Teachers' beliefs about teaching urban indigenous students in Taiwan

Abstract

The purpose of this interpretive study is to situate teachers' understanding and interpretation of their experiences with indigenous students in city schools. This qualitative study examines six teachers' perspectives of indigenous students and reveals factors that potentially impede or promote the success of indigenous students in Taiwanese urban schools.

From the cross-case discussion, we learn that there is a need in the educational field for a reshaped perspective of indigenous students, along with changes in curriculum, instructional methods, and practices and policies. Hopefully, then, schooling experiences like those of indigenous teachers will be historical memories, not everyday occurrences, and their children will have more successful stories to tell about their school experiences.

Keywords: Indigenous education, teacher education, urban education

Background

There is substantial literature that examines the education of indigenous people in Taiwan. Few, however, have attempted to explore and explain exactly how indigenous people, who live off the tribes, get through the Han-dominated education system in the city. Not surprisingly, indigenous youth enter school in urban cities were facing various barrier according to a limited amount of studies. To those indigenous people who immigrate to city, quality of education is not often an option. However, some realize that education can be an opportunity for them to succeed, and make any possible sacrifice to ensure their children learn something in the school.

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 order to respond to concerns about the academic experience of urban indigenous students, we conducted an interpretive study focusing on six teachers' perspectives of teaching indigenous students. Regarding teachers' perspectives, we used Clark & Peterson's (1986) definition of *perspective* as " a reflective, socially defined interpretation of experience that serves as a basis for subsequent action… a combination of beliefs, intentions, interpretations, and

behavior that interact continually"(p. 287). Since the goal of this research is to understand indigenous students' education from a teacher's point of view, much can be learned by interviewing them, and interpreting their classroom experiences with indigenous students.

Who are urban Aborigines?

Current census figures for Taiwan indicate a high rural-to-urban migration of Aborigines (Department of Statistics, MOI, 1997). Demographers estimated that by the year 2002 these new settlers have increased to become as much as 60 per cent of the total Indigenous population (See Figure 1). In recent years, the urbanization of the Indigenous people has accelerated because there is limited employment opportunities in the mostly rural Indigenous areas (Li & Ou, 1992). Displaced Aborigines, while drifting away from their original way of life and finding themselves in an unfamiliar metropolis, encounter numerous adjustment problems. Their problems extend into critical aspects of their existence: employment, education, marriage, family life, group relations, and a variety of other psychological difficulties (Cho, 2002; Fu, 1999, 2001; Li, 1982; Mai, 2000; Wang, 1998; Wuei & Jang, 2000). Although researchers have conducted numerous studies to examine Indigenous education in general, there has been relatively little research focusing on the schooling experiences of Indigenous students who live in the city.

Figure 1. Percentage of urban Indigenous population
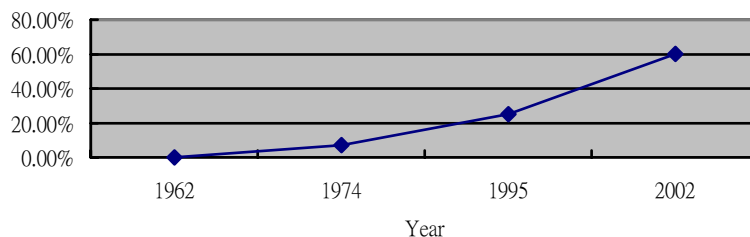
Resource: Chen, Whang, & Chiu (2003). Urban Indigenous Life Counseling Plan. Council of Indigenous People, Executive Yuan. Taipei.

Based on their six-year urban Indigenous life survey, Chen, Whang, & Chiu (2003) concluded that few Aborigines were able to climb the socioeconomic ladder and participate in urban life. Other families struggled to stay employed and make ends meet. Some families maintained close cultural, linguistic, and family ties with their home tribes, often over great distances; others did not keep those ties for a variety of reasons, including marriage outside the tribe, attending school in different places, reaching higher levels of education, and so on.

At first glance, a move to the city might appear to be a wonderful opportunity for advancement. And it can be, but there is also a downside to be considered. When families are transplanted from a familiar home setting to a strange and hostile environment, they experience *culture shock* (Chen, Whang, & Chiu, 2003). Teachers who work with Indigenous students in an urban setting need to realize how such a move impacts students and their families and how students' behavior and school performance can be affected.

For the most part, the Indigenous population has a lower socioeconomic and educational status than other ethnic groups and is afflicted with high rates of unemployment, alcoholism, adolescent prostitution, and various other social challenges. Taiwanese Aborigines have for some time received special education, job training, and other benefits through provisions in the national Constitution. In recent years, social welfare and other such programs have proliferated. Still, the Aborigines remain largely outside the mainstream of society. Few Aborigines are able to climb the socioeconomic ladder and participate in urban life.

School experience of urban Indigenous student

Shieh (1994) was one of the first scholars outside of the Indigenous communities to report on the conditions of Taiwan Aborigines who had moved to cities. The hardships encountered when living in the city, coupled with the lack of promised opportunities and related economic benefits, created situations where despair became the norm. Teachers have been unprepared to work with Indigenous students, and many teachers misinterpreted children's cultural codes for reticence, lack of interest, or lack of the natural abilities needed to become normal students. Indigenous children were cast as the stereotypes that had long been promulgated to the Taiwan public and were still considered accurate.

Chen (1998) argued that most of the non-Indigenous teachers, especially those most experienced, hold stereotypes of Indigenous students as being lazy, having low intelligence, and having parents who are relatively uninvolved in their children's education. Younger teachers have not had much opportunity to understand Aborigines but tend to sympathize with the Indigenous students (Tang, 1998). The Indigenous children are perceived as lacking the required mental ability for success in school and as little interested in schooling. In addition, poor self-concept of the Indigenous students is also attributed to be one of the causal factors of the problem. Tang (1997) argued that "there is much evidence that Indigenous students feel despair, disillusionment, alienation, frustration, hopelessness, powerlessness, rejection, and estrangement, all elements of negative views of the self" (p. 38).

Some non-Indigenous teachers, especially those who are new to their work, feel very uncomfortable with some of the Indigenous ways of life. Most teachers lack the knowledge, skills, and experience for the high degree of professionalism necessary to work successfully with Indigenous children (Chen, 1998). Though teachers generally feel confident in their ability to

implement core teaching skills, many express reservations about their ability to teach students from cultures different than their own.

To understand urban Indigenous students more fully, it is important for teachers to gain a broader perspective on the differences between rural living and urban life for these students and their families. For the most part the rural context provides a setting in which the traditional culture of the tribe and the kinship system are respected and enhanced.

Research question

The main research questions for this study are:

1. What are the relevant prior experiences (personal and sociocultural experiences, K-12 schooling, educational theory and teacher preparation, etc.) of teachers of Indigenous students in city schools?

2. What important issues do the teachers believe should be addressed to improve the education of Indigenous students?

3. What are teachers' perspectives of Indigenous students?

4. What are the teachers' educational philosophies about students, teaching, and learning?

The above questions aim to explore how teachers develop their understanding and interpretation of teaching urban Indigenous students. Because teachers' perspectives are complex and multifaceted, we developed open-ended and probing interview questions that were used to further uncover the specific views that, in turn, enabled me to respond to my guiding research questions.

Significance of the Study

In this study we provided a picture of teachers' perspectives of and experiences with Indigenous students in urban schools. Although some teachers did not explicitly state their

feelings, their beliefs and attitudes toward students were always discernable in their interactions with students (Banks, 1987). A study such as this has the potential to impact the understanding of cultural diversity in teacher preparation and practice (Webb, 2001).

If teachers want children to accept and understand cultural diversity, they need to broaden their own outlook. It is crucial for educators to recognize how the dominant school culture is implicit in hegemonic practices that often silence subordinate groups of students, as well as constrain and disempower those who teach them. Such insights can also enhance the ability of teachers to work with students from dominant and subordinate classes so that they come to recognize how and why the dominant culture dictates their compliance and renders them powerless (McLaren, 1988).

The study of teachers' perspectives is critical to understanding teachers' attitudes and has powerful implications for teacher efficacy and student achievement (McAllister & Irvin, 2002; Pajares, 1992); it is only when teachers accept and embrace student diversity that they will be able to teach *all* children. Researchers have suggested that in order for teachers to interact effectively with their students they must confront their own racism and biases (Banks, 1991; Gillette & Boyle-Baise, 1998; Nieto & Rolon, 1997), and learn about their students' cultures. In exploring teachers' perspectives about how Indigenous students learn and how those preconceptions influence their practices, we can enhance our understanding of the education of Indigenous students. Moreover, understanding what propels teachers' beliefs may be the key to changing the social consequences of undesirable classroom activities.

Theoretical framework: Five approaches to multicultural education

In addition to critical theory, the research of Sleeter and Grant (1987) is important to this analysis. They conducted research and analysis of multicultural education practices in the United States and identified five approaches to multicultural education. Those approaches provide a

useful framework for this study, examining the six teachers' perspectives about teaching

Indigenous students:

1. *Teaching the Culturally Different:* This approach recognizes cultural differences among
   diverse groups. Teachers help students acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that
   allow them to participate in the public culture of the dominant group. Difference is viewed
   as problematic, while discrimination and inequity by the dominant culture is ignored and, as
   well structural and institutional practices of oppression are ignored. Teachers consider the
   low academic achievement of minority students as individual challenge rather than
   institutional challenge. They view the goal of teaching as providing bridges by which
   minority students may assimilate into the cultural mainstream and into the existing social
   structure.

2. *Human Relations*: This approach focuses on cooperation and communication between
   people of different backgrounds. This conception is aimed mainly at the *affective level*—at
   the attitudes and feelings people have about themselves and others. Teachers attempt to
   foster good relationships among students of diverse heritage in order to replace tension and
   hostility with acceptance and care. The major objective of this approach is to help students
   of different backgrounds get along, communicate better with each other, and feel good
   about who they are. Teachers would seek to promote positive feelings, unity, tolerance for
   each other, assimilation, and acceptance of existing structures and practices. This approach
   gives no attention to social stratification or to political or economic constructions.

3. *Single Group Studies*: This approaches focuses on the experiences and cultures of specific
   groups within society. Ethnic groups, as opposed to race, class, and gender groups, are
   investigated with an aim to develop acceptance, appreciation, and empathy for cultural

differences and linguistic diversity. Curriculum receives the most attention; none is given to social stratification or institutional limitations. Teachers neither consider social change nor analyze the social-economic position of minority groups. Teachers advocate adds-on curricula.

4. *Multicultural Education*: This approach promotes cultural pluralism and social equality by appreciating, protecting, and enhancing diverse cultures. Teachers seek to (a) promote the strength and value of cultural diversity; (b) develop a sense for human rights and respect for cultural diversity; (c) change discrimination in society; (d) develop acceptance for social justice and equal opportunity for all people; and (e) develop a sense for equity distribution of power among all individuals and groups.

5. *Social Reconstructionist:* This approach goes a step further by requiring multicultural education to also prepare students to question the status quo and to challenge the existing social-structure inequalities. It invites students to become skilled workers and thinking citizens who are also change agents and social critics. Teachers teach students about oppression and discrimination. Students learn about their roles as social-change agents so that they may participate in the generation of a more equitable society.

Sleeter and Grant (1987) argue that in order to address structural inequality in schools, multicultural education must be both multicultural and social reconstructionist. They assert that "others" can be different in race, class, and gender, as well as in ability (either challenged or gifted), culture, language dominance, and sexual orientation. Every classroom should reflect and celebrate diversity of every type. Extending the role of schools, classrooms should be a base for local social-action projects. Teachers should facilitate the coalescing of diverse groups to work toward social justice. Educators need to be encouraged to promote ideas towards a better society,

and the authors help them understand how their view of "others" will dictate what a truly multicultural education will become in their classrooms.

Teachers and schools are not exempt from the effects of institutional racism and other forms of discrimination present in our society (Nieto, 2002). Although this study examines teachers' perspectives about diversity, the institutional discrimination cannot be ignored. The major difference between individual and institutional discrimination is the way in which power is wielded. Institutional discrimination is wielded primarily through the power of the people who control the institutions such as schools, where the oppressive policies and practices are reinforced and legitimized. Individual discrimination is wielded through the personal interactions of individuals. Discrimination, then, can be understood also as a systemic problem, not simply as an individual dislike for a particular group of people. Because of the power of some groups over others, those groups with the most power in society are the ones that benefit from institutional discrimination, whether or not that is their intent (Nieto, 2002).

Methodology

This qualitative research uses an interpretive case study approach, which is an appropriate methodology when a holistic, in-depth investigation is needed (Feagin, Orum, & Sjoberg, 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 we scrupulously moved, via analytic induction, from six teachers' stories and related experiences, the collected wisdom, to a systematic analysis of my data. After reading the six teachers' interviews about their experiences with and perceptions of teaching Indigenous children, we identified the commonalities of six teachers' experiences and then in cross-case chapter looked across their experiences. We attempted to provide which portraits of each teacher through organizing the chapters around common themes. From the individual cases, we moved to a cross-case analysis to understand patterns of similarity and differences in the teachers' perspectives. This more inductive presentation is particularly effective in reporting research to teachers, prospective teachers, administrators, and teacher educators in multicultural societies.

Data analysis

Analysis of the data occurred in five stages (Marshall & Rossman, 1989): organizing the data, coding the data, generating categories, testing emerging categories, and searching for alternative hypotheses and explanations. A computer software program, NVivo qualitative analysis software package, was used to manage data coding, create categories, and examine relationships among the categories. The process began with open coding: an analytic process by which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered in the data (Strauss & Corbin 1990). We looked for concepts that could be grouped under more abstract categories, which, though fewer in number, might be more explanatory. We looked for ways to link those categories according to their dimensions, a process termed "axial coding" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), and around themes and assertions. For example, the term "parents involvement" was constructed from three categories that included: Han parents, Indigenous parents, and family

environment. Each of those categories had been developed from smaller categories. For example, among the sub-categories encompassed by the term "Indigenous parents" were: parent-teacher relationships, educational support, poverty, and unemployment. These groupings were continually tested against the data sets derived from interviews. The NVivo program also provided a historical trail of new and changed codings and categories. The program enabled the intersection of categories or themes with specific participants.

An inductive approach was used to lessen the effect of research desire or influence from previously studied literature. All codings emerged from the contents of the data rather than predetermined applied categories. Pattern-matching created the coding categories (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988). Sentence-by-sentence coding was used first, and then paragraph coding, using my research questions as a guide. Each coded excerpt was compared with the next, searching for similarities and differences. If excerpts were similar, they were placed together; when different, the excerpt would be compared with other piles or be placed in a new pile. Once all the data had been categorized, each pile of data was examined for congruity (Patton, 1990). The original 83 codes were checked for consistency and overlap, and then merged into four main categories that reflected the research questions.

Cross cases analysis

<u>**Treat students equally**</u>

"Treat students equally" was a recurring principle in four of six teachers' beliefs about their teaching. They tended to diminish the role of cultural differences of students in their teaching and focused, instead, on students' similarities. Race and culture were not considered crucial issues in classroom with cultural diverse students. For example, Ling-Ling, on recalling her own school experiences, stated, "We didn't talk much about race or ethnicity in school.

We're all Chinese. This is what we're taught." Such statements engender a perspective of difference that simply denies or erases any difference. Teachers who subscribe to "we are all the same" also probably embrace, often unconsciously, a commitment to assimilation (Giroux, 1983). This notion of 'sameness' was part of three teachers' perspectives:

> **[Ping-Ping:]** I think we should treat people as equals and not highlight their differences by interjecting culture in every aspect of education;

> **[Ting-Ting:]** I don't want to separate one culture from another culture; let's keep it all together—accept each other for the people we are, not for the ethnicity; and

> **[Ling-Ling:]** I find [children] to be basically the same; they have the same needs and wants and desires.

Some of the teachers in this study believed that race and racism are non-issues that are no longer problems in Taiwan society and schools. As Ping-Ping remarked, "Why shouldn't we teach the Chinese history; it's the truth." She explicitly advocated infusing her students with the values of the dominant culture. Similarly, Da-Wei could not or would not recognize racism in school, when he argued that his Indigenous students "were not discriminated against solely because of their race." Such perspectives suggest a cultural-blindness and universality as the standard for engaging with culturally diverse students. Teachers did not consider the ways in which they approach may impact students through what they mean when incorporated into classroom practice, or how cultural blindness may conflict with other educational principles, such as maximizing human potential and using students' prior knowledge in teaching new information and skills.

Teachers with culture-blind beliefs may profess a commitment to promoting educational equality, but they tend to ignore the implications and consequences of their personal and professional beliefs for the success of all students. As discussions about cultural and racial

diversity move beyond general awareness toward specific instructional actions that challenge prevailing conventions, they seemed to resist such suggestions. It is signaled by statements such as, "[Ping-Ping:] Yes, but Indigenous students have to live and work in mainstream society, so they need to learn to be like everybody else," and "[Ling-Ling:] If I teach them according to their cultural styles, won't the Han students be discriminated against, and won't I be lowering my educational standards?" As with awareness, some teachers assume that they become worthy promoters of equality and social justice because they sympathize with ethnic minority groups. Absent from their explanations were the causes, motivations, depths, and manifestations of their beliefs, and commitments to ensure that the acts of discrimination would not be perpetuated in the future.

Student success: An individual challenge

On the issue of affirmative action the same four teachers concluded that student success is a factor of individual effort, rather than a challenge requiring the cooperation of both individuals and their educational institutions. That perspective reflects their belief in Han superiority and a seemingly culture-blind position. Some teachers used their experiences in school to talk about their perspectives of educational affirmative action. For instance, Ping-Ping mentioned that a former classmate, who enrolled in her high school through affirmation action, was struggled in school and "was dropped out when she was totally crushed by the stress." Da-Wei, Ting-Ting and Ling-Ling explicitly expressed their opposition to affirmative action. Da-Wei suggested the Indigenous students could benefit from affirmative action only if they are academically ready. He pointed out that many Indigenous students have found school alienating and disengaging because of the academic competitiveness among peers (Fu, 2001; Guan, 1987; Kuo, 1996; Lee, 1998). He said:

Affirmative action allows Indigenous students to get into high schools and colleges with

special admission criteria. 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 can't handle the overload of schoolwork.

Similarly, Ting-Ting believed that "the practice of affirmative action is based on the notion that

Indigenous people are less intelligent than Han Chinese people." Ting-Ting doubted the "equity"

of affirmative action that targeted many Indigenous students whose academic preparation was

questionable. She believed that the government should try to increase Indigenous students'

academic qualifications. She believed that the current policies ignored Indigenous students'

struggle in high school and college. Ling-Ling went a step further, charging that the special

treatment of Indigenous students fostered academic laziness:

I believe that Indigenous people have as much opportunity for advancement as we

have…. If you take the Indigenous students because you need to meet a quota, I just think

that's terrible. It almost makes someone feel like, "Don't work as hard."

Although Da-Wei, Ting-Ting, and Ling-Ling acknowledged individual differences among their

students, they seemed to hold some beliefs that were probably problematic when working with

Indigenous students. For example, a recurring theme in their interviews was that hard work is

rewarded. This belief about hard working, they believed, was instilled by their parents. To them,

working hard was "a family value" and "a promise of a bright future." Their perspectives might

suggest that when people do not succeed, it is because they are not willing to work hard. Such a

perspective tends to reinforce the symbolic meaning most Han Chinese people attach to Han

ethnicity, and upholds an ideology of individuality; they tended to believe that everyone has to

work equally hard for self-improvement. This approach gives the appearance that all groups have

an equal chance, in which ethnicity is a private matter, not a government concern. Such a

rationalization tends to avert a structural analysis of racism and inequality in Taiwan society, thereby implicitly reaffirming the superior position of Han Chinese.

A second theme that illustrates success as an individual challenge was revealed in their views of college admission policies. According to these four teachers, only students with higher academic achievement are qualified for admission to elite high schools and colleges. They infer here that some students are admitted who are not qualified, namely Indigenous students. Such perspective on qualifications reflects an inherent belief in Han Chinese superiority. "Han" being synonymous with qualified, competent, hard-working, and deserving.

Tourist perspectives

The first common theme in the participating Han teachers' understanding of Indigenous culture was their 'tourist perspective.' They learned about Indigenous cultures mostly through sightseeing and media. For example, Da-Wei, Ping-Ping, and Ting-Ting had taken advantage of summer vacations to visit Indigenous tribes and take the materials and experiences back to their classes. Da-Wei claimed, "My extensive travel allowed me to discover that our native friends are blessed with exceptional talents in music, sport, dance, art, and sculpture." They admitted that their understanding of Indigenous cultures was superficial because "I am an *outsider*," as Da-Wei put it. Without ever traveling to an Indigenous village, Ling-Ling learned about the Indigenous culture from the media, which often portrayed Taiwan Indigenous people as barbarians and uncivilized. Such tourist experiences tend to perpetuate negative stereotypes of Indigenous people's lives and present only a superficial view of Indigenous cultures.

With only limited knowledge of Indigenous culture, teachers are more apt to use a tourist approach to teach culturally diverse students. This approach addresses predominantly cultural otherness through celebrations and seasonal holidays, and through traditional food and artifacts. Culture is taught in isolated units rather than in an integrated way and emphasizes exotic

differences, focusing on specific events rather than daily life. Derman-Sparks (1993) criticizes the "tourist approach" as patronizing because it emphasizes the exotic differences between cultures and trivializes the multiple dimensions of a particular culture. The problem with this approach is that it represents mainstream perspectives, rules of behavior, images, learning styles, and teaching styles. Other problems with activities *about* other cultures is that they are (a) disconnected, since they are only offered at special times; (b) patronizing, because the cultures are viewed as exotic; (c) trivializing, because important cultural traditions are represented only as a special day, which ignores the essence of the culture; and (d) misrepresentative, because the traditional practices are taught instead of the contemporary practices.

It is evident in the Han teachers' interviews that they frequently made ambivalent comments about the cultural backgrounds of their Indigneous students. The second-hand information they had received about Indigenous people from textbooks, media and friends and family had often been distorted by the negative, stereotypical attitudes that are so pervasive in the Han Chinese culture.

Indigenous teachers' experiences of schooling

Throughout their interviews Mayao and Saoma consistently referred to their personal and schooling experiences as influential in their perspectives about teaching Indigenous students. Those experiences were crucial factors that distinguished them from other participating teachers. For instance, on reflection, Mayao argued, "All of my formal education and training was meant for me to become as Han as possible." Before studying at the Teachers College, Mayao had never "thought about my cultural background seriously." It was there he began to realize how much he had suppressed his Indigenous identity. His experiences with the Indigenous Student Club motivated his quest to embrace his cultural identity. He believed that his involvement in the Club "made me deal directly with my own culture and the culture of others."

Saoma had difficulty adjusting in school because of her limited ability to speak Mandarin. As a student, she experienced frustration and had difficulty adjusting in her Han dominant school. As a result, she worked very hard to improve her Mandarin, yet she never forgot her cultural identity as an Amis.

> There were some Han Chinese kids in my class. Sometimes they would call me "Dumb! Mute Whana!" [Barbarian] because I didn't speak their language [Taiwanese]. They didn't play with Indigenous kids. We were pretty isolated at the time. I was ridiculed by these Han Chinese students as 'low and stupid.'

Both Mayao and Saoma experienced alienation and discrimination in school. Later they realized that many other Indigenous children suffered the same ordeal. When they became more critically aware of the marginalization of their cultures in Taiwan, they became keenly conscious of the differences in treatment between Han and Indigenous students in school and felt compelled to make a difference in school. Mayao said, "I don't think a lot of Han Chinese people have any idea what it's like for Indigenous people in this country." The education of Indigenous students is a major concern of many researchers in Taiwan (Shieh, 1994; Shiu, 1987; Sung, 1998; Tang, 1998); however, the learning experiences of *urban* Indigenous students have not received much attention.

Mayao and Saoma developed a consciousness about their cultures that motivated them to become teachers who were eager to make a difference in Indigenous students' lives. After Mayao finished his teacher preparation, he taught in a city school where Indigenous students were a minority. He chose the school because of the cultural composition of the student population. Saoma too chose teaching because of her commitment to Indigenous culture. After teaching Amis as a church volunteer for many years, she felt compelled to extend her influence by teaching in public schools. After receiving an Indigenous-language certificate, she taught

Amis language in several schools in Taipei. Both Mayao and Saoma realized that many Indigenous students attended public school and lived with a sort of dissonance because the culture of their schools was different from that of their homes (Lin, 2001).

Mayao's and Saoma's schooling experiences were not unique; they noted that many Indigenous children who moved to the city experienced the same alienation and conflict at school as they did. Just like Mayao, they noted that many Indigenous students lost their native language or, even worse, "rejected their Indigenous heritage." Their observations are consistent with Tang's (1997) research findings that suggest that Indigenous students in city schools "feel despair, disillusionment, alienation, frustration, hopelessness, powerlessness, rejection, and estrangement, all elements of negative views of the self" (p. 38). Mayao and Saoma tried hard to make a difference, not only by offering extra help to their Indigenous students, but also by extending their efforts to Indigenous families and communities.

The marginalization of Indigenous students

Unlike other participants in this study who blamed Indigenous students and their parents for the students' educational problems, Mayao and Saoma blamed racism and pointed out inequalities within school and society. For example, Mayao believed that Indigenous students were systematically marginalized in many aspects of education. He argued that in order to teach Indigenous students effectively, issues of school curriculum, the tracking system, ethnic discrimination, and teacher expectations must be seriously dealt with. He believed the school's valued cultural knowledge were alien and debilitating to Indigenous students. In addition, he described the curriculum as "Han-centric." That opinion was echoed in Saoma's comment that many schools did not consider Indigenous languages as important as other Chinese dialects. She reported that she sensed resistance from administrators who told her that the school's limited

facility was inadequate for another Amis language program. She suspected the administrators and principal of being "political," on the issue of Indigenous language. She argued:

> I don't think the schools really care about Indigenous languages. In three of the schools where I teach, my class is not scheduled on a regular basis, you know. That would make me think the Indigenous students are not important. Fukien [a Chinese dialect] is taught in every class, whether the students are Taiwanese or not. They assume that every student needs to learn Fukien. That's not true.

In the eyes of some teachers in this study, for example, Da-Wei and Ping-Ping, one manifestation of the challenge of Indigenous students' success was that Indigenous students had few positive adult Indigenous role models in the school. However, the lack of role models was viewed by Indigenous teachers as simply one aspect of a larger problem. Mayao agreed on the need for more Indigenous teachers in schools. But he believed that the main concern was the school's general marginalization of Indigenous parents, students, and teachers. Indigenous students had difficulty adjusting in an institution in which they felt excluded. That was evident in Mayao's accounts.

> I had a hard time learning about Han Chinese history and things like that. When I went to school, there was never anything involving Aborigines at all. For that matter, very little Indigenous history at all was taught in school... I don't think a lot of Han Chinese people have any idea what it's like for Indigenous people in this country.

When the underachievement of Indigenous students was concerned, the two Indigenous teachers seemed to point to institutional challenges in explaining the problem. The heart of their perspective was that many Indigenous students, particularly those from low-income families, were estranged from an institution whose culture, curriculum, pedagogical and learning styles, goals, and values excluded them because of their Indigenous origin. That was the participating

teachers' only explanation that directly addressed the racism implicit in the low achievement by Indigenous students.

<u>Teacher expectations</u>

In this study, Han teachers and Indigenous teachers had different expectations for their Indigenous students. Han teachers, for the most part, seemed to have low academic expectations for Indigenous students, which seems to be a logical extension of a *deficit perspective* (Irvin, 1990). Ping-Ping, for example, frankly advocated lower standards, based on the resources available. She explained, "I know their parents can't afford the after-school programs like other families can." Others based their lower performance expectations on ability, explaining that Indigenous students were not able to comprehend complex concepts or to complete extended writing assignments. For instance, Ting-Ting suggested that Indigenous students need to work harder because "It [math quiz] was just too difficult for them. They are easily confused by abstract concepts."

Rather than seeing the challenge of Indigenous students' education as an institutional issue, they saw it as simply a challenge for individuals. To them, the teacher's job was merely to transmit knowledge and evaluate students' performance. In discussing achievement among Indigenous students, most teachers simply reiterate the conventional reasons for the discrepancies in Han students and Indigenous students. They did not seem to examine their own personal positions in relation to the issues or question these conventional explanations. Nor did they analyze how achievement is influenced by culture, class, and ethnicity. They seemed unable to imagine novel ways of tackling underachievement.

By contrast, Mayao believed in the power of education to make a difference in the lives of Indigenous students. His mission was to build on students' strengths and to inculcate a sense of "yes, you can," in Mayao's words. That was a powerful theme in his beliefs about teaching

Indigenous students. He did not agree with those of his colleagues who faulted Indigenous students and parents for their disinterest in education. The following excerpt from an interview with Mayao illustrates his beliefs about teaching Indigenous students:

> I realize that these [Indigenous] children are not slow. Many teachers think Indigenous students are incompetent at academic subjects. Many Indigenous students just give up when teachers show this attitude. We just have to understand them—to work with them better. This is why I need to be aware of other cultures. Sometimes teachers adjust the curriculum by suggesting a lowering of expectations, such as not giving Indigenous students academically demanding assignments. There is a fine line between wanting to adjust the curriculum to meet the student's capacity and actually challenging the student.

Teachers' expectations for Indigenous students may impact the way they teach Indigenous students. Brophy (1983) points out that the negative effects of teacher expectations can be either direct or indirect. Giving low-expectation students limited exposure to new learning material or less learning time will inhibit their learning in very direct ways. Many negative effects, however, are indirect. For example, the teachers give students negative messages about their capabilities and the extent to which teacher expectation effects can be modified by student perceptions. Teachers who hold such deficit views, who are unsympathetic to socio-cultural differences, and who are inexperienced in the education of minority students can fail to provide effective education (Partington, Richer, Godfrey, Harslett, & Harrison, 1999).

Indigenous teachers: We are family

Throughout our interviews, the teachers in this study had particular kinds of social relationships with Indigenous students. First, Indigenous teachers showed an intimate relationship with Indigenous people through their use of language. At the same time, Han teachers maintained their cultural distance from the Indigenous students they taught. These

teachers made numerous distinctions between Indigenous students and the other students through their choice of personal pronouns, possessive pronouns, and possessive adjectives. Indigenous students and their families were referred to as "*they*" "*them*" and "*their*" and the other students and their families were referred to as "*we*" "*us*" and "*our*." That choice of language suggests a division between the two groups. On the other hand, Mayao and Saoma always referred Indigenous people as "*we*" and "*our*." For example, when describing the life of Indigenous people in the city, Mayao said, "Our *tribes* are in the city. We want to make a living in the city." In her retrospection, Saoma recalled, "We were pretty isolated at the time. I was ridiculed by these Han Chinese students as 'low and stupid'," and "This is the way we lived."

Second, Indigenous teachers worked inside and outside the classroom as they developed relationship with Indigenous students. Mayao's perspectives about the qualities of a good teacher for Indigenous students placed a great deal of responsibility on himself. For instance, he recruited a few Indigenous boys for his baseball team and ran an after-school tutoring program for them. He felt fulfilled when he learned that these Indigenous students had made substantial progress on their schoolwork. He told me he worked under circumstances that isolated him as an Indigenous teacher. For him, one way to overcome the isolation was to engage in collaborative inquiry. Consequently, he formed an Indigenous teachers group for Indigenous cultural study. The teachers met periodically to exchange ideas about teaching and other matters related to Indigenous people. The meetings provided an opportunity to share experiences, perspectives, and challenges. Mayao said he felt privileged to establish a forum that helped Indigenous teachers grow professionally and spiritually and pledged every effort to keep the group functioning. One of the goals of the group was to "prepare ourselves to teach Indigenous students in the city schools where we serve." The group also sought to develop an ability to screen out stereotyped and biased material and to teach those skills to their students.

Third, Indigenous teachers shared more common experiences with Indigenous children and felt they could build a trusting relationship with them. Saoma agreed that the presence of Indigenous teachers in school was vital. As an Indigenous teacher and former Indigenous student, she believed "It would be greatly beneficial if there were someone who really understood what you had been through." She was convinced that children would learn if there existed a relationship based on "trust and concern, like family." Having witnessed the demise of the Amis language among the young Indigenous generation in the city, Saoma committed herself to teaching the Indigenous language in her church. As she told me, "my greatest goal is to educate Indigenous children about themselves through their own language." She believed that those students needed teachers who "know what it was like, growing up as an Indigenous student in a predominantly Han school system," and that she could help them by using their mother tongue.

Finally, Indigenous teachers seemed more able than Han teachers to take advantage of their connections with Indigenous churches, social and cultural networks, and common experiences. Although Mayao and Saoma were different in numerous aspects of teaching, they shared a common commitment, values, expectations for their students, and connections with families and community. They took their responsibilities beyond the classroom and the demands of their jobs. For example, Indigenous parents were more at ease talking to Mayao. Whatever the issues they brought to school, they preferred that Mayao be present at the meeting. Some of his colleagues also saw him as a bridge between the school and Indigenous families. Mayao's initiative with an Indigenous-teachers group also provided him with a supported system outside of school. Saoma's teaching Amis in church for a long time enabled her to connect with young Indigenous students more easily. As an Amis language teacher at school, Saoma invited Indigenous parents to participate in their children's education. Although both of Mayao and

Saoma regretted the erosion of the Indigenous community and the family cohesiveness that had been a mainstay in their own development, they did not view the families as deficient. Nor did they use 'family problems' as an excuse for not teaching. Teaching for them was a calling. They demonstrated their sense of responsibility not only to the children and their families but also to the community.

Mayao and Saoma's experiences and perspectives are consistent with Qiu's (1998) study findings that suggest that Indigenous teachers are advantaged by understanding how the concept of family may be used as a motif for practice, where the teachers are perceived as parents, mentor, or elders. They understand the benefits of creating a sense of intimacy and trust with their Indigenous students that translates to a comfortable, effective learning environment.

Implications for teacher education: Preparing teachers for diversity

The cross-case analysis suggests a need for change that requires teachers who have (1) direct *experiences* with and thorough *knowledge* about the cultural values, learning styles, historical legacies, and contribution of different ethnic groups; (2) the *courage* to stop blaming the victims of school failure and to admit that something is seriously wrong with existing educational systems; (3) the *will* to confront prevailing educational canons and convictions, and to rethink traditional assumptions of cultural neutrality in teaching and learning; and (4) the *skills* to act productively in translating knowledge and sensitivity about cultural diversity into pedagogical practices. Hopefully, then, schooling experiences like those of Mayao and Saoma, described in Chapter 6 and 7, will be historical memories, not everyday occurrences, and their children will have more successful stories to tell about their school experiences.

Teacher preparation

The most obvious avenue to effectively prepare teachers to work with cultural minority students is through formal teacher education with both preservice and inservice teachers. Formal preparation in teaching culturally diverse students should include carefully planned presentations and field experiences that focus on attitudes necessary to understand and appreciate language development and cultural diversity. Teachers particularly need to be sensitized to the important role language plays in maintaining cultural identity and social ties.

Teacher-education programs are charged with the responsibility to prepare individuals to function effectively in the classroom. Unfortunately, most participants felt that their preparation was inadequate. Dissatisfaction ranged from "There is not one thing that I learned in my education classes" to "it [the training] didn't prepare me for the actual classroom experience." Minimizing the theory/practice gap requires that teacher educators understand the developmental nature of teacher knowledge and pedagogy. Centering the content of teacher-education courses on student learning might better prepare teachers to recognize and respond to students' competencies and needs and to equip them to adapt their instruction and curriculum accordingly.

Nieto (2002) asserts that teachers who share the same culture as their students can be viewed as cultural brokers between linguistic minority children and the school and thus constitute a valuable asset to the teaching profession. The finding points clearly to the need to recruit and train Indigenous teachers. The significant emerging effects on ethnicity show that teachers who share the cultural background of their students are more likely to hold favorable attitudes toward the cultural diversity of Indigenous students. Thus, efforts made to identify promising Indigenous people and recruit them to the teaching profession are well worth the time and effort involved (Fu, 1999; Lin, 2001; Sung, 1998). Research findings here suggest that few non-Indigenous teachers have significant interactions with individuals who are racially different

from them. They tended to adopt culture-blind ideologies in a variety of teaching contexts (e.g., urban, suburban, or rural). Such thinking could be detrimental to the education of Indigenous students.

However, if the problems facing the education of Indigenous students were only about matching teachers' and students' cultural, racial, linguistic, and ethnic backgrounds, we should be able to find a solution in Indigenous schools that have more Indigenous teachers than the city schools. In other words, having more Indigenous teachers, according to all the participating teachers in this study, was deemed to be a way to solve the problem. But that has not been the case in studies about the achievement of Indigenous students in Indigenous areas. By studying the teaching efficiency of teachers in Indigenous schools, some researchers (Chen, 1998; Chiou, 2000) have found that Indigenous teachers are not necessarily more effective than Han teachers when both are evaluated for their teaching in Indigenous schools. The point of creating a more diverse teaching force is to ensure that all students, including Han students, experience a more accurate picture of what it means to live and work in a multicultural and democratic society (Ladson-Billing, 2005).

<u>Professional development</u>

What kinds of professional development can help inservice teachers learn more about cultural diversity and apply that knowledge to improving classroom practices? Clearly, short-term professional development experiences are inadequate. Teaching and learning are complex, and teachers need time to learn and experiment with new concepts in the classroom, just as their students do. To be successful, professional development programs must address teachers' beliefs and attitudes toward cultural diversity and toward students from ethnic minority backgrounds. Teachers need time to reflect on the meaning of education in a multicultural society, on the

relationships between teachers and learners, and on social attitudes about language and culture that affect students (Clair, 1995; Gonzalez & Darling-Hammond, 1997).

The results of this study also suggest that most teachers who work with Indigenous students have not been adequately prepared to take advantage of the opportunities presented by the students' culture or to face the challenges they encounter in the school. Most teachers of Indigenous students complete their professional development courses without the benefit of examining the institutions, cultural traits, behaviors, values, and attitudes that Indigenous students bring to the classroom. They are unfamiliar with strategies for incorporating information related to Indigenous culture in every discipline and for using the information to motivate and inspire Indigenous students to continue and expand their level of achievement.

Future research in this area needs to explore the following themes: First, an examination of preservice teachers' perspectives and dispositions about Indigenous cultures. Second, examining practicing teachers' perspectives and practices of teaching Indigenous students. Third, designing and developing programs that address issues of cultural diversity within schools. We hope that in the future, additional studies will continue to consider what teachers are doing in the classroom that is working for cultural diverse students. Researchers could intensify the results of their findings by increasing collaboration with teachers, as they are the individuals with a finger on the pulse of our future society.

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