

Complexities of Shared Ethnicity, Immigrant Education, and Disabilities: Reconceptualizing Multicultural Special Education

Kim Fong Poon-McBrayer

**Department of Education Policy & Leadership,
The Education University of Hong Kong**

Abstract

This article draws insight from a narrative inquiry to examine the complexities of educating immigrant students with disabilities in which language, culture, and disability collide. Issues related to language-in-education policy, teacher preparation, and the proportion and identification of culturally and linguistically diverse students were primarily reviewed within multicultural and multilingual education conceptual frameworks in English speaking countries between English speaking teachers and non-English speaking students. Little is known about potentially more complicated situations such as those in which teachers and students have a shared ethnicity and dialects with different levels of proficiency. This article thus attempts to illustrate and map the complexity based on the insight from a narrative inquiry situated in an inclusive school setting of Hong Kong. Multiple sources of data were included for a thorough understanding of and analyses on the place, temporality, and sociality within the narrative

inquiry framework. Data were drawn from interviews, classroom observations, teacher diaries, school data, and student input. Analyses indicated that shared ethnicity and languages could complicate rather than simplify the teaching and learning contexts. The lived experiences of the special educator demonstrated and contextualised the complex issues of educating CLD children with ADHD of shared ethnicity in multilingual environments. Findings of this inquiry added an important dimension to immigrant and multicultural special education studies and concluded that current inquiry paradigm should be expanded to include shared ethnicity and different proficiency in shared dialects/languages.

Keywords: *multilingual special education; narrative inquiry; attention deficit hyperactivity disorder; Chinese immigrant students*

Introduction

Issues related to educational services for immigrant children have been primarily scrutinized within the context of bilingual and multicultural education for children from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds. Education involving CLD students with disabilities has been examined within the bilingual special education framework, the interface of bilingual education and special education (Baca & Amato, 1989). The existing literature is mostly based in English speaking countries between English speaking Caucasian teachers and non-Caucasian CLD students with a focus on language related disabilities (e.g., Artiles & Trent, 1994; Figueroa, Fradd, & Correa, 1989; Petrzela, 2010; Hart, 2009; Salend, Garrick Duhaney, & Montgomery, 2002). Comparative studies across continents from Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Britain, the Caribbean, to the United States also focused on teachers of the country of origin and students of immigrant and involuntary racial minorities (Gibson & Ogbu, 1991).

Key issues identified in the literature include over-representation in special education (e.g., Artiles & Trent, 1994; Dunn, 1968; Hosp & Reschly, 2004; Sullivan, 2011), under-representation in gifted education (e.g., Ford, 1998; Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008), identification and assessment issues and difficulties (e.g., Ortiz, 1997; Klingner & Artiles, 2006; Salend, Garrick Duhaney, & Montgomery, 2002), legal rights to appropriate education that addresses disabilities and cultural-language needs (e.g., Figueroa, Fradd, & Correa, 1989; Petrzela, 2010), and teacher preparation (e.g., Robertson, García, McFarland & Rieth, 2012; Trent & Artiles, 1998; Trent, Kea, & Oh, 2008), and experimentation of pedagogy (Goldstein, 1995) particularly in the areas of reading (e.g., Hart, 2009) and writing (e.g., Graves, Valles, & Rueda, 2000). Differences between the mother tongues and cultures of teachers and students due to differences in ethnicity are considered the main barriers to accuracy in identification and assessment, instructional quality, learning effectiveness, and the disproportionate representation of CLD students in specialized educational programs (Artiles, Kozleski, Trent, Osher, & Ortiz, 2010). Despite the increasing presence of various ethnic groups and languages in these English speaking countries, the current focus in the field of multicultural special education continues because the immigrants are largely of ethnicities other than the European origin speaking non-Germanic languages. For example, immigrants of Asian origins to the U.S. constituted over 40% and Spanish speaking immigrants from Mexico alone over 13% of the persons obtaining permanent residency in 2013 (Department of Homeland Security, 2014). As research on issues arisen from cultural-linguistic diversity and disabilities outside the English speaking countries is scarce, the mentioned focus in the literature is understandable.

The need to enrich and advance the field of multicultural special education remains, however. Multicultural special education, mostly referred to as bilingual special education in the

1980s and 1990s, began within the framework of equitable education for all and the concern over whether linguistic-cultural differences between teachers and students have disadvantaged students and limited their access to learning opportunities and appropriate instructions. Such a premise is applicable to potentially more complicated environments where multiple languages and/or dialects are present and immigrant students may be of the same ethnicity as their teachers. However, studies to examine the interactions of multilingual environments and disabilities are practically non-existent. Understanding of such complexities will offer significant insight into the conceptual, policy, and teacher education development of the field of multicultural special education across nations. As such, Hong Kong was selected as a study site for two reasons.

First, Hong Kong's linguistic and cultural landscapes are of great diversity. As a British colony before July 1997, Hong Kong's language policy was one of a 'superposed bilingualism' (So, 1989) of English and Chinese in that the bilingual situation was imposed as a result of colonization (Poon, 2004). After the handover of sovereignty to the Chinese government in 1997, the biliterate (competency in written Chinese and English) and trilingual policy (proficiency in Cantonese, Putonghua and spoken English) was put forward. Cantonese is the most common Chinese dialect spoken in Hong Kong and Putonghua is China's official dialect. The change in political landscape has made the influx of immigrants from Mainland China a daily phenomenon. A total of 732,649 mainland Chinese arrived in Hong Kong from 1998 to 2012 with an average of nearly 30% of them at school-age (Home Affairs Department & Immigration Department, 2012). The growing political and economic importance of Putonghua and Hong Kong's low birth rate have prompted many elementary schools to use Putonghua as the medium of instruction for the Chinese Language subject as a way to attract students to keep the schools alive (Ho & Goh, 2008). Second, no study can be located to examine situations associated with shared ethnicity

and dialects between teachers and students in the context of disability education, following the 1997 policy of inclusive education for students with disabilities and policy for support of Chinese immigrant students. Flowerdew and Leong (2010) observed that the shared ethnicity between Hong Kong Chinese teachers and Mainland Chinese immigrants does not exclude them from significant socio-political and socio-cultural differences. Their lived experiences will offer significant insight to further advance the field of multicultural special education and the impact of interactions between shared ethnicity and languages/dialects on learning and teaching in the presence of disabilities.

Conceptual Frameworks

Two conceptual frameworks are significant to set the foundation for the analysis of this inquiry: multicultural-multilingual special education and dual diversity. A brief critical review of each of them will provide an understanding of the aspects to be examined in this inquiry.

Multicultural Special Education

Multicultural special education has its roots in multicultural education. Multicultural education is often contextualized in the Civil Rights Movement (Sleeter & Grant, 1987). Multicultural education is defined as a concept, reform, and process (Banks, 2007). As a concept, multicultural education is to provide all students an equal opportunity to learn. According to multicultural education proponents, this requires providing space for all students' cultural, racial, and ethnic contexts to contribute to the learning process within class activities (Banks, 2007). Multicultural education is also identified as a school reform effort requiring a focus on both knowledge construction and content integration (Banks, 2006). This reform is conceived as an ongoing process, sharpening teachers' critical awareness of world views accessed within the learning process and their pursuit of understanding within the ever changing cultural contexts of school,

curriculum, and community (Gay, 2000). This culturally responsive teaching, according to Gay (2000), involves being attentive to the dynamic and complex relationship between culture, communication, teaching, and learning within the diverse classroom setting.

International research has long reported the myriad issues significant in multicultural school settings, mostly related to the impact of immigration, for example, acculturation (e.g., Eitle, Wahl, & Aranda, 2009; Portes, Fernandez-Kelly, & Haller, 2009); race, class, gender, and disability (Grant & Sleeter, 2006); bilingualism (e.g., Cummins, 1989; Patrinos & Velez, 2009); pedagogical and curricular development (e.g., Engel & Ortloff, 2009; Sturges & Locke, 2009); teacher preparation (e.g., Sleeter, 2001; Zeichner, 1992), and policymaking (e.g., Resnik, 2009).

Of the above issues, the policy on teacher qualifications and the training of highly qualified teachers for CLD students are central to effective instructions. However, little attention is given to preparing teachers for the swift racial transformation in schools (Frankenburg & Siegel-Hawley, 2008). In the U.S., for example, only 12.5% of teachers who reported having English language learners (ELLs) in their classrooms had at least eight hours of professional training around language diversity within a three-year period (U. S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2002). The deep connection between linguistic and cultural diversity (Faltis, 2008) makes it imperative to equip teachers with competence in linguistic and cultural diversity as they are the main variable influencing student success (Elmore & Burney, 1999). However, not only is the bulk of literature on concepts, principles, policies, and practices of special education in CLD environments derived from the English-speaking countries, it has failed to draw lived experiences of teachers and students in the classroom for grades K-12 (Sleeter & Grant, 1987). The significance of understanding what is actually

happening in those classrooms to build theories and found policymaking prompts the adoption of narrative inquiry for this study.

Complexity of Dual Diversity

The complexity of dual diversity is framed within the discourse of multicultural special education where CLD students are also identified with high incidence disabilities such as specific learning disabilities, attention deficit hyperactivity disorders, and mild intellectual disabilities (Harry, 2007). Key concerns of dual diversity encircle teachers' language competence in the students' mother tongues, teacher sensitivity toward students of linguistic and cultural differences, and accuracy of identification and assessment. These concerns are considered to be validated and reflected by disproportionality—over-representation of CLD students in special education and their under-representation in gifted education (e.g., Artiles, Kozleski, Trent, Osher, & Ortiz, 2010; Artiles & Trent, 1994; Džalalova & Raud, 2012; Ehlers-Zavala, 2011; Garcia & Ortiz, 2006; Liasidou, 2013; Ortiz, Robertson, Wilkinson, Liu, McGhee, & Kushner, 2011; Rodriguez, 1997).

The disproportionate representation of CLD students is one of the most persistent problems in special education, despite plentiful litigations and research on this issue (Skiba, et al., 2008). In the United States, litigations can be traced back to the 1950s (e.g., *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* in 1954) and studies to the 1960s (e.g., Dunn, 1968). In other words, this repeated problem has been scrutinized for over half a century. Dis-proportionality manifests issues associated with test bias, poverty, special education processes, inequity in general education, issues of behavioural management, and cultural mismatch or reproduction (Skiba et al., 2008).

Resulting from professional judgements affected by personal tolerance level of non-

compliance and differences in the social and cultural norms, dis-proportionality is prominent in high incidence disability categories such as learning disabilities, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and mild intellectual disabilities (Harry, 2007). These students can be disadvantaged in two ways. General education teachers may hesitate to refer them for special education services due to uncertainty as to whether their difficulties may result from acquiring a second language or a learning disability (U.S. Department of Education & National Institute of Health and Human Development, 2003). On the other hand, some teachers mistook the difficulties of acquiring a second language as indicators of the existence of language related learning disabilities. Cultural differences among students, families, and teachers are considered main contributors of overrepresentation (Harry, 2008; Trent, Kea, & Oh, 2008) because these differences are accounted for low expectations (Valencia, 2010) and cultural misunderstandings and clashes (Oberg, 1960). School officials also reported a lack of tools, procedures, and qualified professionals to effectively identify these students' difficulties (Zehler, Fleischman, Hopstock, Stephenson, Pendzick, & Sapru, 2003). Some recent studies (e.g., Morgan, Farkas, Hillemeier, & Maczuga, 2012) on the representation of CLD children found that African and Asian Americans were underrepresented in early intervention or early childhood special education programs and asserted the need to more effectively identify these students for equal opportunities to access early intervention and reduce their representation in special education programs at the later stages of education. For now, this issue persists and the quest for CLD students to have educational equity continues (e.g., Artiles, Kozleski, Trent, Osher, & Ortiz, 2010; Beratan, 2008; De Valenzuela, Copeland, Qi, & Park, 2006; Harry & Klingner, 2006).

Narrative Inquiry for Illustration

Researchers of multicultural education (e.g., Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Phillion, 2002)

specifically advocate narrative inquiry as a methodology to probe deep into participants' lived experiences and perspectives of their own experiences through a close examination of how people talk about events and experiences. In recent years, there has been an increasing focus on the little known experiences of the CLD population within the research community of narrative inquiry (Phillion, 2008), which Phillion (2002) and He (2003) termed as multicultural and cross-cultural narrative inquiry, which was subsequently considered a response to the need to advocate for social justice through research (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006). Researchers demonstrate their commitment to the people and the issues by also serving as concerned participants with the goal of bringing about a more equitable environment in their research settings (Phillion, He, and Connolly, 2007). This very same goal led to my adoption of this method for the current inquiry.

In 2010, I became aware through a former graduate student that Sara (alias), a special educator, was struggling with managing the behaviours of Eric, a 7-year old Chinese immigrant child identified with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in an elementary school. I was asked to give some advice. With Sara's consent, I spent 8 months using a narrative approach with a variety of data collection methods to enable a close-up examination of her and Eric's experiences to help identify issues and challenges. Specific data collection methods for this inquiry included: individual interviews of the participating teacher and student in the focal school; non-participant observations in and out of classrooms; teacher reflective journals, researcher field notes; and school documents for analysis of school profiles. Together, they become the field texts (data) used to construct the story (findings) (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) interlaced with information to allow readers to develop a point of view on the story.

In my interactions with Sara, we talked about her training backgrounds, teaching experiences, skills she considered essential to teach Chinese immigrant students with ADHD, her

views on cultures and languages between Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese, if and how Eric's cultural-linguistic backgrounds might affect teaching and learning, and reasons for her adoption of approaches to facilitate Eric's learning. Classroom observations focused on the execution of strategies, how Eric responded to instructions, and if and how ADHD and cultural-linguistic differences between the teacher and the student affected teaching and learning. Post-observation interviews of both the teacher and the student provided an opportunity for reflections and clarifications of what was happening.

Data Analysis

Narrative analysis is a higher order story that is informed by theoretical knowledge and actual events (Bailey & Jackson, 2003) and attempts to reduce the story to a set of elements that may reveal a particular case in a certain time or place (Richmond, 2002). Narrative analysis begins from the stand point of storyteller, or in this case Sara, to make sense of the storyteller's interpretations of people, events, organizations, norms and values, and future possibilities, and subsequent actions. Thus, narrative analysis contextualizes the sense-making process by focusing on the person. Verifications of interpretations with the participating special educator were done throughout the coding process. Based on the delineation of collected data, the story is mostly descriptive. The story of Sara is constructed from multiple unstructured face-to-face and phone interviews, her diaries (to express her feelings, thoughts, and frustrations), field notes based on observations of many Chinese language lessons involving the Eric, and interspersed with direct quotes from interviews. Sara's 30 diaries of varied intervals and length from two sentences to three pages were e-mailed to me throughout the study period. Post-observation interviews provided an opportunity for reflections and clarifications of what I thought was happening. Glimpses of the parents of Eric, the student concerned, in the background were spotted when Sara linked them to Eric's learning issues.

In the rest of the article, I will present the story of Sara and discuss it within the theoretical frameworks of multicultural special education. This article concludes that the provision of appropriate special education in multilingual societies where teachers and students have a shared ethnicity is more complex than those presented in the international literature where teachers and students are of different ethnicities and languages, that the story adds an important dimension to the field of multicultural special education at the international level, and that the narrative approach is effective in delineating the complexity arisen by shared ethnicity between teacher and student, multilingual environments, language-in-education policy, and disabilities.

The Story

To provide a conceptual framework for narrative inquiry and distinguish it from other methods, Connelly and Clandinin (2000) identified three dimensions that must be simultaneously explored: place, sociality, and temporality. Place refers to the specific physical boundaries of place or places where the inquiry and events take place. Sociality refers to two types of social conditions: (a) the existential conditions involving the environment, surrounding factors and forces, and people, that form each individual's context; and (b) the relationship between participant and inquirer. Temporality refers to the fact that events and people always have a past, present, and a future. Thus, the researcher should always try to understand people, places, and events as in process and transition. The story will be presented with the place first to be followed by the weaving of temporality and sociality.

Place: The School

The story took place in one of three elementary schools situated in a government housing complex for low income families and the majority of students resided in this complex. Some

students came from the private apartments surrounding the government housing complex. These dwellings were in a newly developed neighbourhood on the outskirts of the urban areas and the edge of the rural areas near a local university. The private apartments were of lower cost than similar complexes in urban areas because of its location.

Sociality

Existential Environments

This government-aided primary school was established by a local religious body in 1998 and had 30 classes for Grades 1 to 6, totaling about 1,000 students. The teaching team consisted of 26 teachers and three paraprofessionals. The school began to participate in inclusive education in 2005 with 20 students identified with SLD and/or ADHD mostly in Grades 2-3 during the school year of data collection. The school adopted the pull-out mode of instructional support for these students who went to the resource room for mathematics, Chinese language, and English language lessons. Sara was the only resource teacher in that school.

Participant and Inquirer

Sara's friend, a teacher in another school and a former student of mine, suggested that Sara contact me for some advice as she was troubled by the lack of progress made to manage the learning and behaviours of a child with ADHD in her resource room. I first paid a visit to Sara after school to chat informally to understand her concerns. It can be said that we begin our interactions through an informal consultative relationship. We jointly decided that it would be necessary for me to visit her classrooms to see things in action and to understand her perspectives of what was going on over a period of time. Once we agreed on adopting the narrative approach to understand the situation, Sara sought and obtained approval from the

principal for me to visit her classes and began to send electronic diaries to me. Sara was a bit nervous during my first two or three visits to her classroom as if I was going to evaluate her teaching. She became a lot more relaxed over time after numerous informal chats before or after the classroom visits, phone conversations, and electronic mails. Our relationship can be said to be more as friends toward the mid data collection period.

Temporality of the Story

Sara's Backgrounds

Sara, a Hong Kong Chinese, earned a degree in social science and another in special education. In addition, she also completed a 30-hour introductory course on inclusive education and considered her training very helpful to learn about categories of disabilities, concepts/framework of inclusive education, and student counselling. Sara was in her 11th year of teaching in elementary school settings at the time of data collection, nine of which she served as a special education teacher working with students with specific learning disabilities, autism, ADHD, and mild intellectual disabilities through pull-out lessons for core subjects such as Chinese Language. As the only special education teacher in her school, Sara taught non-core subjects such as health and social studies when she was not working with students with disabilities. The students identified with SLD and/or ADHD received small-group instructions from Sara except for Eric who was considered to have high learning needs. As the only Chinese immigrant student with ADHD in that school, Eric came to her alone for his Chinese Language lessons.

Eric the Chinese Immigrant Student with ADHD

The 7-year-old Eric, who presented significant challenges to Sara, came from Mainland China at the age of 3 and lived in a staff residence of a local university where his father was on faculty.

For reasons unknown to the school, Eric's parents decided to transfer him to this local school shortly after the beginning of second grade. He had only been in this school for 4 months at the time of this inquiry. Eric spent 2 years in a university-operated kindergarten where his father was a professor and 1 year in an international school, both of which used English as the medium of instruction. Additionally, both his sister and their living-in Filipino maid spoke English in their interactions. Eric, therefore, spoke fluent English which was not only his preferred language but his de facto mother tongue. Eric's parents, however, spoke the Chinese national dialect, Putonghua, at home. Comparatively speaking, Eric was a lot more proficient in Putonghua than Cantonese. He became agitated when required to speak in Chinese. When doing Chinese language class work or quizzes, he exhibited anxiety and anger through moving about and finger biting. Internal curriculum-based assessments judged that Eric's English proficiency was at 4th grade level. He also won first place in English writing competition of his grade.

Eric was diagnosed with ADHD in kindergarten. His parents employed a behavioural therapist to help him at home for 5 months prior to his enrolment in Grade 1. In addition to ADHD, Sara and other teachers believed that Eric also had specific learning disabilities in Chinese language as his word recognition and reading comprehension in Chinese were well behind his peers. She considered his inability to pay attention as his main difficulty and his mother's objection for him to take medication as the main cause for his fluctuations of attention span, mood swings, and consequent misbehaviours. Other learning behaviours that concerned teachers of the same school included his difficulty in copying information from the board to paper, remembering to record homework in the student handbook, and lining up to exit or enter classrooms. When he was frustrated, he sometimes pulled hair and screamed. Other teachers left him alone to avoid agitating him.

Sara's Perspective of Eric's Home Conditions

Sara emphasized that Eric generally enjoyed the school. She considered Eric's home environment as positive while she acknowledged that parents were absent from home a lot, leaving the children with the living-in domestic helper. Sara considered Eric's father very cooperative in that he helped Eric to do his homework and recorded his home behaviors for teachers' information. On the other hand, she felt that the mother might have put more pressure on Eric to perform while she was friendly with teachers and taught Eric to follow classroom manners generally practised by other children.

Sara's Choice of Teaching Approaches.

Throughout our many conversations and her diaries, Sara asserted that she had acquired skills necessary to teach students with ADHD effectively, that she was perceived as the expert in specific learning disabilities and ADHD in her school, and that other teachers looked up to her for solutions when needed. Highly related to her special education training, Sara considered it important and effective to establish a routine for learning activities and incentives to encourage desired behaviours that would benefit learning. Therefore, she adopted the same sequence of learning activities in each lesson with a sticker-system to encourage Eric to concentrate and participate in learning activities. Sara typically tried to cover the same amount of content as required by the Chinese language curriculum for all students. Her individual lessons for Eric typically began in English, instead of Cantonese, with a reminder of expected behaviours and the need for Eric to focus, followed by the presentation of photos of objects on a computer screen to introduce the key vocabularies to be covered. Sara would then use flash cards with both words and pictures to strengthen Eric's recognition of the target words and asked him to make simple sentences with flash cards. The learning activities through the use of software programs and flash

cards were meant to provide multisensory input to increase learning. Lastly, she guided Eric to complete a work sheet using the words to make sentences in writing. She contended that drill and practice through guided practices were fundamental to improve and ensure learning of the Chinese language.

Struggles with Language Competence

Even though Sara believed that Eric should be instructed in English and Putonghua and that she was supposed to use Putonghua according to the school policy, she alternated between Cantonese and Putonghua because of her limited proficiency in Putonghua. When Eric expressed difficulty to understand the lesson content and learning activities, she switched to English. Because of her limited proficiency in English, she would use Cantonese or Putonghua again. Basically Sara switched between the Chinese dialects and English in an effort to help Eric access the curriculum.

Eric was repeatedly observed to have tremendous difficulty to focus when he could not understand Sara's instructions, both when she used Cantonese that he had greatest difficulty with or English/Putonghua with which Sara struggled. Sometimes he would correct her English when he figured out what she was trying to say. The frequent consequent behaviour was to ask "*what did you just say?*" and "*can I go play now?*" If the lesson remained difficult to understand, he would get out of seat and go to the play area of the classroom. His irritability level was aggravated when Sara repeatedly reminded him of the need to focus so that he could progress at the same pace as his peers. In great despair, she sometimes threatened to report his behaviours to the assistant principal for disciplinary action. Sara ended a few lessons in total exhaustion and tears.

In our post-observation conversations, she repeatedly expressed with confidence that Eric's misbehaviours probably resulted from missing medication since his mother did not want him to be medicated for ADHD. When asked if he could be frustrated by not understanding instructions in unfamiliar dialects, she disagreed and did not think that Eric had trouble to understand her instructions as they were both Chinese.

(1) FRAMING THE EXPERIENCES

The narrative inquiry of Sara's lived experiences with Eric has richly reflected the potential struggles and challenges confronting special educators in multilingual and multicultural school environments of Hong Kong. As analyzed above, Eric was fluent in English with adequate proficiency in Putonghua but limited proficiency in Cantonese. On the other hand, Sara was fluent in Cantonese with rather limited proficiency in both Putonghua and English. The situation was further complicated by the school policy to have Putonghua, which was not mastered by either one of them, as the medium of instruction.

The existing literature in multicultural special education has so far concentrated on issues related to different ethnicities between teacher and students. Teachers of the same ethnicity as their students are considered beneficial to the CLD students under the assumption that they speak the student's mother tongue and understand students' home cultures. This conceptual framework is not applicable to the story of this inquiry. Different from the typical participants presented in the existing literature and unlike other ethnic minorities in Hong Kong, the Chinese immigrant children are considered part of the ethnic majority. However, the core issue remains. Sara and Eric grew up speaking different Chinese dialects despite their close proximity geographically. Their shared ethnicity also led Sara to attribute Eric's difficulties solely to the presence of ADHD without recognizing the potential impact of her lack of proficiency in Putonghua and

Eric's in Cantonese. Her lack of awareness of the impact of linguistic differences mirror that of teachers who are of a different racial group from their students and do not speak their students' home language. This phenomenon can be expected to be seen in a number of schools in Hong Kong, given that Chinese immigrant students are now found in almost all Hong Kong schools and that the current policy does not require special education teachers to have any proficiency in Putonghua when they are involved in teaching Chinese language for students with disabilities. In sum, this story necessitates an expansion of current theories and issues raised in the field of multicultural special education which tend to focus on bilingualism and bilingual settings. Larger scale qualitative and quantitative studies to involve teachers and students in similar situations to refine implications from or further affirm this story are warranted. Areas of inquiries that may aid theoretical refinement include (a) teacher competency in relevant languages, disabilities, and interactions between language acquisition and language related disabilities; (b) teacher understanding of cultural and linguistic diversity of immigrant students of shared ethnicity; (c) assessment of students' proficiency in different dialects to facilitate decisions on the use of appropriate language-in-education and the match between teachers with appropriate linguistic and cultural competence.

In addition to theories, this story illuminates the need for policy refinement. Sara's lack of proficiency in Putonghua reflects the impact of the current policy where special education teachers, unlike Chinese language teachers, are not required to pass the benchmark test on Putonghua even when they are responsible for Chinese language lessons in Hong Kong. Such a policy loophole trickles down to inadequacy in training programs and the eventual student outcomes in schools. The current policy reflects a lack of attention by Hong Kong policymakers to the intricacy as illustrated and its adverse impact in education for Chinese immigrants. The

concept of multicultural special education as advocated in the international literature together with the unique issues illustrated by the story warrants sensible policy considerations in training requirements and qualifications for special education teachers in inclusive settings to bring improvement both in teacher skills and paradigmatic change (Peterson & Showalter, 2010).

Lastly, the story in this inquiry has illustrated and contextualized the complexity through a rare close-up portrayal of a special educator's experiences in teaching a child of shared ethnicity with seemingly similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds alongside the presence of ADHD. The contextualisation makes generalisation possible as other special education teachers in Hong Kong general schools are typically involved in Chinese language teaching without meeting language competence requirements and have a shared ethnicity with Chinese immigrant students. Such a unique situation contributes to an additional dimension for studies in and enriches the existing framework of multicultural special education. The narrative method that requires an in-depth engagement with and understanding of the participant's experience has thus proved its effectiveness to understand and contextualize the complexity of the interplay of shared ethnicity, immigrant education, and disabilities.

References:

Artiles, A. J., Kozleski, E. B., Trent, S. C., Osher, D., & Ortiz, A. (2010). Justifying and explaining dis-proportionality, 1968-2008: A critique of underlying views of culture.

Exceptional Children, 76(3), 279-299.

Artiles, A. J. & Trent, S. C. (1994). Over-representation of minority students in special education: A continuing debate. *Journal of Special Education, 27(4), 410-437.*

- Baca, L. & Amato, C. (1989). Bilingual special education: Training issues. *Exceptional children*, 56(2), 168.
- Bailey, D. M., & Jackson, J. M. (2003). Qualitative data analysis: Challenges and dilemmas related to theory and method. *The American journal of occupational therapy*, 57(1), 57-65.
- Banks, C. A. (2007). Families and teachers working together for school improvement. In J. A. Banks & C. A. Banks (Eds), *Multicultural education: Issues and perspectives* (6th ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Banks, J. A. (2006). *Cultural diversity and education: Foundations, curriculum, and teaching*. Boston: Pearson.
- Banks, J. A. (2007). Multicultural education: Characteristics and goals. In J. A. Banks & C. A. Banks (Eds), *Multicultural education: Issues and perspectives* (6th ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Beratan, G. (2008). The song remains the same: transposition and the disproportionate representation of minority students in special education. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 11(4) 334-354.
- Brown v. Topeka, Kansas, Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).
- Connelly, F.M. & Clandinin, D.J. (2000). Stories of experience and narrative inquiry. *Educational Researcher*, 19(5), 2-14.
- Cummins, J. (1984) *Bilingual education and special education: Issues in assessment and pedagogy*. San Diego: College Hill.
- Cummins, J. (1989). *Empowering minority students*. Sacramento: California Association for Bilingual Education.
- De Valenzuela, J. S., Copeland, S. R., Qi, H.C., & Park, M. (2006). Examining educational equity: Revisiting the disproportionate representation of minority students in special education. *Exceptional Children*, 72(4), 425-441.

Department of Homeland Security. (2014). *Yearbook of immigration statistics: 2013*. Retrieved from <http://www.dhs.gov/yearbook-immigration-statistics-2013-lawful-permanent-residents>

Džalalova, A. & Raud, N. (2012). Multicultural competence and its development in students of teacher education curricula. *Problems of Education in the 21st Century*, 40, 65-74.

Dunn, L.M. (1968). Special education for the mildly retarded. Is much of it justifiable?

Exceptional Children, 23, 5-21.

Ehlers-Zavala, F. P. (2011). History of bilingual special education. *Advances in Special Education*, 21, 343-361.

Eitle, T. M., Wahl, A. M. G., & Aranda, E. (2009). Immigrant generation, selective acculturation, and alcohol use among Latina/o adolescents. *Social Science Research*, 38(3), 732-742.

Elmore, R. F. & Burney, D. (1999). Investing in teacher learning: Staff development and instructional improvement. In L. Darling-Hammond & G. Sykes (Eds). *Teaching as the learning profession: Handbook of policy and practice*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Engel, L. C., & Ortloff, D. H. (2009). From the local to the supranational: Curriculum reform and the production of the ideal citizen in two federal systems, Germany and Spain. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 41(2), 179-198.

Faltis, C. J. (2008). Editorial. *Multicultural Perspectives*, 10, 183.

Figueroa, R. A., Fradd, S. H., & Correa, V. I. (1989). Bilingual special education and this special issue. *Exceptional Children*, 56(2), 174-178.

Flowerdew, J., and S. Leong. (2010). Presumed knowledge in the discursive construction of socio-political and cultural identity. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 42, 2240-2252.

- Ford, D. (1998). The underrepresentation of minority students in gifted education: Problems and promises in recruitment and retention. *Journal of Special Education*, 32(1), 4-14.
- Ford, D. Y., Grantham, T. C., & Whiting, G. W. (2008). Culturally and linguistically diverse students in gifted education: Recruitment and retention issues. *Exceptional Children*, 74(3), 289-306.
- Frankenburg, E. & Siegel-Hawley, G. (2008). *The civil rights project: Are teachers prepared for the racially changing schools?* Retrieved from <http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/k-12-education/integration-and-diversity/are-teachers-prepared-for-racially-changing-schools/frankenburg-are-teachers-prepared-racially.pdf>
- Garcia, S. B. & Ortiz, A. A. (2006). Preventing disproportionate representation: Culturally and linguistically responsive pre-referral interventions. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 38(4), 64–68.
- García, S. B., & Ortiz, A. A. (2013). Intersectionality as a Framework for Transformative Research in Special Education. *Multiple Voices for Ethnically Diverse Exceptional Learners*, 13(2), 32-47.
- Gay, G. (2000). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Gibson, M.A. & Ogbu, J.U. (1991). *Minority status and schooling: A comparative study of immigrant and involuntary minorities*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc.
- Goldstein, B. (1995). Critical pedagogy in a bilingual special education classroom. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 28(8), 463-475.
- Grant, C., & Sleeter, C. (2006). *Turning on learning: Five approaches to multicultural teaching plans for race, class, gender, and disability*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

- Graves, A. W., Valles, E. C., & Rueda, R. (2000). Variations in interactive writing instruction: A study in four bilingual special education settings. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice (Lawrence Erlbaum)*, 15(1), 1-9.
- Harry, B. (2007). The disproportionate placement of ethnic minorities in special education. In L. Florian (Ed), *The SAGE handbook of special education*. London: Sage.
- Harry, B. (2008). Family-professional collaboration with culturally and linguistically diverse families: Ideal vs. reality. *Exceptional Children*, 72, 372-388.
- Harry, B. & Klingner, J. (2006). *Why are so many minority students in special education? Understanding race and disability in schools*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Hart, J. E. (2009). Strategies for culturally and linguistically diverse students with special needs. *Preventing School Failure*, 53(3), 197-208.
- He, M.F. (2003). *A river forever flowing: Cross-cultural lives and identities in the multicultural landscape*. Greenwich: Information Age.
- Ho, K.T. & Goh, Y.S. (2008). Challenges of Chinese language education in multi-lingual societies: Hong Kong and Singapore. *International Education Studies*, 1(4), 44-52.
- Home Affairs Department and Immigration Department.(2012). *Statistics on the new arrivals from the Mainland (Fourth Quarter of 2012)*. Retrieved from http://www.had.gov.hk/file_manager/tc/documents/public_services/services_for_new_arrivals_from_the_mainland/report_2012q4.pdf
- Hosp, J. L. & Reschly, D. J. (2004). Disproportionate representation of minority students in special education: Academic, demographic, and economic predictors. *Exceptional Children*, 70(2), 185-199.
- Klingner, J. & Artiles, A. (2006). English language learners struggling to learn to read: Emergent research on linguistic differences and learning disabilities. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 39(2), 99-156.

- Ladson-Billings, G. & Tate, W. F. (2006). *Education research in the public interest: Social justice, action, and policy*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Liasidou, A. (2013). Bilingual and special educational needs in inclusive classrooms: Some critical and pedagogical considerations. *Support for Learning, 28*(1), 11-16.
- Morgan, P. L., Farkas, G., Hillemeier, M. M., & Maczuga, S. (2012). Are minority children disproportionately represented in early intervention and early childhood special education? *Educational Researcher, 41*(9), 339-351.
- Oberg, K. (1960). Adjustment to new cultural environments. *Practical Anthropology, 7*, 170-179.
- Ortiz, A. (1997). Learning disabilities occurring concomitantly with linguistic differences. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 30*(3), 321-332.
- Ortiz, A. A., Robertson, P. M., Wilkinson, C. Y., Liu, Y., McGhee, B. D., & Kushner, M. I. (2011). The role of bilingual education teachers in preventing inappropriate referrals of ELLs to special education: Implications for response to intervention. *Bilingual Research Journal, 34*(3), 316-333.
- Patrinis, H. A., & Velez, E. (2009). Costs and benefits of bilingual education in Guatemala: A partial analysis. *International Journal of Educational Development, 29*(6), 594-598.
- Peterson, P., & Showalter, S. (2010). Meeting the need for special education teachers for culturally linguistically diverse students with disabilities. *Journal of College Teaching & Learning, 7*(10), 7-10.
- Petrzela, N. (2010). Before the federal bilingual education act: Legislation and lived experience in California. *Peabody Journal of Education, 85*(4), 406-424.

- Phillion, J. (2002). *Narrative inquiry in a multicultural landscape: Multicultural teaching and learning*. Westport: Ablex.
- Phillion, J. (2008). Multicultural and cross-cultural narrative inquiry into understanding immigrant students' educational experience in Hong Kong. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative Education*, 38(3), 281-293.
- Poon, A.Y.K. (2004). Language policy of Hong Kong: Its impact on language education and language use in post-handover Hong Kong. *Journal of Taiwan Normal University: Humanities & Social Sciences*, 49(1), 53-74.
- Portes, A., Fernández-Kelly, P., & Haller, W. (2009). The adaptation of the immigrant second generation in America: A theoretical overview and recent evidence. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 35(7), 1077-1104.
- Resnik, J. (2009). Multicultural education—good for business but not for the state? IB curriculum and the global capitalism. *British Journal of Educational Studies* 57(3), 217-244.
- Richmond, H. (2002). Learner's lives: A narrative analysis. *The Qualitative Report*, 7(3).
Retrieved from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR7-3/richmond.html>
- Robertson, P., García, S., McFarland, L., & Rieth, H. (2012). Preparing culturally and linguistically responsive special educators: It "Does" take a village. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Teaching & Learning*, 2(3), 115-130.
- Rodriguez, D. (1997). Curriculum competencies of bilingual special education teachers: A perception from field specialists. *ETD Collection for Fordham University*. Paper AI9809014.
Retrieved from <http://fordham.bepress.com/dissertations/AAI9809014>
- Salend, S. J., Garrick Duhaney, L. M., & Montgomery, W. (2002). A comprehensive approach to identifying and addressing issues of disproportionate representation. *Remedial & Special Education*, 23(5), 289.

- Skiba, R. J., Simmons, A. B., Ritter, S., Gibb, A. C., Rausch, M., Cuadrado, J., & Chung, C. (2008). Achieving equity in special education: History, status, and current challenges. *Exceptional Children, 74*(3), 264-288.
- Sleeter, C.E.& Grant, C.A. (1987). An analysis of multicultural education in the United States. *Harvard Educational Review, 57*(4), 421-444.
- Sleeter, C.E. (2001). Preparing teachers for culturally diverse schools: Research and the overwhelming presence of whiteness. *Journal of Teacher Education, 52*(2), 94-106.
- So, D.W.C. (1989). Implementing mother-tongue education amidst societal transition from diglossia to triglossia in Hong Kong. *Language and Education, 3*(1), 29-44.
- Sturgess, J., & Locke, T. (2009). Beyond Shrek: Fairy tale magic in the multicultural classroom. *Cambridge Journal of Education, 39*(3), 379-402.
- Sullivan, A. L. (2011). Disproportionality in special education identification and placement of English language learners. *Exceptional Children, 77*(3), 317-334.
- Trent, S. C. & Artiles, A. J. (1998). Multicultural teacher education in special and bilingual Education. *Remedial & Special Education, 19*(1), 2-6.
- Trent, S. C., Kea, C. D., & Oh, K. (2008). Preparing preservice educators for cultural diversity: How far have we come? *Exceptional Children, 74*(3), 328-350.
- U. S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2002). *Schools and staffing survey, 1999-2000*. Retrieved from <http://www.nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2002313>
- U.S. Department of Education & National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

(2003). *National symposium on learning disabilities in English language learners.*

Symposium summary. Washington: Authors.

Valencia, R. (2010). *Dismantling contemporary deficit thinking: Educational thought and Practice.* London: Routledge.

Xu, S., Connelly, F., He, M., & Phillion, J. (2007). Immigrant students' experience of schooling: A narrative inquiry theoretical framework. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 39(4), 399-422.

Zehler, A. M., & Fleischman, H. L., Hopstock, P. J., Stephenson, T. G., Pendzick, M. L., & Sapru, S. (2003). *The descriptive study of services to LEP students and LEP students with disabilities.* Office of English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement for LEP Students. Arlington: Development Associates, Inc.

Zeichner, K.M. (1992). *National Center for Research on Teacher Learning special report:*

Educating teachers for cultural diversity. Retrieved from

<http://education.msu.edu/NCRTL/PDFs/NCRTL/SpecialReports/sr293.pdf>