



Castledown

 OPEN ACCESS

Intercultural Communication Education

ISSN 2209-1041

<https://journals.castledown-publishers.com/ice/>

Intercultural Communication Education, 2 (2), 59-70 (2019)

<https://doi.org/10.29140/ice.v2n2.128>

Negotiating Intercultural Spaces and Teacher Identity in an Internationalised School in Shanghai



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Abstract

There is now a general acceptance that schools need to prepare students for the realities of a globalised world, which necessitates developing intercultural competence. Such an educational mandate is felt particularly keenly in internationalised schools, where the work of teaching and learning involves the negotiation of diverse cultural assumptions, practices, and identities on a daily basis. Whilst schools are in a position where they need to formulate some kind of understanding of what intercultural competence means and how it is expected to be developed with educational content and pedagogical practices, the notion of intercultural competence is perpetually contested. Critical scholars have critiqued the tendency for theorising on intercultural competence to adhere to “solid” notions of culture and assume that there is an end to the intercultural process at which point an individual will become interculturally competent (e.g., Dervin, 2016; Ferri, 2018). This paper, however, argues that it is important to understand the ways in which solid notions of culture surface in the lived experiences of teachers working in intercultural contexts. The paper draws on findings from a qualitative case study of international teachers’ cross-cultural experiences in an international school in Shanghai, China to highlight the ways in which individuals draw on notions of solid culture as a resource for claiming an identity position in relation to dominant cultural practices in the local context.

Keywords: Critical interculturality; cross-cultural experiences; interculturality; international schools; international school teachers

Introduction

Schooling is often seen as serving a national focus, exposing children and young adults to the language, literature, history, culture and science that the state wishes to “enforce within the construction of nationhood” (Yemini & Fullop, 2015, p. 530). However, the notion of education serving to transmit

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Data Availability Statement: All relevant data are within this paper.

only the national culture is no longer tenable in an age of rapid globalisation (Hill, 2006), which has resulted in increased mobility, migration, and interconnectedness (Savva, 2017a). These changes have transformed the nature of schools and schooling in the twenty-first century, which are becoming more culturally diverse. There is now general acceptance that schools, regardless of whether they are national or international in nature, need to prepare students for the realities of a globalised world, which necessitates developing, amongst other things, language skills and intercultural competence in order to negotiate meanings and identities with individuals from different cultural backgrounds (Hayden, 2011). The development of intercultural competence is thus not simply on the education agenda in international teaching contexts (such as international schools or schools that deliver an English curriculum in a non-English country) but is now very much a priority area on an increasingly global scale (Hajisoteriou & Angelides, 2016).

Despite (or perhaps because of) its ubiquity, intercultural competence remains a contested concept (Dervin, 2016) and has been theorised within a variety of educational domains and contexts, including higher education (Kim, 2009; Smith, 2009), international education (Savva, 2017a, 2017b; Tran & Nguyen, 2015), and most extensively language teaching (Bennett, 1993; Byram, 1997; Byram, Nichols & Stevens, 2001). The notion of intercultural competence typically involves the specification of the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately across cultural differences based on particular knowledge, skills and attitudes (e.g., Deardorff, 2006; Byram 1997). The interculturally competent individual is expected to draw on this collection of attributes to manage interaction amongst culturally distinct individuals by alternating “between different perspectives” and being “conscious of their evaluations of difference” (Byram, Nichols & Stevens 2001, p. 5). Intercultural competence, then, requires the individual to not only focus on the Other but to also reflexively question the conventions and values that one has unconsciously acquired as if they were natural (Alfred, Byram & Fleming, 2006). In this sense, reflexivity is a core element of interculturality that allows individuals to relativise perspectives and enhance their intercultural sensitivity. More recently, Byram (2018) has argued that adopting an internationalist perspective (which I take to be related to interculturality) “gives learners an *Archimedean point* [emphasis added] from which to view the world, and their own nation and country within it, a point from which they can see what they have never seen before” (p. 72).

However, the notion of intercultural competence conceived as above has been critiqued for assuming that there is an end to the intercultural process, at which point an individual will become interculturally competent (Dervin, 2017; Hoff, 2014). In fact, some argue that the presumption of a seemingly objective perspective from which the individual can transcend the subjective is in fact inherently subjective, reflecting, a Western-centric perspective (Ferri, 2018). For example, Ferri (2018) argues that a view of intercultural communication predicated on the search for a final moment of understanding when all cultural conflicts are resolved is problematic. As Blasco (2012) puts it, “this paradoxically reproduces an ethnocentric way of perceiving self as perspicacious, self-transcendable, and able to expose the features of a fixed and knowable other” (p. 476). A further issue is that constructions of interculturality are frequently predicated upon “solid” approaches to culture (Dervin, 2016) in which cultures are seen as stand-alone entities that influence how individuals think and behave. This can easily lead to the pigeonholing of individuals into static identities related to national cultures or other racialised identity markers (Kim, 2007; Tian & Lowe, 2014). As a way of moving beyond “solid” approaches to culture and interculturality, Dervin (2017) has advocated the notion of “critical interculturality,” which he defines as:

a never-ending process of ideological struggle against solid identities, unfair power differentials, discrimination and hurtful (and often disguised) discourses of (banal) nationalism, ethnocentrism, racism and various forms of -ism. Critical interculturality is also about the now and then of interaction, beyond generalizations of contexts and

interlocutors. (Dervin, 2017, p. 2)

Within critical interculturality, reflexivity is seen as a “multifaceted, complex, and ongoing dialogic process that is continually evolving” (Clark & Dervin, 2014, p. 2) and is closely linked to the ideological struggle mentioned above. Importantly, critical interculturality prompts new perspectives on individual identity, as expressed in a number of concepts. In moving away from static conceptions of identity in intercultural communication, two initial positions can be acknowledged. A critical intercultural perspective moves beyond liquid approaches:

questioning the terms, concepts and notions that we use to discuss this topic, moving away from Western-centric (and other kinds of centrisms), somewhat biased and limited/limiting discourses, leading to believe that we are “better,” more “civilised,” more “democratic” than the Other. (Li & Dervin, 2018, p. 13)

It also foregrounds the interactional aspects of intercultural encounters that challenge us to look at the particulars of a social encounter rather than judging with ready-made frames of reference that can only generalise.

However, critical interculturality as “a never-ending process” could be critiqued for minimising the importance of the relevance of cultural knowledge and cultural identities in the here and now. Individuals do not approach every interaction as a new encounter but rather, on the level of lived experience, draw upon frames of reference (experiences and identities) in order to (re)negotiate the familiar, new and unexpected (Zotzmann, 2016). It has to be asked to what extent individuals can be critically intercultural without bringing these “solid” frames into play. In Dervin’s work (e.g., 2016), solid identities are positioned as the antagonist, as illustrated by the verb “struggle” in the definition of critical interculturality above. However, given the salience of solid notions of culture and related cultural identities, it is important to understand how solid notions of culture and identity become intertwined in intercultural encounters. As will be discussed in more detail below, in an internationalised school, solid notions of culture take on particular significance for teachers of different national backgrounds who might see themselves as representing particular educational cultures and use claims around culture and identity to advance their own pedagogical agenda or to resist change. This paper draws on findings from a case study of international teachers’ cross-cultural experiences in an international school in Shanghai, China to highlight the ways in which individuals draw on notions of solid culture as a resource for claiming an identity position in relation to dominant cultural practices in the local context. In the section below, I discuss the internationalised school context and issues that emerge in this context in more detail.

The International School Context

Although designed for the children of highly mobile expatriates, international schools have evolved considerably since their inception, now taking on various configurations (Hill, 2006). The international school label has been extended by some researchers to encompass local schools that adopt international curricula and hire expatriate and local teaching faculty to teach middle class elites whose motivation for participating in international education is based on the accumulation of social capital (Lowe, 2000). These schools have been conceptualised in various ways. Hayden and Thompson (2013) refer to them as “Type C non-traditional international schools” whilst Tarc and Tarc (2015) employ the term “hybrid school.” Meanwhile, the author has proposed the term “internationalised” school in order to challenge previous typologies developed by researchers. Thus, Type C schools in the Chinese context can be reconceptualised as “Chinese internationalised schools,” who claim to deliver a synthesis of national and international curricula. However, in practice, these types of schools privilege the national

curriculum, which, in conjunction with symbolic routines, such as flag raising ceremonies and activities, could be said to be designed to inculcate a sense of loyalty and love for the country (Poole, 2019). In contrast, international curricula like the *IGCSE* (International General Certificate of Secondary Education) and *IBDP* (International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme) are utilised as a way to equip students with the necessary intercultural skills to negotiate a globalised world (Poole, 2019). Meanwhile, for middle-class parents, international education is not valued so much for its intercultural value as it is for its symbolic value as social and cultural capital.

In contrast to more traditional international schools which cater to diverse student and teacher bodies, internationalised schools are characterised by a more limited form of diversity mirroring, though perhaps more intensely, schools in other national contexts. In many cases, the student body will consist of a limited range of cultures and ethnicities, being largely dominated by “aspirant indigenous elites” (Lauder, 2007). The teaching body will also be similarly composed, with the majority of faculty being comprised of local teaching staff and complemented by the presence of expatriate teaching faculty.

However, the coexistence of national and international orientations is not without issue. It has been noted that in many international schools, the epistemologies and teaching strategies imported by Western expatriate staff become dominant and lead to marginalisation of local faculty’s knowledge and teacher identities (Lai, Li & Gong, 2016; Zhang, 2015). Transnational education programs have thus been criticised for being “knowledge capitalism,” “linguistic and cultural imperialism” or “ideological imperialism” (Zhang, 2015). This is not always the case. As will be discussed in further detail in the next section, expatriate faculty members in Chinese internationalised schools often face barriers in expressing their knowledge and can feel that their teacher identities are marginalised by institutional structures (Poole 2019). Inevitably, cultural misunderstanding and stereotyping cut both ways, particularly when frames of reference and assumptions about effective pedagogy clash amongst expatriate and local teachers and students.

Sadly, there is often a lack of support for teachers working in this kind of context to develop the ability to engage effectively with different assumptions about teaching and learning and to develop reflexivity. As discussed in Poole (2019), this support, if it is given at all, will typically take the form of a one-off session, usually reserved for the end of a term or the beginning of a new one, when teachers are disengaged and more focused on matters at hand, such as holiday or lesson plans. Ideally, professional development would provide teachers with the flexibility to suspend assumptions about what works and to synergise pedagogical insights from different educational cultures. This would involve problematising so called “Chinese” or “Western” ways of doing things to consider more critically the concrete assumptions that inform decisions around teaching content and pedagogical practices. In line with Dervin’s (2016) perspectives on critical interculturality, this means moving beyond solid notions of culture and the essentialist identities they engender. This paper next draws on the case study to discuss examples of solid identities that are often found in internationalised schools, and also illustrates a number of strategies that teachers employed in order to move beyond static notions of culture in order to develop hybrid identities.

International teachers in an Internationalised School in Shanghai, China: An Illustrative Case Study

Background

This research explored how four international school teachers constructed cross-cultural teacher identities in an internationalised school in Shanghai, China (pseudonym, WEST). WEST was a recently opened private boarding school in Shanghai that offered an “internationalised” curriculum

combining aspects of “Chinese” and “Western” approaches to learning. The school promoted an international perspective by offering international curricula such as the IGCSE (International General Certificate of Secondary Education) and IBDP (International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme) and employing local and expatriate faculty to deliver these courses. Three of the four teachers in the study were Western expatriates: Sophie (French), Tyron (South African) and Robert (New Zealand). The fourth, Daisy, was Chinese¹. Although advertised as a “hybrid” school, WEST’s curriculum focused primarily on the Chinese national curriculum. For example, primary and middle school students followed the local curriculum until grade 9, at which point they would sit the *Zhong Kao* exam (high school entrance examination). After this, they transitioned to an internationalised stream from grade 9 onwards in which they took IGCSE for a year and then IBDP for the final two years of high school.

The study utilised the concept of teacher identity in order to investigate the significations that the participants ascribed to their experiences of teaching in an internationalised school. Identity construction was conceptualised as experiential and discursive in nature, arising out of personal, professional and cross-cultural domains of experience, and articulated in the form of Gee’s (2014) notion of Discourse (narratives) and discourse (language features). Commensurate with identity as discursive in nature, narrative inquiry was employed as a guiding methodology, with semi-structured interviews utilised as the main instrument for data collection. Data for the study were collected over a two-year period, with interview data being collected in the first year, and follow-up interviews and supplemental data collected in the second year.

The Data

It was anticipated that working in a Chinese internationalised school would bring about a transformation in the participants’ identities as teachers, such as increased cultural empathy or adaptation of teachers’ beliefs about teaching and learning. However, findings revealed that the participants’ experiences of adapting to working in a Chinese school were far more complex and ambivalent than expected. Analysis of the interview data generated the following themes: *cultural chauvinism* (the retrenchment of Western ethnocentric beliefs about teaching and learning); *cultural insider* (the retrenchment of Chinese ethnocentric beliefs about teaching and learning), and *cultural mediator* (the decentering from ethnocentric beliefs and the synthesising of Chinese and Western approaches to teaching and learning).

Cultural chauvinism

Tyron and Robert struggled to reconcile their beliefs about teaching and learning (student-centred in nature) with what they perceived to be incompatible demands from the school’s leadership. These demands included teaching more to the test, adopting teacher-directed approaches, and combining “Western” and “Chinese” approaches to teaching and learning without these two terms being defined in any significant way. For Robert, the demands of teacher-directed approaches were equated with “a sort of old style of teaching that has changed in the West and perhaps China just hasn’t caught up with that yet. Maybe it’s, you know, part of the journey which it’s on.” Note that China is positioned as backwards whilst the West (which itself is homogenised) is taken to be more progressive. For Tyron, the schools’ demands to combine “Chinese” approaches to teaching and learning with “Western” approaches proved to be impossible to realise due to a lack of guidance from the principal:

They first said to us we have an international curriculum. We didn’t. They said, “No, it’s not good enough, we have to have a Chinese curriculum.” And these were the actual words from the principal: “with a touch of international in it.” And we say, “What are we supposed to do now?” Do we have to make it softer? Do we have to run

less or run more? Do we have to talk less in this class or do we have to talk more? Do we have to show more pictures? Do we have to – I don't know.

This is expressed in terms of a sense discontinuity or *dissonance*, that is, “when cultural difference does not “make sense” or it threatens to undermine our view of reality” (Shaules, 2007, p. 63). The international curriculum in Tyron’s excerpt does not form the bedrock of the curriculum but is presented as an embellishment. From Tyron’s perspective, the international aspect is effectively compartmented from the national through a process of what could be called “segmented-incorporation” (Lan, 2014). This process has been described as a subtle form of institutional segmentation that reinforces group boundaries (Lan, 2014). In Robert and Tyron’s narratives, the reinforcement of group boundaries is manifested in the retrenchment of an ethnocentric perspective that reaffirms their existing beliefs about student-centred and Chinese education as the Other. In attempting to explain this, it is necessary to return to the notion of critical interculturality. Robert and Tyron’s largely negative attitude towards China and Chinese education can be understood as a form of ethnocentrism. In this case, Western-centric approaches to teaching and learning as well as school governance are taken to be inherently superior to Chinese approaches, which are positioned as inferior. The fact that Tyron and Robert are incapable of decentering also suggests that they lack the reflexive skills needed to become conscious of negative stereotyping. Drawing upon the notion of cultural chauvinism (Holliday & Aboshiha, 2009), Tyron and Robert’s obvious ethnocentrism is effectively neutralised and made invisible to them because it is in continuity with their existing beliefs about teaching and learning. This kind of chauvinism also goes unnoticed because it suffuses the language and pedagogy of the IBDP, a course that is often taken to be the embodiment of intercultural education. For example, a number of position papers published by the IBO clearly situate the diploma programme within Western philosophical traditions, such as constructivism (Bullock, 2011) and Western humanism (Walker, 2010).

The retrenchment of Tyron and Robert’s ethnocentric beliefs can also be interpreted psychologically as a response to dissonance created between their conceptions of themselves as international teachers (that is, student-centred) and the localised identity of the school as a Chinese school. Perceiving their identities to be under threat, Robert and Tyron fortify the defences of their professional identities by mobilising aspects of the IBDP (such as constructivist assumptions about teaching and learning and Western assumptions about autonomy) that they take to be in continuity with their beliefs. However, this strategy is incapable of resolving the dissonance that was created between what was expected (student-centred learning, the pedagogy of international education) and what is actually encountered (a culture of learning that emphasised didactic or teacher-centric approaches). Based on this, dissonance can be conceptualised in terms of competing sets of scripts that are predicated upon conflicting norms and beliefs. The expatriate teachers on the one hand, equated “international” or “intercultural” education with Western-centric assumptions about culture and knowledge, which emphasised knowledge construction, equality, individuality, autonomy and agency. The school, on the other hand, was perceived by the participants to be informed by a script that emphasised hierarchy, collectivity, and cultural assumptions about institutional behaviour that valorised preserving the status quo above challenging it. For example, Robert noted that “*the school had no interest in what I thought. I was expected to simply do my job. Meetings were painful – simply a one-way series of instructions and explanations.* No discussion or debate. There was no collaborative teamwork.”

Cultural insider

In contrast to Robert and Tyron, Sophie had at her disposal a bicultural and bilingual perspective as a result of her fascination with China from a young age:

My mother gave me when I was ten years old a book about Chinese calligraphy. And I really loved it. And from this time, I decided that all the money that people will give me I will save it for later when I will be an adult when I go to China. That was my dream. And I read all the books that I could find about China, such as Chinese culture and calligraphy. I remember also that I watched a documentary with my father about Chinese culture in Su Zhou.

Significantly, Sophie utilises her knowledge of Chinese culture and ability to speak Chinese as a way to invoke a sense of status and prestige. This is revealed in the following excerpt in which Sophie explains that: “Chinese teachers, when they know you speak Chinese, you are a part of their world. They consider you as someone who can understand them. Otherwise you are just a foreigner who doesn’t get anything.” It is clear that Sophie distances herself from her expatriate colleagues, even referring to them as a “foreigner,” a term which conveys a sense of being an outsider and ignorant of how things are done. Therefore, it is more appropriate to call Sophie a cultural insider. She uses her knowledge of China for her own advantage rather than sharing it with expatriate colleagues. In many respects, Sophie’s experiences of working in China have resulted in a form of reverse ethnocentrism. She now considers Chinese culture to be superior to Western culture. One explanation for this reverse ethnocentrism is the fact that internationalised schools like WEST privilege Chinese approaches to teaching and school governance. Therefore, out of necessity, Sophie feels she has to adopt what she perceives to be a Chinese-centric perspective in order to be accepted as a legitimate teacher and, more strategically, to accumulate more social and cultural capital. Whilst her strategy was effective in advancing her career and resolving potential cognitive and cultural dissonance, it came at the expense of negating her “Western” identity by “going native,” thereby leading to the resurrection of ethnocentrism in a new form.

Cultural mediator

In contrast to the ethnocentric position adopted by Tyron, Robert and Sophie, Daisy presented herself as a cultural mediator. One of her suggestions for creating greater understanding between faculty was through collaboration:

I think we need to find a better way to help the Chinese and expatriate teachers to cooperate with each other. Do some research together and do the real co-teaching. I think that’s really important for a Chinese school. I’m not sure what is the real co-teaching [sic], but I guess the idea is the two teachers can make use of each other’s strength and try to incorporate the teaching content into one integrated part.

Rather than passing judgment on her expatriate colleagues, she acknowledges that both Chinese and expatriate perspectives contain strengths and weaknesses. In Daisy’s narrative, solid identities are seen as means to an end, a starting point for creating hybrid identities. This is in contrast to Robert and Tyron’s interview data, which was characterised by ethnocentrism and a lack of reflexivity. For Daisy, identifying these strengths and then combining them involves collaboration and criticality, the bracketing of solid identities that all too easily result in judgment. It is only by combining the best of each that cultural dissonance can be resolved. Her open-mindedness and reflexivity mean that she is able to develop a repertoire of bicultural experiences that result in hybridised identities.

Daisy also reported in other interviews a gradual shift in mind set from viewing cultural conflict between local and expatriate staff as inherently problematic, towards viewing it as an opportunity to explore differences and construct new ways of knowing based on cultural hybridity. Daisy’s data also revealed the presence of solid identity positions. For example, she referred to herself as a “teacher-

centred educator” but as a result of being exposed to international education as a teacher and a colleague to expatriate teachers, she came to define herself as an “internationalising teacher.” Although the expression may appear a little unidiomatic, the use of the present continuous conveys a sense of movement from one identity position (a “teacher-centred educator”) to another (a “real international teacher” as she expressed it). Therefore, Daisy is in a state of temporary liminality. Her identity as an “internationalising” teacher could be described as “liquid” as it is in a state of transition and uncertainty, whereas her past identity as a “teacher-centred educator,” as well as her future identity as an “international teacher,” are “solid.” Generalising from Daisy’s case, it could be asserted with some caution that teachers mobilise solid identity positions as one way of responding to the adaptive demands of Otherness and the need to establish legitimacy in the new context.

Discussion

The findings raise a number of implications for the development of interculturality in internationalised schools. Firstly, it cannot be assumed that teachers will simply become more intercultural as a result of working in a culturally diverse setting. This is illustrated by Tyron and Robert’s data. Without some form of intervention, teachers are likely to continue operating within the comfort zone of their ethnocentric frames of reference. However, as the findings suggest, interculturality is as much a cognitive process as it is an affective one (Wiseman *et al.*, 1989). Synthesising different cultural approaches to teaching is a complex task and requires time, training and collaboration. Significantly, Daisy, the youngest and seemingly least experienced of the participants, was the most interculturally competent. One of the reasons for this may be attributed to her relative lack of experience. As highlighted above, experience often leads to the reinforcement of solid identities. In contrast, Daisy’s professional identity was still very much a work in progress.

Daisy’s advanced intercultural skills may also be attributed to her familiarity with Chinese and English culture and her linguistic ability in both languages. As she was habituated to the local context, she could utilise her solid identity as a foundation on which to develop new hybrid identities that incorporated aspects of both Chinese and Western education. Whilst it would be unrealistic to expect all expatriate staff to become similarly bicultural, it is feasible for schools to utilise teachers like Daisy as cultural mediators. Exploring cultural differences with a cultural mediator enacts the very processes of being intercultural, such as being interactive and reflexive. There are also a number of other advantages of utilising mediators like Daisy for facilitating the development of interculturality. Firstly, mediators add an affective dimension to the intercultural process which is all too sadly missing from most workshops and training sessions on interculturality, which typically are somewhat abstract in nature. Secondly, because mediators like Daisy are able to decentre and combine different cultural perspectives, they both model and scaffold the intercultural process for monocultural teachers who may approach intercultural interactions from the perspective of solid frames of reference.

The findings also suggest what role solid identities and ethnocentrism might play in the development of critical interculturality. For example, the findings suggest that at the level of lived experience, culture is both solid and fluid. Hybridity is not just related to fluid identities, but also the co-existence and interpenetration of fluid and solid identities. Daisy, for example, positioned her teacher identity in relation to a former identity as a “teacher-centred educator.” Moreover, this former identity could be described as the bedrock on which Daisy constructed her present identity as an “internationalising teacher” and an emerging identity as a “real international teacher.” On the one hand, culture and cultural identity is not something that exists independently of individuals but is embodied and instantiated by individuals through interaction (culture as process) and is therefore hybrid in nature. On the other hand, culture is utilised solidly as a frame of reference by individuals and is therefore perceived to be solid in nature (culture as product). It is also necessary to caution against the

polarisation of liquid and solid identities by viewing liquid as positive and therefore desirable and solid as negative and therefore undesirable. As I have argued through this paper, solid identities are not inherently “wrong” or counterproductive but are necessary for developing intercultural identities. Furthermore, as illustrated by Robert’s data, solid identities also play a psychological role in bolstering professional identities that are perceived to be under threat and developing greater resilience and bolstering a positive sense of self in terms of self-efficacy.

To clarify, solid identities should not be utilised as ends in themselves but rather as a means to an end; to facilitate critical interculturality. As Daisy’s findings suggest, individuals embed emerging liquid identities within pre-existing solid identities. It can be seen that the process of developing critical interculturality and reflexivity is both *dialogic*, as Dervin has noted, and *dialectical* in nature. The process is potentially never-ending, but there are moments of permanent and temporary solidity when new experiences either reinforce or challenge pre-existing frames of reference. From this perspective, “solid” and “liquid” identities are not dichotomous or discrete but rather are dialogic in nature. Liquid identities coalesce into solid identities through interaction with others or with oneself in the form of inner-reflections or “I” positions (Hermans, 2001). These solid identities may assume a more permanent shape as frames of reference, such as Robert’s assertion that he was a student-centred teacher, or they may also be more transitory and utilitarian in nature (such as Daisy’s identification as an “internationalising teacher”). Based on this, a pre-requisite for developing a critical approach to being intercultural is to embed an emerging intercultural self within existing solid identities or what could be called “temporary final moments” in order to expose assumptions, biases and beliefs that may be ethnocentric in nature and to move beyond them in future interactions. The main point to underscore here is that individuals have agency over the construction of their identities, although this agency is always circumscribed by discourse and the discursive nature of the contexts of (global) interaction (Mockler, 2011; Watson, 2009).

A final implication based on the findings is that dissonance could be harnessed as a powerful tool for shaking teachers out of their comfort zones and making them conscious of their ethnocentrism and cultural chauvinism. In contrast to previous work on dissonance in international schools, which was largely seen as undesirable (e.g., Allan, 2002, 2003) a more nuanced and optimistic stance should be taken towards dissonance. Therefore, rather than trying to resolve such dissonance, it should be seen as a pre-requisite for the development of an intercultural self. Whilst dissonance can also lead to reflexivity, it can also lead to the retrenchment of existing frames of reference that preclude reflexivity. It can be seen that developing interculturality does not just depend on cognitive and affective dimensions but is also inherently ethical in nature, and care needs to be taken in considering how dissonance can be utilised and whether it could lead to side-effects, such as a loss of wellbeing or staff morale.

Conclusion

This paper has argued for the need to look at solid and liquid notions of interculturality from a more synergistic perspective and to better understand how individuals draw on such notions when constructing identity positions and negotiating an intercultural space within educational contexts. Within the particular context of an internationalised school, the paper has also discussed the important role of cultural mediators such as Daisy who are likely to be instrumental in helping others move away from static notions of “our culture” and “their culture” and to decentre from ethnocentric perspectives (Byram, Nichols & Stevens, 2001). In fact, it may be that such cultural mediators have a more powerful role to play than intermittent professional development sessions oriented towards interculturality. However, ultimately, in order for teachers to become more reflexive, school leaders need to be prepared to provide time, space and money for both expatriate and Chinese teaching staff to engage in

transformative identity work. School leaders also need to accept international teachers as complex humans who are not defined by their contract title or to which category or type they appear to belong but rather, as this study has shown, are active in defining themselves in ways that reinforce and contradict localised interpretations of international education. The presence of expatriate and local teaching faculty can create dissonance and misunderstanding, but dissonance and misunderstanding can also create opportunities for developing critical interculturality.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their comments on an earlier draft of this paper and the journal's editor, Dr. Troy McConachy, for assisting in the paper's evolution.

ⁱ Names of participants and the school are pseudonyms in order to ensure anonymity.