



Chinese and Canadian teachers implement a hybrid Sino-Canadian curriculum: A multiliteracies perspective



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HIGHLIGHTS

- Chinese and Canadian teachers produced a hybrid Sino-Canadian curriculum.
- They tried to enable students' multilayered identities.
- They built in multiple literacy practices and modes of representations.
- Certain power relations limited their space to actualize the school's enriching biliteracy policy.
- Suggestions are provided for teacher education in transnational arenas.

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports one part of an ethnographic case study on a Sino-Canadian transnational education programme in southern China. The framework of multiliteracies pedagogy elucidates data collected from classroom observations and teacher interviews. Key findings relate Chinese and Canadian teachers' efforts to nurture emerging global citizens' multilayered linguistic and cultural identities in response to the school's hybrid Sino-Canadian curriculum. Data also intimate literacy teachers' power negotiations pertaining to modality, regional/international languages, the school's imbalanced emphasis on English curricula, and local and global accountability models by building in multiple literacy practices and modes of representations to cater to students' diversified needs.

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1. Introduction

The school is indeed trying to combine the East and the West ... However, in regard to reality, school administrators, students, and even teachers tend to think that the programme is sufficient if students can just read and understand Mandarin. Especially in regard to students' future adaptations to English-only environments, people will tend to think that it is more important and realistic to focus on English than on Mandarin at this school. (Mr Chen) (Translated)

This interview quotation from Mr Chen, the history teacher in the investigated Sino-Canadian School, well mirrors the dilemmas that educators encounter to address the local-global tensions in transnational education programmes. The Global Alliance for Transnational Education (GATE) (1997) defines *transnational*

education as “any teaching or learning activity in which the students are in a different country (the host country) to that in which the institution providing the education is based (the home country)” (p. 1). The trade liberalization of the General Agreement on Trade in Services has opened up *minority world countries*¹ free market access to education in less developed countries (Education International, 2004). The trend of neoliberalism² has further facilitated the global mobility of education as a commodity (e.g., Xie & Wang, 2008) and simmered tensions pertaining to the linguistic imperialism³ and Western-centrism in transnational education programmes (e.g., Chambers, 2003).

¹ Minority world countries are generally referred to as developed countries.

² Neoliberalism refers to global free market ideology.

³ Linguistic imperialism is a linguistic notion coined by Robert Phillipson (1992). It refers to the transfer of a dominant language to other contexts. This language transfer is often paired with the transfer of cultural and economic power that is associated with that language.

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As one of the largest education importers (Dunn & Wallace, 2008), China has witnessed a rising number of Canadian transnational education programmes at various levels since the 1990s. As of 2014, Canadian elementary and secondary offshore programmes have extended to 20 Chinese provinces (from 11 in 2011), four cities that are administratively on equal terms with provinces, and two special administrative regions (The CICIC, 2014). In November 2014, the total number of Canadian transnational education programmes in China was 77, a 60% increase from November 2011 (The CICIC, 2014). There is an emerging body of literature on Sino-Canadian K-12 school links (e.g., Connelly & Xu, 2011; Cosco, 2011; Kuehn, 2002; Schuetze, 2008; Zhang & Heydon, 2014); however, studies on transnational programmes in higher education are more abundant (e.g., Hayhoe, Pan, & Zha, 2013; McBurnie & Ziguras, 2007).

2. Literature review

Proponents in both home and host countries embrace the concept of transnational education due to its potential to build international education cooperation (UNESCO & OECD, 2005) and to counterbalance inadequate educational resources in host countries (e.g., Huang, 2008). Oppositional voices to transnational education are primarily heard as ideological opposition to the promotion of education as a commodity (e.g., Ziguras & McBurnie, 2008) and the linguistic imperialism and Western-centrism that are engrained in transnational education settings (e.g., Chambers, 2003).

Accountability issues in transnational education programmes have sparked heated discussions among scholars (e.g., McBurnie & Ziguras, 2007; Schuetze, 2008). The simultaneous pursuit of educational and commercial goals has put the educational quality of transnational education programmes at risk (e.g., Dunn & Wallace, 2008). As Kuehn (2002) contends, transnational education programmes' ideological preferences for market competition might give more attention to profit seeking than to learners' real needs.

Transnational education programmes have also ignited debates about linguistic imperialism and elite literacy (e.g., English literacy) (e.g., Dunn & Wallace, 2003; Wallace & Dunn, 2008). Given the dominant presence of English in the language practicalities of transnational education (e.g., English as the language of the curriculum, the language of instruction, and the language of assessment), one scholarly fear is that imported education will jeopardize local languages and cultures and result in cultural and economic dependence. Wallace and Dunn's study exposes the hegemony of English in transnational education programmes and globalized communities. In their study, student participants link English proficiency to the cultural and social capital that will sharpen their competitiveness in the globalized labour market. McBurnie and Ziguras (2007) expound on political contests around languages of instruction (LOIs) in transnational education programmes. The Malaysian government once resisted using English as the LOI in transnational education programmes because it perceived English language instruction as potentially exacerbating ethnic divisions. In contrast, the Chinese government espouses dual language instruction in English and Mandarin in transnational education programmes, as such instruction has the potential to prepare students for the global market and might improve education standards in China (Schuetze, 2008).

In the existing literature, another major theme on the implementation of transnational curricula in higher education centres on transnational curricula's local responsiveness. Teaching and learning materials have been perceived to lack cultural sensitivity (e.g., Debowski, 2005, 2008; McBurnie & Ziguras, 2007; Pyvis,

2008; Ziguras, 2001). Transnational education students were seldom encouraged to explore the local complexities of issues covered in the implemented curricula and assessments (e.g., Debowski, 2005, 2008). Addressing charges of linguistic and cultural imperialism in transnational education programmes, a few scholars advocate pluralistic approaches that challenge the privileged Western-centric language and knowledge systems. These approaches attempt to include the host countries' local languages, cultures, forms of knowledge, and educational practices (e.g., Chambers, 2003; McBurnie & Ziguras, 2007). Instead of simply transmitting Western-centric cultural and linguistic norms, Chambers and Goodfellow, Lea, Gonzalez, and Mason (2001) refer to an attention shift from transnational students' deficiencies in English language skills to their culture- and language-related histories and repertoires.

Existent literature on transnational curricula in higher education contexts abounds, which suggests the necessity of investigating the nuanced landscape of curriculum delivery in secondary school transnational education programmes.

3. Context review: SCS's intended literacy curricula and this Paper's focus

This paper reports one part of an ethnographic case study that was conducted in a Sino-Canadian secondary school transnational programme in southern China, which will be referred to as the Sino-Canada School (SCS). Different from most other Canadian schools in China, SCS integrated Canadian provincial secondary school curricula and Chinese national high school curricula. Upon graduation, students at SCS (96% were ethnic Chinese) would be granted dual Canadian and Chinese diplomas.

The original case study investigated the *institutional curriculum* (which reflects desirable values in specific social, cultural, economic, and political conditions), *programmatically curriculum* (which is embodied in curriculum documents and materials for use in schools and programmes) (e.g., Eisner, 2002; Westbury, 2003), *implemented curriculum* (i.e., what is actualized in class) (e.g., Eisner, 2002, Hayden, 2006), and *lived curriculum* (i.e., students' educational experiences) (Aoki, 1993). SCS's curriculum decision makers (i.e., the Chinese principal and curriculum development coordinators) conceived of SCS's institutional curriculum as featuring an idea of "connecting the East and the West" (a translated quote from the Chinese principal, Mr Guo) by developing emergent global citizens' abilities to read, write, and function in two different languages and cultures. This institutional curriculum of enriching biliteracy education focused on students' academic achievement in two languages and their appreciation of the two languages' linguistic and cultural traditions. This enriching biliteracy programme ostensibly moved beyond the main critique in existent transnational education (i.e., that such programmes promote linguistic imperialism and Western centralism). However, due to time and resource constraints, Mr Guo (SCS's overarching school administrator) and the Chinese curriculum coordinators developed few new curricular materials and new areas of investigation to instantiate its institutional curriculum with bicultural and bilingual options. Instead, SCS's decision makers juxtaposed the 3-year Chinese high school curricula and the 3-year Ontario secondary school curricula and expected students to accomplish the requirements of both systems within 3 years to earn dual diplomas. Though the Chinese and Ontario teachers were situated in the same school in China, they ran independent of each other with limited interaction in the implemented curriculum. Grade 11 (semester two) and Grade 12 students even took Ontario courses in a different building, where the Ontario administrators and teachers were located.

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