

Research Findings

November 2006

Chinese pupils' experiences within British and American educational contexts

The track record of research into Chinese pupils' experiences of education in British and American schools is limited. Where they *do* appear in the literature, they are often narrowly stereotyped and homogenized as a group. This project was carried out by Harris Hadjithemistos, with Ian Law and Carmen Lau at the University of Leeds. The project sought to investigate the evidence regarding learning experiences of Chinese pupils within the British educational context and also with respect to performance and racism in American schools. It focused particularly on educational performance, racism and discrimination and teacher's perceptions of Chinese identity.

1. While Chinese pupils stand out as a high achieving ethnic minority group within the British educational context, there is, however, a remarkable paucity of data regarding their learning experiences and identities (Francis and Archer 2005a).
2. There is a clear failure of responsible educational bodies, researchers and policy makers to keep pace with the evolution of this ethnic minority group and examine the dynamics of its construction (Archer and Francis 2005b).
3. The exclusion and hostility that the Chinese in Britain and America have experienced has emphasised the need to develop community organizations and networks. Such structures have been used as a means of strengthening the bonds of their community, surviving drastic social change, improving their social and economic position by providing rich forms of social capital (Benton and Pieke 1998, Kaufman 2004).
4. Despite all the difficulties that this ethnic minority group has been confronted with, it has managed to make a significant contribution to many aspects of both British and

American societies (Cheng 1994).

Educational Performance

Data coming from individual studies reveals the high educational performance of Chinese pupils in terms of achievement and progress within the British educational context (Gillborn and Gipps 1996).

Three key factors which indicate the outstanding educational performance of Chinese pupils were identified: firstly, their tendency to achieve very high scores, secondly, their high proportional rates of progressing into post-compulsory and higher education and thirdly the similar performance of Chinese boys and girls (Francis and Archer 2005c).

Over 75% of Chinese pupils gain five or more GCSE A*-C passes in comparison to 51% of white and 65% of Indian pupils. In addition, an enormous 90% of them progress into post-16 education (Archer and Francis 2005a).

The positive scene of Chinese pupils' high achievement and progress within the British educational context has led Anglo researchers to "label" and simplistically present this ethnic minority group as a "success story". Although this is a positive stereotype, it does homogenize and underestimate their diverse experiences and serves as a means of masking the inequalities facing these pupils (Francis and Archer 2005c, Law 2004).

This is worth lengthy consideration since all stereotypes, whether positive or negative, can provide the fabric for racist re-readings and pathologisation

(Francis and Archer, 2005c).

Chinese pupils have not been positioned as educationally and/or socially problematic as their counterparts from other ethnic minority groups due to their high educational achievement and progress (Francis and Archer 2005c).

However, discrimination still exists from a western liberal perspective, and certainly from a Eurocentric child development perspective, as Chinese family values and practices regarding education are viewed as problematic and even pathological (Francis and Archer, 2005a:106).

There is a need for future research to assess Chinese pupils' approaches to learning. In addition, there is a need to not only investigate and explain, but also to change the relationship between their high achievement and progress and their positioning as targets of hostility and stereotyping.

Racism and Discrimination

Although the issue of racism remains a potent force within contemporary British schools, it has, however, long been sidelined and marginalised from discussion within the British educational context (Archer and Francis 2005a).

Chinese pupils are constantly confronted with racism, either verbal abuse or racially motivated attacks, and discrimination in British and American schools. Such incidents are relatively an everyday phenomenon and certainly not extraordinary (Law 2004, Archer and Francis 2005a).

Chinese pupils are a target of racist

discourses that focus on a number of embodied Chinese identities, particularly on language and physical appearance. They are also stereotyped as extremely hardworking, diligent, quiet, passive and naturally clever (Archer and Francis 2005b).

Acts of extreme and severe harassment and discrimination facing Chinese pupils are more persistent in American schools. Chinese Pupils were observed and reported to being pushed, punched, teased and mocked by their non-Asian peers (Rosenbloom and Way 2004).

Incidents of racism and discrimination have severe impact on Chinese pupil's emotional and psychological development. It was observed that low self-esteem; depression and negative emotions towards their schools and peers were more likely among them (Rosenbloom and Way 2004).

The emphasis upon self-reliance in some Chinese families and limited verbal interaction between parents and children (due to language barriers Sham and Woodrow, 1998) may intensify feelings of discrimination and isolation.

Further research is required to examine Chinese pupils' experiences with respect to racism and discrimination and to develop changes in the relationship between their school life experiences and their relationships with their peers.

Constructing teachers' perceptions through popular "laddish" masculinities

The context of the notion of "laddism"

or of "laddish behavior" currently deployed in educational policy discourse and the way it impacts on perceptions about the ideal child has long gone unanalysed and unarticulated (Archer and Francis 2005b).

Western constructions of childhood and youth associate the ideal child with an assertive, challenging, confident and middle-class white boy. Against such stereotype, pupils from different ethnic backgrounds are judged negatively and are narrowly stereotyped and homogenized (Archer and Francis 2005b).

British teachers position Chinese pupils in relation to Western constructions of childhood and youth. Therefore, they develop extremely stereotypical views of Chinese pupils as deferent, collectivist, conformist, entrepreneurial and conforming to Confucian values (Francis and Archer 2005b).

British teachers construct "Chineseness" as being discursively separated from "laddishness" or "normal masculinity". They argue that Chinese pupils not only engage in the "wrong" approaches to learning but they also concentrate on hard-work rather than engaging in laddish pursuits (Archer and Francis 2005b).

Any deviation from the "normal" Chinese masculinity was perceived by British teachers as "special cases" deriving not from natural attributes but from external pressures such as peer influence (Archer and Francis 2005b).

There is opportunity here for future research to examine and investigate the implications that dominant Western discourses and learning models have on teachers' perceptions about Chinese pupils. In addition, it should seek to

change the relationship between such perceptions and the ways teachers construct Chinese identity.

References

- Archer, L. and Francis, B. (2005a) 'Constructions of racism by British Chinese pupils and parents'. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 8, (4), pp. 387-407
- Archer, L. and Francis, B. (2005b) 'They never go off the rails like other ethnic minority groups: Teachers' constructions of British Chinese pupils' gender identities and approaches to learning', *British Journal of the Sociology of Education*, 26, (2), pp. 165-182
- Cheng, Y. (1994) *Education and Class: Chinese in Britain and the US*, Aldershot: Avebury.
- Francis, B. and Archer, L. (2005a) 'British-Chinese pupils' and parents' constructions of the value of education', *British Educational Research Journal*, 31, (1), pp. 89-108
- Francis, B. and Archer, L. (2005b) 'Negotiating the dichotomy of Boffin and Triad: British-Chinese pupils' constructions of 'laddism' ', *The Sociological Review*, 53, (3), pp. 495-521
- Francis, B. and Archer, L. (2005c) 'British Chinese pupils' constructions of gender and learning' *Oxford Review of Education*, 31' (4), pp. 497-515
- Gillborn, D. and Gipps, D. (1996) *Recent Research on the achievements of ethnic minority groups*,. London: HMSO
- Kaufman, J. (2004) 'The Interplay between Social and Cultural Determinants of School Effort and Success: an investigation of Chinese-Immigrant and Second-Generation Chinese Students' perceptions towards school', *Social Science Quarterly*, 85, (5), pp. 1275-1298
- Law, I. (2004) *Chinese Action Research Project Final Report: Household needs, public services and community organisations* Leeds: Centre for Ethnicity and Racism Studies.
- Rosenbloom, S. R. and Way, N. (2004) 'Experiences of discrimination among

African American, Asian American, and Latino Adolescents in an urban High School', *Youth and Society*, 35, (4), pp. 420-451

Sham, S. and Woodrow, D (1998) 'Chinese Children and their Families in England', *Research Papers in Education*, 13, (2), pp. 203-226

For further information on this study, contact either:

Harris Hadjithemistos,
E-mail: harris_hadji@hotmail.com
Tel: 07891745948

Ian Law and Carmen Lau
School of Sociology and Social Policy,
University of Leeds, Leeds, LS2 9JT.
E-mail:
i.g.law@leeds.ac.uk; edu2cl@leeds.ac.uk
Tel: 0113-343-4410