Choreographing learning in developmental psychology utilising multi-generational genograms and reflective journal writing

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Teaching a complex topic, such as lifespan developmental psychology, challenges most lecturers to find ways to produce and develop adequately students' ability to integrate theoretical knowledge and an understanding of psychosocial issues in everyday life. In this paper, I will explain the possibilities of tools from practice in creating and engaging in learning and knowledge production in developmental psychology. Based on the notions of my teaching philosophy, social constructionism and a family systems perspective, I applied the principles of the multigenerational genogram, life-story remembering and reflective journal writing as strategies for choreographing the stage on which reflective learning and the co-construction of knowledge took place. In a reflection on practice I contend that these strategies, when combined in a learning context for lifespan developmental psychology, provide useful tools for gaining access to the kinship network and balance the teaching enterprise with a process of everyday living so that learning becomes both pictorial and practical.

Collaborative teaching, co-constructing knowledge, multigenerational genogram, remembering, reflective journal writing, collage making

INTRODUCTION

Choreographing learning spaces for the co-construction of knowledge in psychology courses at undergraduate level is a challenging enterprise. It is particularly challenging in a context where the culture of learning clearly defines the roles of learner and lecturer in an almost non-negotiable power hierarchy. Furthermore, the rules of interpretation and cognitive processes are somehow different from my own where questioning and debate are valued (Nisbett, 2003), and passive, input-driven teaching not an option for pro-active learning. Students at the institution where I am currently teaching also find it difficult to express themselves and their views in a language in which they may not feel competent—conversing in English, the language of tuition, as opposed to Cantonese, which is their native language. Sharing in the process of knowledge construction seems to be a violation of their existing "realities" and engaging in conversational activity and talk, or even asking questions, is a foreign concept to most students. On the other hand, the local context provides a rich resource of information regarding transitional periods in the lives of the citizens and as primary context for applying developmental psychology.

The purpose of this paper is to explore and explicate the possibilities of utilising alternative mechanisms for engaging students in knowledge production in developmental psychology courses. In this paper I explain how the underlying assumptions and philosophy guiding my teaching practice inform the practical application of three techniques from practice: the multigenerational genogram, life-story remembering and reflective journal writing, as strategies

for choreographing a learning context in developmental psychology courses at undergraduate level.

CHOREOGRAPHING LEARNING

I use the concept of choreography as metaphor referring to the rhythmic dance that evolves in the interaction between students (learners) and me (facilitator) in a learning context. The dance between the students and me is accompanied by the music of my teaching philosophy, a philosophy informed by an intuitive belief and acceptance of a social constructionist position as the point from which to engage in the complex dance of collaborative teaching. Underlying my teaching philosophy is a passion for psychology and teaching, a passion that provides a starting point from which I engage with students in the learning environment on an equal basis and appreciate the special knowledge and understanding that students have of their community and the local discourse (White, 2000). In choreographing a learning environment I endeavour to create a stage for facilitation and transference of knowledge, attitude and skills where students can appreciate their personal knowledge as much as that provided in textbooks, and where students can develop confidence and personal agency in their learning (Carlson & Erickson, 2001; Garson & Archer, 2000). In different courses on developmental psychology that I teach at undergraduate level at the University of Macau, I take ideas from the field of social constructionism (Burr, 1998; Gergen, 1985, 2000) and family systems (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2001; McGoldrick, Gerson & Shellenberger, 1999), combined with the assumptions of my philosophy of collaborative teaching, to create a connection between theory and practice and to develop students' critical thinking skills and knowledge construction abilities (Van Schalkwyk, 2005).

A collaborative teaching model challenges both students and facilitator "to reconstruct how they think about teaching and learning" (Anderson, 2002, p.2), and about sharing responsibility for the learning process as equal partners (Garrison & Archer, 2000). By decentring the dominant accounts and becoming familiar with personal knowledge that comes from a rich history of lived experiences, I encourage students to become reflective in the mapping of new ideas and thoughts about the subject matter. The students and I engage in different dances as we collaboratively reflect upon existing knowledge systems, explore different perspectives and move, for example, from just learning and memorising theoretical constructs, to thinking about the influence of personal experience, and to interpreting observations in accordance with relevant theory or scholarly debates. Furthermore, students develop a critical awareness and psychological thinking not only in terms of theoretical knowledge, but by integrating their own "expert knowledge" in similar vein, thus moving away from passive learning to a position of negotiating alternatives.

Moreover, I believe that learning, particularly with regard to developmental psychology, does not only take place in the classroom and students should also engage in observational and reflective skill development outside of the classroom. Through creating their own meanings on the stage of their personal lives, students can engage in the social action of co-constructing knowledge in psychology that is of greater consequence to critical and reflective thinking and practice. I also have much to learn from the students in my class, particularly where I am now teaching in a foreign culture. Thus, in choreographing learning in developmental psychology a stage emerges on which a process of mutual exploration of a variety of fields and resources unfold, and where establishing conceptual links and conclusions become tailored to specific needs that are locally relevant.

Finally, on the learning stage, language is crucial as a way in which we construct meaning in an interactive manner (Shotter, 1993). However, if one has to speak in a second language with which one is not particularly familiar and competent, the social act of talking and negotiating can be lost and collaborative learning is a defeated purpose from the start—the stage remains empty and the actors mere parrots of rote learning. Choreographing of the learning stage in a non-native

language setting poses particular challenges to the collaborative learning process. In a culture where the principles, beliefs and interpretation are also somewhat different from that in which developmental psychology texts emerge, the reciprocal process of collaboration and sharing knowledge of prior experiences and perceptions, as well as cultural and contextual stories of knowing and being should therefore be negotiated in a different manner. Although I believe that knowledge is "inexplicably linked to the participants involved in meaning making" (Souza, 2004, p.4), alternative mechanisms become important as a means to communicate those meanings and to act through language on the learning stage, and to construct new knowledge.

STRATEGIES APPLIED TO CHOREOGRAPH COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

My objective in choreographing the stage for a lifespan developmental psychology course was thus not only to facilitate learning, but also to apply psychology in different settings in pursuit of the co-construction of personal and public knowledge that would sustain beyond the realms of the classroom. I considered it important that learning had to take place in such a way that students would integrate personal meanings regarding a variety of life experiences with the subject matter of developmental psychology. For this purpose, I employed three strategies to choreograph the delicate dances evolving on the learning stage of a developmental psychology course. The strategies of a multigenerational genogram, life-story remembering and reflective journal writing were not mutually exclusive but integrally linked and the aim was to engage with the students and to encourage active participation even though they felt constrained by their limited language abilities.

The Multigenerational Genogram

McGoldrick et al., (1999) posed that the multigenerational genogram was a practical and useful framework for understanding complex patterns of interrelationships in a coherent and systematic manner. As a subjective, interpretive tool the genogram was mostly used within practice by health care professionals and psychologists. However, in facilitating an undergraduate course in the second year of a degree programme in psychology, I successfully used the multigenerational genogram as a strategy for choreographing a learning stage and engaged students in the co-construction of knowledge regarding developmental psychology. Mapping the three generations of their own family systems historically and assessing the life cycle transitions for different members of the family, provided a context for the stage on which they participated with me as the director (facilitator or lecturer) in the explorative dance concerning different topics and evolutionary patterns and processes of human development. It also provided a framework for case study research and for generating tentative hypotheses for class discussion and reflective activity, thus becoming a valuable strategy for facilitating more coherent co-construction of knowledge in developmental psychology.

The utilisation of the multigenerational genogram in the learning context unfolded in three parts. I started the course during the first lecture with a brief introduction of traditional perspectives on lifespan development and the vertical and horizontal challenges the individual faced during his or her progression through life. I focused in particular on the different interrelated and interdependent systems proposed by the ecosystemic theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and a psychosocial approach to development through life (Newman & Newman, 2003). Furthermore, during this first lecture, I explained the common elements of the genogram and basic information about individual family members and the family as a collective required to compile a multigenerational genogram (McGoldrick, et al., 1999). In a class exercise, the students were guided in compiling a genogram for their own families of origin including at least three generations and using what they readily knew, such as demographics and relationships (legal and otherwise) between family members, and patterns of behaviour evident in their own lives and that of their family members. Dates of significant life events in family members' lives and the types of

events that could impact on individual development were also indicated. During this first part of the unfolding of the multigenerational genogram, students became aware of what they already knew and how it related to the subject matter. They entered onto the stage as actor-participants in the process of knowledge co-construction, thus taking responsibility for their own learning and identifying the gaps in their knowledge systems (Garison & Archer, 2000).

The genogram could not be completed in full during this first lecture period. The students were therefore expected, in the second part of the project, to add further information at home, particularly pertaining to aspects such as family rules and rituals, myths and legends, role appropriate behaviour, and significant events for which they needed to consult with other family members. In completing the genogram in collaboration with their family members the door was thus opened to also include the family onto the learning stage and for privileging the personal experiences and meanings embedded in the family life story (Figure 1). Students also became aware of characteristics processes that made their family unique and that expressed the qualities, capacities, and psycho-social activity of the family as part of the larger community setting and culture (McGoldrick, et al., 1999). Furthermore, they came to realise that social processes sustained knowledge, and developed awareness for the fact that we fabricated or represented our versions of knowledge through daily interactions in the course of social life (Burr, 1998).
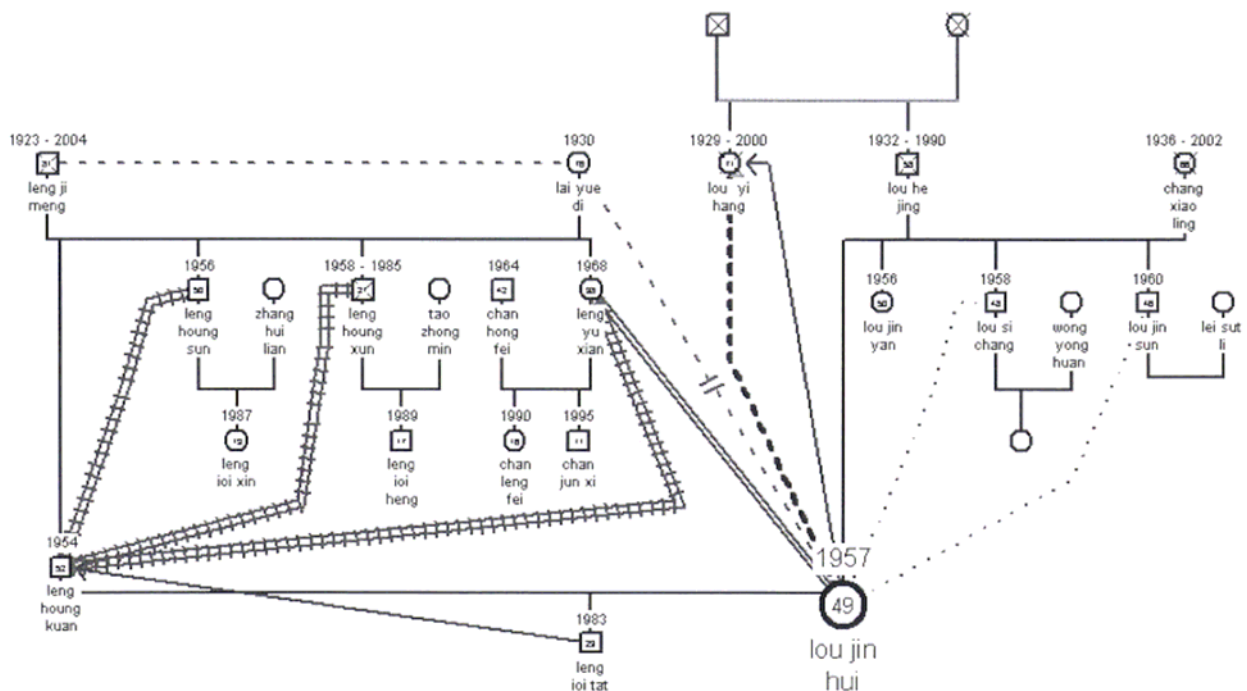

Genogram of Mrs. Leng's Family:

Figure 1. Genogram compiled by a student in a third-year developmental psychology course[1]

Compiling a multigenerational genogram for their families of origin furthermore enabled students to construct a framework that provided clues to the challenges and life stressors of individual development, particularly during transitional periods. During the third part of the project, which continued until the end of semester and formed part of their assessment at the end of the course, students engaged in critically questioning their own genograms. I encouraged them to question and pose tentative hypotheses that could be presented either in class or by anonymously writing down their questions on a separate sheet and submitting it at the end of a lecture. These questions

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[1] Students have to get informed consent from their families in order to submit the final collage as part of an individual assignment at the end of semester.

related to a particular period in the developmental life cycle and concerned both content and process. The questions also formed the basis for class discussion during which I encouraged students to participate and share in the process of co-constructing answers and finding solutions for complex problems.

A few of the many questions generated in a session on early childhood development suffice as example. I corrected the language for these questions posed by the students for the sake of this paper. However, the limitations of their language proficiency were usually evident in the questions and in individual feedback I would use the opportunity to correct these and help them to develop more effective language skills.

- *What happened before I could be conceived into my family? What contributed to my parents coming to know each other and getting married?*
- *If the mother of an unborn child was addicted to drugs, what would be the consequences for the newborn baby?*
- *What if my mother did not take care of me when I was a little girl or boy?*
- *How did I develop the ability to communicate through language?*
- *What processes were involved in learning to talk?*
- *If a child grew up in a two-language home, would his or her personality develop differently?*
- *If a child had no playmates in early childhood, would it impact negatively on his or her cognitive, social, and moral development?*
- *What made me develop as a girl or a boy?*
- *If a child entered formal education at an early age, would it influence the cognitive development in a positive or negative way?*

Applying the principles of a multigenerational genogram to map the patterns of interaction furthermore provided a representation of how people were connected with one another within the broader structure of three generations and in society. Discussing family legacy and ritual in a non-threatening manner (they did not have to provide any specific identifying information) offered students the prospects of recognising the inter-connectedness of different generations, trans-generational transference, and the ecological patterns prevalent during the lifespan. As a feature of the genogram, mapping family patterns and interrelationships also reflected the specific attachment bonds and sub-systems that were prevalent between the siblings and the parents and grandparents. It was thus possible, from an ecological perspective, to explore the relationships between family members and society and how different systems collaborated, offering the context and content of development through the lifespan and posing challenges to human development during the lifespan, something I did in a more advanced developmental psychology course at the third-year level.

I explicated above how I utilised the multigenerational genogram in a course on developmental psychology. In the context of co-constructing knowledge about developmental psychology, students used the framework for understanding the transitional periods from infancy to late adulthood, exploring common biological, cognitive, cultural, and psychosocial histories and implied futures for their family of origin. Constructing a genogram from a family systems and lifespan perspective involving at least three generations, helped the student to review assumptions and interpretations about family psychosocial ecology (Newman & Newman, 2003), also taking into consideration other system levels in the meso, exo and macro contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

In developmental psychology, different forms of knowledge abound and in a particular culture further artefacts of indigenous knowledge systems prevailed. I encouraged the students to be aware of the fact that "we should not assume that our ways of understanding [are] necessarily any better than other ways" (Burr, 1998, p.4), and that the textbook did not necessarily have more

authority than their own interpretations. By using their own frameworks and understanding of human development, class discussions were active participation settings in which students and facilitator shared meanings and made sense of different ways and systems of knowing, topical issues and processes that evolved during different periods of the lifespan. Through respecting, inviting and valuing each student's voice and being flexible and responsive to his or her personal accounts of the world (Anderson, 2002), collaborative learning became a reality.

Life-story Remembering

Integral to constructing a multigenerational genogram was the practice of life-story remembering (McAdams, 1993). Remembering comes through telling stories about one's lived experiences, events and relationships. However, remembering through telling one's life story could be challenging, particularly at the age of most of the undergraduate students in my classes (the average age of the second-year group was 19.2 years). They were only beginning the myth-making process (McAdams, 1993), and for many late adolescents not used to reflective practice, this was quite difficult. Furthermore, "sharing a family's history is a sacred relationship, not a matter of technical fact-gathering" (McGoldrick et al., 1999, p.13), and for Chinese students there was the added constraint that they were not encouraged by their culture or parents to reflect too deeply on positive and particularly negative experiences in their lives (Bond, 1986; Nisbett, 2003; Pina-Cabral, 2002). I therefore had to be sensitive to the ways in which students remembered their life stories in their family of origin and engaged with the stories of other members of their family such as father or mother.

In order to create some distance, I utilised a second strategy to choreograph the stage on which they learnt about developmental psychology. I used the process of performing life-story remembering in which I facilitated remembering by assigning a project in which they had to compile a life-story collage of 12-15 pictures, images or artefacts (Figure 2).

Life story collage and essay

For this project you have to make a life-story collage. The main objective is that you should demonstrate how you integrate major events in your past and project how these may impact on your present and future life.

Create your own life-story collage in response to the question: *Who am I?* Make use of photos, pictures and cuttings (also text) from old magazines and other media, and any other print material that tell something about you as a person. Your life-story collage can include reference to context, situations, and/or events, emotions, etc., as well as other people that tell us about who you are and how you came to be the person you are today.

Use as many images as you wish, but not less than 15. paste all images and pictures on one page (A3 is preferable) but do not use poster board, since you will need to fold the final product to an A4 format. After completing the collage, make a colour copy so that you do not loose any special pictures that you put on the collage. You also have to number the images and text messages for when you do the second part of the project

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Figure 2.   Prescriptions for compiling a life-story collage

They were free to choose, without threatening their privacy, whatever pictures or images they wanted, as well as cuttings from popular magazines. The main criterion was that the pictures, images and artefacts represented their development from early childhood to the present. They

could also include images that represented future anticipations, attitudes and beliefs about the world they lived in (Figure 3).

Besides the collage, the student also had to compose an essay on his or her life story. Writing an essay on their own life stories was less threatening than performing it impromptu without reflection, and they had time to think about how and what they wanted to include in response to some guiding questions. I posed the guiding questions in such a way that they could move from the more general and overt actions and relationships (e.g., *Who is the person that greatly influenced your life?*), to those that were more difficult to deal with (e.g., *What events represent a low point in your life?*). By posing this assignment, I invited students to reflect on their experiences and their own transitions through life up to the present.

Figure 3. A life-story collage

During class discussion, after completion of the collage and remembering essay, students participated in sharing their lived experiences, events and relationships with classmates. This was the performance stage of the project and they were free to share only that with which they felt comfortable. As facilitator, I guided them towards collaboratively interpreting their own life events in terms of theoretical constructs and concepts in lifespan development. I choreographed a learning stage with this assignment where "a reliable and accurate link between the objective and subjective worlds" (Freedman & Combs, 1996, p.28) could be facilitated, and where relational responsibility was shared (McNamee & Gergen, 1999). The students and I connected, collaborated, and constructed with each other resulting in "the learning relationship and process [to be] more mutually gratifying and rewarding" (Anderson, 2002, p.6).

Participating in a life story project invited students also to reflect on ways in which their own lives shaped their understanding of human development. Garrison and Archer (2000, p.14) proposed that "the aim of education [was] to collaboratively develop the thinking and learning abilities of students in the pursuit of worthwhile and meaningful knowledge…and [students] to be self-directed in their continuous search for personal meaning and public knowledge". Utilising the life-story remembering in addition to the multigenerational genogram provided such a framework for the transactional processes of higher-order learning to take effect and for the confirmation of personalised knowledge. Sharing their life stories and collaborating in meaning-making on the learning stage of a developmental psychology course provided an opportunity socially to construct meanings and created a setting in which students took responsibility for their own learning.

In the aftermath to the life-story project, I asked the students to evaluate the learning space created by the collage making and life-story remembering and to comment on whether sharing their experiences helped them co-construct more significant knowledge systems than what would have been possible by just listening to a lecture in a passive way (the language in these extracts was not corrected revealing some of their language limitations).

- *Past memories rush to my mind at the time of doing my collage.*
- *Everyone live with different story in their life. Every little pieces of their life experience can group up into a colourful story book... In conclusion, the process of making this collage, I think it can let me to have a good memory about my past issues... It really is an unforgettable memory.*
- *From the course outline, the life story collage attracted my attention since I like doing the artistic work that can show my own feeling and thinking. It is like a mind map that represents my thought... it is also a good chance to look at my life... I really think about my life process, my experience and all the event that happens to me.*
- *This is my first time to do a life story collage for myself; it is a challenge to me. At first, I feel I cannot find a clear mind and memory about my childhood and school time; secondly, I have no such experience in writing life story. However, when I start to search pictures, my memory become clearer and clearer, many pictures appear, a lively childhood and school time are replayed clearly in my mind.*
- [In making this life-story collage, I realised that] *I cherished gains and learnt from losses. I feel my life is going in a positive way, as I can learn from mistakes and accumulate experiences of successes. Still, I will keep learning from others and I as learning is a life-long process.*
- *It is a good experience for me. I must remember what I learnt in this project and find out the solution for those problems.*

Reflective Journal Writing

A third strategy that I used for choreographing the learning stage in a developmental psychology course was the practice of reflective journal writing. I invited students to keep a journal in which they wrote about their observations in everyday life. Reflective journaling, focusing on critical thinking and questioning of observations promoted self-insight, self-development and self-directed processes for life-long learning (Harris, 2005). Although time-consuming, reflective writing was a learning tool that enabled students to reach a deeper and different understanding of the issues under discussion. Writing was an intentional activity with a specific purpose in mind and reflective journals offered a space for cognitive activities such as "observation, speculation, doubt, questioning, self-awareness, problem stating, problem solving, emoting, and ideation" (Kerka, 1996). By expecting them to submit regularly journal entries as part of continuous assessment, I also attempted to engage them in an ongoing manner with the subject matter of the course and to keep track of their progress, both in terms of observational skills and for the

interpretation of these observations. Thus, students again took responsibility for their own learning and meaning making, and submitting their journals for review added to the overall grade for the course.

As a starting point to reflective journal writing, I provided students with critical questions that they could use as prompts for interpreting their observations (Figure 4). I posed several questions that they could reflect upon and, if necessary, consult further literature in order to gain insight in the observed behaviour. Using different theoretical concepts to interpret events and behaviours that they observed in everyday life, they gained insight with regard to the physical, cognitive and psychosocial transitions in the life cycle of members of their community and their own.

- What do you think of the situation/behaviour/lecture of the day that you observed?
- Can you summarise the observation in terms of assumptions and/or a problem statement?
  - Did you challenge your own assumptions? How?
  - What factors were included and/or excluded from your definition/description of the observation? Which psychological factors did you take into account?
- Do you think that the situation/behaviour/lecture of the day promoted the expression of care, empathy, and concern for the physical and emotional well-being of other human beings?
- What conceptions of the good society and the good life are promoted? Are these based on self-interest or cooperation?
- How did you arrive at the conclusion you present in this reflection?
  - Does the conclusion focus exclusively on the reading for this course, or does it include further reading and/or integration of previous readings in psychology (also in other psychology courses)?
  - Does the conclusion include other systems affecting the person?
- Were you sceptical about the validity of your decision/conclusion?
  - Do you trust your judgement?
  - Did you consider other alternatives?
  - What other interpretations could have been used?
  - Was intuition involved in making this decision or coming to this conclusion?
  - What decisions would you make to manage this situation differently? What would the results look like?
- Did you consult other literature to support your conclusions? Which explanations were best supported by the literature?
- How did you evaluate your thinking processes?
  - How did you evaluate your analysis of the observed situation?
- What conclusions did you reach after examining your own critical, reflective thinking

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Figure 4. Critical thinking questions for reflective journal writing

Reflective journal writing had the added advantage of providing students with the opportunity to practice their language skills, while weaving accounts of their private and personal experiences and observations to reflect upon the content of the developmental psychology coursework. As a less formal and less inhibited way of representing knowledge, students were thus provided with a space in which their own authentic voices could be heard, furthermore supporting a necessary emotional component of the learning process. In their journals, the students revealed their identity and became aware of their own thought processes and ideas, which in turn allowed them to claim ownership of these thoughts as their own and strengthening their understanding of the topics under discussion.

Some extracts from the reflective journals suffice as examples of how students developed sensitivity for their environment and utilised the reflective journaling as learning space to express their viewpoints and explore their thoughts regarding developmental psychology topics. These extracts were taken from the final year students' reflective journals in an advanced developmental psychology course in which the learning content also focused on the family system.

- *In Macau, the dominant culture is the Chinese culture which promotes harmony within the family. According to the Chinese tradition, the Chinese does not like to reveal their problems or bad things to others. They thought that it would be shameful to let others know about their own family. These traditional beliefs and cultural background makes the families in which there are disabled family member(s) harder to speak up and ask for help.*

- *Sometimes punishment in my eyes may be the perception of others' reinforcement. From the book, it is easy enough to understand that Skinner's learning theory for children that both reinforcement and punishment are used to shape children's behaviour. When I first came across with Skinner's theory, I think his theory is mostly widely applied in my daily lives.*

- *Everyone will learn difference things in the different periods, which we calling "development". For aging, there are many communities or organisations to take care the old people in Macau. How about the giftedness? The giftedness student's step is a little bit faster than the others. They also need some complements to help them to face their difference and difficult stages.*

- *Today, I go to visit my aunt who is pregnant with her third child. Her fetus is now five months old. We often talk on the phone and have lunch together. It is interesting to find that I know her pregnancy lately. She tells me that there is a Chinese traditional custom about pregnancy. A pregnant woman can tell her pregnancy to her own family members (her husband, parents, and siblings). However, she can only tell other friends and distant relatives about her pregnancy until her pregnancy period is over three months. She explains that if the pregnant woman tells everybody about her pregnancy, her baby will become stingy and the woman may have miscarriage easily. I really do not understand the concept and my aunt does not understand it either. She says it is a wide-spread Chinese custom and she thinks it is better to hold this belief. I think it is related to one of the Chinese values of being modest.*

- *A... [a family member] is in the stage of young adulthood, she should have more contact with her friends, it is very important for her to be in-group than out-group. Working in a company is just another family, if she doesn't contribute in this family, it would be very difficult for her to continue staying in this big family.*

CONCLUSIONS

Utilising the three strategies outlined provided me with the tools to choreograph the learning stage in undergraduate developmental psychology courses and to co-construct, in collaboration with the students, knowledge that went beyond the scope of the textbook materials. All three strategies fitted my philosophy of teaching in psychology and my aim "to grant privilege and honour the personal experiences, desires, motivations, knowledge and skills" (Carlson & Erickson, 2001, p.207) of my students. The tools from practice were quite useful and beneficial in creating a learning context in which students developed new knowledge systems, attitudes and skills.

In this paper I reflected on my teaching practice. Rather than conducting a comparative analysis concerning the effectiveness of different strategies or comparing different teaching styles, I

reflected on my practice as it unfolded on the learning stage for developmental psychology courses. This could be considered a limitation because I do not present any data or factual truths, and I did not subject my interpretations to reliability and validity testing. No absolute knowledge claims could therefore be made and generalised to different contexts. It was, however, not the purpose of this paper or the objective of my project to conduct such comparative research. Besides, a comparative analysis would not have matched the philosophical assumptions that supported my practice of choreographing the learning environment. Therefore, credibility and plausibility of these strategies could only be established when others could successfully employ the same or similar tools from practice in order to engage students successfully, particularly students who had to construct knowledge in a second or third language, in collaborative learning and co-construction of knowledge.

Making use of privileging questions that encouraged students to share experiences from their lives during group discussions in class or in the form of reflective journal writing encouraged my students to think deeply about the constructs they encountered in the course. In this way, we mapped new knowledge and collaboratively engaged in reflective meaning making. As a learner myself in the reciprocal process of co-constructing knowledge, I also gained insight into the interrelationships, reciprocal patterns of interaction, and cultural legacies of Macanese families that helped me choreograph a stage for developmental psychology learning that was fitting for the context in which it would be applied. In an extended version of this project in the third year, students had to do the genogram project for a different family, and conducted a life-history interview with one of the family members. The aim was for them to apply their learning to a real life situation and to expand their knowledge mapping new information and interpreting the life-history in terms of lifespan developmental processes. With these assignments, the students developed further skills in interviewing and collecting and interpreting qualitative data. Reflective journal writing became a regular practice for students by the time they reached their fourth year in the psychology program, and they also applied this strategy when engaging in the practicum training that formed part of the final year of the program. On this process I will report in another article.

Anderson (2002, p.1) commented, "knowledge is fluid and communal, yet personalised. When we share our knowledge with one another, we cannot know what each brings to the sharing… Whatever the outcome, it will be something different than either started with, something socially constructed." It was quite challenging to facilitate the processes that unfolded on the learning stage, but also rewarding in the sense that students, despite their initial reluctance to communicate in a second language, became active participants in the learning and teaching process. In collaboration with one another, me as the facilitator, and the content of the prescribed texts their local knowledge and experience were once again challenged, and they came to recognise the place of personal reflection in the process of constructing knowledge (Anderson, 2002; Garrison & Archer, 2000).

Finally, I have to emphasise here, that utilising the multigenerational genogram, life-story remembering and reflective journal writing in the learning context as described above was not done for the purpose of planning any interventions, therapeutic or otherwise, but merely for choreographing the stage on which students could become active participants in the co-construction of knowledge rather than passive receivers of information. In collaboration with a colleague who was teaching counselling skills and practice and who also utilised the outcomes from the projects students did in the developmental psychology course, knowledge was also transferred to other courses. Thus, choreographing developmental psychology in this way made it a valuable opportunity for creating a coherent knowledge framework of psychology instead of the fragmentation that often resulted when learning units were kept separate and the subject matter taught in an input-driven style.

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