence obtained. From the psychological perspective, self-identity is the *mental* and conceptual awareness one holds regarding the existence of one's own *being* (Erikson, 1959; Hamachek, 1978; Jourard, 1971; McAdam, 1986; Patterson, 1961; Rogers, 1947). For immigrant students, the development of self-identity is a more complex process than it is for others because they experience more changes as a result of their migration than those who have never had such an experience (Cuypers, 2001). Norquay and Doucet (2004) suggested that identity formation is affected by a variety of factors, including culture, religion, economics, and politics. Gans (1979, 1992, 1994) put forward the concept of "symbolic ethnicity" to account for various means of adaptation and assimilation. For immigrant students, the changes involved are caused by the move to a new locale, which requires adaptation to a second culture and a change in the language used. Adaptation and assimilation may create additional stress and intensify the already existent crisis of self-identity that many experience in adolescence. However, it is by no means the case that all changes resulting from the immigrant experience have negative effects on identity development. For some immigrant students, such changes may lead them to rethink their roles and identities by making meaning of their cross-cultural experience (Carr, 1986; He & Phillion, 2001).

## **Bourdieu's Theorization of Capital**

Bourdieu's (1984) theorization of capital is helpful for understanding the experience of immigrant students. In his view, individuals are more likely to be accepted by others, have a sense of belongingness, and fully function in various social settings when they are familiar with the values and practices of those settings. When they are sufficiently familiar with those values and practices, they use their familiarity as capital for socialization. According to Sommerfeld and Bowen (2013, p. 48) cultural capital is "familiarity with forms of knowledge, skills, and behaviors," whereas Friesen (2013) sees it as a set of cultural competencies and cultural resources that function as key resources for social and economic mobility. For immigrants, it reflects the knowledge, skills, and types of behavior learnt from the second culture, i.e., the host society. Several studies (Friesen, 2013; Peterson & Heywood, 2007; Sommerfeld & Bowen, 2013) have shown that students who attend schools that value their cultural capital demonstrate superior academic achievement, and similarly those who behave in accordance with the culture of a school characterized by a high level of institutional cultural capital are more successful. Students are also more successful in learning to read and write when schools affirm their existing cultural identities. In understanding the cross-cultural experience of the immigrant students in this study, it was important to see how they associated it with their cultural capital in developing a cross-cultural identity.

## **Research Methods**

The aim of the study was to examine the cross-cultural experience of Mainland Chinese and Mexican immigrant students. Three research questions were addressed: 1) How did the immigrant students talk about their cross-cultural experience? 2) How did the cultural capital they brought with them change? 3) How did they relearn and reevaluate the culture they had inherited from mainland China and Mexico?

The study was qualitative and narrative in nature. It adopted the theoretical frameworks of interactionism (Blumer, 1962; Cooley, 1964; Mead, 1934) and the social construction of reality (Berger, P. L., Berger, & Kellner, 1973; Holzner, 1968) to examine microscopic aspects of the cross-cultural experience of immigrant students. The study was also interested in the social construction of these students' cross-cultural experience, the relationship between that experience and their cultural capital, and how the knowledge of reality was constructed in their everyday lives at school.

To explore such knowledge, the methodological approaches of narrative analysis and personal experience were employed (Anderson, 1991; Clandinin & Connelly, 1992; Denzin, 1998, 1978; Geertz, 1973; Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). More specifically, the methodological approach suggested by Clandinin and Connelly (1992, 1995) was used to explore the immigrant students' constructions of their experiences across three dimensions, namely, 1) the change in *space* from the schools in their hometowns to those in the host city, 2) the change in the *place* of the host city schools in which they were enrolled, and 3) the change over *time* as they moved from their hometown schools to their new schools in the host city. Furthermore, the analytical framework of moving inward, outward, backward, and forward was adopted. By "inward," we mean we attempted to discover their inner feelings about the immigrant experience, whereas "outward" refers to our exploration of their perceptions of the new environment of the host city. In terms of "backward" and "forward," we were interested in how these students related stories

of their past experience to the present and how doing so shaped their perceptions of the future.

Interviews were conducted in six secondary schools in Hong Kong and two high schools in California. In Hong Kong, 12 students aged 13 to 16 in the first three years at the secondary level, who had migrated to Hong Kong less than three years previously were invited to attend one-to-one interviews. The approximately 60-minute interviews were unstructured in nature, conducted in Cantonese, and tape-recorded. The Californian sample comprised of 12 high school students aged 14 to 18 who had emigrated from Mexico to the United States less than two years prior to the study. In-depth one-to-one interviews lasting approximately 45 minutes each was conducted in Spanish and tape-recorded. In the transcription of the data students' real names were replaced with pseudonyms focusing on the experiences of four of the student interviewees: two girls from Mainland China and two from Mexico. Their stories are told in the following section.

## Findings

The four students that were selected for in-depth study were Xin Xin and Meng Chang from mainland China and Maria Valesquez and Jacinta Lopez from Mexico because the narratives of their cross-cultural experience were particularly rich in description. Their cross-cultural experiences were also representative of those of the other immigrant students interviewed. More importantly, these students used colorful metaphors to describe their experiences. These metaphors vividly depicted the cultural journey the students undertook in redefining their self-identity, during which they had to deal with many new challenges in cultures very different from those they had left behind in mainland China and Mexico.

### The Story of Xin Xin

Thirteen-year-old Xin Xin was in her first year of secondary school and had lived in Hong Kong for one year. She had previously lived in a town in Fujian Province. Xin Xin used the metaphor of a ship sailing in the center of the ocean to capture her cross-cultural experience, depicting her identity as that of an explorer. As she put it:

I feel like I'm a ship sailing in the center of the ocean. It gradually finds its way and eventually reaches the continent. When I was in mainland China, I could not see the world. Fewer activities were provided in mainland Chinese schools than in Hong Kong schools. This has broadened my view of the world. In the past, I was in the center of the ocean, but now I have found my way and know the direction of my life.

Xin Xin experienced a process of change that led her to self-identify as "an explorer." Throughout the adventurous process of "sailing," she explored herself as she overcame the difficulties brought about by her migration to Hong Kong. In recalling her journey, she admitted that she had experienced two particular difficulties that had caused considerable anxiety and frustration: the change in language from Fujian dialect of Mandarin to Cantonese and her disconnection from the members of her former social group. In Hong Kong, however, although the written form of Chinese is the same as that on the mainland, Cantonese is the spoken form. Xin Xin found it very difficult to speak Cantonese without being influenced by her first language. She tried hard to conquer these difficulties, but found her progress to be less smooth

than she had hoped for.

Exacerbating the situation, she found herself unable to master the English language, and lagged behind her Hong Kong counterparts in this regard. She was required to obtain at least a passing grade in the public examination to fulfill one of the basic requirements for university entry in Hong Kong. Xin Xin expressed negative feelings while expressing the language difficulties she faced. She said, “The most difficult thing for me was speaking Cantonese. I felt also really bad when I couldn’t speak any English at all. I once thought about going back [to Mainland China].”

Negative feelings were also expressed about her disconnection from her social group in Mainland China, with whom she had enjoyed a warm acquaintance. She was used to having social support from her classmates, close friends, and relatives. In Hong Kong, she found herself with no close friends to talk to, even at school. Occasionally, she felt overwhelmed and wanted to go back home to her friends and relatives.

A positive change occurred for Xin Xin when she was sent to another secondary school, which had more than 80% of students are from Mainland China. She found it much easier to make friends at her new school and to reestablish what she had lost in terms of community, i.e., a connection with others. She received support from her peers and teachers gaining greater knowledge of Hong Kong and its history, thereby boosting her cultural capital. She moved forward with a sense of satisfaction and motivation and took advantage of every opportunity to explore new things. She became more confident and independent in connecting with others and building her academic confidence. Although she still experienced difficulties learning English, her proficiency in Mandarin and knowledge of her home country functioned as another source of cultural capital in the school. She was able to contribute in the classroom, at last allowing her to find her “place” in the school.

In the process of playing the role of explorer, Xin Xin acknowledged that there was a certain cultural heritage that would never change and keep her connected to the culture of Mainland China. At the same time, however, she continued to work hard, exploring ways to enrich her cultural capital by extending her social network in her new society. In Xin Xin’s words:

Before moving to Hong Kong, I never had such feelings. I am missing my mainland friends and relatives much more than I did before. At the beginning, yes, things were hard, but now I have friends in Hong Kong with whom I meet and play.... I never realized that there were so many advantages to mastery of Mandarin until I came to Hong Kong.

### **The Story of Meng Chang**

Fourteen-year-old Meng Chang was also studying at the year-one level at a secondary school in Hong Kong. She was also from a town in Fujian, although not the same town as Xin Xin’s, and had migrated to Hong Kong one year before the interview. In describing her experience as an immigrant student, she depicted herself as a mountain climber whose mission was to overcome all difficulties, wrestling with the external environments of the school and wider community to reach her destination on the summit. She said,

It is just like climbing a mountain. I experience many difficulties at school and in my

daily life. I climb higher and higher by resolving the difficulties one by one. At last, I will reach the summit of the mountain.

During the interview, Meng Chang mentioned three particular difficulties: adapting to the lifestyle of Hong Kong, searching for a new identity, and feeling disconnected from the community. These were the difficulties she had to deal with on her “mountain climb.”

In adapting to life in Hong Kong, her cross-cultural experience prompted her to redefine her identity as both a *Daluren* (mainland Chinese) and *Xianggangren* (Hongkongese). Like Xin Xin, Meng Chang also spoke Mandarin and the Fujian dialect, and was unhappy with her Cantonese because she spoke it with a distinctive accent. What annoyed her most was being assigned the ethnic identity of “girl from the mainland” by some of her classmates. She was even given the nickname Mainland Girl, which made her feel discriminated against. Beyond the school setting, she also felt discriminated against in very subtle ways in the community in which she lived. It could be identified only by reading between the lines of the language used by those with whom she interacted at school and in the community. In Meng Chang’s words,

When some of my classmates found that I couldn’t speak Cantonese, they gave me the nickname *Dalurmei* (Mainland Girl) and other nicknames. It was just horrible. Others tended to speak to me in English when they knew that I couldn’t speak English.... They [referring to her classmates and people in the wider community] look down on new immigrants from the mainland. They discriminate against us. For example, they gossip about new immigrants and say bad things about us.

The underlying meaning of using the nickname *Daluren* is to intentionally distinguish the person in question from locals, who identify themselves primarily as *Xianggangren*, i.e., Hongkongese. However, whenever Meng Chang returned to her hometown in Fujian, the situation was reversed, as she had begun to refer to herself as *Xianggangren*. Her friends and relatives thought she had taken on a new identity as a Hongkonger. She explained it this way:

When I get back to my hometown to see my relatives and friends, they keep asking me what my life is like in Hong Kong. They feel happy for me that I have become a Hongkonger. Apparently they all think that I have a great life in Hong Kong.

Meng Chang acknowledged that in Hong Kong, she was engaged in a process of reevaluating her identity as a Mainland Chinese, whereas in her hometown in Fujian, it was necessary to redefine her identity as a Hongkonger. She was thus forced to “climb a mountain,” between her Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese identities.

Because of Meng Chang’s disconnection from the Hong Kong community, the most likely venue for her to establish social relationships was the school. She told herself that she needed to open up at school, but in practice her feeling of being a stranger meant she lacked confidence in speaking to her classmates. A change occurred when she made friends with some fellow immigrant students from the same region and district of mainland China, who, more importantly, spoke the same dialect as her. Together, Meng Chang and these classmates gradually developed a kind of linguistic subculture, which helped them to develop a sense of ease and security and relief from the necessity to speak the dominant Cantonese dialect. This clubbing together of immigrant students from the same area energized Meng Chang’s cross-cultural life,

giving her the necessary cultural capital and confidence to climb the “mountain” of the immigrant challenge, re-experience a sense of personal growth, and at last have the courage to express herself and extend her social network.

### **The Story of Maria Velasquez**

Sixteen-year-old Maria Velasquez was a 10<sup>th</sup> grader at a high school in California’s San Bernardino School district. She was born in the U.S but had gone back to Mexico with her parents when she was three years old but two years prior to this study her parents sent Maria back to the U.S. while they remained in the state of Guadalajara in Mexico. They believed that it was better for her to be in the U.S. and enjoy its economic and educational opportunities. Maria was living with her paternal grandparents and cousins in San Bernardino city in a poor neighborhood. It was contrary to her life in Mexico where her family enjoyed a middle-class status.

She likened her immigrant experience to swimming against many currents. “I am like a swimmer in a big river and keeping me afloat is a challenge because many things pull me down like not knowing English, the learning difficulties at school, poor living conditions and cultural differences I face every day. I know coming to the U.S. was the right thing for me but I am facing many difficulties, and a lot of times I feel like a swimmer against many currents that are pulling me down”.

For instance life in the U.S was quite hard for Maria. Unlike her home in Mexico, the living space here was crowded and she had to share everything with other family members. At school she did not understand English and was not able to follow directions and therefore could not learn. In Mexico she spoke only Spanish and did not worry about daily class work at school because there she had to only pass the final exam. Math was much easier, here science and all the other subjects were hard.

In this context she was building her new identity and was in a confused state of mind about who she was. She missed the sense of inclusion she felt in Mexico and did not feel accepted by her peers in the United States. She expressed strong negative feelings about her teachers many of whom she felt did not have a positive or inviting attitude toward her because of her lack of English proficiency. That bothered Maria much and she even had a fight with one teacher who refused to clarify the directions for an assignment.

Maria was concerned due to the culture at her school. When she first enrolled in the school, she felt overwhelmed by a large number of African American and Asian students. Then she saw U.S. teachers interacting with the students in a friendly manner, going to the students helping them in their individual and group work. In Mexico teachers stood in the front teaching and holding everyone’s attention. There she was habitually late to school but in the United States she quickly realized it was important to be on time for class every day, and was forced to adapt to the culture of punctuality.

The cultural capital she had built in her home country gave resiliency in her cross-cultural experience. She recognized that as an immigrant she had to give up some of her cultural ways and adopt the American culture. Slowly she was becoming proficient in English and making friends with African, Asian, and Anglo American students and was trying to fit into the new culture. While she was building her new cultural capital she recognized that there were some Mexican cultural characteristics that she would never forget and her sense of being Mexican grew stronger each day. She said, “the longer I stay here, the more Mexican I feel.” In the



acculturation process, Maria felt that she was swimming against currents caused by both social and cultural factors. The demands of the mainstream culture that dominated the school environment seemed too big for her to handle. Feelings of inferiority that she experienced made her feel negative in building the new cultural capital. However, she demonstrated a sense of determination that helped her to swim through the currents that seemed to overwhelm her.

As Maria charted her course through the cross-cultural milieu in which she found herself, she was able to recognize differences in the lifestyle of her neighborhood and school. Her mind frequently recalled images of life in Mexico, but she realized that she was learning new cultural ways and figuring out what new things she needed to learn and adopt. The best thing about her U.S. experience was the consciousness of the challenges she faced and the changes that were occurring within her but she felt a strong urge to hold on to her Mexican cultural identity. She was able to draw strength from her Mexican capital while building her American cultural capital. “When I left Mexico, I was sad to leave my parents, brother, and sister. I came because my future here would be better but that doesn’t mean I am going to forget that I am Mexican. I will always be a Mexican!”

### **The Story of Jacinta Lopez**

Jacinta Lopez was a 14-year-old freshman at Arroyo Valley High School and had come to the United States with her mother and two siblings from Guanajuato, Mexico 15 months before this study began. Her father came earlier to find work and the family lived in the Mexican neighborhood in San Bernardino. Life in Mexico was very happy with her grandparents and extended family members around. In Mexico, everyone in her neighborhood was of the same nationality, i.e., Mexican, and they all spoke Spanish.

Living in the U.S. posed many challenges for Jacinta. Lack of English proficiency, and cultural and lifestyle differences were obvious struggles in her immigrant experience. Her self-determination to overcome those difficulties was strong. Jacinta likened her immigrant experience to “an Artist creating a new painting” because she felt she was in charge of carving her path in the new culture. Like an artist she said, “I have to select the right brushes and colors to create my painting. I have to learn to choose the right tools and habits to make the best painting of my life in the United States.” She was determined to make her mark on the American cultural tapestry.

Jacinta’s Mexican cultural capital gave her inner strength to face the difficulties she encountered. A lot of times she was unable to fully understand what was going around her and even was bullied by some students once complicating her school life. In addition, some teachers were insensitive to her English deficiency and failed to help her understand the lessons, which made her cry. One day she was speaking in Spanish to her friends in the class, and an Anglo student got angry and said, “Shut up! Stop speaking in Spanish.” Subsequently she was dropped from the class without her knowledge. She felt very sad about this but made learning English a priority. She worked hard learning English and improved in speaking, reading and writing in English.

Another limitation she had was her lack of ability to deal with the cultural diversity in the school community. In the United States, in contrast, Jacinta’s school community was made up of students and staff from different ethnic groups, and everyone spoke English. She attended school with African and Asian Americans, in addition to white/Anglo Americans, and had to learn to relate to them. She realized that living in the United States meant getting along with people of

different races and learning about their cultures. Her Mexican cultural capital was very strong but served as the basis for building her new cultural capital. Developing a bicultural identity required her to adapt to mainstream U.S. culture while also accepting multicultural perspectives.

As Jacinta reflected upon the cross-cultural experiences she had faced since coming to the United States, she realized that her sense of personal identity as a Mexican had not changed: "I am a Mexican and not a Mexican-American. I don't like to be considered one. I do make changes to live here but I am still a Mexican and not a Mexican-American." However, she said she felt accepted by her friends who were not Mexicans and felt that her teachers were slowly beginning to recognize her abilities and support her. She was happy that she was becoming more fluent in English and was being valued and respected by her peers. Jacinta's goal was to become a teacher and continue living in the United States, but as a Mexican rather than a Mexican-American. She likened her bicultural experience to painting a new portrait of herself. All of the know-how she had acquired helped her to become a bicultural person with Mexican and American cultural characteristics.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

Like Xin Xin, Meng Chang, Maria Velasquez, and Jacinta Lopez, the other immigrant students involved in this study gradually became aware that they were engaged in a journey of learning informed by their cross-cultural experiences and the struggle they faced in adapting to a new culture, language, and way of living very different from their own. The cultural capital they had acquired in their home culture supplied pointers for their cross-cultural identity development, and also became a starting point for learning the new culture. Although their desire to retain their home culture became stronger in their new homes, as they came into closer contact with the new culture they slowly started to integrate the new with the old. They chose to maintain their cultural roots from Mainland China and Mexico, keeping their home culture intact, while they learnt from their cross-cultural experience. Although most of the interviewees said they felt alienated from mainstream society in terms of language, culture, and identity, they held to the belief that individual effort constituted the agent of change that would help them to transform their lives by overcoming the economic disadvantages of their home countries to take their place as professionals in the more economically affluent society to which they had moved. That belief gave them hope and the motivation and courage to face new challenges and explore a new world and culture they initially knew little about.

Although there were similarities between the samples, there were also a number of differences. One was the racial homogeneity shared by Mainland China and Hong Kong. The immigrant students in the Hong Kong sample had moved to a society where the majority of the population shared their ethnicity, i.e., Chinese, whereas the Mexicans interviewees had immigrated to a country with a diverse population. They therefore had many more challenges to overcome before cross-cultural identity development could take place. In some ways, interacting with African, Asian, and Anglo Americans afforded them an opportunity to see themselves in a wider context and helped them to expand their social boundaries.

Another difference was that the Mainland Chinese students did not experience as much discrimination in Hong Kong as their Mexican counterparts did in the United States. The immigrant students interviewed in Hong Kong spoke less about any negativity expressed toward them than did the Mexican students interviewed in the United States. That negativity had consequences for the latter's experiences. The Mexican students' initial inability to speak English

was looked down upon, which somewhat counter intuitively injected them with a sense of cultural pride. These students repeatedly mentioned their desire to hold onto their Mexican identity. Crossing over to become a Mexican-American was too difficult for them to accept or even envision.

### **Implications of the Study**

This study has a number of implications for school managers, educational policymakers, and teacher training institutions. Its findings support the supposition that the cultural capital that immigrant students bring to their schools should be recognized and supported. At the policy level, the rights of immigrant students must be adequately protected. It is necessary to develop policies to prevent any form of discrimination against these students and to proactively promote social justice and equity for them. At the teacher training level, training institutions must take care to instill teachers and school administrators with sensitivity to the cross-cultural needs of immigrant students. Classroom teachers must be equipped with the necessary multicultural skills to foster the cultural capital that these students bring with them and to help them to integrate that capital with their new social and cultural environment.

The cross-cultural experience of immigrant students also needs to be addressed at the curriculum level, with culturally responsive curricula, pedagogies, and teaching strategies developed. This is a particularly necessary step, as it is well recognized that assimilation does not occur naturally or spontaneously; rather, it requires purposive, intentional effort on the part of the host nation. The emphasis in pedagogy and curricula alike should be not only on the cognitive elements of education, but also on the affective and social elements. The issue is not only what students should know, but also how they feel about their new lives and the cross-cultural experience. Taking such issues into account will help schools to raise practitioners' awareness of the diverse needs of all students, including immigrant students, and open up a dialogue concerning new ways to cater for individual differences. The ultimate aim is to create a favorable environment for developing an inclusive school.

The issues surrounding the education of immigrant students are no longer peripheral to mainstream schooling. They have become part of the discourse on the best way to support all students, bringing into the discussion concerns over cultural identity, ethnicity, the purpose of education, and the meaning of inclusion in an increasingly diversified world. By enhancing school members' understanding of the cross-cultural experience of immigrant students, schools will become better equipped to develop their own practices to promote the whole-person growth of all students, a crucial step toward creating a more inclusive, just, and fair society. All parties in the school have a role to play if this important goal is to be achieved.

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