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Stalactite Cave Adventures: Developing a Holistic Model of Parent Education Programmes in Hong Kong

Eunice Pui-yu, YIM

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ABSTRACT

Within the context of parent education, the existing parenting programmes in Hong Kong are either drawn from contexts that are less sensitive to the local one or imbued with Confucian and High Context culture (HC) values of social hierarchy and group harmony. Within such cultural values educators and learners are expected to behave in adherence to the expected social role wherein the educator is the knowledge transmitter whereas the learner is the knowledge absorber or the approaches to parenting that permeate the programmes are inappropriate to the context. The impracticality and cultural insensitivity of these existing parent education programmes, together with news related to adaptation of both new arrivals and Hong Kong locals in terms of adapting to the increasingly diverse sociocultural population in Hong Kong, alert the parent education field to a dire need to develop a model for parent education programmes that caters for different family unique needs within the diverse sociocultural context. With an aim to explore the essential components that are needs and cultural sensitive, the study adopted narrative inquiry as the research methodology to explore the three research questions: (1) To what extent do sociocultural factors affect group interaction among members from diverse backgrounds in Hong Kong? (2) What mechanisms affect group interaction among people from diverse backgrounds in parent education programmes in Hong Kong? (3) How can one formulate a model of parent education programme to suit families having diverse backgrounds, values, and beliefs in the Hong Kong context? The findings of these three research questions emphasise the vital role played by the group facilitator in creating a mutual supportive and need sensitive context to engage learners in mutual learning. Also, a critical analysis of the Subjective Group Dynamics model (SGD) is discussed in the light of group formation

among members with diverse sociocultural background within the Confucian and High Context culture (HC) oriented context culture in Hong Kong. The findings of the research questions and analysis of SGD build the foundation for the Family-centred Mutual Support Model of parent education programmes in Hong Kong that emerged from this study.

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In addition, I wish to declare my sincere thanks to parents and teachers who participated in and contributed to my study. Without their input, it would not have been possible for me to complete the study.

Although I experienced many challenges in the process of my research, with the support of the above people and others I have overcome them and completed the study.

DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the Regulations of the University of Bristol. The work is original except where indicated by special reference in the text and no part of the dissertation has been submitted for other degree.

Any views expressed in this dissertation are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University of Bristol.

The dissertation has not been presented to any other University for examination in the United Kingdom or overseas.

Signed: ______________________________

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Prologue

I emigrated from Hong Kong to Canada when I was fifteen years old. Certain issues of identity and social isolation remained with me throughout my stay in Canada. I still remember my sense of excitement and expectation when we received the approval letter from the Canadian Consulate in 1992. However, life as an immigrant was neither as happy nor as easy as we had expected. The first year of settlement was a nightmare experience for me as well as my family members. I clearly remember how hard I tried to be part of the mainstream by adopting the features of the host culture, particularly the people's accents and behaviour. I did not dare to bring Chinese food to school because I knew that my classmates would describe it as 'disgusting' and smelling 'yuk'. While I was aware that I had not really 'melted' into the host culture and become a 'Canadian', whenever I visited Hong Kong during my vacations, I was perceived as 'different' by the people in Hong Kong, when they got to know that I had been living in Canada for some years. In other words, people's perception made the 'difference' bigger than it actually was. For example, while eating out, I would be taken to places that served western cuisine rather than the regular Chinese fare. Thus, people in Hong Kong treated me according to their stereotypical beliefs regarding 'Canadians'. Such stereotyping also led people to make unwarranted assumptions about my beliefs and intentions.

In 2000, I returned to Hong Kong for work. During the last ten years of living in Hong Kong, my multiple identities—as a Canadian immigrant and as a Hong Kong local—have constantly confronted me with the dilemma of who I really am. I always claim to be a Hong Kong Chinese person. I know that my behaviour is primarily guided by the Chinese

values and beliefs that have been transmitted to me by my parents, both Hong Kong locals. On the other hand, the teenage years are a critical period in moral development. In my case, my teenage years in Canada affected my interpretation of appropriateness, particularly appropriateness in relation to the community and society, not just within the family and immediate kinships.

Having extensive experience of two different cultures, I find myself quite sensitive to the 'cultural clash' that arises whenever there are opposing views based on different cultural orientations. Since I have learnt to be flexible in reorienting myself in ways that are appropriate to the given context, I find myself open to different interpretations. I noted one such experience in my social life when I participated in a home–school partnership kindergarten project, which consisted of a mixture of new arrivals and Hong Kong locals. Meeting the families of the 'new arrivals' through this kindergarten project and hearing their stories strongly reminded me of my own past as an immigrant: the feeling of being isolated, trying to adapt to a host culture and seeking to develop social relationships with the mainstream were common to us all. Eventually, I realized that my story is not merely a personal issue. Rather, it is an issue that concerns the community and society at large (Trahar, 2006). More importantly, as the population in Hong Kong becomes increasingly more diverse, it is not only the new arrivals that need to adapt to the host culture: Hong Kong locals also have to adapt to the changing cultural population in Hong Kong.

Chapter 1. Looking Forward to the Stalactite Cave Adventure: Introduction

I am a local Chinese parent residing in Hong Kong, with a personal as well as professional interest in parent education. I have also experienced what it is like to move across countries and to have to cope with a foreign culture. This interest and my experiences of having multiple identities (as an immigrant, Hong Kong local, parent and educator) prompted me to embark on this research project with the aim of gaining an understanding of parent education in Hong Kong and how such programmes are perceived by locals and newly arrived mainland immigrants. Through this project, I hope to be able to offer suggestions for the further improvement of parent education.

This first chapter provides some background information on parent education in Hong Kong, which is followed by a statement of the aims and research questions addressed in this dissertation. The chapter also describes the methodology underpinning the research investigation, explains the key terminology, and concludes with an outline of the remaining chapters.

1.1 Background

As a Hong Kong local, immigrant, parent and educator, I have experienced and continue to witness social segregation brought about by misunderstanding and misrepresentation. It is important to face the reality that the Hong Kong population is becoming increasingly culturally diverse, and that there is a dire need to promote social harmony at both the micro

and macro level. At the micro level, the media has been widely circulating negative reports regarding new arrival families ever since 1997, when the immigration from mainland China increased dramatically. These reports have established a stereotype of the new arrivals in the eyes of Hong Kong locals at various levels in our community, such as school and neighbourhood, leading to social disharmony in Hong Kong (Ho & Chan, 2007). On the other hand, at the macro level, the Hong Kong government has launched several services to promote social harmony and has shown its commitment to strengthening and indigenizing parent education in Hong Kong by increasing its funding for district support (Tsang, 2004).

Social disharmony and perceived differences between Hong Kong locals[1] and new arrivals[2] not only socially isolate the new arrivals from the host culture but also deprive them of the opportunity to adapt to the host culture at the community, school and family levels (Brewer, 1999, Brubaker, 2001, The Race Discrimination Ordinance, 2008). At the community level, the different values and beliefs of responsible citizens contribute to stereotyping the mainland Chinese as 'uncivilized'. At the school and family level, the different expectations of the role of teachers and parents as well as the adults' expectations of children lead school teachers and Hong Kong local parents to describe mainland Chinese parents as irresponsible, who 'delegate' the responsibility of nurturing and educating children to teachers (Chao, 1994). Although the existing professional-led parenting programmes are capable of satisfying a knowledge-seeker's desire to acquire knowledge

[1] Hong Kong locals: Hong Kong locals are people with permanent Hong Kong residency. In this study, I have categorized participants as Hong Kong locals only if they have lived in Hong Kong for more than seven years and perceive themselves as Hong Kong locals.

[2] New arrivals: According to the immigration policy in Hong Kong, immigrants who have resided in Hong Kong for less than seven consecutive years are ineligible to apply for permanent Hong Kong residency (Immigration Department, 2010). These people cannot benefit from the welfare system and have no right to vote.

from authorities, the lack of case follow-ups and sustainable relationships between professionals and families make these programmes less effective and incentivizing (Tsang, 2004). While studies confirm that group sharing is an effective learning mode in terms of gaining practical knowledge, relationship establishment, and understanding differences, I believe that it may also be an appropriate mode for parent education in Hong Kong as the population becomes increasingly diverse and mutual understanding becomes increasingly necessary to resolve group conflicts (Boud, Cohen & Walker, 1993). Through interaction, particularly, the participants are provided with a platform to negotiate any deviation from the 'norm' with a better understanding of each individual's background. Hence, it is necessary to explore the mechanisms that may contribute to minimizing intergroup differences and maximizing intergroup similarities.

1.2 Objectives and Research Questions

The present study explores and develops a model for a socially and culturally sensitive parent education programme in Hong Kong. The study of cultural mechanisms that underpin parent education programmes will be grounded in literature on social identity theory, assimilation, social pluralism, Confucianism, High Context culture (HC) and group dynamic models. Specifically, the study aims to pursue the following objectives:

- To review the sociocultural characteristics of Hong Kong locals and the mainland Chinese
- To review the existing parent education programmes in Hong Kong
- To review cultural orientation in group learning within the Chinese context

- To develop a model of socioculturally sensitive parent education programmes in Hong Kong

1.3 Research Questions

Based on the above, this study is guided by the following research questions:

- To what extent do sociocultural factors affect group interaction among members from diverse backgrounds in Hong Kong?
- What mechanisms affect group interaction among people from diverse backgrounds in parent education programmes in Hong Kong?
- How can one formulate a model of parent education programme to suit families having diverse backgrounds, values, and beliefs in the Hong Kong context?

1.4 Research Methodology

This is a qualitative study conducted using the methodology of narrative inquiry to collect data from five focus groups comprising parents of kindergarten children. The participating parents were recruited from community centres, kindergartens, and nurseries from different districts in Hong Kong. The focus groups were conducted in Cantonese, and their observation was based on the Subjective Group Dynamics model (SGD), with data analysis guided by dialogic/performance analysis. The collected data was analysed after transcribing it into Cantonese. The Cantonese transcribed data and their analysis were presented to the participants as stories for their verification and elaboration. Their

elaborated stories became the new stories that were utilized in this study. All participants were informed about the aims of this study, and their consent to participate in this study was obtained either verbally or in written form. The session with each focus group lasted from one hour to an hour and a half.

This analysis of narratives led to the development of a model of group learning for parent education in Hong Kong. This model is made up of themes that were directly derived from the data. To enhance the believability and authenticity of this study, I incorporated my experiences as an immigrant, Hong Kong local, parent, and educator in the analysis. I aim to help the reader understand (1) why I consider a particular research story interesting, (2) what are my values and beliefs regarding the presented issues, and therefore, (3) how I derived a particular interpretation from the presented stories (Riessman, 2008).

1.5 Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation is based on a metaphoric scene of a stalactite cave. When I was young, I visited a considerable number of stalactite caves in China. Whenever I walked into these caves, I could feel the cool calmness and hear echoes of mineral water dripping from the stalactites onto the stalagmites nearby, as well as far off in the cave.

Stalactites and stalagmites grow in pairs and are unique. The water dripping from stalactites onto the ground creates stalagmites. Stalactites, therefore, represent the history of how the associated stalagmites are created and become. Pairs of stalactites and stalagmites develop in groups where they share similar geographic activities. In this study, stalactites represent a person's biography and experiences, which contribute to what the

person has become today (stalagmites). When we study human beings, we do not look merely at their current behaviour but study the person as a whole, in terms of the person's past and present, which is directly involved in the context of where the person belongs at a particular time and place (specific geographic activities in the cave). The echoes of dripping water in the cave are like people talking in one place. The phenomenon of water dripping from stalactites at a different pace, time and location and the different geographic activities associated with its dripping are similar to different groups of people talking about different topics at different places and times; however, a closer examination reveals that all these activities have many aspects that are similar to one another.

This dissertation adopts the metaphor of the stalactite cave in order to depict the complexity of human development and interaction. This complexity will be illustrated by interweaving the content with my experiences of different life roles. As such, it comprises the following:

Chapter 1. Looking Forward to the Stalactite Cave Adventure: Introduction

This chapter introduces the objectives and research questions of the study, defines the important terms, explains the significance of the study, and outlines the dissertation's structure.

Chapter 2. Preparing for My Adventure: the Sociocultural Context of Hong Kong and Mainland China (PRC), Confucianism and High Context Culture

This chapter positions this study with respect to previous research and outlines the important issues addressed. It also presents the background of the study by describing the sociocultural characteristics of Hong Kong locals and the mainland Chinese.

Chapter 3. The Evolution of a Stalactite Cave: Parent Education Programmes and Group Dynamics in Hong Kong

This chapter reviews the findings of existing local studies, discusses related parent education issues, and seeks to explain the challenges and drawbacks associated with the existing parent education programmes in Hong Kong. Together with the literature review of the sociocultural context of Hong Kong and mainland China, this chapter outlines relevant literature that provides a framework for this research and demonstrates the need for it.

Chapter 4. The Spirit of Adventure—Curiosity for the Unknown and Discovery of New Possibilities, Paths and Discovery Limits: Study Design

This chapter outlines the research methodology of narrative inquiry as well as the research methods and procedures employed in the analysis.

Chapter 5. An Amazing Journey in the Stalactite Cave: Data Analysis and Presentation

This chapter presents verbatim quotations from the participants in the form of a series of stories. Each story is followed by my personal anecdotes to illustrate to the reader why and how I have interpreted the participants' stories in a particular manner, thus increasing the study's transparency and trustworthiness.

Chapter 6. I Saw, I Found and I Conclude: Discussion

This chapter describes the study's findings and how they can be used to guide the development of a model for parent education programmes in Hong Kong.

Chapter 7. The Stalactite Cave Adventure Is not only Exciting but also Inspirational and Impressive: Conclusion

This chapter draws conclusions about the findings guided by the research questions. The implications of the study are elaborated in terms of the application of the proposed model. This chapter presents some reflections on the methodology used and my own learning, while discussing the limitations of the study. To conclude, I will analyse the practicality of the proposed model in light of the various roles that I have undertaken—and continue to undertake— in my life.

Chapter 2. Preparing for My Adventure: the Sociocultural Context of Hong Kong and Mainland China (PRC), Confucianism and High Context Culture

In this chapter, the review of the sociocultural background of Hong Kong as a colony and the communism of mainland China sets the scene for readers to understand the sociocultural contexts that contribute to the differences in the perceived identities, parenting values and beliefs prevalent among the Chinese people of both lands. Later on in this chapter, the discussion of literature on cultural orientation reveals that Confucianism still exerts a powerful influence on parenting and social behaviours in Chinese societies, particularly in terms of how people relate to one another (group dynamics) and perceive knowledge acquisition.

Rather than presenting the background information of this study as an outsider, I will accompany readers on this journey as a fellow traveller and relate my biography as an immigrant, Hong Kong local, parent, and educator to the presented literature. My reflections upon the different experiences associated with my different social roles will further explicate and clarify to readers the perspectives through which I interpret the continuities and discontinuities between the sociocultural context and parent education programmes in Hong Kong.

2.1 Sociocultural Background of Hong Kong and Mainland China (PRC)

2.1.1 Hong Kong as a Colonized City

Hong Kong was a British colony for more than a century. In 1997, the reunification of mainland China and Hong Kong united not only the regions but also their people, who had been separated for decades and nurtured by different governance systems (Appendix 1a). The perceived identity of Hong Kong locals has been widely researched, both before and after the reunification in 1997 (Abbas, 1997, Kemenade & Webb, 1997). One of the most important findings from such research is the perceived identity of the 'Hong Kong Chinese' or the 'Hong Konger' by the Hong Kong locals (Brewer, 1999). The presence of such an identity indicates that Hong Kong locals perceive themselves as a different group of people from the residents of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Hong Kong locals generally regard communists, including communists in mainland China, as uncivilized and detached from the rest of the world (Kanbur & Zhang, 2005). Although the rapid economic development that has occurred in mainland China over the past decade amazes the world, in my experience, the increased prosperity has not improved the sociopolitical culture in mainland China. Some years ago, I travelled to Guangdong (the Chinese province closest to Hong Kong) with my family and relatives. On one occasion, my aunt happened to drop her Hong Kong identification card (HKID) on the ground, and a policeman picked it up. My aunt extended her hand for the card and said 'Thank you!' to the policeman. However, the policeman did not give her the card. Instead, he asked her to follow him to the police booth across the street while the rest of us waited on the opposite side of the street. At the booth, the policeman informed my aunt that he had picked up her HKID on his side of the street and insisted that she pay him some money in order to collect it. Of course, we were

appalled and frustrated at the injustice of his demand. However, none of us was surprised that such an incident could occur in today's China, because we believe that the legal system and the awareness levels of civilized society are still underdeveloped in a system where money and relationships exert power on people's life.

In contrast, with their well-established legal and welfare systems, the formerly colonised Hong Kong locals believe that they are more civilized in terms of justice and awareness of responsible citizenship (Segal, 1999, Roccas & Brewer, 2002). As mentioned earlier, the perceived identity of 'Hong Kongers' or the 'Hong Kong Chinese' carries a very clear message about identity differentiation between Hong Kong locals and the mainland Chinese.

2.1.2 Mainland China as a Communist Country—Cultural Revolution and Its Impacts

Among the political events in recent Chinese history, the Cultural Revolution is recognised as having exerted an enormous influence on China's socioeconomic development, including the parenting values of its people. The Cultural Revolution's promotion of a classless society ensured that the Chinese citizens had no voice and no choice (Appendix 1b). During those dark days in China, to live was to obey. Everything was decided by the authorities, and obedience, social hierarchy, and respect for authority became the core values.

When the revolution ended in 1968 and the authorities accepted 'reform and openness' and launched the 'market-oriented economy policy' in 1978, experts and educated teenagers were severely lacking after being expelled to remote areas or factories during the

Revolution. With this, the development of China was therefore lagging far behind other parts of the world, particularly neighbouring countries or regions such as Japan and Hong Kong (Kanbur & Zhang, 2005). This was because the country had not progressed for ten years since the Revolution. Hence, when compared with the colonial Hong Kong citizens, the mainland Chinese generally tended to perceive themselves as less educated and civilized (ibid.).

The Cultural Revolution is the most important political event in recent Chinese history. Many people who suffered during this period still survive; they are the grandparents of our generation. Through their parenting practices, their experiences and beliefs still influence our values and beliefs. My grandparents were victims of the Cultural Revolution and fled to Hong Kong during those years. I have heard stories of their hardship from my parents, who heard them at first-hand from my grandparents. Gordon (1991) once pointed out that social rejection and stereotypes are transmitted inter-generationally. I completely agree with this view, in that certain preconceptions regarding particular cultural or social groups can be formed through various family behaviours without any direct contact with those cultural or social groups. My parents were born in Hong Kong, where they never experienced any political chaos. However, they often view certain aspects of China from a biased perspective. This is especially true in the case of my father, who always adopted my grandparents' experiences as a reference point and related these 'stories' to his own experiences as a trader and visitor to China. Whenever he encountered any unfairness or injustice there, he would say, 'See! (They are) still the same. This has been happening since your grandfather's generation.' I, of course, have never experienced any political hardship. Nevertheless, I admit that my perceptions of certain aspects of the mainland

Chinese people, such as their value of justice, are influenced by my parents, to a certain extent.

2.2 Public Perceptions of Immigrants from Mainland China after the Reunification

The increasing population of new arrivals not only burdens the already overwhelmed population density in Hong Kong but also increases the cultural variation within Hong Kong. Although Hong Kong locals and the new arrivals have the same skin colour and speak similar languages, the former generally perceive the latter as 'others', who do not share their values regarding many aspects of life (Jackson, 2002). For example, in our daily lives, it is not uncommon to see a mainland Chinese person standing too close to others in a queue, which is likely to offend the person standing before him/her. Based on my observation, no matter how many non-verbal signals, such as body movements or eye contact, such a person delivers, the mainland Chinese generally seem unaware of or ignore the fact that such social behaviour is considered inappropriate by Hong Kong locals, thus showing a lack of understanding of their host culture. I must declare that I do not possess a hostile attitude towards this perceived 'unacceptable' behaviour because I understand that cutting in lines and standing close to each other are acceptable behaviours in mainland China. The word 'acceptable' in this example means that if an individual standing in a queue does not cut in and stand close to the person in the front, that individual is unlikely to obtain what he/she wants, such as boarding a bus in mainland China. From this perspective, the perceived 'unacceptable' behaviour is acceptable in one context but not in the other, and the mainland Chinese simply fail to adjust their social behaviours to fit the needs of different contexts. On this basis, many Hong Kong locals who are unable to understand the

social behaviour of the mainland Chinese tend to describe the new arrivals as 'less civilized', while the latter often describe the former as discriminating against the mainland Chinese. Owing to this lack of trust and understanding between the Hong Kong locals and the new arrivals, the latter tend to congregate together and form their own communities without connecting with the host culture or entering the mainstream (Shek, Chow, Au & Lee, 2002) (Appendix 1c).

Studies on social adaptation of new arrivals in Hong Kong reveal that social integration, financial difficulties and family relationship are the major difficulties that new arrivals in Hong Kong encounter (Law & Lee, 2006). In terms of social integration, by exaggerating the reportage of a few extreme cases, the misrepresentation of new arrivals by the media generates the stereotyping and labeling of new arrivals as uncivilized, ignorant, rude, dirty and greedy within everyday conversation and social interaction. Discrimination towards new arrivals is a phenomenon acknowledged by Hong Kong locals who tend to believe that mainland Chinese are different in terms of living habits, thoughts and even regard them as the weakest ethnic group in political and moral areas (Law & Lee, 2006).

Discrimination is also reflected in the labor market. Social rejection is evidenced by employers who do not acknowledge new arrivals' education attainment and even reject them simply due to their status as new arrivals. Studies reveal that new arrivals reported lower wage and poorer welfare than their local counterparts. With inequality in employment, the financial situations of new arrival families are generally difficult (Law & Lee, 2006). Their disadvantageous situations are further aggravated when the majority of the new arrivals settle in distant rural areas in Hong Kong where the social provisions for unemployed, poor, family, child care and women are inadequate. It is not uncommon to

hear new arrivals complain that the transportation time and expense restrict them from working and lack of community support and care in these districts make social integration of new arrivals more difficult if not impossible (Law & Lee, 2006).

Together with the above difficulties in the areas of social integration and financial situation, new arrivals' family harmony is also threatened after long years of separation from wives living in Mainland China before getting the immigration permit from the Hong Kong government (Law & Lee, 2006). These new arrivals, usually women, require multi-dimensional assistance in terms of social and psychological support. Among them, many of the new arrivals are mothers caring for their young children at home on a full-time basis. Being a full-time mother, going to the market, and taking children to and from school constitute these women's major interactions with Hong Kong locals. However, the 'hi-and-bye', 'come-and-go' nature of these activities does not provide sufficient socialization opportunities for the new arrivals and Hong Kong locals to achieve mutual understanding and develop friendships.

In addition to the limitations imposed by child caring, the new arrivals' difficulties in acquiring social support and developing social relationships in a foreign land result in their limited exposure to Hong Kong's local societal norms, including public expectations regarding the role of a Hong Kong citizen and parent (Shek et al., 2002). These adaptation problems are reflected at both community and school levels. At the community level, the media's negative reports regarding the unemployment levels and welfare reliance of the new arrivals give Hong Kong locals an impression that the new arrivals generally fail to become what Hong Kong locals perceive as responsible citizens. At the school level, in the in-house staff meetings, teachers often complain of finding it difficult to communicate with

the new arrivals. Unlike teachers in Hong Kong, teachers in mainland China are expected to take full responsibility for children's learning, and parental involvement is not expected. Hence, the new arrivals describe Hong Kong teachers as 'irresponsible' and 'discriminatory' (Yuen, 2004; 154). Teachers generally describe these mothers as uneducated, unsupportive, and irresponsible, while their children tend to misbehave (Chong, 2005). Teachers generally believe that home–school conflicts can be attributed to different parenting values between Hong Kong locals and the new arrivals.

I personally witnessed these 'stereotyped beliefs' of teachers when I participated in a home–school partnership research project in 2000. I still remember the sense of frustration with which the teachers described their communication problems with the mainland Chinese children and their families. In particular, the teachers declared that 'notices' or 'notes' were never an effective means of communication with parents, because these 'papers' remained in the children's school bags without being taken out and read. The teachers who escorted the children to cross the border reported that despite several verbal reminders, there was no improvement in the parents' awareness of the importance of parental participation in their children's learning (So, 2003). While teachers attributed the parents' 'ignorant' attitude towards their children's learning to cultural differences, I heard a mainland Chinese mother in a new arrival family resilience seminar in 2007 share her experiences of discriminatory treatment at her daughter's secondary school. The mother admitted that she did not understand the role and responsibilities of Hong Kong teachers in teaching and learning. She compared teachers of both regions and asked why Hong Kong teachers expected parents to go through their children's schoolwork at home. In her view, home activities should exclude school-related tasks and focus on nurturing children (Ng,

2003). Such different expectations contribute to the Hong Kong locals' perception of mainland Chinese parents as 'irresponsible'.

Although I have no personal experiences regarding school operations in mainland China, through social interactions with friends who are teachers in mainland China, I came to know that parents there are not expected to participate in their children's academic learning, which is entirely entrusted to teachers or even paid tutors. I believe that the nursery teachers' attribution is valid in terms of different cultural expectations from the roles of educators and means of education. To the mainland Chinese, learning activities should take place in the school context. As a Hong Kong local, I cannot claim that all Hong Kong local parents assist their children's learning at home. Instead, I am aware that many of them hire tutors or send their children to learning centres to complete their schoolwork. In that case, it would be unsafe to conclude that Hong Kong local parents are more responsible than mainland Chinese parents are. It would be better to assume that parents from both regions have different expectations from the different social roles of parents and teachers within the Hong Kong context. In the following section, I will present studies pertaining to Confucianism and High/Low context cultures to illustrate the influential power of the seemingly old Chinese doctrines and familial philosophy that are still followed in not only Chinese societies but also the majority of the Asian world, particularly within the realm of social roles and expectations in a group context (Berndt, 1993, Chan, Bowes & Wyver, 2009).

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2.3 Parenting Values in Chinese Societies: Confucianism and High/Low Context Cultures

Confucianism is a very old philosophical doctrine that may seem to have no influence on modern society. People generally perceive Confucianism as 'outdated', 'obsolete' and 'scholarly' in the sense that such a doctrine is not applicable to the family in the twenty-first century (Lai, Zhang & Wang, 2000). However, cultural studies of Asian societies reveal that Confucianism is still very influential for Chinese people in the family and social contexts (Berndt, 1993, Lai et al., 2000, Chan et al., 2009). In this section, I will first introduce the core values of Confucianism. Then, I will review various relevant cultural studies to illustrate the influence of Confucian doctrines on Chinese societies in the modern world.

2.3.1 Confucianism in the Chinese Context

Confucianism is one of the most influential Chinese philosophical doctrines pertaining to the conception of an ideal society (Bond, 1996, 1998, Slote & De Vos, 1998). The core values of Confucianism suggest that a society's stability and harmony are moderated by 'differences' in social hierarchy where citizens are expected to behave according to their allocated social roles (ibid.; 138). Moreover, the ruler of a country must govern with morality (including honesty and loyalty) and humaneness, characterized by empathy rather than adherence to rigid written laws (Appendix 1d).

Although Confucianism is a philosophical doctrine developed in a monarchical age in China, it has profoundly influenced cultural development in Asia. In my biological family,

my local-born parents' parenting was characterized by Confucian values. My father has always been the decision-maker for our family. His wife and children, regarded as subordinates in Confucian terms, were expected to respect and obey his words. I hardly remember any occasion when I have simply chatted with my father or mother. Instead, my sister and I were expected to obey the 'orders' we received from our parents. Looking back on my childhood and adolescence, I witnessed the essential Confucian values of Yi (responsibility), Hsiao (love within the family), Xin (honesty and trustworthiness), Yen (benevolence) and Chung (loyalty) in how my father spent all of his golden years (thirty years) serving one company without taking a single sick leave. I appreciated his loyalty to relationships: he regarded 'changing jobs' as disloyal behaviour. The efforts that he put in to support the family when we experienced economic difficulties during our immigration years and when my mother suffered from cancer in 2002 provide ample evidence of his belief in his role as a responsible husband and father.

Recent cultural studies conducted by Ivanhoe (1993) and Kim, Pan & Park (1998) revealed that Asians are still heavily influenced by Confucianism that is consistent with their cultural orientations, namely, High Context culture (HC) and Low Context culture (LC), as proposed by Hall (1976). The connection between Confucianism and HC will be presented in the next section.

2.3.2 High/Low Context Cultures

Hall (1976) stated that cultures in our world can be categorized into High Context cultures (HC) and Low Context cultures (LC), with each category exhibiting a particular set of characteristics. An HC is characterized by collectivism, wherein people are deeply

involved with each other. Such a culture is marked by intimate relationships among people and a social hierarchical structure where individual inner feelings are kept under strong self-control and information is shared through simple messages carrying deep meanings (Lau, 1992, Kim, Pan & Park, 1998; 509). In contrast, a LC is characterized by individualism, wherein people are highly individualized with relatively little involvement with others, resulting in minimal social hierarchy. Kim et al. (1998) compared HC and LC through six dimensions (social orientation, commitment, responsibility, confrontation, communication, and dealing with new situations) (Appendix 1e(i) – 1e(vi)); their study highlights not only different cultural orientations but also the consistency between HC characteristics and Confucian values (Ivanhoe, 1993). As regards HC–LC distinction, social harmony, social hierarchy, and group benefit are the major components distinguishing LC people from HC people and affecting how people interact and learn in social settings.

According to Ivanhoe's study (1993), Confucian-oriented cultures such as the Chinese culture are characterized by HC characteristics wherein people are deeply involved with one another (dimensions of social orientation and commitment); social hierarchy operates at all levels within the society (dimension of responsibilities); people behave according to their allocated roles with associated social expectations from their adopted roles in order to avoid any 'trespassing' into a role or class to which they do not belong (dimensions of confrontation and communication); and people seek help only within their kinship, since asking for help within Chinese culture is akin to losing face (dimension of dealing with new situations) (Shek & Lee, 2005). Accordingly, open discussion in group learning is not considered appropriate in Chinese culture. Respect for authority and seniors, combined

with absolute obedience, is one of the most important Confucian values. Therefore, it is the Chinese norm or expectation that the expert is the absolute knowledge authority and depositor (Ng, 2001). Even though folk knowledge works well within the family, it is not shared with others as 'knowledge'. Sharing, to the Chinese, is only a medium for emotional relief, with no knowledge-related connotations attached to it (Shek & Lee, 2005). Within the realm of Confucianism, knowledge can only be acquired from specific people in a specific setting.

The review of Confucian doctrines and different cultural orientations reveals that Asians espouse a set of values and beliefs that are coloured by Confucianism as well as HC characteristics. I believe that the analysis of HC and LC characteristics is very relevant, particularly since social hierarchy, mutual harmonization and the avoidance of direct confrontation can be witnessed and experienced in everyday social events, such as interaction between family members, workplace meetings, and classroom group discussions. In power relationships, such as teacher–student or employer–employee relationships, people who consider themselves subordinates will rarely express ideas that oppose the 'group norm' or 'social expectations' of that particular context. In the Chinese context, which is marked by power relationships, subordinates are expected to follow their leaders' wills. In my experiences in the workplace, although employees are encouraged to express their views, they will very rarely voice a view opposing that of the perceived leader in a group setting; they generally prefer to express opposing views out of the group context. Respect and the 'face' concept are still present and considered highly important in Chinese communities. In the family setting, my sister-in-law would say that she 'trained'—not 'nurtured'—her child to possess certain strengths or even character. Whenever her child

did not listen to her or obey her, she felt as if she no longer had ownership over her child. Such a statement very strongly conveys that a child is perceived more as a 'property' owned by his/her parents than as a separate, unique entity. Hence, the above examples in both the workplace and family settings highlight the impact of power relationships on interpersonal interactions within the Confucian belief system. On the basis of the literature reviews of Confucianism and HC—both of which are very influential and powerful in Chinese communities—in the following section, I will review their influences at the macro level, with particular reference to parenting and family values in Hong Kong and mainland China, in order to explore whether the parenting practices in these two regions are marked by substantial differences.

2.4 Review of Studies: Parenting in Mainland China and Hong Kong

There are few studies of parenting in different regions of China. Lai, Zhang & Wang (2000) studied the child-rearing practices of Chinese families in Hong Kong and Beijing, while taking into account both historical and cultural factors. The study found that Beijing families tend to adopt a less restrictive child-rearing pattern and are more concerned with their children's achievement than Hong Kong families. The study attributed the differences to the political, cultural, and historical variations between Beijing and Hong Kong (Lai et al., 2000). Under the one-child policy, parents direct intensive attention to their only child and satisfy the child's every need. However, such physical proximity in their child-rearing practices does not necessarily mean that they are sensitive to their child's affective needs (Ho, Lai & Peng, 2002). Lai et al.'s (2000) study suggested that Beijing parents place very high expectations on their child's achievements. Ryback, Sanders, Lorentz and

Koestenblatt (1980) further suggested that this tendency can be explained as an impact of the Cultural Revolution on the mainland Chinese. Since many of these parents had to work in either remote areas or factories during the Revolution, they now tend to push their children to excel in every aspect in order to compensate for their own lost aspirations. Most of them believe that sending their child to a university is the best way to ensure a brighter future for the child (Lai et al., 2000, Hua, 2001). Thus, their experiences of the Cultural Revolution not only induced mainland Chinese families to place a high priority on education but also encouraged the belief that civilization and self-discipline come with education (Ryback et al., 1980). In other words, to be educated is to be civilized, and imparting discipline and education to children is considered the exclusive responsibility of teachers and educators.

In contrast, instead of academic achievement, family unity and harmony are prioritized in the happiness index list among the Hong Kong population (Ho & Chan, 2007). Many of the local-born Hong Kong parents have never experienced political hardships such as the Cultural Revolution, and since Hong Kong's welfare system already guarantees nine years of education, education is never out of their reach and is well planned by the government (Lai et al., 2000; Hua, 2001). Furthermore, compared with the mainland Chinese, Hong Kong locals have more freedom and therefore more choices to plan their future. Thus, they perceive themselves as having a higher degree of control on their life and future. Unlike the mainland Chinese, Hong Kong locals believe that what they want to become and how are largely in their hands, which induces them to exert power to control various relevant aspects of their life.

Although the new arrivals and Hong Kong locals share the same cultural roots or context, namely Confucianism and HC, their values are merely behavioural guidelines for them. People can have different expectations from different social roles because of their unique experiences and sociopolitical backgrounds. For example, both Hong Kong locals and the mainland Chinese expect teachers to be responsible for their children's education. However, compared to the former, the latter generally expect teachers to bear the entire responsibility of providing knowledge and education to their students, while the parents' role is limited to caring for their children in the non-educational context. This example illustrates that the latter still adhere to Confucian values, but have different expectations from different social roles. Hence, analysing the consistency between HC and Confucianism would increase our awareness of the shared values and beliefs among the majority of Asians. This common ground, however, does not imply that Asians share the same expectations and behaviours in various social roles and relationships such as the parent–child and teacher–student relationships. Unfortunately, family education service providers do not seem to be sufficiently sensitive to both the similarities and differences between groups of people with different sociocultural backgrounds. The next chapter reviews the parent education programmes in Hong Kong and shows that they are all 'imported' from LC countries and hence are characterized by individualism, equality and expressive communication rather than the values held by people in HC countries such as China. Therefore, it is understandable that the existing parent education programmes do not meet the needs and expectations of many families in Hong Kong.

Chapter 3. The Evolution of a Stalactite Cave: Parent Education Programmes and Group Dynamics in Hong Kong

The previous chapter described the sociopolitical and sociocultural contexts of the colonized Hong Kong locals and communist mainland Chinese in order to illustrate the possible factors that may contribute to their different expectations from life and social roles. In fact, family and cultural studies reveal that Asian societies are influenced by Confucianism and High Context culture (HC) in various aspects, including social hierarchy, interpersonal relationships, and beliefs in knowledge acquisition. Although Confucian doctrines influence both Hong Kong locals and the mainland Chinese, people's personal histories and sociocultural backgrounds contribute to variations in their life and role expectations. Without recognizing the similarities, many Hong Kong locals perceive only differences in the new arrivals in Hong Kong and thereby develop negative stereotypes pertaining to them. This chapter discusses various features and weaknesses of the existing parent education programmes in Hong Kong. An analysis of the weaknesses is likely to facilitate the formulation of a parent education programme that is sensitive to the needs of families in Hong Kong. As befits the core values of Confucianism and HC, this chapter will present the social identity theory and the Subjective Group Dynamics model (SGD) to highlight the major components of group development with positive interactions among members with diverse backgrounds.

3.1 Parent Education Programmes in Hong Kong

In Hong Kong, parent education programmes are conducted by schools, non-government organizations (NGOs) and the government (Tsang, 2004). However, the effectiveness of these programmes is in doubt, and some programmes have even been shown to be ineffective. In this section, I will review the existing parent education programmes conducted by each of the abovementioned major service providers in Hong Kong, particularly focusing on their weaknesses and inappropriateness.

3.1.1 Parent Education Programmes Provided by Schools

For schools, holding an expert-led talk is the most convenient and traditional way to 'educate' parents (Chan & Chan, 2003). The schools themselves suggest the topics of these talks, based on the concerns expressed by the parents. Although these programmes' contents are tailored to meet the parents' requirements, parent attendance is usually low. Some parents claim that these talks are too theoretical, impractical, and boring to sustain their interest. Chan's (2003) study on parent education in Hong Kong's childcare settings supported these claims, indicating that the increasing knowledge accessibility through technological advances has transformed the function of professional-led (knowledge-transmission-oriented) parent talks as the major source of knowledge delivery, which is impersonal to parents. Schools may realize that small group sharing activities provide opportunities for parents to discuss their own concerns, which can enhance the practicality of the sessions. Unfortunately, limited human resources and the lack of group-work skills in teachers make small-group in-depth discussions unfeasible (ibid.). In my experience of a home–school partnership project, I witnessed the difficulties faced by teachers in running

parent education programmes at the school level. Although all the participating teachers were aware that they occupied an advantageous position in terms of knowing and understanding the children and their families, they generally felt inadequate in leading group discussions and responding to parents' queries in a professional manner. Moreover, because of the increasingly popular trend of inviting professionals such as social workers and psychologists to give these talks in schools, the teachers knew that parents were impressed by the professional images of these invited speakers, whose words are generally regarded as more valuable and convincing. Hence, schools prefer to recruit professionals from non-profit organizations (NGOs) to deliver parent education talks.

3.1.2 Parent Education Programmes Provided by NGOs

Because of their professional image, social workers and psychologists serve as the primary parent educators in schools as well as communities in Hong Kong (Lou & Chan, 2003). Compared with teachers, in general, they are believed to possess more updated knowledge regarding children and their families in Hong Kong, as a whole, rather than being limited to one school setting (ibid.). However, parents often complain that these professionals from external bodies do not understand their children, families, and school curriculum. In particular, they expect to learn parenting skills for their own family context from these experts (Mingpao News, 2008). Ultimately, these parent education programmes are offered in a piece-meal manner and are highly unsystematic as regards follow-ups and self-development in parents. I was once a research assistant for a home-school partnership project, where I often heard parents describing the speaker–audience relationship as distant in the sense that the speakers do not know their audience at all, because of which the

presented skills may not fit their needs. Hence, parents do not find sustainable support from either teachers or professionals to develop or enhance their parenting skills on a regular basis for their specific family context.

3.1.3 Parent Education Programmes Provided by the Government

In response to the need for professionalism, practicality and case follow-ups, the Maternal and Child Health Centres and Child Assessment Centres of the Hong Kong government implemented the 'Positive Parenting Programme' (Triple P)[3] for families living in Hong Kong (Tsang, 2004). This is a multilevel family intervention programme with a strong theoretical foundation aimed at preventing and treating behavioural and emotional problems in preadolescent children. Triple P is composed of individual consultations, group programmes, seminar series, and the Triple P self-help activities. Although the programme's individual consultation and group sharing aspects distinguish it from those offered by the other two service providers mentioned above, a study of Triple P's effectiveness in Hong Kong revealed the inappropriate cultural aspects of the programme when applied to the Hong Kong context (Sanders, Cann & Markie-Dadds, 2003a).

A pilot study of Triple P's implementation in Hong Kong noted that while showing affection was a key component of Triple P, Chinese parents, who are not used to openly showing affection for their children, found this behaviour very difficult to adopt (Education

[3] Positive Parenting Programme (Triple P) was originally developed in Australia. It is a multilevel family intervention program with a strong theoretical foundation for the prevention and treatment of behavioural and emotional problems in preadolescent children. Triple P is composed of individual consultations, group programmes, seminar series and Triple P self Help. Individual consultations are tailored to meet the specific needs of parents and group programs focus on effective parenting strategies and child behavior (Tsang, 2004).

and Manpower Bureau & Department of Health, 2003). They also believed that their children were obliged to respect them, without any negotiations in this regard. It is not very common for children to negotiate with their parents on any issue because of the traditional Chinese value of parental authority and control, thus making it difficult for some programme participants to apply the technique in their families (Ho, Chow & Fung, 1999, Blair & Qian, 1998). Furthermore, the participants were reluctant to share their parenting or family problems with other group members. This reluctance is again related to the Chinese values that emphasise family honour and family unity, wherein disclosing family problems to outsiders is seen as tarnishing family honour (Lee & Rong, 1988, Schneider, Hieshima, Lee & Plank, 1994). Although such programmes have been shown to be very effective in many non Asian countries, some of their aspects were very difficult for the Hong Kong participants to accept or apply because of their different cultural values (Education and Manpower Bureau & Department of Health, 2003).

In short, the review of existing parent education programmes in Hong Kong reveals that many of them are theory-driven and/or professional-led, with heavy emphasis on knowledge transmission. Even in programmes that included discussion and sharing to ensure case follow-up and self-development, the participants reported difficulties in learning through group sharing because the programmes disregarded cultural values such as the value of negotiation between parents and children, the importance of family honour in Chinese society and affection-sharing with strangers (between group participants). To address these drawbacks of the existing parent education programmes, it is essential to formulate a programme that can build upon the participants' mutual trust relationship and (1) cater to the needs of families from diverse sociocultural backgrounds, (2) deliver

education in a mode reflecting Chinese cultural characteristics, particularly the social hierarchies and interpersonal relationships that have developed under Confucianism, and (3) facilitate social harmony by developing a mutual understanding of the participants' differences, which need to be acknowledged and respected. In the following section, I will present mechanisms for promoting mutual understanding among group members from diverse sociocultural backgrounds from the perspective of perceived similarities.

3.2 Mechanisms for Group Interactions among People from Diverse Backgrounds

While both Hong Kong locals and new arrivals generally perceive themselves as belonging to different groups of 'people' who share nothing but their ethnic origin, the analysis in the previous chapter revealed that both groups share the same cultural roots, namely, Confucianism, which still influences their parenting and interpersonal relationships. However, the sociopolitical and sociocultural background of both groups results in their having different expectations from social roles, life and the future. Such perceived differences give rise to tensions and conflicts and overwhelm Hong Kong locals at all levels. Hence, it is crucial to minimize such group conflicts and maximize social harmony. It is suggested that the perception of a similar social identity can be used as a social tool to maximize the perceived similarities, at both interpersonal and intergroup levels, among people from diverse backgrounds and thus contribute to the development of more culturally sensitive parent education programmes. My role in this chapter is to accompany the readers as an immigrant, Hong Kong local, parent, and educator and posit my understanding about norm (social expectation) and identity formation within the realm of social identity theory, assimilation, and social pluralism. In particular, this journey will

utilize the mechanisms that once helped me, and possibly other people, to reinterpret perceived values and identities to meet various personal and contextual needs at different places and times in order to facilitate interactions between groups of people from diverse backgrounds.

3.2.1 Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory suggests that a person's identification is established through that person's attachment to a group (Stets & Burke, 2000). Such attachment is facilitated by certain perceived common similarities, such as traits, interests, beliefs and values, established through a process of comparison and attachment among group members, which will eventually lead to 'ingroup' and 'outgroup' member identification (ibid.). Hence, identity is not given by a group but is formed by actions of social comparison and recognition within groups (Jarvis, 1987). For example, an individual can adopt different sets of traits to meet the requirements of a particular context. Hence, identification is flexible and varies across contexts (Imel, 1997), and an individual behaves according to the role associated with that particular identification (Jarvis, 1987).

In this study, the perception of belonging to an ingroup is regarded as an important element for positive interactive discourse. Acquiring a sense of belonging by perceiving oneself as an ingroup member enhances one's self-esteem and self-worth. At the same time, perceived similarities between oneself and the group also help develop the perception of equal status because of which one becomes more open for discussion. Since the new arrivals and Hong Kong locals perceive themselves as belonging to two different groups sharing no common ground, it is important for people from both the groups to recognise

their similarities, develop an ingroup identity and thereby facilitate positive exchanges between the groups.

The new arrivals generally have lower self-image because of their relatively disadvantaged financial situation and the media's negative reports about them. Hence, they are less likely to share their views in front of the Hong Kong locals, who are perceived as enjoying higher social status. Therefore, instead of stating different views, the former are more likely to conform to the views of the 'dominant' group, which is referred to as 'cognitive conformity'[4] (ibid.; 111).

Based on my observations of the new arrivals' interactions with the Hong Kong locals, it is common to see cognitive conformity in group discussions. The former were always 'humble' in describing themselves as uneducated and needing others to tell them the 'correct' way, while rarely sharing their own views during group discussions. Instead, they nodded and asked questions whenever the latter shared their views and offered suggestions. This behaviour makes it obvious that the new arrivals valued knowledge from others (external standard of correctness) more than that derived from their own life experiences. Jarvis (1987) explained that this phenomenon can be attributed to people's need to belong. When outgroup members perceive that they belong nowhere, they will revise their values to be closer to the 'dominant' group. While some people may describe this assimilation process as losing one's own identity, I would argue that this process involves enlarging the existing self or even creating another, more adaptable identity to suit the needs of the particular social context. In that case, assimilation undoubtedly serves as an adaptation tool for an individual's integration into the ever-changing context, which is necessary for all

[4] Cognitive conformist refers to a person who lacks of independent thinking or critical thinking (Jarvis, 1987; 111). He or she simply 'absorbs' facts that are told by others.

human beings. In the following section, I will discuss assimilation and the identity formation process as an adaptive behaviour that helps individuals to maintain and enhance social harmony to meet various contextual needs without losing or diluting their existing sets of values and beliefs.

3.2.2 Assimilation

Early formulations of assimilation theory viewed the dominant culture as superior. However, with the advent of globalization, Brubaker (2001) suggested that assimilation be perceived as a degree of incorporation of people within the structure rather than a process of becoming the dominant culture (or some subculture within the society). As mentioned in the previous section, 'becoming more similar' to the dominant culture does not mean that people lose their existing identities. Instead, people engage in the process of assimilation to enlarge their existing identity or even create a new one that will meet the contextual needs, maintain or enhance their self-esteem and develop sufficient ingroup identity to satisfy their need to belong. People re-interpret their roles, status, and values against the dominant norms, recognising similarities and developing an ingroup identity at a particular time and place. During this process, they remain aware of their own cultural values and beliefs while incorporating some from the host culture in order to become more similar to the dominant culture (Brubaker, 2001). Within the realms of the social identity theory and the Confucian value of being an 'insider' at the interpersonal level, an individual's ability to recognise potential similarities and develop a common ground will inevitably develop ingroup identity, thus fostering mutual trust and positive group interactions (Tse, Lee, Vertinsky & Wehrung, 1988, Stets & Burke, 2000).

Assuming that the holistic understanding of an individual is important for developing sustainable relationships, it is not enough to maximize perceived similarities while overlooking the significance of understanding the differences between people from diverse backgrounds. The following section will introduce the concept of social pluralism as a theoretical basis for the mechanisms required to understand interpersonal differences.

3.2.3 Social Pluralism

Social pluralism examines the multicultural aspects within a society (Le Roux, 2001), focusing on mutual communication and understanding between social groups. While the mere tolerance of differences does not require people to know anything about one another, social pluralism requires an understanding of the differences. Therefore, social pluralism extends beyond the mere tolerance or concealment of differences, which do little to remove social neglect and rejection. Rather, it advocates developing understanding and respect for other cultures through constructive dialogues that reveal both shared values and real differences. In the pluralistic age of globalization, where social norms are malleable because of rapid changes in population constitutions across time periods and contexts, there is no singular norm for societies in the twenty-first century. In these times, sub-norms emerge from different social groups according to the group members' shared values and beliefs in particular contexts (Alasuutari, 1995). Hence, understanding intergroup differences is particularly important in the twenty-first century (ibid.).

In conclusion, after reviewing social identity theory, assimilation and social pluralism, is it possible to minimize the gap between the new arrivals and Hong Kong locals through the mechanisms of assimilation and increased interaction? With increased understanding,

would people from different groups respect each other's 'group/individual distinctiveness' rather than labelling any norm deviation as 'inappropriate'? In parent education, what mechanism(s) will facilitate interaction among people from different groups? In the following section, I will present the role of education and group learning in the Chinese context. Thereafter, I will explore the group dynamic model and its features that can enhance group interactions among people from diverse backgrounds.

3.3 Orientation of Parent Education in Hong Kong

As mentioned above, an evaluation of the existing parent education programmes in Hong Kong revealed that the programmes needed to be more culturally sensitive to the Chinese context and address different beliefs and expectations of people with regard to social roles, knowledge acquisition, life and the future (Sanders, Cann & Markie-Dadds, 2003a). This section will discuss Chinese beliefs regarding knowledge acquisition in groups from the viewpoint of Confucianism.

3.3.1 Knowledge Acquisition in Confucian-oriented and non-Confucian-oriented Cultures

Knowledge Acquisition in Confucian-oriented Culture: Who and Where is the Source of Knowledge?

In ancient China, monks were considered the source of knowledge, and the temple was perceived as a formal place for learning to become 'enlightened' (Quanxing, 2008). These beliefs imply that absolute knowledge exists 'out there' with a particular group of people in

a particular place. The learner's role is to learn from these 'knowledge transmitters', and the process of acquiring this knowledge is an internal, private and individual cognitive process termed 'meditation', whereas knowledge sharing and discussion are regarded as disrespectful, selfish and egotistic (Woo, 1999).

From the Chinese perspective, meditation, which originated in Taoism, helps one concentrate on the experiences, thoughts, and feeling within oneself, without interacting with others, in order to acquire wisdom. During meditation, people acquire a form of knowledge called 'wu' (悟)—a character that can be divided into two meaningful parts, 忄 and 吾, which mean 'heart' and 'knowing', respectively. The entire character, therefore, means 'knowing by heart', thus entrenching learning as a private event in Chinese culture (Kennedy, 2002). Meditation promotes an empty state of mind, as a still and empty mind mirrors the universe where 'truth' abides (ibid.). Hence, although the Chinese traditionally emphasise knowledge authorities, they also appreciate the importance of an 'internal cognitive process' in self-development or, in Tao terms, self-enlightenment. Although this study does not discuss Taoist philosophy in detail, it should be noted that Taoist meditation and the 'learning by heart' philosophy are consistent with the non Asian notion of 'self-reflection' to a very large extent. It is important to note that 'learning by heart' in Chinese means understanding the meaning through knowledge application and reflection.

Knowledge Acquisition in Non-Confucian-oriented Cultures: Who and Where is the Source of Knowledge?

The Chinese concept of meditation leading to knowledge acquisition is also reflected in Western psychological theories, albeit through different terminologies. Self-reflection, in cognitive psychology, parallels meditation in that the internal cognitive process is a knowledge-acquisition medium. Unlike meditation, however, self-reflection in Western psychology does not require emptying or purifying the mind; it emphasises recalling all past experiences for experience exploration and analysis (Jarvis, 1987). In other words, self-reflection involves revisiting one's experiences mentally in order to explore alternative interpretations of these experiences (Schon, 1987). Reflection is a process of deep thought that requires both a backward glance at the situation being pondered upon and a future projection, being a process of recall as well as reasoning (Jarvis, 1987). Schon (1987) explained that evaluation occurs only when one encounters biographical experiences and context disjunction. Sharing and discussion combine to create cognitive disjunction, which can facilitate reflection and therefore create new knowledge (ibid.).

The review of knowledge acquisition in different cultural contexts suggests that although meditation or reflection plays a role in knowledge creation in both cultures, their mechanisms operate differently. Meditation in traditional Chinese culture de-emphasises the functional role of sharing and revisiting experiences, whereas reflection in Western psychology emphasises the creation of cognitive incongruence within oneself through external sources such as social sharing. However, both meditation and reflection are cognitive mechanisms that can change a person's mental functioning.

In the twenty-first century, people can no longer connect with just one cultural group; they have to interact with people from diverse backgrounds and identify themselves as belonging to different groups at different places and times. Hence, understanding, not just

tolerance, is the key to social harmony and positive interaction among group members with diverse backgrounds. Although sharing and discussion provide direct access to people's beliefs and develop mutual understanding, open group discussion is not considered a legitimate learning mode by the Chinese, who are profoundly influenced by Confucianism and possibly the historical conception of meditation. In that case, how can we open up the learning mode of discussion to the Chinese, who generally believe that professionals are the sole source of knowledge and that knowledge formation can be established within oneself without interacting with others? In the following sections, I will first explain the major group dynamic models and the relevant literature to explore the underlying mechanisms of group interaction, particularly among group members with diverse backgrounds. Then, I will justify my decision to adopt the Subject Group Dynamics model (SGD) to guide my study observations and analysis.

3.4 Group Learning in the Chinese Context

3.4.1 Group Dynamics

Recent studies on group dynamics in the context of America have concentrated on specific aspects associated with the four stages of group development identified by Bruce Tuckman (1965), who claimed that the ideal group decision-making process should include four stages:

1. Forming (getting along with others)
2. Storming (lowering the politeness barrier and trying to tackle the issues, even if tempers flare up)

3. Norming (getting used to each other and developing trust and productivity)
4. Performing (working together in a group towards a common goal on a highly efficient and cooperative basis)

Tuckman's model has been criticized for neglecting the aspects of interpersonal relationship building among group members and self-motivation in individual members. These criticisms point out that trust and self-motivation play important roles in these stages. In particular, the model's second stage has been criticized because if distrust intrudes and persists, a group may never reach the 'norming' stage. Even at the 'performing' stage, positive group dynamics are never guaranteed unless the goals are established by the group itself based on personal motivations without any external intervention wherein goals are assigned by external authorities (Wegge, 2000).

Hinsz (1992, 1995) suggested that three elements play a significant role in positive group dynamics: social comparison, anticipated evaluation and group-decision processes. According to Hinsz (1995), the social comparison theory indicates that group members evaluate themselves and anticipate being evaluated by other members of the group. To avoid the discomfort of being evaluated, group participants become less active and perform more cautiously in contributing to goal achievement as part of the group (Hinsz, Park & Sjomeling, 2004). At this stage, the fulfilment of members' social and emotional needs through group interaction can also enhance their motivation and involvement in the group (Levine & Moreland, 1998). To investigate the effect of the desire to belong on group dynamics, Williams, Harkins & Latane (1981) studied self-efficacy and found that when individuals work with friends or colleagues that they respect, they tend to work as hard collectively as they do individually to establish a favourable self-evaluation. This confirms

that members' self-evaluation of being ingroup or outgroup directly affects group cohesion and participants' involvement because of the immediate implications of self-evaluation (Karau & Williams, 1997).

Given my belief of the positive effect of group learning on mutual understanding among families with diverse backgrounds, I based the model for this study on a group dynamic model for guiding observation and data analysis. After reviewing Tuckman's stages of group development and group-dynamics-related literature, it is possible to identify the relationships between social comparison, self-evaluation, and ingroup- and outgroup-member identity as important components in creating and maintaining positive group interactions among members from diverse backgrounds. This recognition also echoes the previous literature review of the relevant ideas represented by social identity theory, assimilation, and Confucianism in terms of the need to belong, assimilation, as an adaptive social process, and power relationships in the group context.

While searching for a model that highlights the relationship between social comparisons, self-evaluation and group member identity formation, I encountered the Subject Group Dynamics model (SGD), which is sensitive to group formation, cohesion and members' self-perception (Abrams, Hogg & Marques, 2005, Heron, 1993). The model posits that people with different perspectives and different sociocultural backgrounds can benefit from group learning as long as they share a common goal (ibid.). The model is supported by social identity theory, which highlights the need to acknowledge the presence of multiple identities in each individual. A person's identity is flexible in the sense that the similarities and differences between individuals depend on the discourse in which a person engages on a particular occasion. Once an individual identifies him/herself with a social group based

on perceived similarities, a group goal can be established based on shared values or beliefs. The shared values become the group norm, which regulates members' behavioural orientations for the sake of the group's benefit rather than exclusively for individual benefits. SGD explicates this process of moving from not knowing each other to knowing each other, from acknowledging the existence of multiple identities in an individual to obtaining a set of group values from all group members (ibid.). These processes include the following:

- Process 1: Dynamics of exclusion and inclusion
- Process 2: Multiple identity acknowledgement and group values establishment
- Process 3: Salient multiple identities and one-group representation

Process 1: Dynamics of Exclusion and Inclusion

From the social identity perspective, the member exclusion and inclusion process fulfils the need to belong. Each individual evaluates similarities and differences between him/herself and the group in response to his/her potential contribution to the group, as a whole (Dovidio, Gaertner, Hodson, Houlette & Johnson, 2005).

Process 2: Multiple Identity Acknowledgement and Group Values Establishment

The acknowledgement of multiple identities facilitates intergroup interaction, open communication, self-disclosure, and consequently cooperative and respective interaction (Abrams, Hogg & Marques, 2005). According to SGD, although people driven by a search

for meaning and the reduction of uncertainties attempt to strengthen themselves by being ingroup, they do not necessarily adhere to exactly the same values and norms as other members (ibid.). SGD assumes that the values of an ingroup are normative directions rather than prescriptive procedures. While group members may not follow any specific steps, they do adhere to or attempt to achieve a clear direction, expectation or goal (ibid.), hence, the members' behavioural orientations are regulated by the group norms, which 'glue' people together to a common interest or goal. However, the ways in which people proceed and achieve these goals can vary, as individuals have different perspectives towards the group. Through sharing, members acknowledge the differences among group members and value discussion as a process of mutual understanding, knowledge consolidation and personal development in terms of recognizing new possibilities and searching for common ground, which can reduce intragroup bias in the long run (Dovidio, Gaertner, Hodson, Houlette & Johnson, 2005).

Process 3: Salient Multiple Identities and One-group Representation

When participants share a common group goal and interact collaboratively, with positive attitudes towards intragroup differences, the group has established a one-group representation (ibid.). One-group representation does not necessarily refer to a single group with undifferentiated and homogeneous group members. Rather, people in such a group behave for both their own and the group's sake. The interaction process is characterized by a member's attempt to change the group and to be changed by the group to satisfy both personal needs and the group goals.

The three processes suggested by SGD explain how group members (1) explore their identities at a particular place and time in a group, (2) acknowledge differences and similarities among group members and identify group value and (3) establish one-group representation with a shared group goal or interest. In the SGD model, differences are regarded as assets that enable one to be flexible in shifting among different social groups depending on the contextual needs at each particular moment (Abrams & Hogg, 2001). When applying SGD in parent education, groups of parents with diverse sociocultural backgrounds are expected to identify similarities and acknowledge differences through interaction. In this, their perceived similarities bond 'seemingly' different parents together, whereas their perceived differences are recognised and valued as group assets for both personal growth and group goal achievement. While SGD provides pointers on how to nurture and establish a foundation for positive group interactions among members from diverse sociocultural backgrounds, how can SGD engage new arrivals and Hong Kong local parents as one group ready to acknowledge mutual differences and promote mutual good? The following section will explain the mutual support group model that can address the above needs.

3.4.2 Mutual Support Groups

The mutual support group mode of learning assumes that when a group becomes a system of mutual aid, the differences among group members are significantly reduced because everyone becomes a helper (Garvin, Gutierrez & Galinsky, 2004). It is based on the realization that people with different sociocultural backgrounds can also share the same problems and consequently be identified as ingroup members. This perception of being 'in

the same boat' promotes equal status between group members and is critical to members' motivation for sharing and reflection, whereas a non-equal status leads to memorization as a cognitive conformist (Jarvis, 1987; 111). While all ingroup members can voice their opinions, they can share their stories, debate issues and take decisions regardless of mutual differences. According to Kieffer (1984), through asserting their voices in a group, members develop 'participatory competence'—the ability to participate in a common enterprise (group benefit) (Garvin, Gutierrez & Galinsky, 2004). Believing in their 'collective strength' and 'power over life' as individuals, the participants realize that all group members can help one another and value each member's experiences and stories (ibid.). Given that minimal professional intervention is required when the participants themselves are the key help providers and recipients, a mutual support group mode can promote equal status among participants while recognizing, acknowledging, and valuing their experiences. Such a mode is particularly appropriate for parent education as parenting is not only a cultural but also a life-long activity. With different needs at different life stages, parents can identify themselves with different social groups and gather informally, rather than being organised together by professionals who are unacquainted with the families, to participate in a parent education program at a specific place and time (ibid.). The mutual support group mode of learning within the realm of SGD therefore assumes with increased awareness of perceived similarities (including perceived equal status), understanding differences and beliefs of power in knowledge creation, parents would be more likely and motivated to gather together 'informally' to share rather than limited to official education programmes led by 'expert'.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter highlighted the drawbacks in the existing parent education programmes to illustrate these programmes' incompatibility and cultural insensitivity with regard to the target learners, particularly considering the Confucian values of social hierarchy and group harmony and the historical conception of learning as a private rather than a public or open activity. In order to address these drawbacks while taking into account the parents' shared cultural roots and different social expectations due to their unique biography, values and beliefs, I introduced the SGD model to highlight the major components of group development among members from diverse backgrounds, particularly the mechanisms promoting group discussion among such members. In the next chapter, I will present the methodology that best fits this study to explore these mechanisms in the Hong Kong context and the extent to which sociocultural factors affect group interaction among members from diverse backgrounds, with the final objective of formulating a model of parent education programme suitable for families with diverse backgrounds, values and beliefs in the Hong Kong context.

Chapter 4. The Spirit of Adventure—Curiosity for the Unknown and Discovery of New Possibilities, Paths and Discovery Limits: Study Design

4.1 Introduction

One of this study's objectives is to explore parent education for families from various sociocultural backgrounds in Hong Kong. This is a cultural study as it involves investigating the influence(s) of sociocultural factors on group dynamics. It is also a field enquiry which explores the mechanisms that facilitate learning group development among people with diverse expectations and needs. This study, in particular, is guided by three research questions: (1) To what extent do sociocultural factors affect group interaction among members from diverse backgrounds in Hong Kong? (2) What mechanisms affect group interaction among people from diverse backgrounds in parent education programmes in Hong Kong? (3) How can one formulate a parent education programme to suit families having diverse backgrounds, values, and beliefs in the Hong Kong context?

Since the emphasis is on studying human interaction in a holistic sense, narrative inquiry has been chosen as the most appropriate research methodology for this study. This chapter explains the reasons for doing so, while discussing how the nature of cultural studies justifies the importance of a holistic study of human beings. Given my belief in parenting as a cultural practice and group dynamics as by-products of human interaction within a particular context, it is essential to use a research methodology that combines the holistic study of human beings with an awareness of 'fluidity' in perceived identities and frame of references for interpreting the world or its truths. Furthermore, to justify my choice of

methodology, I will present my underlying rationale for using focus groups as the data collection tool to collect social dialogues in order to capture human interactions and, later, to serve as the units of analysis. Finally, in making meaning of the life experiences of people from diverse sociocultural backgrounds, I will justify the use of the SGD model for guiding the data analysis and the significance of incorporating my life stories in the interpretative process.

4.2 Narrative Inquiry as a Study Tool for Human Interaction

The use of the narrative approach has been influenced by a philosophical change of thought from traditional views on objective truth to a more postmodern view of the individual, which acknowledges the influence of experience and culture on knowledge construction (Gorman & Balter, 1997). The storytelling process represents the teller's organization of experiences into stories of important or critical events (Webster & Mertova, 2007). These critical events are important aspects of our life because they provide some meaningful information about who we are and why we behave in particular ways. The narratives that recount these events provide a specific structure for understanding meanings that convey one's past and present values, beliefs and frames of reference (ibid.; 4). Hence, narratives allow researchers to present experiences holistically in all their complexity and richness, aspects not usually revealed by more traditional research approaches such as questionnaires and individual interviews. The process of narrative inquiry attempts to capture the 'whole story', whereas other methods tend to communicate an understanding of the studied subjects or phenomena at certain points, while frequently omitting important 'intervening

stages' (ibid.). In addition to being well grounded and supportable, narrative inquiry aims for its findings to have verisimilitude.

4.3 Is This a Cultural Study?

Interpersonal interaction is a cultural practice that reflects our cultural values and beliefs (Alasuutari, 1995). In other words, to study social relationships is to study a culture. In the social sciences, a cultural study examines the meaning of 'life' as it is subjected to particular social and cultural contexts (ibid.; 26). In specific terms, people's perceptions of the world direct their way of life and how they relate with others (ibid.). People's interpretation of the world, termed as reality, is the product of their experiences in the context to which they belong. These experiences are regulated by social expectations and defined by personal values within a culture. Relating this idea to my study, I have mentioned in Chapter 2 that although Hong Kong locals and the mainland Chinese share similar cultural roots, their different social expectations from social roles, perhaps attributable to different sociopolitical factors, result in different behaviours and consequently different experiences within the shared context. In other words, these two groups of people experience different 'realities' within the same social context.

Within this definition, the concept of 'reality' varies across social contexts. People's actions are regulated by their perceived 'identities' and the cultural values and beliefs held by them. In this regard, cultural studies reject the notion of universal phenomena, while emphasizing cultural sensitivity and the holistic interpretation of data (Scupin, 1995; 411). More importantly, cultural studies value all derived meanings as equally valid and

important (ibid.). In other words, no cultural value or belief is superior to any other, and all behaviours can be explained through factors that require investigation and understanding within a context (ibid.; 41). Based on my conviction that people's behaviours are guided by their beliefs resulting from their experiences with their particular social world, this study is conceptualized as a cultural study that seeks to understand the 'truth(s)' behind the perceived meanings conveyed by the participants' stories. In the following section, I will further support my reasons for conceptualizing this study as a cultural study by presenting philosophies underpinning qualitative research that seeks to explore 'truth(s)' and showing how they foreground meaning contextualization to promote the holistic understanding of human activities.

4.4 Philosophies of Understanding in a Post Era

The holistic understanding of data has become increasingly important because of the phenomenon of globalization, wherein the flow of information and people from different countries has become more accessible and plausible (Usher, 1996). In a country with multiple cultures, it is important for people to be sufficiently empathetic to establish relationships with one another. Empathetic understanding requires real understanding, not merely tolerance, of difference (ibid.). Hence, to explore the group dynamics among people from diverse sociocultural backgrounds, guided by the approaches focusing on meaning contextualization, researchers (1) define the criteria underlying the social issues targeted by the researchers' inquiry and (2) determine the ways in which the researchers approach and evaluate data theoretically and methodologically (Husen, 1988, Usher, 1996; 15, Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

The philosophies underpinning meaning-contextualization-oriented paradigms will be presented in the following sections to illustrate how different philosophical approaches, including interpretive hermeneutics, postmodernism, poststructuralism, social constructionism and critical theory, share certain common views on truth and knowledge. These perspectives provide a theoretical basis justifying the appropriateness of narrative inquiry as this study's research methodology.

4.4.1 The Interpretive-hermeneutic Approach

The interpretive-hermeneutic approach is 'derived from the humanities with an emphasis on holistic and qualitative information and interpretive approaches' (Husen, 1988; 17). The approach is based on the values of open dialogue and a practical interest in free communication (Carr, 1995a). Interpretive researchers regard the life-world as not merely one world but an infinite number of worlds relating to the subject's infinite number of attitudes and interpretations (Pearse, 1983). People may differ in their responses to the same or similar situations (Gage, 1991), because perception results from each person's biological experiences, culture and immediate context. An interpretive-hermeneutic approach regards reality or truth as a person's interpretation within his/her own frame of life. It is impossible to understand reality and truth without reference to the context. Therefore, through its interest in hermeneutics, the study seeks an improved understanding of human life through dialogues about people's common concerns.

The adoption of an interpretive-hermeneutic approach suggests that a researcher seeks culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social world (Crotty, 1998;

67). The terms 'culturally derived' and 'historically situated' do not imply that a researcher's interpretations are to be bounded by the limits of the past, however, the past does provide a frame of reference for the derived meanings of a person's current worldviews. According to Crotty (1998), the agglomeration of past and present worldviews on knowledge formation can be conceptualised as a spiral in which newly derived meanings become the foundation on which future knowledge develops. Hence, a person's interpretation of the current state is a 'fusion' of the past and the present, which constitutes the 'reality', 'truth' and 'knowledge' in that person's social world (ibid.).

In the interpretative-hermeneutic approach, researchers acknowledge different people's perspectives in understanding a phenomenon and engage with the participants' holistic accounts (Wood, 2006, Craig, 2007, Lindh, Severinsson & Berg, 2009). Furthermore, the analysis and interpretation of participants' stories are not considered the products of either the participants or the researcher. Rather, they are the products of the researcher's and participants' accounts of a particular phenomenon—representing communal ownership with intersubjectivity (Craig, 2007). Hence, the participants' stories may yield multiple meanings and interpretations since the participants and the researcher adopt different frames of reference across time periods and contexts. Based on this, it should not be mistakenly assumed that I, as the narrative inquirer, am a neutral observer and analyst. Rather, I am the participants' partner in the process of interpretation 'from the historical and cultural context that defines one's interpretive framework' (Usher, 1996; 22).

Since this study is a contextualized, holistic, and cultural study that explores group dynamics among people from diverse backgrounds, it is also concerned with how context and personal factors frame interpretations. Within the framework of the interpretive-

hermeneutic approach, I assume that meanings are created through 'negotiations'[5] between personal experiences, immediate context, and sociocultural expectations from adopted roles. Any external environmental event that elicits a 'negotiation process' denotes the presence of different perspectives that facilitate responses based on those of the group members. In this process, each person's responses not only reflect that person's own interpretation of a phenomenon but also serve as catalysts to facilitate new knowledge formation in other group members through discussion and negotiation processes (Erickson, 1986; 120). Based on this assumption, this study analyses the personal meanings that can be attributed to the participants' conversations to explore the puzzle of how and why a person develops certain beliefs and what are these beliefs (Crotty, 1998).

Since this study considers the personal, contextual and sociohistorical accounts of its participants, the concepts of 'truth', 'reality' and 'knowledge' become products of subjective interpretation in which people interact with a phenomenon based on their pre-understanding, history, and interaction between known and successive new interpretations (ibid.). In this regard, my position on truth is that the interpretive process is a recursive activity generating new understandings or truths on a continuous basis, which could result in multiple or even an infinite number of truths and meanings (Pearse, 1983). The following sections will discuss postmodernism and poststructuralism to show how these approaches, likewise, position subjective, multiple truths in a manner consistent with the meaning-contextualized nature of my research (Webster & Mertova, 2007; 6).

[5] In this context, 'negotiations' refer to cognitive events wherein individuals create knowledge by finding a common ground in the differences between the existing knowledge schema and new information.

4.4.2 The Postmodernist Approach

Consistent with the interpretive-hermeneutic premise about 'truth', the postmodernist approach favours multi-dimensional, multi-voiced descriptions of reality (Webster & Mertova, 2007), emphasising that people bring their own 'baggage, or past life experiences, to a situation' (ibid.; 28–29). Therefore, the approach has an inherent interest in human factors related to knowledge acquisition, where 'I' is highly valued and emphasised. Hence, there is no objective truth but only a constructed reality, which is further shaped by an ever-changing social and cultural context. Thus, like the interpretative-hermeneutic approach, the postmodernist approach suggests that the dialectical relation between individuals and the social context is embedded in 'truth' and 'reality'.

Adhering to the central premise of multiple truths, a postmodernist researcher stresses the importance of data transparency and authenticity in uncovering and understanding the contextual truth in order to obtain an empathetic understanding and completeness of data (Mangan & Banks, 1999). This study, therefore, is guided by the postmodernist approach which advocates the power of empathetic, complete and holistic data in supporting the notion of multiple truths wherein 'a truth' becomes 'the truth' for the particular individual, but not for all people, because of people's different prior experiences and expectations from a phenomenon (ibid., Webster & Mertova, 2007; 6). The next section discusses poststructuralism to further explain how the interplay of contextual and personal factors contributes to multiple truths.

4.4.3 The Poststructuralist Approach

Poststructuralists define truth and knowledge from the viewpoint of self-perception within a social world and hold that self-perception plays a critical role in an individual's interpretation of meaning (Hall, 1985; Webster & Mertova, 2007). Consistent with social identity theory, the poststructuralist approach posits that rather than perceiving the self as a singular entity, each person has multiple selves, such as those defined by class and profession, comprising different knowledge and values. One's self is constituted by contexts and motives based on which one performs, depending on one's contextual needs and desire to promote self-effectiveness and self-belonging at a particular time and place. Riessman (2008) explained that self-perception could be modified according to different contextual needs. She termed this ever-shifting self-identity as the 'performed self'. Hence, self-perception influences not only how and why a person narrates a particular story but also what the person narrates. Based on this influence of the performed self, poststructuralists advocate that all readers must understand how the data are related to both the tellers' and the readers' own personal self-concept at the time of data collection and research. In other words, poststructuralists reject the notion that data, including narratives and transcribed text, have a single purpose and meaning (ibid.). Instead, the reader may interpret different purposes and meanings from a given data or text in response to different 'selves'. From this viewpoint, it is particularly important to analyse how narrative interpretations shift in relation to the performed identity of the reader at particular moments (ibid.). Accordingly, poststructuralists suggest that while meanings may be multiple and inconsistent, they are nevertheless 'true' at a specific time and place, because a person's

behaviours and role can change based on individual and contextual needs at a particular time and place.

The above perspective provides some important guidelines for this study. First, shared interpretations or beliefs do not necessarily derive from people of the same culture. However, people who share the same performed self can contribute to a similar, if not the same, frame of reference regarding a phenomenon (Alasuutari, 1995; 31). Second, because of the shifting nature of the performed self, readers as well as researchers must ensure that people's performed selves and motives are understood contextually. Within these premises, a person can have multiple and mutually contradicting selves if the tellers or readers shift their performed selves and change their motives for telling or interpreting stories (Fook, 2002). Hence, data transparency and completeness, combined with an awareness of the performed self, become critical for readers to understand why and how a story is told in a particular manner. In other words, to understand the process of truth generation, we need to understand how an individual interprets a phenomenon in his/her own way. In the next section, I will illustrate how social constructionism frames social dialogues as the cognitive means through which people engage in the construction and reconstruction of their own truths, reality and knowledge (Webster & Mertova, 2007; 5).

4.4.4 Social Constructionism and Understanding

Sharing its approach to truth and language with interpretative hermeneutics, postmodernism and poststructuralism, social constructionism is a philosophy that not only equates understanding with interpretation but also constructs and reconstructs interpretation in

terms of language (Chang, 2010). Social constructionism explains that the essential condition for knowledge construction is social dialogue, through which individuals become conscious of the discrepancy between established knowledge and newly acquired information by sharing different views on the same (Taylor, 1998). In this regard, individuals experience an inner drive rather than any external coercion to minimize the said discrepancies through the process of knowledge construction[6] and reconstruction[7] (Imel, 1997).

Being empathetic and open to other perspectives, people tend to search for common ground while simultaneously making the most appropriate adjustments to unite their past and present knowledge to achieve 'cognitive equilibrium' (ibid.). Based on this assumption of knowledge construction, individuals play an active role in recognizing contradictions and incorporating new information into an already established schema that involves not only knowledge but also thoughts and feelings (ibid.). However, rather than conceptualizing the process of knowledge construction as a mechanical process of knowledge reconciliation, social constructionists emphasise an individual's holistic and interactive accounts in terms of biography, frame of reference and affection during knowledge construction and reconstruction (Mezirow, 2000, Taylor, 1998).

In my view, learning that best fits an individual's needs and cultural context is that which exposes the individual to differences, engages him/her in critical analysis and ensures the best balance of knowledge construction and reconstruction between past and present

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[6] 'Knowledge construction' implies making contextual sense of new knowledge based on one's own frame of reference (Cranton, 1994, Imel, 1997).

[7] 'Knowledge reconstruction' refers to the synthesis of past and present knowledge by using critical reflectivity to determine the shared interests as well as differences between past and present knowledge (Cranton, 1994, Imel, 1997).

knowledge within a particular context. Dialogues, in this study, are therefore assumed to reflect the participants' perception of their role in a particular context and critically interrogate their long-held assumptions regarding their own cultural values when faced with the needs of the immediate social context (Grabove, 1997, Merriam, 1998, Kennedy, 2002). At a given moment, people's social expectations from their adopted roles guide their behaviour in a group. Based on this premise, this study explores how people formulate their role in a group context with associated social expectations from the adopted roles that guide their behaviour.

4.4.5 Critical Theory and Understanding

Critical theory emphasises the impact of norms and perceived power relations on people's behaviour in particular contexts. The word 'norm' refers to social expectations which become the standard for 'appropriate' behaviours that are valued for the sake of social belonging. When a person's behaviour is regulated by social norms and meaning becomes the product of the person's interaction with the environment, the concept of meaning itself becomes unstable because of the rapid transformation of social structures comprising different group members. More importantly, norms are not explicitly stated, in the sense that their rules are inferred on the basis of people's prior experiences and beliefs regarding their social roles in a particular context, and authorities, in particular, can violate the full articulation and use of acquired knowledge because of the authority conformity effect in perceived lower-status individuals (Habermas, 1984; 11). By analysing the influence of norms and perceived power relations on meaning construction, my study not only

highlights the importance of contextual understanding but also reveals to readers the potential impact of implicit norms on participants' behaviour so that readers can be more critical in understanding the contextual meanings within the account of a particular social structure (ibid.). Experts and teachers, especially, are regarded as power authorities in the Chinese context, where the power-norm relations of teacher–learner, superior–inferior, instruction–obedience are implicit power relations with certain social expectations from both parties. By adopting a critical theorist's perspective that people's behaviour is regulated by the norm of a particular context, we can regard people's interaction with the environment as an accumulation of new experiences and therefore new knowledge. Consistent with this belief, new knowledge is conceptualized in my research as guided by the norms or social expectations of particular roles in particular settings. With this assumption, it becomes necessary to consider the power-norm perspective during data analysis by recognizing the potential impact of the established and developing group norms formed based on the adopted roles, shared beliefs, or values of a particular group of people in a given context.

4.4.6 How Do These Philosophical Approaches Guide This Study?

The discussion of various philosophical approaches illustrates their conception of the meaning-making process and the source of truth and reality. The interpretive-hermeneutic approach suggests a holistic interpretation of dialogues based on culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social world. The notion of situated meanings or understanding leads to the possibility of multiple meanings of the same phenomenon.

Postmodernists further explain the phenomenon of multiple meanings by highlighting the dialectical relation between an individual and the social context, which contributes to the construction of truth and reality. Hence, truth is not a static fact, in the sense that the contradictions between past and present knowledge illustrate that truth is both time- and context-specific. However, even constructed truths and realities should fulfil the criteria of transparency and authenticity of data, which are crucial in obtaining complete data, namely, the narratives or transcribed text, so that readers can empathetically understand the participants' experiences from the latter's perspectives without having had the same experiences.

Based on the abovementioned notions, poststructuralists propose the importance of situated understanding from a self-perception perspective. The fluidity of self-perception and motives for choosing to perform a particular 'self' at a particular time and place further support the subjective nature of contextual truths. To explain how and what one performs as oneself within a given context, critical theorists describe how social norms affect one's chosen 'performed self' and regulate one's behaviour, including the presentation of one's stories.

The above illustrations indicate that meaning-contextualization-oriented philosophies share some common ground regarding multiple truths and subjectivity in their worldviews, thus addressing the need to incorporate culture and self-reference in research to explore 'who is doing what to whom for what reason', multiple voices (truths), holistic views, practical concerns within contexts, personal voices, and social and cultural issues (Webster & Mertova, 2007; 30). Based on this philosophical discussion, narrative inquiry was chosen as the research methodology of this study, which aims to explore the group dynamics

among people, namely parents, with diverse sociocultural backgrounds, for two reasons: Firstly, narrative inquiry considers the subjective truth in terms of the relation between past and present knowledge, consistent with my belief that new knowledge is mediated by different, mutually contradictory perspectives and interpretations of the past and present. Secondly, narrative inquiry emphasises the completeness and empathetic understanding of narratives. To further clarify my position regarding these two reasons, I will present my own learning experience as a mother to illustrate how I constructed my own meaning of motherhood.

After my son was born in 2006, I became a full-time mother. My knowledge of motherhood and my own experiences about parenthood told me that children should always be prioritized. I believe that parents should take care of their children for building the child–parent relationship and transmitting worldviews. A knowledge or cognitive contradiction occurred in this regard when I realized that the childcare culture in Hong Kong is 'different' or even 'contradictory' to my own parenting beliefs. All around me, I observed the norm that foreign helpers[8] became the child's primary caregivers, while parents enjoyed their own life. The word 'norm' at this point refers to the 'expected', 'appropriate' and 'standard' practices. Full-time mothers are perceived as a minority and devalued by society in terms of economic productivity; they are always labelled as 'detached' (from the outside world). This led to an identity crisis during which I suffered both cognitively and affectively. I had to change if I did not want to be considered an 'alien' or devalued by others. I reviewed my blog for the last five years and found that I underwent various cognitive constructions and reconstructions during this period. I first

[8] Foreign helpers in Hong Kong refer to nannies imported from foreign countries, usually from southeast Asia.

shared my feelings with mothers who faced similar problems, while blaming various aspects of my life. Even while sharing my problems with this group of mothers, I insisted that 'my way' was correct, without analysing the problem from different perspectives. When my situation did not improve, I felt the need to understand why some families 'ignored', in my view, their children and handed over their precious offspring to foreign helpers. Sharing my problems with people who held different views required me to put in extra efforts to compare and analyse the reasons behind their parenting practices. At that time, my feeling that 'I need to change' was so strong that it motivated me to confront these differences through a cognitive struggle. Over these years, I openly shared my stories with parents having different parenting philosophies. Only through empathetic understanding could my listeners understand and respect my position without stereotyping me as a 'stubborn', 'resistant' and 'hopeless' mother, which prevented them from offering me advice and help.

By reviewing my blog, I came to believe that I was not behaving like a mother who belonged to the twenty-first century. In response, I tried to adopt parenting philosophies and practices that did not come naturally to me—to enjoy my life while appointing a nanny to take care of my children. This phase lasted for only a few months and left me feeling extremely guilty. Eventually, I found a balance between my children's and my own well-being by reinterpreting and repositioning my definition of well-being as a balance of every aspect of life, not exclusively my life as a mother. The process was painful, and I consider it an important life chapter that has formed 'me' as I am today. I learnt through this process that sharing with people who hold different views facilitates one's realization that there are no right or wrong parenting values and beliefs, but those that should be adapted to one's

biography and context. Restricting oneself to sharing with people having the same views not only strengthens your old beliefs but also suppresses your awareness and appreciation of other alternatives. In empathetic sharing, we were all aware that although we shared the role of being a mother and parent, we had different expectations from motherhood and parenthood. I recursively experienced an awareness of differences and cognitive struggle when exposed to these 'unknown' perceptions.

4.5 Narrative Inquiry as a Methodology

As discussed in earlier sections, globalization in the modern era signifies cultural diversity and a fluid reality. Consistent with the philosophical ideas presented in the previous section, narrative inquiry addresses the values of meaning contextualization, data transparency and completeness, and truth subjectivity and fluidity (Blumenfeld-Jones, 1995).

While narrative inquiry does not strive to produce any certain conclusions, its findings should be 'well-grounded' and 'supportable', emphasizing the linguistic reality of human experience. Narrative inquiry does not claim to represent the exact truth but rather aims for 'verisimilitude'—its results have the appearance of truth or reality (data transparency) (Webster & Mertova, 2007; 4). Narrative inquiry is based on the respondents' life experiences and explicates chosen parts of the tellers' lives that are important to them in a particular context (ibid.; 3). Through their telling, stories are constantly being restructured in light of the tellers' new experiences. Stories help us to not only make sense of, evaluate and integrate the past with the present and the different with the unexpected but also transform the present and shape the future to be richer or more complete than the past

(ibid.; 2). Sharing life stories in focus groups, in particular, is a process that allows the participants to revisit the 'truth' of their experiences (Seidman, 1998, Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). In other words, a story provides a complete picture of the antecedents, occurrence, and consequences of a series of events. It not only illustrates temporal notions of experience, recognizing that one's understanding of people changes, but also forms meaningful connections with life.

Hence, based on my belief that storytelling holistically presents experiences in all their complexity and richness, stories, in this study, are regarded as tools through which people make sense of themselves at different points of time, when they can orient themselves to interpret the narratives from particular perspectives (Mishler, 1999, Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Within the realm of narrative inquiry, narratives are defined as 'truths' that are relative to 'how the teller performs and tells the story at the particular moment in a particular discourse' (Pinnergar & Daynes, 2007; 29). Denzin (1997) further asserted that the way in which people perform their stories (i.e. reflect their performed self) in turn affects the researcher's understanding of the 'truth'. Therefore, there is never a complete version of the truth, because our representations of experiences can never be a static representation of the truth (ibid.; 14).

In short, narrative inquiry embraces the power of understanding different experiences at specific places and times (Pinnergar & Daynes, 2007). Assuming this, to properly study and understand narratives, the narrative inquirer must understand how the narrative's meaning is related to its teller's own personal orientation, including the 'performed self' and other motives, which gives rise to personal meanings within given contexts (Riessman, 2008).

4.5.1 The Role of the Narrative Inquirer

Since this research is positioned as a cultural study of subjective truth in a holistic perspective, my topic cannot be studied effectively using the traditional 'scientific' or 'modernist' paradigms that are grounded in objective reality and neglect real life, relationships and contexts. Narrative inquiry applies the techniques of description—scene, plot, character and events. In this regard, narratives are treated as truths in the sense that the tellers actually express their face meanings whereas the listeners need to explore their hidden meanings with reference to the stories' context and the values and beliefs they reflect as well as the relation between these beliefs and actions (how one performs oneself in the group) (Webster & Mertova, 2007; 22). Accordingly, using narrative inquiry enables me to gain a holistic understanding of the participants' experiences in three important ways. First, the interpretive-hermeneutic orientation helps me examine the development of group dynamics among individuals from diverse backgrounds with reference to the historical dimension of the sociocultural values of the mainland Chinese and Hong Kong locals. Secondly, narrative inquiry's emphasis on human-context relationships encourages me to reflect critically on my own relevant experiences, while the stories that are told help me understand how I can interpret and use their truths more responsibly (ibid., 2007; 7). In other words, through dialogue and reflection, both the narrative inquirer and the participants can not only construct (interpret within an adopted frame of reference) but also reconstruct the perceived truths (knowledge of the past and present) (ibid.; 16). This indicates a holistic approach to knowledge construction and reconstruction, with knowledge and beliefs interwoven between the past and the present to represent the relevant

experiences of a long life span (ibid.; 15). Bochner (2007; 203) further elaborated the relationship between past and present knowledge in knowledge construction as follows:

> [...] Making stories from one's lived history is a process by which ordinarily we revise the past retroactively. The process of retelling is both describing and modifying the past. What we see as true today may not have been true at the time the actions we are describing were performed. Thus, [the] narrative inquirer needs to resist from attributing intentions and meanings to events that they did not have at the time they were experienced.

Narrative inquiry never aims at exploring causal relationships; it seeks to display how occurrences represent 'meanings' or 'truths' that show necessary connections among data or 'narratives' (Webster & Mertova, 2007; 19). In this study, the dialogues between the participants and my reflections on their stories incorporate both participant and researcher stories that form new stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; 4). Parenting was chosen as the discussion area because it is believed to be a social product that reflects an individual's sociocultural values and beliefs. Based on this assumption, after understanding what kind of story should be told, how, why, for whom and based on which context, I reached a position wherein I could make sense of the participants' experiences or narratives and organise them into a body of practical knowledge, applicable to the context of parent education programmes in Hong Kong.

4.6 Where and How to Collect Narratives?

In this study, narratives were the units of analysis and gathered primarily using focus groups. In addition, I conducted a few individual interviews with participants in the Family Resilience project[9] to investigate the protective and risk factors regarding people's resilience capabilities. The interview data were used as reference when necessary. Participants were recruited from community centres and kindergartens at suburban and urban areas in Hong Kong. In this section, I will first explain the appropriateness of using focus groups as the data collection method for this study. Within the realm of narrative inquiry, I will also present the procedures of sampling, data presentation, and analysis that highlight the humanistic aspects of this study.

4.6.1 Focus Groups

Focus groups are a form of group interview that make use of communication between participants by encouraging them to ask questions, talk to one another, and exchange comments on each others' experiences and viewpoints (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2007). Based on this definition, as long as the discussion is facilitated among the participants, perhaps by a group facilitator, the researcher can play a rather 'muted' role in collecting narratives. My role in these focus groups was overtly that of a non-participant observer for three reasons (Stephens & Leach, 1998). First, according to Stephens & Leach (1998), the researcher's overt presence represents the participants' informed consent to explicitly monitor their interactions rather than observing them unseen behind a one-way mirror. All

[9] I was the research assistant for the Family Resilience project conducted by the City University of Hong Kong. The project studied aspects related to family resilience capabilities such as family functioning (including parenting), finance, adaptation and social acceptance.

the participants of this study were fully informed about my study and therefore expected my physical presence as an observer-recorder in the focus group. Second, my role as a research assistant or fieldwork supervisor for the moderators of these focus groups could effectively minimize the 'Hawthorne effect' (ibid.; 38), which refers to 'behaviour change as participants felt they were important people in the eyes of researcher' (ibid.). I was never the major figure leading the focus groups. In some groups, I was the research assistant for a project conducted by a university. The image and status of an assistant is secondary to the project investigator. In other groups, I was the fieldwork supervisor for practicum in-service teachers who led parent education programmes for their school. In these groups, the teachers were the primary figures who communicated with the parents, although the parents were fully informed about my dual roles as a researcher and fieldwork supervisor who sat in the corner and watched the entire process. Third, one of the criteria for sample selection is established relationship among the participants (Details about sample selection will be discussed later in this chapter).

The interactive nature of the focus groups, combined with my non-intrusive role throughout the process, provided me a platform to collect authentic narratives that became the analysis units for this study. In particular, the active roles played by the participants in interpreting, analysing and responding to others' narratives revealed their understanding of other's perspectives while developing their own viewpoints based on the multiple perspectives shared by others. In other words, the power of the focus group allowed me to tap into interpersonal communications that were especially important to this study because they highlighted the participants' cultural and personal values. Therefore, focus groups can examine the relationships between individual and the social environment in order to

uncover not only what people think but also how and why they think that way (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2007, Tennant, 1991; 123).

4.6.2 Observation Guided by the Subjective Group Dynamics Model (SGD)

Chapter 3 contained a detailed discussion regarding the appropriateness of applying the SGD model to this study. With this model guiding my observations, I was able to avoid being overwhelmed by the pace of the activity and probably focusing too much attention on only a subset of the available phenomena. Rather than having the study comprise discrete periods of data collection and data analysis, the model systematically guided me to focus on various aspects of the changing stages of group dynamics. According to Zorn (2009), model-guided observation is especially important during the early stages of research since researchers are usually so overwhelmed by the rich 'data' that they cannot pinpoint the issues that are important to the group and the subtle ways in which group members may influence each other. In this study, I have explained my inferences and comments made during or after the observation by relating them to the observed and recorded performances as well as my own life experiences. As the narratives unfolded in the focus groups, I did not know whether they would reflect the phenomena mentioned in the SGD model. However, I transcribed, studied and analysed the narratives in relation to my own life experiences, and the participants verified and elaborated on the collected data to form 'new stories' that may or may not reflect the components mentioned in the SGD model.

4.7 Sampling of Focus Group Members and Procedure

4.7.1 Gathering Narratives

In the narrative inquiry methodology, data are found everywhere, ranging from interviews to casual conversations (Phillion, 2002). One's life experiences become stories of one's life, while specific events and the manner in which these events are retrieved and retold depends on one's motives and contextual needs. In this study, the data included how the study participants interacted with one another while recalling and retelling their stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, 2000). The focus groups' discussion topics pertained to parenting for two major reasons. First, the project for which I served as the research assistant is about family resilience; it studies aspects related to family resilience capabilities such as family functioning (including parenting), finance, adaptation and social acceptance. Therefore, the research project started with an exploration of the participants' family functioning, including parenting. Second, my job as a practicum supervisor for the parent education programmes in my university also offered me access to data collected from parents.

Since I was not the group facilitator for the focus groups, I did not ask the participants any questions. Instead, I listened to the participants' shared stories and observed their interactions. Based on my experiences as an immigrant, Hong Kong local, parent and educator, I conducted this study while believing that "I know something, but not everything" (Richardson & St. Piere, 2005; 961). By sustaining this position of a respectful and curious inquirer, I allowed the interpretation process to signify the perspectives and interpretations of both the researcher and those being researched (Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

4.7.2 Sample Selection

Given my belief that social stereotypes are transmitted intergenerationally, parents of young children are critical for promoting social harmony to establish and develop a harmonized society in the future. Hence, I chose parents of young children to be the major participants in this study. While I wanted to explore group dynamics among people from diverse sociocultural backgrounds, I also considered the diverse sociocultural compositions of the focus groups with regard to the accessibility of data collection. Also, although it would have been ideal to have conducted several observations over time in order to capture the group development process with the same groups of participants, my limited access to research sites and therefore sample recruitment and sustainability did not allow me to study the same groups over a period of time. Given that I had no control over the sample size and sample background, I decided to study these particular groups of participants after I was informed about the relationship between the recruited participants as well as the diversity of their sociocultural background In other words, my careful selection of research sites had already taken account of the participants' sociocultural makeup, in terms of their socioeconomic status and identities as new arrivals and Hong Kong locals, to fulfil the study's diverse sociocultural background requirements. As mentioned earlier, as a research assistant for a government-funded project on family resilience that was conducted in a community centre at Tin Shui Wai (Site A, Appendix 1f(i)), I gained access to the focus group with the verbal consent of its project team members and participating parents. Other focus groups were organised by the practicum in-service teachers who had enrolled in a parent education course at a local university to deliver parent education programmes at

their own schools (Sites B and C, Appendix 1f(ii) and 1f(iii)). The practicum students decided the composition of the focus groups and the specific areas of discussion based on their knowledge of these parents through daily contact and questionnaires. I was the field supervisor for these students. I explained my study to the teachers, the schools and participating parents and provided consent forms with this study's abstract for obtaining their consent. I only collected data from my onsite observations, without analysing the information collected from the questionnaires and daily contact with students; however, this information was used for reference when necessary. For this study, five observations were made in total across the three sites.

Based on the assumption that effective group sharing requires trust-based relationships, the sample selection process required that the participants know one another, and not be strangers, in order to participate in the focus groups (Garvin, Gutierrez & Galinsky, 2004). Therefore, the elements of trust, sincerity, and security set the stage for an in-depth and interactive group dynamics within which people work collaboratively to seek solutions to problems or further elaborate on issues (ibid.). The participants at Sites A, B and C fulfilled these criteria; they were either neighbours in the same housing estate (Site A) or members of a community centre (Site A), kindergarten volunteer group (Sites B and C) or fellowship (Site B).

The sample size was small with a good mix of diverse sociocultural backgrounds from new arrival and Hong Kong local families for two major reasons. First, the three research sites were located in distant rural areas where is close to mainland China border (Site A), urban (Site B) and rural (Site C). Second, the participants consisted of families on welfare as well as single and dual income families.

For this study, I was concerned with exploring the elements operating in group dynamics among people from diverse sociocultural backgrounds rather than offering generalizations about how many parents like to learn parenting in groups. I mentioned my objective of understanding how parents from different backgrounds participate in a group-learning context and repeatedly emphasised the confidentiality of the data collection. All participants were verbally briefed about the project, and their informed consent was obtained in either written or verbal forms. The participants were also fully informed of their right to review and clarify the transcribed data to ensure authenticity. The selected data were presented as stories from anonymous storytellers to protect the participants' privacy. All soft copies of the raw data will be deleted and hard copies destroyed two years after the completion of this study.

4.8 Data Presentation and Analysis

4.8.1 Data Presentation

Narratives set the scene for readers to gain an understanding of the sense of reality behind the participants' experiences (Boje, Fedor & Rowland, 1982, Mason, 1998). In this study, I was particularly interested in the story 'plots'—the antecedents, transition and change in the narrators' state of affairs (Alasuutari, 1995). These plots are particularly useful in depicting the dynamics of a dialogue in terms of the interactions among the participants and why they choose to perform the narratives in a particular manner. The contextual factors (e.g. group members' interactions, venue, social position, culture) and personal factors (e.g. emotional states, attitudes) uncovered by these stories allow readers to interpret the stories from the teller's perspective (Alasuutari, 1995, Cohen & Mallon, 2001).

4.8.2 Dialogic/Performance Analysis Approach

I selected the dialogic/performance analysis approach for data analysis because it emphasises the dynamicity of meaning and identities, thus addressing the concerns of the postmodernists and poststructuralists (Riessman 2008). The dialogic approach interrogates what is said, why and/or how in relation to the historical and cultural context. Therefore, to understand a narrative beyond its face value, it is interpreted based on a fuller picture. Furthermore, assuming that 'all participants jointly construct narrative and meaning', wherein meanings are treated as both situated and socially constructed (Riessman, 2008; 23), the dialogic approach takes into account subjectivity in both the narrator and the audience. Interaction among participants shapes the 'performance' of the narrators and therefore their identities (Phillips & Hardy, 2002).

According to Riessman (1993), interpersonal interactions are embedded in identity relativism in the sense that one's identity depends on the needs of one's immediate environment. While the participants' interactions depicted contextual and personal factors that contributed to a particular scene's development, their conversations served as units for analysis. Unlike traditional thematic analysis, where data are fragmented into coding units and thematic categories, the dialogic approach presents and analyses data sequentially and contextually (Reissman, 2008). In other words, the dialogic approach involves an empathetic, context-based analysis that allows researchers to examine how and why a story is told, who elicits the story and for what purpose, what a narrator accomplishes by developing the story in a particular way, the story's effect on the readers and audience, how the audience affects what is told and whether the story contains any hidden messages. All

of these transcriptions are selected and presented as stories (data within context) based on the themes considered in this study.

As an inquirer, I am aware that the narrative interrogation process begins with my own pre-understanding of the transcripts (Chang, 2010). Hence, I read my notes and jotted down journal entries between focus groups at each site. I listened to each recording after it was transcribed, not only to ensure its accuracy but also to capture the spirit of that particular participant's words. In order to 'snapshot' the image and impression of each participant at a particular moment, I drew and wrote descriptive comments on the seating plan of each focus group. These notes created a 'word picture' of each participant and formed the basis of their individual stories that I have cited or retold in this dissertation. Based on the raw data and field notes of the focus group, I began to interpret the narratives within my understanding of the participants and my own life experiences.

4.8.3 My Story

I, as the narrative inquirer, played an important role in analysing, interpreting and presenting data through both the participants' and my own perspectives in order to explicate the complexity of the researched topic. In this particular study, the basic premise was to understand the participants in the given social setting; hence, the participants' narratives and data have been sympathetically presented, examined and interpreted so that they can be comprehended by anyone trying to understand their life-worlds (Mangan & Banks, 1999). The incorporation of my own experiences as an immigrant, Hong Kong local, parent and educator will help the readers understand (1) why a particular research story is of interest to me, (2) what are my own values and beliefs regarding the presented

issues and (3) how I derive a particular interpretation from the presented story (Riessman, 2008). The process of reflexivity through which I relate my own experiences to the presented stories provides evidence of the process and outcome of the inquiry (Trahar, 2006). Telling stories, listening to others' stories and then reading and responding to the collective narrative of individual stories is a form of self-reflective learning (Boud, Cohen & Walker, 1993). In this process, by revisiting experiences, viewing them from different perspectives and reconstituting my insights, I not only redefined my values and experiences throughout the learning process but also examined my own influences on the data production and interpretation, particularly in terms of why I chose the selected issues and analysed them in a particular manner (Cortazzi & Jin, 2006, Riessman, 1993). In addition, my own immigration experiences helped me to interpret issues discussed by the groups of new arrivals from the identity or perspective of an immigrant, while as a Hong Kong local, parent and educator, I could also interpret the discussion from those perspectives. The connections drawn between my story and the presented stories articulate how and why I attach meaning to the participants' stories (McNiff, 2007). Hence, my own story adds value to the believability and authenticity of this study's analysis (ibid.).

Field notes were analysed along with the audio digital recordings, which were transcribed into written Cantonese to maintain the authenticity of the conversations. After transcribing the narratives, I presented their Cantonese scripts to the participants, along with my field notes, to inform them of both the content and the flavour of my experiences, requesting them to suggest any corrections or add supplementary comments if they so wished.

4.8.4 Issues of 'Reliability' and 'Validity' in Narrative Inquiry

'Reliability' in quantitative research refers to the consistency and stability of the measuring instruments, whereas in narrative research, it refers to the 'trustworthiness' of the researcher's field notes and focus group transcripts. However, stories derive their convincing power 'not from verifiability but from verisimilitude' (Webster & Mertova, 2007; 21). In this study, my life stories are used to strengthen the verisimilitude of the collected narratives as they explain why certain issues are important to a particular group of people and why these issues are interpreted in a particular manner. In this study, the transparency in data collection and interpretation fulfils the criteria of data 'trustworthiness' to a very high degree. My clarification and sharing of my interpretations of the narratives with the participants add credibility to the study. Further, connecting these interpretations to my own life experiences allows me to re-orient the measurements from a more empathetic perspective (ibid.). Hence, while the terms 'reliability' and 'validity' generally refer to consistency and stability in discovering and measuring objective facts in quantitative research, they refer to the believability and trustworthiness of field notes and transcripts in terms of persuasiveness, correspondence, and coherence in narrative studies (Pinnergar & Daynes, 2007). These criteria could be assessed from the resonance between each narrative and its social and cultural context.

4.8.5 Persuasiveness

My story as an immigrant, Hong Kong local, parent and educator positively contributes to this study's trustworthiness and global coherence in the sense that it not only prompts me to

examine my influence on data production and interpretation but also reveals the correspondence between the data interpretation and my reflections as a person with multiple roles and identities. This correspondence is established through the readers' understanding of why I focus on certain issues and how I derive certain interpretations (Riessman, 1993). It strengthens the transparency of the data analysis and further enhances the trustworthiness of the study (Riessman, 2008). Finally, the data interpretation combined with the reflection of my own stories throughout the writing process underscores the pragmatic usefulness of the study in terms of its research–real life connection (McNiff, 2007).

4.8.6 Correspondence and Coherence

The study's correspondence and coherence can be defined in terms of its (1) congruency between the research questions and the components of the method and (2) sample appropriateness (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson & Spiers, 2002). As regards the former, as discussed earlier, the contextualized nature of narrative inquiry and interactive nature of focus groups fit the aim of this study—to explore group learning among parents from diverse cultural and sociocultural backgrounds and the mechanisms that facilitate interactive group learning. The emphasis on 'what', 'how', 'who', 'when' and 'why' in the narrative analysis reveals meaning relativism and potential variables that may affect interaction among participants (Riessman, 1993). Sample appropriateness refers to whether the study's sample consists of participants who best represent the study topic (Morse et al., 2002). Like most narrative studies, this study has a limited sample size; however, the study sample was selected only after fully considering the participants' diverse sociocultural

backgrounds and mutual relationships in order to explore the factors related to the quality of group dynamics and mechanisms that facilitate interactive group learning.

4.9 Pragmatic Use

The pragmatic aspects of this study operate on two levels: the social level and the personal level. At the social level, educational researchers have long faced an ongoing critique which claims that much of their work is insufficiently relevant to the 'real world' of educational practices (Hargreaves, 1996, Tooley & Darby, 1998). This reveals an increasing need for more educational research that relates to the real world of practices (Jarvis, 1999) in order to strengthen the relationship between research and practice and therefore policy (Crossley, 1999). The holistic and hermeneutic nature of narrative inquiry, which emphasises understanding experiences and organizing them into practical knowledge, bridges the gap between research and practice (Webster & Mertova, 2007; 21, 88). On this basis, this study's findings contribute to the development of a model for parent education programmes in Hong Kong, based on a theoretical framework that considers the specific sociocultural backgrounds of families in the Hong Kong context (Morse, 2003). The developed model informs preschool teachers and family educators about the essential components of effective parent education programmes in Hong Kong.

At the personal level, narratives reveal the subtle dimensions of data such as thoughts, feelings and cultural experiences, which are not readily accessible in more standard forms of research (Webster & Mertova, 2007; 7). My process of analysing and retelling stories involved the co-construction of new stories by the tellers and myself in the sense that the process allowed me to discover new meanings by assimilating different experiences and

perspectives into my existing schema. Such assimilation can be conceptualized as a progression from an incomplete story to a more complete one and, therefore, the acquisition of new knowledge as a researcher, human and parent (ibid.; 22). My awareness of data transparency and the tellers' impact on the researcher or vice versa enable readers to empathetically understand the experience the study seeks to convey (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; 749). Therefore, the emergence of new knowledge makes a difference to me, my participants, and all my readers.

4.10 Ethical Implications

Before conducting the study, I informed all the participants about the study purposes, the anonymity and confidentiality of their collected data, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time. As explained earlier, the study was explained to all participants through verbal (Site A) and/or written forms (Sites B and C). Moreover, I obtained the participants' informed consents in verbal and/or written form before collecting data from each site.

The focus groups were conducted in Cantonese. I was the only person who recorded and transcribed the spoken Cantonese narratives into written Cantonese and later English. All the collected narratives were transcribed into written Cantonese to maintain the authenticity of data; the Cantonese transcriptions were later shown to the participants to achieve the communal ownership of 'stories' as advocated by the narrative inquiry methods (Yardley, 2008).

The communal ownership of stories is one of the complexities of narrative inquiry. If the story is constructed collaboratively, both the researcher and the participants 'own' the story.

To achieve this goal, I shared the transcribed Cantonese narratives, together with my interpretation and analysis of these narratives (in Cantonese), with the participants for their elaboration and verification. The resultant stories, therefore, were no longer my own or the participants' stories but new stories with communal ownership (ibid.). With this belief, I have tried to retain the spirit, values, and authenticity of the original storytellers as they shared their stories. The participants were informed that they could access the Cantonese transcripts and make corrections wherever needed. Thereafter, I shared my feelings and thoughts regarding their stories with them, and their acknowledgement of my experiences led to the emergence of new stories, which were later translated into English to meet the dissertation requirements.

To maintain their anonymity, I have not mentioned any the participants' names in this study. With this, participants are less likely to feel threatened by the exposure of their thoughts and identities through storytelling (Sparkteam, 2001). In the data presentation through storytelling, all voices together make up the story, and the voice of each individual participant is equally important and valued.

4.11 Limitations

As the researcher, I acknowledge and examine my experiences and potential influences on data interpretation by analysing and interpreting the data from both the participants' perspectives and my own (Mangan & Banks, 1999). I am also aware of the potential impact of my image as a university staff member on the participants, as well as the differences of knowledge and experience in every social exchange among group members (ibid., 1999). In narrative data presentation, the interpretation determined by my

presentation and the readers' biography, self-perception, self-identity and sociocultural experiences in different social roles contribute to their interpretation of the transcribed text. Readers may construct alternative possible experiences and, therefore, interpretations (Clandinin & Connelly, 1989). In order to share the participants' experiences, the reader has to enter these experiences and view them from the participants' perspectives; otherwise, they would not be able to understand these experiences (ibid.). Here, contextual information becomes a critical element for putting readers in the tellers' shoes. This study pursues the creation of local and practical knowledge that may have resonances that are important to others' understanding. The study's findings are primarily useful and important to the people involved and, secondarily, to the wider community which shares their concerns (Mangan & Banks, 1999). In other words, it would not be appropriate to generalize the findings of this study.

4.12 Conclusion: Amid Frustration and Messiness

After many years of involvement in traditional quantitative research, I have become mechanically geared to find the 'the right way to do things'. This being my first encounter with narrative inquiry methodology, I experienced feelings of both frustration and messiness in the sense that there was no standard way to determine truth and knowledge. Being a novice narrative inquirer, I read up on the stories of narrative inquirers and followed their methodology of listening to others' stories and reorienting and interpreting those stories from different perspectives. All stories are interesting, because the tellers disclose their values and beliefs naturally through the storytelling process. As an analyst and interpreter, I enjoyed the 'experience revisiting process' as I found that my experiences

as an immigrant, Hong Kong local, parent and educator, though unique, can possibly be understood very well by people with similar sociocultural values who have adopted similar roles in similar contexts with similar social expectations from the adopted role. My relation of my own experiences to my study topic takes me from the stance of 'I know so much' to that of 'there is so much to be explored and learned'. The most interesting aspect of the inquiry process is that it is not difficult; however, my curiosity regarding this study topic 'grew' naturally, with no external coercion. This internal drive for exploration could be attributed to my linking my experiences with the collected narratives, which makes the study even more personal. The more I found out, the more I became motivated by my own curiosity regarding the studied phenomenon.

To conclude, this chapter reviewed the approaches of interpretative hermeneutics, postmodernism, poststructuralism, social pluralism, social constructionism, and critical theory to obtain guidelines on how to approach and treat data in a meaningful, respectful, and responsible manner. These philosophies share common views on the subjective truth underlying personal (biography, past and present frames of reference, sociocultural values and beliefs, affections, self-identity) and contextual accounts (social expectations from the adopted roles, group norms, and the performed self). Personal and contextual aspects comprise the two major dimensions of the holistic understanding of data. I used audio recordings of the narratives during the entire discussion for data collection. However, to avoid being overwhelmed by the richness of such data, I used the SGD model to guide my observations and gain a better awareness of the various aspects commonly involved in group dynamics. By revisiting the audio recordings and field notes made during my observation, my two sources of data, I could furnish the missing jigsaw puzzle pieces in an

attempt to 'complete' the 'incomplete picture' presented by the narratives. By reorienting my own perspectives and those of the participants and analysing and interpreting the data with a careful consideration of the contextual account, this study's findings could narrow the gap between research and 'real life' practices, thereby greatly enhancing the pragmatic purpose of this study.

Both the participants and me own this study. Through communal interpretation, clarification and communication of each other's lived stories, we established trust-based relationships that were deepened through various means of contact. Our trust could be felt even in our eye contact with each other and was not limited to the verbal confirmation, 'I trust you'.

Chapter 5. An Amazing Journey in the Stalactite Cave: Data Analysis and Presentation

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will present the narrative data as stories depicting the complexity of a narrative plot, characterizations and embedded meaning in the particular context conveying their 'meaning, social significance and purpose' (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; 120, Clandinin, 2007). While I will analyse these stories using dialogic analysis to explore what story is told in a particular manner and why, the following sections present five stories with plots and characters that show rather than tell readers of the tellers' experiences. These five stories emerged from two sharing groups (Stories 1 and 2) organised in a community centre in Tin Shui Wai (Site A), one sharing group (Story 3) organised in a kindergarten in Tsuen Wan (Site B) and two sharing groups (Stories 4 and 5) organised in a kindergarten in Po Lam (Site C). Given that my interpretation exerts powerful influences on the readers' interpretation of stories, I aim for the holistic presentation of data through storytelling to allow the readers to understand the stories from both the participants' perspectives and my own, within the particular context (Chase, 2005).

5.2 Interpretive Position: The Subjective Group Dynamics Model (SGD), Participants and I

The SGD Model

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the SGD model entails the following three processes for coherent group formation of members from diverse backgrounds:

- Process 1: Dynamics of exclusion and inclusion
- Process 2: Multiple identity acknowledgement and group values establishment
- Process 3: Salient multiple identities and one-group representation

Guided by the SGD model, the analysis of the group interactions under investigation may or may not show the processes suggested by the model. However, the components or factors involved in the above mentioned processes will be analysed in terms of what factors operate in the groups, how and why.

Participants' Accounts

The participants' stories illustrate the complexity of their life experiences. Their rich contextual background provides readers with a frame of reference for understanding and interpreting the meaning underlying these stories. This frame of reference, however, is not merely limited to describing participants' sociocultural background. Rather, through sharing life stories that capture everyday experiences which are familiar to everybody, the tellers indicate not only how they see themselves but also how they know themselves through another's life story by reflecting and responding to them (Richardson, 1997; 6). In this study, by presenting narratives in the form of stories, I wish to 'show' rather than 'tell' the readers what the tellers feel and why they choose to tell their stories in a particular way (Ellis, 2004; 365, 369). Such holistic understandings of the participants' accounts

encourage readers to empathize with the tellers through a common point of entry into their experience.

My Account

I will continue my journey of inquiry into each story by presenting my story as an immigrant, Hong Kong local, parent and educator. As discussed in Chapter 4, the inclusion of my own story allows readers to understand how I derived a particular interpretation from the narrative text. In the process of analysing others' stories, I investigated my own personal experiences to understand how these stories reflect or resist my interpretations (Ellis, 2004; 48). Such reflection and blending of stories lays the foundation for the communal ownership of stories, especially since I shared my personal stories through data analysis and interpretation to 'hook' both the research participants and readers so that they could understand my particular perspective of the participants' stories. Hence, bringing an 'insider's'' perspective into this study interpretation was particularly important for evaluating the trustworthiness, integrity and transparency of the research process and its findings (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; 93, Chase, 2005; 659).

5.2.1 Translation

The collected narratives were first transcribed into written Cantonese to maintain their authenticity. The transcribed Cantonese, together with my field notes containing my explanations of my experiences and other backgrounds that depicted my feelings and thoughts regarding the research process, were shared with the research participants. The participants were invited to verify and elaborate on the transcribed data to not only clarify any misunderstanding and misrepresentation but also provide them with an opportunity to

participate in the co-construction of their stories with me, the researcher. The resultant 'new stories' were then translated into English. In this chapter, I will present five such stories that were analysed in my attempt to investigate the various dimensions affecting group dynamics:

Story 1: Who Are 'We'? Who Are 'They'?

Story 2: We Share Common Ground, but—!

Story 3: We Are Different, but We Understand You.

Story 4: We Seem to be Quite Similar.

Story 5: Can We Help? How?

5.3 Story 1: Who Are 'We'? Who Are 'They'?

(12/09/2008) On this day, I visited a community centre at Tin Shui Wai (Site A), a rural area in Hong Kong well known for its large population of new arrivals and people who have suffered family tragedies. This centre had agreed to participate in a government-funded project, 'Family Resilience', where I was employed as a research assistant. This was my first visit to Tin Shui Wai. The project leader (hereafter referred to as 'PIFR') of the family resilience project took me to the public estate in Tin Shui Wai where the research briefing session would be held. Throughout the trip, I was full of curiosity regarding this seemingly 'distant' district labelled as 'the city of sorrow'. Tin Shui Wai, with its low average income and large proportion of newly arrived persons, has been the main target of negative media reports. Once we left the highway, I saw a landscape full of

clusters of public estates with only one private estate among them and thus recognised Tin Shui Wai. The public estates implied that disadvantaged or people of or lower socioeconomic status (SES) resided in this area. We walked out of the parking area and entered one of the public estates. Unlike other lower SES group urban districts such as Sham Shui Po, which is very crowded and dirty, Tin Shui Wai is a very quiet and clean residential area. Essentially, there was a unique touch to the place. The environment was so calm that I could hear the wind blow and birds sing. Women chatted in groups with food from the market at hand, and groups of men aged between 30 and 40 years gathered in groups for playing chess or wandering around the estate.

After walking for five minutes, we arrived at the community centre. It was located on the ground floor of a residential building. It was very small, so small that the office barely had enough space for three social workers. Around the corner from the office was the 'multifunction room' where the briefing session would be held.

The room was about 100 square feet in area, surrounded by bookshelves and equipped with a mobile whiteboard. The chairs were already set in a circle when we entered the room. Although it was only five minutes before the briefing session scheduled at ten o'clock, I did not see any parents coming towards the room. The centre supervisor explained that the parents were usually late. While awaited them, she explained to us how she had recruited parents for the Family Resilience project. At ten o'clock, a number of parents walked into the room, to be greeted by the centre supervisor and the PIFR. Each parent was given an outline of the Family Resilience project. They sat down quietly with the given outline, handbags on their laps, without greeting the parents who sat next to them. Some read the sheet, while others merely looked around, waiting for the session to begin.

The centre supervisor informed us that she had invited fifteen parents to join the project. At five past ten, the PIFR decided to start the session with the eleven mothers who were present. The PIFR introduced me as the research assistant, as well as a student who conducted a study on parent education, and himself as the project leader. With their verbal consent of participating in my study, I took a seat in the corner of the room and began to observe and record the briefing session process. Each parent was invited to introduce herself and her family to the group. I noticed that many of them spoke quite fast and softly, as if they wanted to finish their turn as quickly as possible. They seemed uncomfortable speaking in front of the group and being the centre of attention for even one minute or less. Their self-introduction gave me very little information regarding their years of residence in Hong Kong and the family members in their household. While eight of the eleven participants had lived in Hong Kong for less than seven years, one mother had been residing in Hong Kong for more than ten years and two mothers were Hong Kong-born locals. After the self-introduction, the PIFR briefed the participants about the family resilience project and started by asking the participants about their perception of 'new arrivals'. At first, I expected that the parents would show some signs of discomfort, as the label of 'new arrivals' tends to carry a universally negative message (Chapter 2). Surprisingly, the participants were very open and honest in discussing their views regarding the new arrivals. Mother A (new arrival) started the discussion in a frustrated tone:

> *'People always say that the new arrivals are lazy, don't work, and rely on welfare. Many of us are very hard working and employed. I do admit there are some lazy ones, but many are not.'*

Her assertive tone seemed to refute the public misrepresentation about new arrivals being a social burden. Immediately after Mother A's claim, Mother B (new arrival), a medium-built female wearing fancy make up, continued,

> *'Yes, if jobs were available, nobody would want to rely on welfare. People always think we are lazy because the media only reports the bad parts.'*

Mother C (Hong Kong local) nodded her agreement and joined the discussion:

> *'Just like Tin Shui Wai. The media's negative reportages cause the public to believe that Tin Shui Wai is a very poor district.'*

The group lapsed briefly into silence. Mother F (new arrival) broke the silence by saying in a helpless tone,

> *'There are so few jobs in Tin Shui Wai. Many more jobs are available in Kowloon, but cross-district transportation is so expensive. The commuting time is also an issue. Nobody takes good care of our children.'*

Suddenly, the parents began to whisper to those sitting next to them. I could hear some pairs of parents expressing agreement regarding the difficulties they faced in this situation. The PIFR caught the group's attention and asked,

> *'Does anyone here have to work?'*

The whispers faded, and the room became very silent. None of the mothers raised her hand or said a word. They all looked at one another to check if any of them was employed. The PIFR continued,

> *'So you all take care of your own children?'*

They looked at each other and nodded. Then the PIFR asked,

> '*What difficulties do you face while raising children in Hong Kong?*'

Mother B quickly replied,

> '*Children in Hong Kong must be closely monitored.*'
>
> '*Not those in China?*' asked PIFR.
>
> '*They need to be monitored to a lesser extent in China. We had very good relationships with our neighbours there. When we were young, we would never go hungry as we would be greeted by any one of our neighbours. But in Hong Kong, our neighbours do not even know one another,*' Mother B complained.

All the new arrivals nodded their agreement. At this, a few Hong Kong locals in the group gave bitter smiles. Perhaps this claim was so familiar that they did not know how to respond. I could see embarrassment in their faces; however, this feeling did not last long. A few seconds after Mother B's claim, Mother K (Hong Kong local) spoke up in defence,

> '*The traffic in Hong Kong is chaotic; parents must hold their children's hand when on the road. But I see that some new arrivals let their very young children go out by themselves. These children play in playgrounds without any adult supervision.*'

Immediately, Mother B, who had previously complained about the misrepresentation of the new arrivals, retorted,

'*There are two types of parents—those who closely monitor their children and those who let them run around without supervision.*'

'*Why would that be?*' asked the PIFR.

'*Some parents have no problems in letting their children go out on their own. We were brought up in China without supervision. Even now, the children in our hometown grow up under the sun. However, the children in Hong Kong grow up indoors with toys. We are different,*' Mother B further explained.

Both the new arrivals and the Hong Kong locals appeared to agree with Mother B's explanation, which was perhaps so familiar to them that nobody wanted to discuss it further.

Since there was no further response to Mother B's claims, the PIFR asked if the new arrivals and their children had ever experienced any discrimination. Rather than looking at each other, as they had done earlier, the parents simply stared at the PIFR, giving no further response. There was silence for a few seconds. Their faces showed some signs of hesitation, but I do not think they were surprised by this question. They just did not know how to answer—where to start. Suddenly, Mother B broke the ice again and said,

'*The locals simply cannot accept the fact that we are smarter than them.*'

'*Can you explain what you mean? Smarter than them?*' asked the PIFR.

'*Yes. Previously, I worked in sales in Kowloon. Whenever I performed better than my Hong Kong local co-workers, they would do something to*

hurt me. For example, speak to the boss behind my back,' answered Mother B.

'*Why, and what did they say about you?*' asked the PIFR.

'*They simply couldn't accept the fact that we could be better than them. They would spread rumours that the mainlanders must have done something underhand in order to get a better sales performance,*' she elaborated.

At this moment, Mother F (new arrival) joined the conversation by declaring in a loud and angry voice,

'*Once a lady called me a "mainlander ghost" when my arm accidently touched hers in a crowded bus. She pushed me. I kicked her in return.*'

The participants' eyes, and even some mouths, opened wide on hearing that Mother F had actually fought with somebody on the bus. I guess that both the new arrivals and the Hong Kong locals believe that fighting is not the right solution. Both groups were surprised that an accidental body touch could lead to a fight. Although Mother F recognised the astonished look on the participants' faces, she did not feel embarrassed or disgraced. She continued,

'*She (the passenger) then got off the bus. I guess she was scared. We (both Mother F and the passenger) had the same skin colour. If she (the passenger) was not Chinese, then who was she? Was she a foreigner?*'

The PIFR did not directly respond to this story. Instead, he turned to the group and asked,

'How do people know that you are not Hong Kong locals?'

'Accent,' Mother F replied with a pout.

The other mothers nodded.

'Appearance ... (she paused for two seconds) *clothes* ...' said Mother E (Hong Kong local), who had been settled in Hong Kong for over twenty years.

'What do they wear?' asked PIFR.

'Mainlanders are not very fashionable,' Mother E answered.

'Mainlanders should be more fashionable; then they'll look much more beautiful than the Hong Kong locals!' Mother F responded with a laugh.

Immediately, laughter erupted in the room as the other mothers strongly agreed. Some said, *'That's so true,'* while all the participants laughed and nodded in agreement. We were all aware of the fact that young female mainlanders in Hong Kong are perceived as intruders who can break up the marriages of Hong Kong couples. I wondered if the mother who commented on the fashion sense of the newly arrived women was making some sarcastic joke. I did not know if I was being oversensitive or if the other mothers had the same thoughts. However, the discussion on discrimination ended in laughter.

5.3.1 Who Am I? To Which Group Do I Belong? Do I Belong Nowhere?

Story 1 illustrates the first process of the SGD model—the dynamics of exclusion and inclusion—where the group participants not only were conscious of their identities as new arrivals but also defended these identities vigorously and explicitly throughout the

conversation. In this group, the new arrivals significantly outnumbered the Hong Kong locals. At the outset of the activity, the PIFR asked the participants to introduce themselves, including their years of settlement in Hong Kong. The self-introduction activity, therefore, already conveyed the clear message that there were two groups of participants in the sharing group. Following this, the PIFR's question about the participants' perception of 'new arrivals' further set the context for identity formation in this activity—new arrivals versus Hong Kong locals. Given that the new arrivals constituted the majority in this sharing session, it was understandable that they were not as quiet and timid as they were within the mainstream community (of Hong Kong locals). In the beginning, the new arrivals could not wait to describe the unfair treatment they received. They did not try to hide their status as new arrivals. Rather, they expressed their anger at being misunderstood and labelled as lazy and reliant on social welfare. Moreover, Mother B's attempt to speak up for the new arrivals elicited a chain reaction wherein other parents joined the protest. The new arrival parents took this opportunity to explain why they were misrepresented by both the Hong Kong locals and the media. At this point, a local Hong Kong mother (Mother C) joined in the conversation and blamed the media for misrepresenting Tin Shui Wai as a very poor district. Hence, the common concern of both the groups was that the media's negative reports misrepresented their identities or images to the public. The new arrivals were concerned about their distorted images, while the Hong Kong residents focused on the economic status of Tin Shui Wai residents. Hence, although they focused on different aspects, they were able to break through the silence between them, taking the first step to engage in discussion as one group with common concerns. However, this discussion was characterized by individual presentations of their own views or concerns,

without much interaction between the participants; hence, the group representation was rather short-lived, in the sense that once the discussion veered away from the shared interests, the group broke up into two 'cultural groups' again—representing the two different identities of the participants in this activity.

At the very end of this activity, a new arrival (Mother F) made a statement about the fashionable appearance[10] of the new arrivals which united the two groups again, to a certain extent. Her comment conveyed that unlike the stereotyped communist citizens of the past, the mainlanders kept pace with modern trends. Mother F's comment indicated that in her view, the appearance of the new arrivals was comparable to that of the Hong Kong locals. At another level, she referred to the social issue of the 'second wife' that was prevalent in Hong Kong families with low socioeconomic status[11]. The hidden meaning of this reference was well understood by all the participants, who burst into sarcastic laughter at the comment. More interestingly, the new arrivals laughed extraordinarily loudly and nodded in response, possibly to indicate to the group that they were not second wives, as the public believed. Such a social response from both the groups reflects that they all shared the same social and moral values wherein having a second wife was unacceptable. Such shared values minimize intergroup differences and maximize intergroup similarities, which establish the foundation for the future development of a 'one-group representation'.

Throughout the sharing, the new arrivals interpreted themselves as a 'good and responsible group of new arrivals' comparable to the Hong Kong locals, as opposed to the new arrivals

[10] The stereotyped communists are perceived to be detached from the rest of the world, including social life. However, the modern mainland Chinese women are very fashionable in appearance and often marry to Hong Kong locals and later settle in Hong Kong, a democratic world city.

[11] Many new arrivals in Hong Kong met their husbands after moving to Shenzhen from the rural areas for work. They later married these Hong Kong locals, who already had wives in Hong Kong.

who were lazy and irresponsible with regard to their children. They explicitly differentiated the 'misrepresented new arrivals' from the 'irresponsible new arrivals', and their core message was, 'Many of the new arrivals are as good as the Hong Kong locals. It is only you (the Hong Kong locals and the media) who misrepresent us as intruders exploiting the welfare system in Hong Kong society.'

The study participants, therefore, performed different identities to meet their self-belonging needs. In particular, none of the new arrivals denied this identity. However, in their conversation, they emphasised that they were civilized new arrivals with citizenship qualities comparable to those of the Hong Kong locals. By doing this, they defended and sought respect for their identity as new arrivals while supporting the identity of the Hong Kong residents. The narrative data indicate that the process of member inclusion and exclusion was decided by whether the participants' performed behaviour and held values were similar to those of the Hong Kong locals. This story thus explicates the dual identities of the new arrivals and the Hong Kong locals.

5.3.2 The Story of an Immigrant

I was once an immigrant in a Western country, where I experienced discrimination as well as identity construction and reinterpretation from time to time. Nobody wants to be isolated, myself included. The easiest way to be 'perceived' as part of the mainstream is to change one's image, including one's outfits and accent. I still remember that when I was in school, I performed as a mainstreamer, raising my hand with the index finger pointing up, greeting teachers with a 'Hi!' and answering their questions while remaining seated. All

these behaviours are considered disrespectful in a Chinese classroom. At that time, I was perfectly aware of the fact that I would be considered an 'alien' if I stood up to answer the teacher's questions or greeted the teacher with a bow. Under pressure to adapt, I felt an urgent need to be treated as an 'ingroup' member, which was my sole motivation to be closer to the host culture. I wanted to have something that I could share with the mainstreamers; however, such a shared ground could exist only for a very short time. Once the shared issue ended, I was isolated again as an 'outsider'. As an immigrant, I was always conscious that my performed identity required me to resemble the host culture in certain aspects, at least at the level of observation (Chapter 2). Hence, a performed identity results from an individual's need to meet the requirements of a particular context in order to be considered ingroup. A new immigrant will make every effort to assimilate, to be more similar to the host culture. This assimilation, however, does not imply a devaluation of the immigrant's own culture, beliefs and values (Brubaker, 2001). Instead, the attempt to seek common ground not only reflects our need to be wanted by and belong to the ingroup, a basic need of social animals such as human beings (ibid.), but also the process of appropriating a particular group of people and context so that we can be understood by the majority and the environment to which we attach ourselves.

5.3.3 Concluding Remarks

Story 1 and my experience as an immigrant explored the issue of 'wanting to belong'. Cultural minorities can easily adopt physical traits such as accents and outfits in order to resemble the host culture, while shared interests create a platform for different groups to identify their similarities and thereby minimize intergroup differences. However, certain

perceived similarities emerge based on the information conveyed within a particular context at a particular time. As seen in the above story, the perceived similarities of particular aspects changed according to the shifts in the discussion topic. At this level of group dynamics, these perceived similarities illustrated the flexibility and fluidity of member inclusion and exclusion. However, without in-depth understanding of one another, the participants were still overwhelmed by their intergroup differences. Hence, the perceived similarities were fragile and stayed at a very superficial level, since the reasons behind these similarities and differences were neither explored nor mutually understood and the participants had not yet acknowledged their differences. In this story, the participants recognised rather than acknowledged their multiple identities. Furthermore, at this point in the story, there was no group values development and one-group representation as suggested by the SGD model.

5.4 Story 2: We Share Common Ground, but—!

(09/10/2008) Following the project briefing session in Tin Shui Wai (Site A), the centre supervisor had invited the participants to join the Family Resilience focus group a month later. On this day, I travelled alone to Tin Shui Wai by public transportation. The light rail in Tin Shui Wai was not overcrowded even during the morning rush hour, unlike in the urban areas. The residents did not rush or hurry while boarding or alighting from the light rail. The place was marked with the same tranquillity and peace that I experienced during my last visit. This time, as I walked into the multifunction room, four mothers were already sitting there, chatting about the estate environment. They were all from the group of new arrivals. They were no longer shy, and greeted me with big smiles. One of them,

Mother M (new arrival), was no longer a stranger to me as the PIFR had scheduled an individual interview for the Family Resilience project[12] with her last week, allowing me to explore her family functioning and coping strategies. When I met her in the group setting, I wondered if she would feel embarrassed in front of me because she had disclosed many private concerns to me during the individual interview. To my surprise, however, she did not avoid me. Her attitude was so positive that I joined their conversation and offered my views on the estate.

At ten o'clock, the PIFR arrived, along with three more mothers—two Hong Kong locals and a new arrival who had recently joined the Family Resilience briefing session. They were chatting among themselves as they entered the multifunction room. Then the centre supervisor entered the room and greeted us. The supervisor said that it was unlikely that more parents would come that day, although they had promised to join this session. The PIFR comforted the supervisor, saying that it was very common for half of the group to drop out of the research project. He further explained that it was possible that more parents would drop out. The focus group's atmosphere was very different from the last time's, probably because the group, comprising seven mothers, was smaller and therefore had greater physical proximity and perceived intimacy. The parents of both groups seated themselves at their convenience, without any of the groups explicitly grouping themselves together. They were more relaxed than the last time and smiled more often. While the PIFR talked to the centre supervisor and prepared the focus group for the day, the parents chatted quietly in pairs, mainly about the weather and other issues pertaining to the estate

[12] The Family Resilience project selected a few participants from the focus group every time to participate in post-group individual interviews for an in-depth investigation of other aspects of their life wherein they encountered difficulties and their coping strategies.

or community. Then the PIFR started the focus group activity by inviting the participants to discuss a traditional Chinese poem, 'Yan Shi' (燕詩) (A Swallow's Poem[13]). He invited Mother B (new arrival) to read out the short poem, after which he asked, '*Can you tell us what it means?*'

> '*It narrates how the swallow parents take care of their little swallows whole-heartedly, while the little swallows leave their parents after they grow up,*' she answered without hesitation.
>
> '*What are your views?*' the PIFR asked the group.
>
> '*It's true, and we need to accept it. We are like that too,*' said Mother B.

The others nodded. The PIFR further elaborated that the poem conveyed Chinese family and parenting values and beliefs. It represents the Chinese belief that the parents' role is to protect and support their children, with no expectation in return. Although this role is expected, the poem is considered to have a sad ending. The PIFR asked the group,

> '*Do you think parenting is difficult?*'
>
> '*Yes, very difficult. The media has a profound influence on children's development,*' said Mother K (Hong Kong local) in a very affirmative tone.
>
> '*Can you sit in the middle and share your views with us?*' The PIFR grabbed an empty chair and placed it in the centre of the group.

[13] A Swallow's Poem is a Chinese folktale about how swallow parents nurture little swallows when they are young. However, when these little swallows grow up, they leave their parents to make their own homes.

Prior to my participation in this focus group, by participating in a series of home-school partnership related seminars and workshops between the years 2000 and 2003, I had seen cases where the parents refused to share their views in front of the group for two reasons: (1) they did not want to be the focus of attention and/or (2) they did not want to disclose their family issues to relatively unknown people. This time, to my surprise, Mother K took the chair and shared her story without hesitation.

> '*My son is now fifteen years old. He stopped listening to me after we moved from Tuen Mun to Tin Shui Wai. I was a full-time mom till he entered secondary school. The school is not good. He is always cycling around the area with his friends. He dates girls. When we lived in Tuen Mun, he was very good. He listened to me and did his homework after school.*'

Throughout her narrative, Mother K looked only at the PIFR, as if he were the only audience in the group. Her calm, neutral facial expression and monotonous speech gave me the feeling that she not only had shared her story many times but also did not expect anyone to be able to help her or improve her difficult situation.

> '*Why do you think your son has changed so much?*' asked the PIFR.
>
> '*Because of this district and the school. The parents in Tuen Mun always accompany their children, but the parents in this district let their children wander around,*' she reported, with a hopeless facial expression and tone.
>
> '*Why?*' asked the PIFR.
>
> '*Because the majority of the Tin Shui Wai residents are new arrivals.*'

Mother K did not tone down her words or even attempt to be cautious while making this statement. The new arrivals did not defend themselves until PIFR asked,

> '*Do they?*' *(Do the new arrivals usually let their children wander around without supervision?)*
>
> '*Some really do not care about their children. Children as young as three years old can go and play in the playground all by themselves while their parents play mahjong at home*,' said Mother D (new arrival).
>
> '*There are two types. Some really care, others don't*,' added Mother B.

Mother K did not respond to any of these comments; she continued,

> '*He (her son) cycles around the area with his classmates.*'
>
> '*How does your husband manage your son's problems?*' asked the PIFR.
>
> '*We work in shifts. Sometimes, we need to work at night and do not have much time to talk to him. I have a bad temper. My husband is better at handling him. He talks to our son and reasons with him. I don't have the patience to discuss these issues with my son, and our relationship is worsening*,' said Mother K in a rather soft voice.

She paused for a few seconds while her eyes rolled around the room, stopping at the ceiling. It appeared that she needed to make an extra effort to tell us why her relationship with her son was worsening. After a few seconds, she continued,

> '*He is now in the rebellion period.*'

Some of the participants nodded, while others seemed to show intense interest in her continuing story:

> '*When couples have a problem in their relationship, we term it as a "conflict". How about describing the disagreement between you and your son as a conflict like those experienced by couples rather than using the term "rebellion"?*' asked the PIFR.

> Mother K paused for a second and uttered, '*Yes, we can do that.*'

The PIFR then explained how we can reframe a particular situation through our language/word choice and how our language affects our interpretation and perception of the situation. Before the session ended, the PIFR again asked Mother K,

> '*What do you think (of using the term "conflict" instead of "rebellion")?*'

> '*Yes, if we can interpret this situation as a conflict, our relationship appears very different.*'

> '*But in some matters, wrong is wrong. We cannot use another term to make wrong things right,*' quipped Mother X (Hong Kong local).

> '*What do you mean?*' asked the PIFR.

> '*This morning, for instance, my daughter picked up garbage from the street. It was extremely dirty. She insisted on putting it in the garbage can. That's not done. She may catch some disease and fall sick,*' said Mother X in a frustrated tone.

> '*I would praise her for doing that,*' Mother B responded promptly.

'*But picking up the garbage from the street is such a dirty act!*' Mother X defended herself in a raised voice.

'*I still would praise her for good behaviour. She can wipe or wash her hands later.*' Mother B continued, '*When we were young, we were very poor in our village in rural China. Rice was very scarce. I remember, one night, I dropped a scoop of cooked rice on the ground, which was rather muddy. My mother ordered me to pick up that rice and eat it. There was a lot of mud and sand in that scoop of rice; it was really dirty and disgusting, but I still ate it. Therefore, for me, picking things up from the ground is not scary at all,*' she said with a proud smile.

'*I would also let my children do that. They can wash their hands later. Or she can use a napkin while picking up the garbage,*' suggested Mother Cg (new arrival).

'*I won't,*' responded Mother X, with a pout.

It was now eleven o'clock. The participants had started looking at their watches frequently to signal their wish to leave. Many of them needed to return home to prepare their children's lunch. The PIFR indicated that the session was over and invited the participants to join another focus group next week. The parents agreed and wished us goodbye.

5.4.1 I Sometimes Perceive Myself as a New Arrival and Sometimes as a Hong Kong Local. Who Am I? Am I Both?

Story 2 is also about the first process of SGD, wherein the group members are still conscious about 'who is in my group and who is not'. However, unlike the participants of Story 1, those of Story 2 showed less vigorous or explicitly defensive behaviour regarding their identity as new arrivals. While participants from both groups were acutely conscious of the 'cultural groups' (i.e. new arrivals and Hong Kong locals) in which they were rooted, they did not stress these perceived identities all the time. The new arrivals, in particular, showed less inclination to defend themselves than they did in Story 1.

The recitation of the classic Chinese poem 'Yan Shi' at the outset of the focus group set the scene for eliciting the participants' common views on traditional Chinese values and beliefs pertaining to the family. This poem is so popular that every Chinese person is familiar with its meaning. The participants agreed with the values and beliefs presented in the poem, which led the group to focus on the expected roles and responsibilities of parents and children in Chinese society. This discussion enabled the participants to recognise that both groups shared the same cultural roots. Hence, the use of a classic poem characterizing Confucian values resulted in a discussion on Chinese family values, and the values and beliefs shared by the participants reduced the intergroup differences and enabled further discussion (Chapter 2). Although I cannot say whether the poem exerted any influence on group coherence, the participants' nods and verbal appreciation of the poem indicated that their family values were aligned with those suggested by the poem.

Mother K's story was characterized by Confucian doctrines in terms of benevolence and order of respect—children obey their parents. In her story, we do not see terms such as

discussion, sharing, or negotiation. Rather, she clearly expressed her views that 'not listening to her' meant rebellion. Mother K expected her teenage son to be as obedient as he was in his primary years, and attributed her son's misbehaviour to the influence of his classmates who had newly arrived from mainland China. She unhesitatingly asserted that these new arrival families failed to supervise their children and allowed them to wander around. Her certainty conveyed that 'we (Hong Kong locals) are different from them (new arrivals)' in terms of parenting values and behaviour. In an individual interview[14] scheduled by the family resilience project to investigate the protective and risk factors regarding people's resilience capabilities, Mother K shared her discontentment at moving from Tuen Mun to Tin Shui Wai,

> '*[In Tin Shui Wai] the parents let their children go out alone. They don't care. When we lived in Tuen Mun, many parents attended talks, school award ceremonies etc., but very few parents attend these activities in Tin Shui Wai.*'
>
> '*Do you mean that the irresponsible parents are all new arrival families?*' I asked.
>
> '*The majority are. They rely on welfare; they have plenty of time. Despite that, they do not care for their children,*' she replied angrily, with a scornful look.
>
> '*How do you know those are new arrivals?*' I enquired.

[14] The Family Resilience project selected a few participants from the focus group every time to participate in post-group individual interviews for an in-depth investigation of other aspects of their life wherein they encountered difficulties and their coping strategies.

'*By observation. Accents,*' she exclaimed and continued, '*They group themselves together. I found it very difficult to enter their network. We were raised with different cultural backgrounds. They like to talk about issues pertaining to their hometowns. We don't have a common topic to discuss.*'

These statements from the individual interview reveal that Mother K was very critical of the parenting attitudes and behaviours of the new arrivals; nevertheless, she had tried to get acquainted with them by participating in their social conversation. This made her even more critical of the new arrivals because they formed a group and appeared to exclude her. Her descriptions indicate the power of discrimination in the sense that it was not necessary for the Hong Kong locals to reject the new arrivals. However, now even the latter have the social power to reject the former when they outnumber the Hong Kong locals in a social context. Hence, the distribution of power relations between the two groups varies, depending on the social context. It also implies that the host cultural norm does not always exert the same power on the new arrivals. Norms develop along with the context, according to the needs of the particular situation.

In terms of group interaction, the new arrival participants in the focus group very calmly responded to Mother K's comment regarding 'new arrival parents who neglected their children'. They did not interrupt her or talk back in order to defend their 'misrepresented' images. They respected the speaker and commented only when invited to do so. Hence, in contrast to the media's negative reports, the new arrivals seemed to be highly 'civilized' with regard to their behaviour, mutual respect, and use of language. Their active listening and responding to Mother K from the perspective of motherhood shows that this group

found a shared identity and common concern in the sharing. However, while it is very difficult to conclude that both the groups shared a common goal, I am certain of the fact that both the groups discussed the issues raised by the teller for the good of their children. Although they did not share a common view on all the issues, as illustrated in the issue of citizenship in Story 2, they clearly outlined their views, particularly regarding their life experiences, which definitely facilitated mutual understanding between both the groups. Hence, although the process of exclusion and inclusion of group members (Process 1 in the SGD model) continued in Story 2, the intensity of self-defensiveness in the 'perceived minority' was much lesser than that during the members' first meeting in Story 1.

On the other hand, Mother K's indifference and hopeless tone throughout her storytelling indicated that she expected no positive outcome from sharing her tale. The virtual lack of pauses in her 'reporting', her monotonous speech and the smoothness of her narrative gave the impression that she had shared this story more than once before. However, she was taken aback and paused for a while during her narrative when the researcher suggested replacing the word 'rebellion' with 'conflict'. Although she agreed to this change with a terse reply, her softer tone, changed expression and verbal pause already indicated that this suggestion was unexpected. This interpretation was further confirmed during the Family Resilience project's post-group individual interview.

> '*When you shared your story, did you have any expectations from the group?*' I asked.
>
> '*No, I just wanted to share my views*,' she said. Then, she rolled her eyes, looked at the ceiling and switched to another unrelated topic:

'But now I am aware that the problem is not only because of the child; it concerns both of us. Maybe I am forcing him to do things that I could not achieve when I was a child. Whenever I made any plans for his future, I never asked for his opinion (i.e. whether her son likes her plans).'

Her sudden change of topic and willingness to share her 'learning' indicated that this insight was important and meaningful to her. The word 'rebel' implies that only one party is at 'fault', whereas 'conflict' refers to the different opinions of two parties wherein neither may be at fault. In Chinese culture, disobedience in children is described as 'rebellion', while 'conflict' usually applies to couples or friendships. The Chinese rarely interpret their children's independence positively, and any deviance from seniors' wills is inappropriate. The story's analysis reveals that Mother K's parenting beliefs are strongly characterized by Confucian values. As discussed in Chapter 2, Lai et al.'s (2000) study confirmed that the Hong Kong locals' parenting values are rooted in Confucianism, suggesting that Hong Kong families still stress parental control over children in terms of benevolence, obedience and respect for authority, as advocated by Confucian doctrines. In this case, the Hong Kong local attributed her parenting problems to an external factor, namely, the influences of the new arrivals, rather than an internal factor such as her communication skills in parenting. This episode highlights the importance of analytical skills in solving family problems in Hong Kong families. Mother K's story showed that stereotypical beliefs significantly affect one's attribution of ineffective parenting. Hence, there is a dire need for both the new arrivals and the Hong Kong locals to be flexible and reflective while parenting within a new social context. Furthermore, the latter need to accept and adapt to the ever-changing composition of Hong Kong's population.

In the second half of the discussion, a Hong Kong local parent, Mother X, raised the issue of citizenship responsibility regarding cleanliness. This short discussion clearly illustrated the different parenting values held by the two groups, which can be attributed to their different historical and cultural backgrounds. Mother X did not regard picking up garbage from the street as an acceptable form of citizenship education, whereas both Mother B and Mother Cg (new arrivals) felt that such behaviour should be praised and valued. In that connection, Mother B shared her story of childhood hardship. Because of the poor living conditions and political struggle that they have experienced, mainland Chinese parents make light of many situations that are perceived as life-threatening by the Hong Kong locals. Once it became clear that the two groups of parents had completely different standards for good and bad, safe and risky, the 'misrepresented' image of 'irresponsible' new arrival parents became understandable. These people survived through difficult days and grew up without close supervision. Therefore, when the two groups perceive each other as different, the difference actually stems from their background and the resultant values rather than any form of class or cultural superiority.

5.4.2 The Story of an Immigrant

Shared ground and values do not guarantee group cohesion. One's stereotypical beliefs regarding a certain cultural group distort reality. I was once a volunteer in a day-care centre in Canada. I worked with the team very well from my first day in the centre. The team warmly welcomed a Chinese volunteer because they believed that all Chinese students are hard working and could inspire their children with appreciation for cultural diversity. In the working context, we shared the importance of playing, social experiences, and multiculturalism in children's development, including the customs of our own culture.

From our sharing, I realized that the centre supervisor held a set of beliefs regarding Chinese people, which led her to homogenize them all and overlook the diversity within Chinese culture in different regions of China. She believed not only that all Chinese are hard working but also that they never voice their complaints and maintain silence when faced with conflicts. She once told me,

> '*I don't understand why the Chinese use English names. I don't think they need to.*'
>
> '*We were asked (by the school) to select one,*' I replied, feeling somewhat insulted at this remark.
>
> '*But an English name does not mean anything to them. They are originally Chinese. A Chinese name means something to their families and culture.*'
>
> '*We have a mixed culture and are required to provide an English name in various situations, particularly job settings,*' I responded. She did not make any further comment but just pouted and shrugged her shoulders.

I did not particularly like her comment. Although I agreed with her to a certain extent, I also felt that she misunderstood 'us' in implying that the Chinese admired Western culture at the expense of undervaluing our own culture. I was never a cultural nationalist. However, I found her statements offensive; they elicited negative feelings in me.

My story reveals that different groups can be very similar at one time and very different at other times. The focus of a discussion or task plays a major role in developing an individual's ingroup and outgroup identity. Stereotyped beliefs regarding a specific cultural group exert an influence in categorizing ingroup and outgroup members; such

beliefs define how one approaches and interprets an individual. Any deviation from these beliefs is regarded as an exception. In fact, such deviation may represent a subgroup among many subgroups within a culture, wherein each subgroup shares a certain set of characteristics. The stereotyped beliefs of a particular cultural group can be a subgroup of that culture. Hence, rather than regarding stereotyped beliefs as a misrepresented set of beliefs, we can regard them as a set of characteristics shared by a cultural subgroup. In my story, the Hong Kong locals' sociopolitical background cannot be explained and understood by non-Hong Kong citizens in one or two sentences. The explanation that 'Hong Kong was a British colony at that time' does not provide the audience sufficient contextual information to understand every aspect of a colonial citizen's life. In the example pertaining to English names, Hong Kong locals adopted English names for their daily functioning in colonial Hong Kong rather than to signify our parents' expectations of us, as evidenced in our Chinese names. Without doubt, providing practical examples to illustrate the reasons for adopting English names would minimize our understanding gap on the above issue. However, I perceived myself as a minority at that time and place where nobody could understand me. I felt a strong need to maintain a harmonious atmosphere and withheld further discussion to prevent any conflict based on our opposing views. Therefore, I dropped the topic and returned to our shared ground—childcare.

While interpreting this story, I am aware that my experience may influence the data interpretation. To address this, I have taken extra care in orienting the new arrival group as providing the minority perspective, since they tend to express less than the Hong Kong locals, who are perceived as part of the mainstream or host culture. In this story, however, the new arrival members outnumbered the Hong Kong locals. Hence, I do not assume that

the reason behind the new arrivals' silence towards the Hong Kong locals is the same as the one in my experience. The analysis of Stories 1 and 2 reveals that the new arrivals defended themselves at the appropriate time and context in Story 1, particularly when they were invited to defend themselves, while they maintained silence in Story 2. This silence in Story 2 did not mean that they adopted a tolerant attitude towards the misrepresentation. On the contrary, the new arrivals listened to the Hong Kong locals actively and respectfully throughout the sharing process to maintain group harmonization.

5.4.3 Concluding Remarks

Story 2 described the first process of SGD where the members are still conscious of 'who is in my group and who is not'. However, as compared to the participants of Story 1, those of Story 2 were less vigorous in performing the similarities between the new arrivals and Hong Kong locals in terms of values and beliefs. In Story 2, the new arrivals were the majority in the group. Nevertheless, I observed that they appeared to be 'more mellow' than those in Story 1. For instance, they certainly did not lead the group discussion. Moreover, they acknowledged their identity as 'new arrivals' while respectfully and actively listening and responding to the group minority, the Hong Kong locals, as they discussed issues from the perspective of being a mother in the Hong Kong context (shared identity with the Hong Kong locals). By orienting themselves into this role, they elicited the shared values among both the groups. However, as discussed in Chapter 2, the emergence of shared values does not guarantee group cohesion. Because of different life experiences, people carry different expectations from the same social role and prioritize its importance differently. In this story, the political hardship experienced by a mainland

Chinese parent (Mother B) resulted in her having different standards of cleanliness and understanding of hazards from the Hong Kong locals, which may lead to different parenting strategies and interpretations. Unlike the Hong Kong locals, therefore, Mother B's life experience in mainland China made her prioritize moral and citizenship development over absolute cleanliness. Hence, although both the groups valued citizenship and moral education, their approach to their children's education could be very different because of different parenting strategies and behaviour. Without understanding the reasons behind some exhibited or performed parenting behaviour, a person might misrepresent the values and beliefs held by a cultural group.

5.5 Story 3: We Are Different, but We Understand You.

(18/3/2009) The institution that employed me assigned me to supervise a student working on a parent education programme organised by a kindergarten in Tsuen Wan (Site B), an urban area in Hong Kong. Before the activity commenced, the student informed me that the group members consisted of parents of children in kindergarten year 1 (3–4 years old) to kindergarten year 3 (5–6 years old). They were members of the same parent volunteer group and church fellowship, and had known each other for a certain period of time.

At 8:45 am, I arrived at a pink building in Tsuen Wan. It did not look like ordinary kindergarten schools, which are usually located on the ground floor. This kindergarten was located on the second and third floors of the building, while the fourth to eighth floors housed centres for the elderly, shops for their rehabilitation and activity rooms for various functions needed by the kindergarten and elderly centres. Hence, this building provided

integrated services for the elderly as well as young children. The atmosphere in this building was very different from that in an ordinary kindergarten in the sense that everyone in the building showed loving and caring attitudes. Nobody rushed at work, and everybody wore a smile. I took the small elevator to the top floor, where my student had prepared her parent education activity for the day.

Four parents were already present in the room; they greeted me as I entered the room. They did not seem surprised at the sight of a stranger, and none of them asked me why I had joined them. I quietly settled myself in a corner, and my student came to greet me a few seconds later. The room was full of piles of chairs and contained a whiteboard and a piano. Seeing the computer and projector in the room, I realized that the room was designed for seminars or talks and could accommodate at least 50 persons. This was a very spacious room, very different from the typical kindergarten classroom or activity room in a community centre. Later, the other six parents arrived at the scheduled time at nine o'clock. My student introduced me to the parents as her field supervisor as well as researcher. She also explained my study objectives to them and obtained their written consent so that I could record their conversation as a non-participant observer and later use it as data for analysis.

My student started the group session by making a PowerPoint presentation of Maslow's theory of human development. She explained to me that she chose this topic because she had found that parents did not respect their children's preferences and often forced them to learn topics or participate in interest groups that did not interest their children. She believed that it was important for parents to understand hierarchy of needs in human, which include love and respect rather than academic achievement, for children's self development.

The presentation lasted for fifteen minutes. Although the parents were quite attentive for the first five minutes, their attention then drifted, and they fidgeted, sent messages from their phones, and yawned. However, these behaviours did not annoy my student, and she completed the entire presentation that she had prepared for this activity. After her presentation, she asked the group,

> '*Does any one of you feel that you do not respect your child's interest?*'
>
> Mother W (new arrival) responded promptly, '*If my child does not know what is right and wrong, I cannot let him do whatever he wishes.*'
>
> '*What are Wing Wing's interests that you cannot let her continue?*' asked my student.
>
> '*Not my daughter. I'm talking about my son. He is already fifteen years old, but please do not assume that he can manage himself. He is so intensely involved in online games. He does not sleep, but plays online games till midnight. I have tried all kinds of strategies, but I can't stop him.*'
>
> '*Where have you kept the computer?*' asked Mother Ta (new arrival).
>
> '*In the living room,*' replied Mother W.
>
> '*Have you tried to talk to him? Let's say, to set a work and play schedule?*' asked Mother Yg (new arrival).
>
> '*I have tried everything. He just does not listen to me. I even cut the power cord. He is so smart; he knows how to fix it,*' she replied with irritation.

'*When you talk to him, what is his reaction?*' asked Mother Kk (Hong Kong local).

'*He just ignores me*,' replied Mother W. She began to sob as she continued, '*I need to work. I work part-time. I really have no time to monitor him.*'

'*Have you discussed this with your husband?*' asked Mother An (Hong Kong local).

'*He does not want to bother. We don't have a very good relationship. I have even considered divorcing him. But I believe children need a father, and I don't want them to grow up in a single-parent family. I read newspaper reports saying that children who grow up in broken families become irresponsible and even delinquent. My husband does not understand me. I need emotional support from him, but I can't change him. He has a much lower educational level than me, and we cannot seem to communicate. I now comfort myself by interpreting my issues from different perspectives. Sometimes, I think that he is better than those men who have extramarital affairs. He just likes to gamble*,' Mother W replied tearfully and in a helpless tone.

The group kept silent, and all were very attentive to her sharing.

'*I guess you need to take care of yourself first*,' responded Mother An.

Mother W wiped her eyes with a tissue and nodded in appreciation.

'*I just don't know what to do*,' she sobbed.

'*I guess you really need to talk to your son. Using "hard" strategies won't work. He is fifteen years old,*' suggested Mother An.

'*The church friends told me he gets a sense of achievement from online games which he cannot have from reality. He does not do well in school. I know that the more I force him, the more he will rebel against me. I am now trying to get him to participate in volunteer jobs in the community in order to obtain a sense of achievement from sources other than online games,*' Mother W shared, in a more positive tone.

'*We need to "cooperate" with older kids. He is a human being, not a machine or robot. If you express a wish to "cooperate" with him, he will feel much better. We can no longer insist that our children respect us. We must become a "friend" to them. I guess communication skills are an issue as well,*' Mother An continued.

'*Not just teenagers—even my four-year-old daughter plays computer games. I have password-protected my computer. She needs to ask for my help to log in to the computer,*' commented Mother Yg.

'*It is also important to update ourselves. Otherwise, the children will look down on you for not being knowledgeable enough to support them and understand their world. They may not find your words very convincing, and if they do not trust your ability, it will be very difficult to make them listen to you,*' said Mother Kk.

'*One thing is very strange as they grow up. They no longer believe you. For example, sometimes I tell my children that it is not good playing on the Internet for too long, but they won't believe me. Then I show them newspaper reports and make them read about the ill effects of the Internet. They find these external sources more convincing,*' said Mother An.

'*Yes. The teenagers like to go to karaoke. You ask them not to go because the place is very dangerous. But if they ask you, "Have you been to karaoke before?" you just don't know what to say. You say "no", but you can't tell them exactly why you don't want them to go there. You can't convince them. Therefore, you must enter their world and understand how they feel and think. Otherwise, you cannot communicate with them,*' Mother Kk explained.

'*We should not stick to the old way of thinking—that kids should learn from you (juniors learn from seniors). We need to learn from them, too,*' Mother Yg further elaborated.

I was impressed by her comment. Her parenting beliefs emphasised the importance of negotiation and equal status in the parent–child relationship. I guess her confidence in sharing her experiences also impressed the other group members, who all nodded their heads. Mother W sighed, shook her head in response to Mother Yg's comment and said,

'*I don't know. I really don't know. I will think about it.*'

I was not sure whether she agreed with the other parents' comments, but at least she did not reject them. Perhaps she needed some time to 'digest' the comments and determine how to apply them in her own family context.

5.5.1 I Can Understand You. We Are Not All that Different.

Although the participants have known each other for a certain period of time, process 2 of 'dual identity and group values establishment' of the SGD model occurs in this story where the participants are aware of their own identities because they are seated next to those who 'share' this identity. However, as this story progressed, the participants no longer focused on their carried identities of 'we' and 'you'. Instead, they focused on offering support and empathy to Mother W, as she became the 'you' and the rest formed a support group. It is important to note that this support group's members had still not left their 'me' identity to develop the 'we' identity. They simply contributed to the problem individually. That is, their support or responses did not build upon those of others.

In this story, there was plenty of interaction and experience-sharing among the parents. Mother W's sincere and honest sharing of her problems, as well as her marital difficulties, elicited caring attitudes and respect from the participants, while Mother W's appreciation and trust were shown in her continued sharing and nods of appreciation. Throughout the conversation, my student, the group facilitator, neither verbally nor non-verbally intervened in the discussion. In this instance, Mother W did not show any reluctance or hesitation in sharing her problems or being the focus of the group. Instead, it appeared that she could not wait to seek help. A simple statement from Mother An established a caring and

respectful atmosphere in the room: 'You need to take care of yourself first.' Without doubt, the group responded in empathy. Mother W's tears indicated that she sensed the group members' caring attitude. Such emotional exchanges are a vital part of group formation and direct all group participants to establish the group goal of providing mutual support. This goal, however, does not mean that all the participants should expect to benefit from group sharing. In this story, they all aimed to 'help' Mother W. As discussed in Chapter 2, process 2 of the SGD model highlights the importance of shared goals and a respectful atmosphere in productive group formation. Since all participants are regarded as ingroup members, they share an identity (helping Mother W), while the group members in this story also recognised and acknowledged Mother W's identity as a new arrival with a lower socioeconomic status.

The comments offered in support of Mother W's problem were marked with cooperative interaction in the sense that each member contributed individually to Mother W's situation rather than building their 'opinions' based on those of others (collaboration). Chapter 2 mentions that such interaction helps to reduce intergroup (local and new arrival) bias in the long run. It should be noted that a shared group goal does not necessarily imply sharing the same or similar thoughts, because each group member can approach a problem differently (Garvin et al., 2004). In this story, the participants shared their real life experiences as a possible reference for Mother W. Such a sharing of 'similar' life experiences that are considered applicable to others' situations conveys the powerful message that 'We are not the same, but we are not all that different.' In addition, Mother An's active participation acted as an important catalyst in establishing the group goal by offering empathetic support

to the teller. Rather than leading the group through a rational, in-depth discussion, Mother An acted as a facilitator by effectively understanding and responding to the teller's story.

5.5.2 The Story of an Immigrant and a Parent

The empathetic statement quoted above made me recall a sharing experience with new mothers when I gave birth to my first child in Canada. It was very stressful to breastfeed and take care of my baby entirely by myself. Hence, I joined a new mothers' group organised by the hospital where my baby was delivered. The group consisted of five mothers and a nurse. All the mothers were breastfeeding their babies. Although we had not met each other before, all of us shared how taking care of a newborn exhausted us. Although I received support from my husband and my own father, my traditional Chinese belief that a mother is a baby's primary caregiver did not allow me to rest. When my husband rocked my son to sleep, I felt too guilty to take rest. At night, I alone would wake up to take care of the baby. Over the weeks, we all lost patience. At one point, I blamed myself for giving birth to the baby. I shared these difficulties and thoughts in the new mothers' group. The group not only recognised but also shared and acknowledged the different beliefs regarding the mother's and father's roles in different cultures, but none of the participants tried to change my beliefs. They merely offered me suggestions and their experiences about how to improve the situation with the available resources in terms of time and my physical and emotional states. The nurse did not intervene throughout the sharing process, and her only statement at the end of the sharing was, 'Do you need formula?' She whispered it to me as if she were a thief. However, I could feel her care as

she offered me resources that might relieve my stress, although she further reminded me that I should always consider breastfeeding before introducing formula.

This group of mothers who had not met before was united by a sense of empathy between people with different values and beliefs. All the group members contributed to the 'client's' emotional state. Such a group dynamic is again characterized by cooperative rather than collaborative interaction. In this instance, group cohesion, with minimal intragroup and interpersonal differences, was shaped by the shared group goal.

5.5.3 Concluding Remarks

Story 3 illustrated that its participants were still aware of their multiple identities, differences, and similarities, as suggested in processes 1 and 2 of the SGD model. This story revealed that empathy development in participants is effective and necessary in strengthening the bonding among group members. Unfortunately, this development has not been included in the group coherence development processes in the SGD model. More importantly, merely understanding different perspectives is not enough to minimize the perceived differences among participants. Participants must show empathy in 'feeling' the teller's experiences in order to further maximize their trust, openness and shared values. As suggested in Chapter 2 and the previous stories, the group members who realized that they shared Confucian cultural roots, particularly those who understood the social hierarchy operating in Chinese society—where the wife/mother obeys the husband/father—developed empathy and understanding towards each other with regard to the role and restrictions of the mother/wife. Based on this empathy and understanding, the participants could interpret

and analyse the storyteller's problem from her own perspective. Thus, intergroup bias was greatly reduced by developing a common group goal.

5.6 Story 4: We Seem to be Quite Similar.

(18/9/2009) The institution where I was employed assigned me to supervise a practicum student who was conducting a parent education workshop at her nursery in Po Lam (Site C). The student informed me that she had invited a group of seven parents to participate in this workshop—three new arrivals and four Hong Kong locals. These mothers were all full-time mothers whose children attended my student's K1 class (first year of kindergarten). I was informed that the mothers met each other when dropping off and picking up their children from school every day. In addition, they were all members of the school volunteer group. However, my student stated that the interaction between these mothers remained at the level of chatting; they rarely engaged in in-depth discussions.

The nursery is located in an old public estate in an rural area, and the workshop was held in the K1 classroom. I arrived ten minutes before the scheduled starting time of five o'clock. The student briefed me about her plan. There were seven chairs set in a semi-circle at the centre of the classroom, and I seated myself on the right side of the classroom, which meant that I could barely see the faces of the participants. At five o'clock sharp, all seven parents entered the classroom along with their children, who had finished their school day. The parents took their seats, and my student led the children to the adjacent classroom where they could participate in some activities while their parents attended the workshop. The parents were aware of my presence and greeted me with a smile. They talked to each other

openly and loudly without any shyness, indicating that they knew and were comfortable with each other.

In a few minutes, my student returned to the classroom. She first welcomed the parents to the workshop and then introduced me as her field supervisor as well as researcher of my study. I also introduced myself in a few words and invited the parents to participate in this study. When I had explained the study's purposes, process and their rights as participants, the parents expressed their understanding of these details and signed the consent form to participate in this study. Once these forms were collected, my student started the workshop by presenting the results of a questionnaire on 'misbehaviour', which the parents had completed in the week prior to this programme.

> '*The following are behaviours that you listed under "misbehaviour": not eating properly, disobedience, not following orders, rebellion.*'
>
> Mother PLD (Hong Kong local) immediately responded in a very angry tone, '*For every meal, it is like having a battle. I have to "bomb" her ears with non-stop urging.*'
>
> Mother PLA (Hong Kong local) commented, '*The child suffers.*' Mother PLD agreed.
>
> '*My daughter is like that, too.*' Mother PLYau (new arrival) wanted to share her problem: '*Whenever she eats, she seems tired.*'
>
> '*She must hate eating,*' Mother PLD commented.

'*She is very lazy. She moves only when I kick her. She is irritated and annoyed throughout the meal*, Mother PLYau described her daughter's behaviour in a frustrated tone. However, she continued with grin, '*Because I always urge her, she urges me in return.*'

'*What do you want her to do?*' my student asked.

'*I want her to finish her meal quickly,*' said Mother PLYau.

'*What can we do?*' my student asked the group.

'*I worry that she will remain hungry if she does not eat,*' sighed Mother PLYau.

'*Don't force her to eat if she is not hungry. Don't give her anything to eat immediately before a meal,*' suggested Mother PLM (Hong Kong local).

'*Whenever she does not eat, my mother-in-law keeps saying that the dinner has grown cold and is not good for her health. I wish she would go and give her something else to eat later at night!*' Mother PLYau exclaimed.

'*Ha! If the elderly do not cooperate, we can do nothing,*' said Mother PLD.

'*Just starve her if she does not eat,*' suggested Mother PLLoud (Hong Kong local). '*When we were young, we had nothing to eat. Nobody urged us to eat. We were all very self-disciplined,*' said Mother PLLoud very calmly.

The other parents nodded in agreement. Mother PLD reminded the group, '*The problem is that she lives with her mother in-law, who does not cooperate. She can do nothing.*'

Mother PLYau nodded and said, with a bitter grin, '*My mother-in-law does everything for her. She feeds her whenever she does not eat.*'

'*Have you ever talked to her?*' asked my student.

'*Of course I have! But she does not listen,*' replied Mother PLYau in exasperation. Turning to the group, she asked, '*You tell me what I should do.*'

'*I suggest that you to talk to her again and tell her the importance of cultivating good habits and the consequences of doing things for her,*' suggested Mother PLM. However, Mother PLYau sighed and made a helpless gesture to indicate that this suggestion would not work for her. My student suggested,

'*Next time, why don't you ask your mother-in-law to join this workshop? I believe that she loves her grandaughter and will come. Maybe after sharing this issue with the other parents, she will change.*'

Mother PLYau did not make any response. It seemed that she did not know how to respond to my student's suggestion. However, the group agreed that it might be a possible solution and encouraged her to bring her mother-in-law the next time the group met.

My student looked at the clock. Half of the session time had passed. She then related the eating problem to the topic of disobedience by saying,

'*Now, as some parents have mentioned, the children do not listen to you. Some of you have described them as naughty and disobedient. How do you deal with their disobedience?*'

'*By making them stand in the hallway outside our flat?*' replied Mother PLQ, with her eyes on her son.

'*You can see him, can't you?*' Mother PLA (Hong Kong local) asked seriously, with concern in her eyes and tone.

'*No, with the door closed sometimes,*' Mother PLQ replied, finally turning her head towards us.

Mother PLA opened her mouth in surprise.

Mother PLM (Hong Kong local) responded, '*No, that's very dangerous. Once I also asked my child to stand in the hallway. Suddenly, I heard a very loud "bang", which sounded like some heavy thing had fallen onto the ground. After that, it was very quiet outside. I opened the door, only to see that my daughter was neither at the door nor in the hallway. My heart almost jumped out of me. I worried that she had jumped off from the building. I asked all my neighbours if they had seen her. Finally, I found her in her classmate's home, a few levels below our flat. Since then, I do not dare to punish her by making her stand outside our home.*'

'*Our place is safe,*' replied Mother PLQ, in a much softer voice.

Nobody in the group argued with her, but I could see disagreement in their eyes. My student did not know how to respond. She then turned to her lecture about the three styles of parenting: democratic, authoritative, and authoritarian. After her five-minute-long presentation, she asked the group,

'*Which parenting styles do you adopt?*'

The participants thought for a few seconds. Mother PLLoud finally said, '*A mixture of all three. Depends on the situation.*' The group agreed. Mother PLQ continued,

'*Of course, the democratic style is the most ideal. But sometimes the situation and time simply do not allow for any negotiation. The child cannot choose, and I cannot give him a choice.*'

'*True,*' replied Mother PLX. '*Sometimes, the child should not have a choice. Just like the eating problem, the child should not have a choice of whether to eat or not. He must know that this is mealtime. If he wants to play, he can play before the meal, or if he wants to eat something else, he can have it after the regular meal.*'

Mother PLYau listened attentively. My student asked the group,

'*What are the issues you can and cannot negotiate with your children?*'

'*In issues related to their health, safety and schooling, there should be no negotiation,*' replied Mother PLX.

'*Schooling means?*' my student asked.

'*Homework*,' replied Mother PLD.

'*Yes, it is not up to him to choose whether or not to go to school or do homework. Sometimes, if he does his homework wrongly, I ask him to correct it*,' said Mother PLLoud.

'*For instance?*' asked my student.

'*If his handwriting is not good enough, I erase it off and ask him to do it again*,' said Mother PLLoud.

'*I wouldn't do that. I would just let her finish her work*,' said Mother PLA.

The workshop had already overrun its allocated time. My student ended the workshop by explaining to Mother PLLoud how adults should appreciate children's work and how our behaviour affects children's learning motivation.

5.6.1 Sharing Values in the Absence of Empathy or Sense of Belonging

Story 4 provides a very good example that sharing without developing empathy in individuals would not effectively orient participants towards a common entry into an experience to provide support that caters to the tellers' needs. In this story, Mother PLYau's views on feeding children and Mother PLQ's views on punishing her child by sending her outdoors all alone only highlighted the different parenting values held by individual group members. In the above interaction, Mothers PLM, PLYau, and PLD inter-simulated one another (MacKenzie, 1992). They sat near each other and engaged in a common topics—children's eating problems and transgenerational parenting issues.

Through their shared and similar attitudes and values, they formed a group entity during the discussion.

In contrast, Mother PLQ's 'starvation' philosophy and disciplinary practice of leaving the child standing alone in the hallway were obviously not shared by the rest of the group. Although she spoke quite often in the group, she had no intention or motive to relate to the other group members in any manner. In particular, she shared her views without interacting with the group. Her behaviour can be explained in terms of the need to become an ingroup member. Obviously, her statements revealed that she considered her parenting skills effective and applicable to her living environment and family context. She was not motivated to become an ingroup member merely for adaptation and assimilation purposes (Chapter 2). However, Mother PLQ played a significant role in the development of group dynamics. Her 'deviant' parenting practices brought the group to a state of action (stopping other interactions among group members), followed by a period of silence (MacKenzie, 1992; 179). Hence, the unexpected 'surprise' element introduced by Mother PLQ took the group atmosphere to a high level of intensity, followed by silence (ibid.). This rise-and-fall group pattern is termed as 'group homeostasis' or 'equilibrium', when all the participants become conscious of their similarities and differences (ibid.). This is when the participants will redefine their ingroup and outgroup member identities. Hence, Mother PLQ's deviation made ingroup and outgroup distinction more salient and further strengthened bonding among the perceived ingroup members.

Mother PLQ neither shared a common viewpoint with the group nor received empathy and understanding from the group members. She was merely a fellow-parent whose child attended the kindergarten's K1 class. Hence, merely sharing an identity without common

interests or empathy is not a strong enough bond to 'glue' the group members together and create a one-group entity (MacKenzie, 1992; 173).

5.6.2 The Story of an Immigrant and a Hong Kong Local

When I studied in Canada, although I got along well with my classmates during schoolwork, I struggled with their social topics of conversation. They regarded co-habiting with boyfriends as a common practice, paid rent to their parents, earned their own living by doing part-time jobs, and their families, because of the well-developed welfare system, enjoyed their everyday lives without worrying about monetary security. This is my understanding of my classmates' life and beliefs. Our family values were located at the other extreme: living with a non-legitimate partner is losing face and bringing dishonour to the family; parents bear the responsibility of bringing up their children strictly and fully support their education; if school-age children or teenagers earn their own living, it is a sign of poverty that is, again, losing face and bringing dishonour to the family; rather than fully enjoying themselves using their earnings, our parents consider buying assets that will be inherited by their children and grandchildren and expect these future generations to look after them in their old age (Confucian beliefs regarding the roles and responsibilities of parents and children). Although my family values may have been perceived as too conservative by my Canadian classmates, my family had expectations regarding my behaviour and future, and I lived and grew up in that particular cultural context. Living away from these expectations was to live away from my home and parents. When my classmates talked about their lives, I found that I had nothing common to share or discuss with them, as I did not share any of their experiences. Of course, my different values did

not affect my entire social functioning. However, because of some of my family-value-related issues, I remained alien to certain situations and could not fit in perfectly. People who were not part of my family system and culture could scarcely understand why we chose to remain in a world marked by strict orders and obligations. However, these family issues further highlighted my identity as an outsider.

5.6.3 Concluding Remarks

In this story, the 'deviant behaviour' of Mother PLQ served as a 'chemical reaction' to bond together the other group members who, while they may have held different views regarding disciplining children, found common ground in disagreeing with Mother PLQ. In this way, a shared sentiment can unite members with different views regarding the same issue. This story indicates that affection plays an important role in group formation. In particular, simply sharing an experience without taking into account affection such as empathy and sentiment would not effectively provide participants a common entry into an experience. Therefore, it is essential for participants to develop affection to form a one-group representation with a common ground and goal.

5.7 Story 5: Can We Help? How?

(09/10/2009) Two weeks after the first supervision, my student who worked in Po Lam (Site C) arranged a follow-up sharing session with the parents who had participated in the first session. Like the last session, the sharing group was scheduled right after the children finished school so that the children could remain in the school with the teachers while the

session was conducted in the adjacent classroom. All the parents reported to the classroom on time. This time, two more participants joined the activity—a grandmother and a father. The grandmother was in her mid-sixties and had come with her daughter-in-law, Mother PLYau (new arrival). The father was Mother PLYau's husband. My student started the session by asking them if there were any special issues or changes in parenting during the last two weeks after the previous workshop.

> '*I asked my mother-in-law to ignore my daughter if she comes to her to escape from me. I also asked her not to feed my daughter or give her snacks if my daughter does not eat at dinner time*,' reported Mother PLYau.
>
> '*Yes, otherwise the child will just use you as her float ring. She will no longer listen to her mother*,' commented Mother PLM (Hong Kong local).
>
> '*I don't. I just ignore her when she comes to me*,' said the grandmother.
>
> '*Sometimes, I feel simply unable to control my emotion when my child throws a tantrum. I really want to explode or smack my daughter a few times. Instead, I try to walk away as soon as possible*,' shared Mother PLYau.
>
> '*How does Yo (Mother PLYau's daughter) respond?*' Mother PLM asked.
>
> '*She goes to her grandmother*,' replied Mother PLYau.
>
> '*And what do you do?*' Mother PLM asked the grandmother.
>
> '*I ask her to apologise to her mother*,' she replied.

'*Yo just uses her grandmother as an escape route. She goes to her grandmother when she gets mad at me. Her attitude is, "I don't need you; I have grandmother". Even after a while, when I calm down and ask her if she is feeling better now, she merely turns her back to me and says, "I don't need you". That day, she threw away her toothbrush. I was so mad,*' said Mother PLYau in a tone of frustration.

All the group members looked at the grandmother, who made no response.

'*I think that the mother and grandmother are playing two different roles. They must cooperate and compromise with each other. If the mother is really mad and Yo goes to her grandmother, the grandmother should encourage Yo to confess her mistake and apologise to her mother. Otherwise, Yo will just go to her grandmother and complain about her own mother. Then she stops listening to her mother. If that happens, Yo's mother will have great trouble in teaching her anything,*' responded Mother PLA (Hong Kong local), as she analysed the situation.

'*I understand. It's just that things are getting worse now,*' sighed the grandmother.

'*I suggest that the grandmother just ignore Yo and let her sort out the problem on her own,*' Mother PLX (new arrival) advised.

'*I will encourage her to do that,*' the grandmother continued. '*If her mother scolds her, I will not say a word. If Yo comes to me, I will ask her to think about what she needs to do and ask her to apologise to her mother.*'

The group nodded in assent. A few parents whispered among themselves and agreed that grandparents should cooperate with parents in disciplining children. My student then summarized the discussion by sharing how children develop self-discipline when there are two teachers in the same classroom. My student emphasised the principle of rules consistency and cooperation between caregivers when two adults share childcare. After my student had provided examples of these principles, the father stated,

> '*Nowadays, children are very self-centred.*'

The group nodded in agreement. He continued,

> '*Sometimes, I cannot tolerate it anymore and then I cane him.*'

My student immediately clarified that physical punishment was never an effective strategy in managing child behaviour. However, the parents did not discuss the drawbacks of physical punishment. Mother PLLoud (Hong Kong local) shared her experience with a grin,

> '*My son hits his own hands, so we do not have the opportunity to hit him. He tells us that he has punished himself already. The child is just so smart.*'

The group burst into laughter, whereas my student shook her head in disapproval. Mother PLLoud continued,

> '*Now I use another strategy. I ask him to sit facing the wall. I tell him, "I don't want to see your face because I feel so mad when I see you".*'
>
> '*For how long?*' asked Mother PLYau.
>
> '*One hour,*' answered Mother PLLoud.

The group was surprised by the high tolerance levels of the child. Mother PLLoud explained,

> '*He starts fidgeting after half-an-hour. He asks for food, to go to the toilet, etc. I then give him a choice: (1) I will hit him twice with a cane, which will only last for thirty seconds, after which he will be free, or (2) he will keep sitting there facing the wall for one hour,*' Mother PLLoud shared this as a joke with the group.
>
> '*Sitting for half-an-hour is already unbelievable,*' commented Mother PLYau.
>
> '*I believe that physical punishment is necessary for disciplining the child. If he feels and remembers the pain, he will remember his fault and not repeat it again,*' said the father.
>
> '*Physical punishment is not a long-term strategy. You cannot use it when they are older. Children nowadays are very self-centred. You must forge a good relationship with him, and he will listen to you,*' said Mother PLYau.
>
> '*Yes, I know. But sometimes I just cannot control myself,*' replied Mother PLLoud.
>
> '*It (relationship development) takes time. You admit that you cannot control yourself. But if you continue using physical punishment, he will know that you use your power to control him. He will believe that only people with power can control (life). Once he grows up and obtains more physical strength, you will be unable to control him. We keep hearing news about*

sons hitting their parents. Don't you worry that this may happen to you? Young children learn to imitate their parents. Why don't you let him imitate your use of reason, not power, to develop self-discipline? To be honest, I have never hit my daughter,' remarked Mother PLYau.

'*My child is not as good as yours,*' said Mother PLLoud.

'*If you continue thinking in this way, you will not change. I guess you need to control your emotions,*' said Mother PLYau in an assertive tone.

The session approached its end. My student concluded it by asking,

'*What do you think about sharing among parents? Do you find that other parents can help you?*'

'*Yes, we can share experiences and learn from one another,*' said the father.

'*So, next time, you can share among yourselves and help each other without my presence,*' said my student.

'*No, we can't. Ours experiences are everyday experiences. We definitely need you to teach us more,*' said Mother PLLoud.

'*Why? All of you have very good experiences. What's the difference between your knowledge and mine?*' my student asked.

'*We need a leader. If a parent leads a group, I guess many of us will question why they need to listen to her. We are all parents participating in group sharing; we all have "equal stature". We shouldn't have*

disagreements about who will listen to whom ("listen" in this context means "obey"),' said Mother PLX.

'*Our experiences are merely those of ordinary housewives. You have seen many cases and can see a bigger picture (macro view on parenting); you can tell us about many different situations and solutions,*' said Mother PLLoud. The other parents nodded in agreement.

'*You are an expert. You have worked with children and their families for so many years. Parenting actually is a skill that needed to be learnt, from either you (experts) or our own living. An expert's opinion is more professional [...], providing analysis on various factors that may influence our children, of which we may not be aware. You can provide clear steps for us to follow,*' exclaimed Mother PLM.

The group facilitator gave me a rueful smile, and I smiled in return. The parents noticed this eye contact between us and stopped 'complaining'. The group facilitator continued,

'*I hope you can learn by reflecting on your actions. What do you think about this learning mode? That is, learning by reflection as a group?*'

'*Yes, reflection helps us recall and reflect on our current practices. However, reflection is useless for people who are already helpless. I am sure that these people have already reflected on their practices and tried to improve their situation. Perhaps they need to seek help from you, and this format might not help them,*' said the father.

'*Just reflection will not solve the problem. Some people don't know how to think (of answers), or they forget them when they leave the group. This (format) is meaningless*,' said Mother PLA.

'*Yes, we may learn from each other's experience, but we get many opportunities to share our experience with other parents on our own. However, your lecture is not always available,' said Mother PLLoud.*

'*Sharing between parents is too casual. You give us more information. Your suggestions are more comprehensive, and you help us to see issues from different perspectives*,' said the father.

'*We, as a group of parents, limit our discussion on one aspect. Our experiences are all we talk. But you can help us to analyse the problem from different perspectives*,' continued Mother PLLoud.

'*Some parents say we, and sometimes our guest speakers, are too theoretical and not practical enough. What do you think?*' my student enquired.

'*Even though some things (lecture contents) are too theoretical and may not be applicable, it is worthwhile, nonetheless, to learn something new*,' responded the father.

'*Yes, but you can still analyse the problem for us and tell us possible solutions*,' said Mother PLLoud.

'*We are not well-educated; we don't have the knowledge. You are an expert in this area. Of course, you have more experience than us,*' said Mother PLA.

'*Don't you think a group of parents can also analyse each other's problems and shared possible solutions, since each family has different experiences and can provide various solutions for various situations?*' asked my student.

'*We want better. Even some strategies work well in my own family. But we still need you (expert) to tell me which areas I am adequate and where I need to improve,*' said father.

'*If you say that we can learn from sharing with friends, what if my neighbours and friends tell me that beating children is an effective disciplinary strategy? It works for them, so should I try it? The point is that we need somebody to tell us how to discipline our children,*' said Mother PLLoud.

'*Sometimes, even if I know my parenting is effective and applicable to my family, I still need a professional to tell me whether I am right and give me advice for further improvement,*' remarked Mother PLYau.

'*So you believe that there is a right way of parenting?*' asked my student.

'*I don't; I just gave that as an example. However, we do we need somebody to analyse our problems. Then I can decide whether the suggested solutions would work for my family or not. That's my part,*' said Mother PLYau.

My student concluded that she hoped that the parents could support one another so that all of us can help each other at any time and in any place. The group was then invited to complete an activity evaluation form, and the parents picked up their children from the next room.

5.7.1 We Can Identify Ourselves as One Group, as 'We'

In Story 5, all the group members shared a group goal, with their contributions building on one another. The dynamic was characterized by respect, understanding, and empathy, with minimal intergroup bias. This story started with a scene reminiscent of a 'family court', where all the participants commented on the grandmother's uncooperative behaviour. Then, the participants made comments that built upon previous ones. For example, corporal punishment was discussed as a form of behaviour reflecting loss of emotional control in oneself and the effects of a distorted belief on one's behaviour. The group members elaborated on one another's responses, indicating the emergence of collaborative interaction. Each comment elaborated upon the previous issue in order to explore it at a deeper level. More importantly, they co-constructed a better solution wherein each participant owned the final resolution. The group dynamic was marked by in-depth discussions and collaborative interactions seeking to explore the underlying problems of the shared issue in order to offer mutual support to the individual family as well as the group. This process also resulted in the construction of a 'we' group identity (one-group representation) among the participants.

On the other hand, although the group dynamic in this sharing activity was characterized by group cohesion with minimal intergroup and interpersonal differences, the participants admitted that they would not be satisfied merely sharing their experiences with other parents in the absence of professionals. Hence, the belief that professionals are the main knowledge transmitters and sources was still deeply rooted in their minds. In this story, the parents believed that only professionals can uncover the complexity of cases to reveal the underlying problems. In contrast, participants believed that parents focus on the superficial level and fail to analyse deep-rooted issues. The parents were also aware that rationality among group members is an important factor in group learning. In particular, they expressed their concern that if group members agree on the effectiveness of corporal punishment, they might further promote inappropriate practices.

Although the participants in this story did not dismiss group sharing as a learning format, they explicitly and directly expressed that 'I want you (the professional) to give me a clear answer and message'. Hence, their expectation of knowledge and advice transmission was apparent. This belief in knowledge authorities as the source of knowledge reflected the belief that 'there is absolute knowledge out there'. In contrast, they were uncomfortable and distrustful with respect to their own lived experiences, which they perceived as not as valuable as the inputs from knowledge authorities. The participants feared that they were 'not well-educated', 'not knowledgeable enough', 'not knowing good parenting practices' and 'likely to say something wrong'. The Hong Kong locals, for example, described their parenting knowledge as 'folk knowledge' that was derived from their life experiences and not from evidence-based research. Therefore, they considered their folk knowledge to have fewer credentials than that provided by 'experts'.

5.7.2 The Story of an Immigrant and Educator

In 1999, when I took up an early childhood education programme (full-time) at college in Canada, there was plenty of group work. The class comprised a few Latin Americans, European minorities and three Chinese students, including me. After the first year of the programme, we developed trust and friendship towards one another, and intergroup differences were thereby greatly reduced. At one stage, we were required to design a parent education workshop for parents from different cultural backgrounds. My group contained some minority group members. Each of us shared some of our own cultural values and practices with the group and discussed how to align all the different cultural rituals and fit them into the workshop. We chose the most important features of the rituals and wove them into one piece of work. For example, 'discussion' is always the most popular communication strategy suggested by the mainstream. However, other group members from India and China opined that ''discussion' was not an appropriate communication practice in their families. Since the workshop targeted families from different cultures who had settled in Canada, we realized the need to respect their unique cultural values, while at the same time explaining the parenting practices of the host culture. Before the discussion, the mainstreamers misunderstood us, believing that there was no ''discussion'at all in Asian cultures. However, after the sharing session, people from both host and minority cultures understood that ''discussion' existed in all cultures; the only difference was the extent to which it was used as a communication strategy. Building on this understanding, none of us adopted the all-or-nothing strategy to promote the 'discussion' strategy in the workshop. Rather, we 'contextualized' different

communication strategies and asked the parents to analyse the requirements of their particular context and apply them appropriately.

5.7.3 Concluding Remarks

The final stage of 'one-group representation' in SGD emerged in this story. All the group members shared a group goal, with their contributions building on one another. With minimum intervention from the group facilitator, the dynamic is characterized by mutual respect, understanding and minimal intergroup bias. Although the members achieved the stage of one-group representation, they indicated their wish to be led by a group facilitator or educator, revealing that the Confucian beliefs regarding education and the teacher–learner relationship are deeply rooted in both the mainland Chinese and Hong Kong local parents' beliefs pertaining to learning and the role of the educator.

5.8 Conclusion

The transcription and my thoughts on each of the five stories were shared with the participants within a month of their participation in the focus group. The participants agreed that the transcribed narratives represented what they wanted to convey in the group and did not elaborate further on the transcribed data. Regarding the trustworthiness and transparency of the narratives, they found my interpretations from the perspectives of various identities as a Hong Kong local, immigrant, parent, and educator provided an empathetic account of the narratives of tellers with different identities.

The five stories revealed not only the three processes of the SGD model but also the power and necessity of identifying the development of empathy and understanding among group members as an important part of the group formation process that bonds members from varied sociocultural backgrounds and with different values and beliefs. Moreover, my stories from my different identity perspectives further enable the readers to understand how my experiences impart meaning to the collected data.

The analysis of these five stories revealed that there is no clear-cut distinction between the different processes. Earlier processes lead to the next process, with the components of the earlier processes exerting lesser and lesser influence on the group as they progress to the next process. These stories also illustrated that their participants were aware of and acknowledged their multiple identities whenever these identities were elicited by the discussion topics. However, their tolerance, understanding and abilities to shift between the different identities to meet their own and the group's needs developed over time. It is unrealistic to expect individuals to abandon their adopted identities; however, their need to belong and shared affection motivate them to be more flexible in shifting between their different identities to meet their individual and group needs.

The inquiry based on the SGD framework, participants' accounts and my own accounts illustrated that Hong Kong parents from different sociocultural backgrounds can learn in groups. However, the three processes suggested by the existing SGD model are inadequate for the development of a collaborative, ideal mutual support group dynamics. The presence of affection, in particular, plays a very important role in establishing the foundation for a mutual support group. In addition, regarding parents' perception of educators and education, both the new arrivals and Hong Kong locals groups had similar Confucian

beliefs regarding the elevated role of educators and the 'lecture' mode of learning as the ideal and standard mode of education. Given the belief that parenting is a culture- and family-specific process, the lecture mode would not be sensitive to the ever-changing needs of families. Hence, in the following chapter, I will present a model of parent education programme that is sensitive to the needs of families, while taking into account the parents' expectations from education in the Hong Kong context.

Chapter 6. I Saw, I Found and I Conclude: Discussion

Based on the five stories analysed in the previous chapter, this chapter will explain the mechanisms required for effective parent education in Hong Kong and the role of family life educators in the Hong Kong context, based on the exploration of this study's three main research questions:

1. To what extent do sociocultural factors affect group interaction among members from diverse backgrounds in Hong Kong?
2. What mechanisms affect group interaction among people from diverse backgrounds in parent education programmes in Hong Kong?
3. How can one formulate a parent education programme to suit families having diverse backgrounds, values, and beliefs in the Hong Kong context?

6.1 Research Question 1: To what extent do sociocultural factors play a role in group interaction among people from diverse backgrounds in Hong Kong?

Chapter 3 explained the identity formation process based on the social identity theory and cultural studies, namely, Confucianism and High Context culture (HC), to examine their influences on interactions between group members and group identity formation. In response to the first research question, the following section will describe the effects of (1) a self-perceived identity on the group dynamics of new arrivals and Hong Kong locals, (2) shared cultural roots, such as Confucianism and HC, on the group dynamics and (3) the SGD model described in this study.

6.1.1 The Effect of Self-perceived Identity on Group Dynamics

Self-perceived Identities: New Arrivals versus Hong Kong Locals

In the absence of mutual understanding, participants identified their group membership at the superficial level based on physical attributes such as accents and verbal information shared during the activity. Both groups identified their ingroup members as a 'we' group by making eye contact with these members, thus mutually verifying their self-perceived identification as ingroup or outgroup members in the particular context and time. During discussions, the ingroup members echoed each other through either verbal or body language whenever any shared interests emerged. However, it should be noted that same-culture as well as different-culture members can share a common interest as long as they share perceptibly similar, if not the same, values. This perceived ingroup/outgroup identity could be a temporary self-identity. As evident in Story 1, where the group members made sarcastic jokes about second wives, the incident showed that a short-lived group identity could emerge based on shared values. Once the discussion topic changed, this perceived self-identity changed accordingly.

Stereotypes

The stories revealed that the Hong Kong locals tended to attribute a set of stereotypical traits to the new arrivals instead of acquiring a deeper understanding of the latter through social interaction. In Stories 1 and 2, the Hong Kong local parents made some very explicit comments reflecting their belief in the stereotypical traits reported by the media. These beliefs, which are held by the majority of Hong Kong locals, guided their interaction with

the new arrival parents. Such negative attitudes magnify intergroup differences and create obstacles in the recognition of similarities between groups. Hence, stereotyped beliefs played a significant role at the outset of group interaction between members from diverse backgrounds. As is evident in Stories 3, 4 and 5, this influence can be minimized by mutual understanding through dialogue, relationship development and empathic understanding.

As an Inquirer, I Saw, I Found and I Conclude

Having some experience as an immigrant and a Hong Kong local, I could perfectly understand the new arrivals' frustration at being misrepresented, treated unfairly and being perceived as 'different' by the Hong Kong locals. Although none of the participants in this study explicitly refused to know more about one another, the new arrivals admitted that since they were busy with child caring and had very limited connections with the Hong Kong locals, they had no opportunity to get better acquainted with the locals. In contrast, although the latter, as members of the mainstream, did not reject the possibility, they did not feel the need to better understand the former, believing that they had more options to choose from members of their own social network. Within the limitations and beliefs of these groups, they chose to identify their own ingroup members largely based on their 'root' or 'home' identities, without in-depth mutual understanding. I believe that their member-selection strategy is probably the quickest way to achieve self-belonging and obtain social support. While I do not deny that we all adopt the same strategy to identify 'our' people, to a certain extent, especially when meeting unfamiliar people for the first time, it is important to examine whether this member-selection strategy is sustainable

enough for people to maintain their relationships and obtain practical support in the longer run. Given that both groups have no intention to reject engaging in mutual understanding, a facilitator that provides a suitable medium, such as sharing, that can promote mutual understanding would be effective in clarifying people's stereotyped beliefs and thereby developing positive attitudes towards a particular sociocultural group, recognizing their hidden similarities and respectfully acknowledging differences, thus establishing an empathetic relationship.

6.1.2 The Effect of Shared Cultural Roots on Group Dynamics: Confucianism and High Context Culture (HC)

Confucianism and High Context Culture (HC)

The core values of social hierarchy and adherence to social expectations regarding an adopted social role, as emphasised by Confucianism and HC, were apparent in this study. The participants in this study avoided direct confrontation by adopting different strategies, for example, those in Stories 1 and 2 expressed their views individually without responding to others. After a trust-based relationship was established, the participants either actively listened or responded to those who actively sought help or were struggling with a problem. In this stage, the group members were invited to express their views on a problem that was less likely to threaten the group harmony. When faced with disagreements, the participants grouped themselves into those who shared similar views through their seating arrangement or eye contact to indicate their perceived 'we' (ingroup) and 'you' (outgroup) identities throughout the interaction, as illustrated in Story 4. The participants in these stories illustrated their need to belong and attempt to maintain group harmony by avoiding

assuming the leading role of the group facilitator and expressing 'different' feelings or viewpoints (communication and dealing with new situations, Appendix 1e (v)(vi)). For the participants, the most vigorous way to express disagreement was to share one's opposing view while looking at the group leader's eyes rather than at the 'opponent', as is evident in Story 2, when Mother K commented on the new arrivals. However, as shown by this study, such behaviour was rare. The most common way the participants expressed their disagreement was by maintaining silence or changing the topic, as evident in Story 4, where the parents had different views on disciplinary practices. These responses indicate that the participants did not want to take any action to 'clarify' or 'investigate' the seeming disagreement. Instead, they preferred to avoid any situation that might elicit disharmony.

As an Inquirer, I Saw, I Found, and I Conclude

As an overt non-participant observer in all five sharing groups, I witnessed how perceived identity and cultural values of Confucianism and HC developed group identities among Hong Kong locals and new arrivals. As the participants engaged in mutual understanding and group identity formation, they began to focus less on the primary identity—their deep-rooted cultural identity—while being more sensitive to shifting along different identities to meet the contextual needs of the sharing processes. This phenomenon implies that in order to heighten the awareness of multiple identities and perceived similarities in participants, the discussion must activate their dormant multiple identities by sharing various aspects of their lives in order to explore their shared identities rather than being restricted to a single dimension of an issue or problem.

Seeing the above phenomenon from the viewpoint of an immigrant, I observed that the need to belong was particularly strong in the new arrivals. Meeting new people in a new place was both exciting and worrying for them. Through experience, I know that nobody likes to be labelled as 'a new arrival'. As a new arrival in a Western country, I was very conscious of my root identity—Chinese. Hence, I was always extra-careful not to project a poor image to the mainstream and therefore tried to adopt their social practices, hoping to become more similar and belonging to the host culture at least temporarily, if not melting into it altogether. I remember being aware of my own multiple identities when engaging in discussions on different social topics or interacting with different social groups. Through communication, however, we can understand our similarities and differences within the realm of our shared identities and our expectations from the shared identities. Hence, sharing life experiences as stories is an effective medium for 'showing' intergroup similarities and differences within a context which embraces the social roles, identities and reasons why sometimes there is a 'you and me' representation, while sometimes there is a 'we' representation.

In short, a mere sharing context that is insensitive to sociocultural factors such as perceived and shared identities, stereotyped beliefs, Confucianism and HC would not develop group cohesion and a one-group representation characterized by mutual understanding, respect, collaboration, common goals and mutual help. In the following section, the SGD model will be used to illustrate the interactions of the abovementioned sociocultural factors in contributing to the development of a group comprising members from diverse backgrounds into a sustainable and collaborative group marked by one-group representation, mutual understanding and respect.

6.1.3 The Use of the Subjective Group Dynamic Model (SGD)

The group formation processes in this study reflect the three processes suggested by the SGD model. However, further analysis based on SGD revealed that perceived similarities and shared common goals do not guarantee collaborative mutual support among group members. In contrast, the stories revealed the need to develop empathy and understanding among the participants so that they could understand their differences and offer help to address the individual as well as group needs. In addition, there seemed to be no clear-cut distinction between the various group development processes in these stories. Although the ingroup–outgroup distinction remained, it became less intense as the group proceeded to develop a one-group representation characterized by shared goals and mutual support. Hence, I propose that the SGD model's three existing processes be revised to include an additional process (Process 2a) to the existing model that helps develop a mutual support group entity. In that case, the four processes are as follows:

Process 1: Dynamics of exclusion and inclusion

Process 2: Multiple identity acknowledgement and group values establishment

Process 2a: Development of empathy and understanding

Process 3: Salient multiple identities and one-group representation

Process 1: Dynamics of Exclusion and Inclusion

In social identity theory, people can have multiple identities, adopting a selected identity to fit a particular context (Brubaker, 2001, Levine, Moreland & Hausmann, 2005). The new

arrivals in Story 1 identified themselves strongly with their cultural roots as mainland Chinese, while underplaying their identity as Hong Kong residents. As a result, the two groups remained at opposite ends of the identity continuum (Brubaker, 2001). The new arrival group, in particular, strengthened their mainlander identity throughout the session through defensive conversation. For example, they used 'we' to refer to themselves and 'they' to refer to Hong Kong locals. This socialization among ingroup members strengthened their ingroup identity in order to maximize their within-group cohesion and positive self-image.

The Hong Kong locals (Stories 1 and 2), who were the minorities in the group, became outgroup members. The ignorant attitudes displayed by a few Hong Kong locals in Story 2 only highlighted the intergroup differences. The presence of antinorm validates, strengthening rather than weakening the ingroup norm (Abrams, Hogg & Marques, 2005). In this context, with mere sharing without developing empathic understanding towards various viewpoints, the process of ingroup formation and outgroup members' exclusion escalates hostile attitudes between the perceived groups.

Process 2: Multiple identity acknowledgement and group values establishment

In Stories 3, 4 and 5, the group members acknowledged their dual identities. In Story 3, the members' openness and sincerity in personal sharing developed a sense of trust between both groups. The authenticity of this sharing produced a cultural representation of the group, in which the Hong Kong locals were directly interacting and engaging rather than passively absorbing or accepting cultural information learnt from third parties such as the media. This direct and authentic engagement that explained the reasons behind certain

cultural values and behaviours could effectively promote mutual understanding and reduce intergroup bias in the long run (Dovidio, Gaertner, Hodson, Houlette & Johnson, 2005). Reducing intergroup bias is a milestone in developing positive interactive group dynamics, because the participants perceive each other as having equal status and recognise the similarities among themselves. Equal power relations and perceived similarities are catalysts in group sharing because 'equal status leads to reflection', wherein people relate their experiences with new information. However, non-equal statuses cause people to memorize and conform to the views of their knowledge authorities, without relating them to their experiences (Brubaker, 2001).

In addition to the reduced intergroup bias and increased perceived similarities, the acknowledgement of multiple identities also facilitates intergroup interaction, open communication, self-disclosure, and therefore cooperative and respectful interaction (Abrams, Hogg & Marques, 2005). In Story 3, the two groups' recognition of their dual identity contributed to the development of mutual understanding of the different perspectives of the different groups. Such an understanding not only minimized the differences between the groups and maximized their members' similarities but also increased the members' readiness to achieve shared goals despite a certain degree of variation in values and beliefs due to different sociocultural backgrounds. According to SGD, although people seek to reduce uncertainty in order to strengthen their self- and ingroup identity, an ingroup person does not necessarily need to adhere to exactly the same values, norms or experiences as the other members (ibid.). In other words, the function of the 'perceived ingroup' informs one about the direction of the group expectations and goal,

and the perceived ingroup identity reorients one's perception and interpretation of the situation in ways that meet the group expectations and, therefore, the common group goal. Group unity with a shared group goal lays the foundation for mutually supportive group dynamics, wherein participants are encouraged to engage in collaborative and mutually beneficial interaction. This was evident in Story 5, where the participants learnt from one another by elaborating and expanding the viewpoints of the other group members. In this story, the members attempted to satisfy their personal needs as well as contribute to the group goal. Given the beliefs that people from different groups carry different perspectives to the group, participants respect within-group variation in terms of how to proceed and achieve the group goal(s). More importantly, group members appreciate that each participant contributes to the group goal through sharing life experiences that are beneficial to all members. Such group members not only acknowledge differences but also value discussion as a process of knowledge consolidation and personal development. In particular, open communication and the acknowledgement of different perspectives helps maintain the salience of different groups along with mutual respect. These differences shape one's perception of and reaction to the nature of the contact by revealing new possibilities and common ground regarding certain issues. Collaborative and mutually respectful interaction can therefore be enhanced and intergroup bias reduced in the long run (Dovidio et al., 2005)

Process 2a: Development of Empathy and Understanding

Empathetic understanding involves a person temporarily living in the other's life, sensing the feelings the person experiences and perceiving the causes as the person perceives them

without judgment (Vincent, 2005). An empathetic person enters the world of another "as if" he or she were the person. The recognition of 'as if' implies that there is no denial in any experienced feelings of the person and the empathetic person is sensitive to understand experiences, feelings and meanings within the person's involved context and his or her internal frame of reference, including sensations, perceptions, meanings and memories (ibid).

Rather than paraphrasing, or summarizing what the person has said, an empathetic person should engage in ongoing perception checking of his or her empathic understanding in respond to what the person said. Such a reciprocal relationship is essential for the development of authentic understanding towards the accuracy of the person's feelings, possible meanings derived from the person's experiences and internal frame of reference (ibid). In this study, both feelings and meanings are integral aspects of empathetic understanding. Being aware of the multiple identities that I experienced and experience, I am cautious about my influences in experiencing the feelings of the parents and giving meanings to the narratives. It is a dynamic process that I and my participants engaged in, a perception checking process that allowed me to attune my position of 'as if' to the parents' feelings and meanings, including unspoken and underlying feelings and meanings from the parents' own internal frame of reference. With 'appropriation' of understanding, the empathetic understanding in this study is characterized with authenticity and respect in terms of perception and communication.

Open and sincere communication allows trust, empathy, and understanding to develop among group members, as evident in Story 4, where Mother PLQ expressed her shared identity as a caring mother and advocated disciplinary practices with which the group

disagreed. Story 4 showed that perceived similarities and acknowledged differences alone cannot effectively minimize intergroup bias in the long run, enhancing members' readiness to interact with 'other groups'. In contrast, as in Story 3, the development of empathy and understanding allowed members to cognitively reorient themselves from a different perspective and situate themselves in the context appropriate for the teller. Empathy and understanding was seen in Story 5, where all members performed as task-oriented helpers who shared the same emotions and thoughts, to some extent. Hence, maximizing the holistic understanding of the teller's perspective and the stories told can further minimize, if not completely extinguish, intergroup bias and stereotyping effects among group members.

Process 3: Salient Dual Identities and One-group Representation

The emergence of collaborative interaction and acknowledgement of dual identities signals the development of one-group representation, wherein all members regard each other as ingroup members with a shared common goal (Dovidio et al., 2005). One-group representation does not necessarily refer to a single group with undifferentiated and homogeneous group members but represents a group wherein all members evaluate differences, particularly those of initially outgroup members, in a positive manner, while focussing on benefitting individuals as well as the group. During the socialization, individuals attempt to orient groups members towards their own perspective to satisfy their personal needs, particularly the need for empathy and acknowledgement (ibid.; 255). Similarly, the group attempts to change individuals so that they further contribute to the attainment of its goals, such as enriching parenting resources.

In Story 5, Mother PLYau, a new arrival, took the initiative to share her problem. She described in detail how her daughter ignored her and treated her grandmother as a 'float ring'. The participants not only helped Mother PLYau to analyse her problem from different perspectives but also benefitted from the interaction and discussion in terms of reviewing their current beliefs and parenting practices. Through discussion, all the participants became aware of their established values as they explicitly articulated the reasons for adopting their particular parenting values and practices. Hence, discussion provides not only a platform for self-reflection and therefore self-development but also an opportunity for participants to acknowledge and understand interpersonal and intergroup differences (Levin et al., 2005). Hence, there is an effect of mutual influence and mutual benefit between individuals and the group.

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My field notes and collected narratives illustrated that all the five stories showed the dynamics of exclusion and inclusion, regardless of whether or not one-group representation was eventually formed. However, as some of the groups developed trustful relationships with one another, they became not only more sensitive to the multiple identities, shared similarities, and differences among individuals but also more flexible in shifting identities to fit the needs of their immediate context, including the expectations of the group to which they belonged. During the participants' initial encounter with members from a different cultural group, ingroup and outgroup member identity was vivid and distinctive in the sense that the members attempted to clarify their self-identity and the reason for having this identity. Such clarification not only acknowledges differences but also enables group

members to recognise multiple identities in each individual while understanding intergroup as well as interpersonal similarities.

As trust developed between participants, they became more open to other aspects of life so that the audience could have a better grasp of the entire picture. This represents holistic understanding—the aim of narrative inquiry. At this point, they could proceed beyond the mere recognition and tolerance of differences by empathetically understanding them. In this regard, objectively understanding the 'individual' as a whole rather than the set of 'described problems' helped the participants to reflect on and analyse the situation within the 'appropriate' context and perspective. Furthermore, the participants' sharing of their life experiences surely increased the amount of mutual support within the group whereby the teller not only gained knowledge and cognitive support by reflecting on his/her own and others' experiences but also affective support from the empathetic understanding of others rather than their mere knowledge that 'the teller was in trouble'. The acceptance and appreciation of each other's expressed 'knowledge' indicated that the participants enjoyed 'equal status' in the group sharing, regardless of their cultural identities, indicating to the new arrival parents, for instance, that 'You face problems not because you are new arrivals. We all experience similar problems because we all are parents in Hong Kong.'

To summarize the discussion for the first research question—'To what extent do sociocultural factors play a role in group interaction among people from diverse backgrounds in Hong Kong?'—this study revealed that perceived identities, stereotypes, Confucianism, and HC influence group interaction to a varied extent. With regard to perceived identity, the identities of 'new arrivals' and 'Hong Kong locals' were associated with a set of stereotyped beliefs that guided participants' interactions with particular

cultural groups through a particular manner or attitude. However, the cultural root identities of both groups became less important as the group developed mutual trust and understanding wherein multiple identities as well as intergroup similarities and differences were recognised and acknowledged. At this stage, the perceived similarities of the participants became more apparent and therefore positively contributed to the group dynamics. With regard to Confucianism and HC values, none of the participants of the focus groups openly challenged each other. When faced with opposing views, the participants chose to listen quietly and expressed their views only when invited to do so, thus ensuring that group harmony could be maintained. All of these 'inoffensive' behaviours reflected Confucianism's as well as HC's emphasis on group harmony and social hierarchy. Furthermore, the participant–group facilitator relationship was marked by power relations wherein the latter was attributed a professional status, reflecting the participants' or learners' passive-inferior role within the Confucian and HC cultural context.

Although the recognition of perceived similarities through the exploration of multiple identities and clarification of stereotypes through mutual understanding laid the foundation for positive group dynamics, such a group context that disregards the cultural traits of social hierarchy and social harmony as advocated by Confucianism and HC would not engage participants in an in-depth inquiry of issues from the perspectives of different identities and roles. The observation and analysis guided by SGD further revealed the interplay of these sociocultural factors in developing positive group dynamics. In particular, the role of empathy and multiple identities with perceived similarities in promoting equal status among group members helped the participants in this study to achieve a balance

between their own and the group's goodwill, whereby both individual and group needs could be satisfied within the realm of Confucianism and HC.

6.2 Research Question 2: What mechanisms affect group interaction among people from diverse backgrounds in parent education programmes in Hong Kong?

Given my awareness of the influence of social hierarchy on power relationship within the Chinese context, the second research question focuses on exploring not only the participants' belief in the role of education and educators but also the appropriateness of mutual support and group collaborative learning within the Confucian and HC context of Hong Kong.

6.2.1 Role of Education

The participants described parenting as a set of 'skills' that need to be learnt (Chapter 5, Story 5). The word 'skill' indicates that parenting knowledge is perceived and interpreted as professional knowledge that is acquired through formal training in a formal setting (Brubaker, 2001). The Chinese have internalized the belief that professional skills must be learnt from professionals in formal education settings such as schools rather than informal settings such as social gatherings (Garvin, Gutierrez & Galinsky, 2004). The perception of education as a formal activity also implies the participants' belief in objective, external standards of correctness for parenting. In other words, they believe that parenting can be evaluated based on absolute standards with reference to authority (ibid.).

Brubaker (2001) indicated that assessing one's knowledge against an external standard, in conformist terms, is particularly seen in people with low self-esteem or self-concept. It is evident that the new arrivals devalued their own life knowledge and requested professional knowledge from experts. For instance, in Stories 1 and 5, they repeatedly described themselves as uncivilized and uneducated. Although the Hong Kong locals also voiced their need for professional knowledge/expert advice, they perceived these as references rather than as absolute standards in terms of its appropriateness to their unique family context and culture.

As an Inquirer, I Saw, I Found and I Conclude

I observed that the new arrivals were still influenced by social hierarchy and role specification. For them, education occupies a professional status that cannot be assumed by people who are not trained in the profession, and learning is a kind of professional activity which is contextually and professionally bounded. In contrast, since the Hong Kong locals attribute comparably greater value to folk knowledge than the new arrivals, the former's learning is less bounded by context and profession. As a Hong Kong local, I believe that legitimate teaching and learning can occur anywhere when it is derived from real experiences and, therefore, from reality. Brubaker (2001) suggested that flexibility in learning requires analytical skills, breadth of knowledge, and a positive self-concept. The detailed relationship between these components will be discussed later in this chapter.

6.2.2 Role of the Educator

An educator is still perceived as an authority figure and the major source of knowledge in the Chinese context. The teaching profession possesses a respectful social status that cannot be challenged. In Confucian society, the student is expected to learn passively from knowledgeable authorities, while a teacher's social duty is to deliver knowledge. If students ask questions, they are regarded as show offs, challenges to authority and threats to the existing social harmony.

A review of the inquiry journey in this study reveals that both the groups had certain social expectations from the roles of educators and learners—those who teach and those who are taught. The educator was believed to be the only legitimate source of knowledge, and learners were not expected to be able to teach other learners. The participants expected education to be delivered by 'qualified' people in a formal setting, not through conversations on the street. Both the groups in this study preferred direct knowledge transmission from authorities and believed that learning at school was the 'official' mode of learning. Open discussion among group members was generally considered a form of emotional catharsis rather than learning. As illustrated in Story 5, the participants believed that the knowledge authority should assume an active role in being a problem solver who 'provides' solutions. In other words, the parents had joined the focus group with the expectation of being taught. However, their narratives in Story 5 reflected their disappointment at not being taught during the activity. When questioned about their expectations from the focus group, they expressed the wish for the expert to teach and provide them with 'solutions' to their problems. In particular, experts should provide both micro- and macro-level analysis on how social problems and situations influence children.

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The parents in these stories, particularly Stories 2 and 5, have clear social expectations from educators in the sense that 'an expert has expertise', knows 'more' and is 'better' than laypersons; therefore, they prefer 'listening to expert opinions'. In their view, highly educated experts and those with child-related professional qualifications such as educators and social workers represent quality assurance brands. The participants' desire for a professional's 'lecture' made apparent their expectation of knowledge transmission and advice-giving. Hence, they were not very comfortable in group learning wherein a leader, such as a teacher or educator, acts as a supporter and facilitator rather than lecturer.

Books and peer sharing are always regarded as a secondary source of knowledge. Learning from each other is therefore viewed as an informal way of learning that is less valued than learning from authorities in the Hong Kong context.

6.2.3 The Relationship between Open Discussion and Self-perception in the Hong Kong Context

Since both Confucian and HC values emphasise social and group harmony in the Hong Kong context, the participants were reluctant to engage in open discussion, particularly among members with perceived unequal status and different sociocultural backgrounds. While our society no longer consists of a single sub-group but is a synthesis of many interpretations, open discussion is an important and effective means for understanding, not just tolerating, differences (Abrams, Hogg & Marques, 2005). Without understanding and

interpreting life events from each person's perspective, we can only know and tolerate behaviours or values that are different from ours, rather than understanding, appreciating and integrating them into our existing beliefs. This study revealed that the following conditions mediate the extent to which people interact with those from diverse sociocultural backgrounds and benefit from group sharing:

- Extensiveness of social network
- Breadth of knowledge base
- Critical thinking

In this study, new arrivals, particularly those from economically disadvantaged groups, had a rather limited social network for two reasons: (1) the women, being full-time housewives, were busy taking care of young children at home, and/or (2) they could spend less money on socialization. These limitations not only restricted them from connecting with the locals but also posed obstacles to their acquiring knowledge from the outside world and therefore enhancing their understanding of Hong Kong's local culture.

While socializing with people from different backgrounds is important for social integration and self-development, the new arrivals in this study had limited access to environments outside their own family. Hence, they preferred socializing with other new arrivals who shared a similar sociocultural background. Through lesser socialization with the Hong Kong locals, they faced a lower possibility of exposing their incongruence and were therefore less motivated to engage in 'cognitive reconstruction' to meets the contextual needs of social integration. Rather than being isolated from the mainstream and socializing purely with those who share a similar sociocultural background, it is important

for people from different cultures to socialize with each other in order to not just know, but also understand, their 'apparent' differences.

Given the assumption that social dialogue and one's knowledge base mediate the depth of social integration and knowledge development, it is understandable that new arrivals have restricted sources of knowledge—knowledge authorities. By relying on knowledge authorities and perceiving themselves as passive learners, people believe that they have no power to create knowledge that is compatible with their unique background and are therefore less motivated to engage in critical thinking. This perception of disempowerment is evident in Story 5, where the new arrivals voiced their need for expert knowledge because of their disadvantaged educational background and sociocultural condition. This belief explains why less resourceful families heavily emphasise their children's education, believing that it is the only way to lead a successful life. Hence, the new arrivals' reliance on knowledge acquisition from experts and lack of engagement in critical thinking seems reasonable and understandable in light of their doubting their own ability to control their lives and perceiving themselves as less educated and uncivilized.

A similar reliance on knowledge authorities was also evidenced in the conversations of the Hong Kong locals, who are comparatively higher educated and have more extensive social networks and a broader knowledge base. However, they viewed this external knowledge as equally important as that gleaned from self-developed sources. Moreover, their parenting behaviours were quite different from those of the new arrival group. As opposed to the latter, the former had great confidence in the effectiveness of their parenting practices with regard to their family context. However, they required other people, especially authorities, to validate their practices, acknowledging their need to improve or enhance their parenting

skills. Rather than perceiving themselves as 'inadequate' or 'not good enough' parents, as the new arrivals did, the Hong Kong locals valued self-development as a learning vehicle that suited their situation and values. Hence, they tended to regard sharing and discussion as a medium for self-efficacy 'validation'.

As an Inquirer, I Saw, I Found and I Conclude

In this study, I, who studied parent education in Canada, would like to describe my experience as a parent in Hong Kong, wherein I experienced a cultural clash in parenting values. I insisted on applying my own thoughts and beliefs on parenting—highly democratic methods exerting least control over the child. Unfortunately, I had a strong feeling of misfit between my beliefs and practices and the expectations of the nursery that my child entered at the age of one-and-a-half years, particularly with regard to raising children in the crowded and materialistic Hong Kong environment where achievement in examinations is regarded as the primary assessment tool for life achievement. Hence, as a repatriated immigrant, I encountered incompatibility between my parenting beliefs, social expectations and needs, which put me in the difficult situation of 'abandoning' my own values on parenting or 'adopting' those that met the social expectations and contextual needs. My experience told me that neither choice would meet my or my family's needs and unique situation. I realized that raising children in Hong Kong required closer supervision in terms of monetary management and extra effort in meeting the requirements set by the examination system, on which the school syllabus is based. My dilemma was reflected in the stories given in this study. In this study, the new arrivals' insistence on holding on their cultural practices without (1) their being understood by the Hong Kong locals and (2)

considering the social expectations of a different culture led to their misrepresentation as a cultural group as well as adaptation problems. Hence, I believe that rather than training parents to behave in prescribed ways, parent education should aim to educate parents to reason soundly with regard to their parenting within the particular context and perform skilfully to meet their own needs, those of their family and those of the society to which they belong. Sound reasoning requires that parents self-reflect on their actions while developing an adequate base of facts, principles, and experiences on which to base their reasoning. The accumulation of experiences does not come from imagination; the development of such a 'data base' requires interpersonal interactions that make an individual flexible enough to adapt to diverse contextual needs. Hence, parents should be encouraged to engage in self-reflection and critical thinking when it comes to using their knowledge base as the ground for effective choices and actions that are most compatible with their life (Leach & Moon, 1999; 70). In short, Chinese people can establish a mutually supporting group dynamics and therefore benefit from group sharing based on trust-based relationships, perceiving similarities, acknowledging differences, developing empathetic understanding, and sharing common goals.

To summarize the discussion for the second research question—' What mechanisms affect group interaction among people from diverse backgrounds in parent education programmes in Hong Kong?'—the study clearly showed that the perception of education is still heavily influenced by Confucianism and HC. The traditional school culture of external objective assessment is still perceived as the most appropriate source of knowledge, which in turn shapes people's perceptions of the roles of educators and education. Rather than achieving self-development through discussion, reflection, and knowledge integration, both groups of

people in this study had similar expectations from professionals in terms of desiring step-by-step procedures that guarantee success. In particular, the new arrivals' limited connection with the mainstream restrained them from exposing their 'incongruence' and therefore engaging in reflection for knowledge creation and expansion to meet the needs of their immediate context. Unlike the new arrivals, except expecting to obtain more perceived 'better' advices, Hong Kong locals expected professionals to give them explicit 'confirmation' and 'credits' for their current parenting practices.

6.3 Research Question 3: How can one formulate a model of parent education programme to suit families having diverse backgrounds, values, and beliefs in the Hong Kong context?

Based on the discussions of research questions 1 and 2, a model of parenting programme suitable for families with diverse needs must reflect and meet the needs of the participating families within the Confucian and HC context. It is necessary, however, for the participants to share their needs with the group so that the members can address these stated needs. Such an interaction requires respect and collaboration in terms of acknowledging differences in sociocultural backgrounds, perceiving similarities among participants in order to minimize intergroup bias and maximizing equal status between participants in order to engage in open discussion to promote cultural understanding and social integration.

6.3.1 Social Integration

As discussed earlier, a perceived similarity helps participants see how all the group members can fit together in different ways, thus enhancing acceptance in the group (Garvin, Gutierrez & Galinsky, 2004). However, perceived similarities do not guarantee homogeneity among participants because of their contextual prior experiences and social expectations. The occurrence of 'deviations' or differences should be understood and acknowledged in this regard. Moreover, perceived similarity alone cannot develop the holistic understanding of an individual, particularly in the affective dimension. Therefore, given the participants' diverse sociocultural backgrounds, the group facilitator should help them to recognise mutual similarities, promote status equality among group members, and acknowledge their differences at both interpersonal and intergroup levels with empathic understanding of the contextual motives and reasons that underlie differences (Abrams, Hogg & Marques, 2005, Dovidio, Gaertner, Hodson, Houlette & Johnson, 2005; 247).

6.3.2 Mutual Support

Mutual support in group learning stresses the importance of respect, acknowledgement, shared support, mutual feedback, and equal status among participants. In this, all members are active helpers and learners (Tennant, 1991). Based on mutual feedback, throughout the interaction, group members acknowledge not only their similarities and differences but also the social group or subgroup with its expectations or norms to which they are expected to adhere.

The issue of norm adherence is consistent with the social harmony and mutual goodwill advocated by Confucianism and HC (Chapter 2). The stories in this study illustrated that

participants need to not only recognise differences but also understand the reasons behind these variations in order to provide mutual feedback and shared support, for which they must develop empathy and understanding. Only with mutual understanding can a group find a common ground on which to build shared values or goals. As discussed earlier, group members' needs for help and group belonging are critical factors in motivating them to participate in group sharing towards a common goal or mutual goodwill. In this study, a sense of parenting inefficacy prompted the participants to share their experiences and offer help to one another in order to improve or expand their current parenting practices to suit their unique family needs. Hence, setting a group goal and motivating each other to achieve the goal determines the extent to which group members benefit from group sharing.

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I could see that some tellers doubted whether the group would be able to help them. Through the open sharing of various aspects of their life, the participants understood not only the tellers' problems but also the possible reasons and limitations, which they may have or will encounter, the tellers encountered in facing the problem. With this, the teller's problem should not be considered as a private issue. Rather, it could be a 'public' issue wherein participant may encounter to certain, if not fuller, extent. The more the issues that the teller disclosed to the audience, the more the audience understood the 'teller' as a whole, rather than merely the 'problem'. The experiences of the parents in this study mirrored my beliefs regarding role adaption as follows: as a mother, I face pressure to discipline my child to fit my own family context; as a repatriated immigrant and Hong Kong resident, I face pressure to discipline my child in ways that are accepted by Hong Kong locals and

adaptable to the Hong Kong context. Hence, a newly arrived mother who wishes to settle down as a Hong Kong resident needs to achieve a balance of all these roles rather than choose one over the other.

To summarize the discussion for the third research question—'How can one formulate a parent education programme to suit families having diverse backgrounds, values and beliefs in the Hong Kong context?'—the discussions of research questions 1 and 2 showed that when participants can obtain both knowledge and affective support from group sharing, affectionless knowledge transmission and sharing without empathetic understanding should be avoided. In that case, group facilitators or educators become trusted and empathetic context creators that help the participants to (1) facilitate the recognition of their multiple identities, (2) find a common entry point to enter the discussion journey, (3) develop empathy and understanding in the participants, (4) help the participants to relate sharing to their real life context and, finally, (5) recognise that the group needs 'you' and that 'you' need the group for self-development. While the group facilitator should perform these five important roles, group sharing and discussion help the group members (1) to understand a different sociocultural groups by providing interaction opportunities, (2) to acknowledge and understand intergroup and intragroup similarities and differences and (3) to undergo affective experiences for both those who receive help (emotion support) and those who offer help (empowerment).

6.4 Conclusion

The analysis and discussion of this study's three research questions reveal that group dynamics, as seen in this study, were mediated by sociocultural factors such as perceived

identities, social expectations from adopted identities, Confucianism and HC. The SGD model was used to guide this study to uncover the processes undergone by the participants from concentrating on their root identity (new arrival or Hong Kong locals) to recognizing multiple identities which could be shared by participants from different backgrounds. This recognition was particularly important in identifying mechanisms such as empathic understanding that facilitated one-group representation marked by collaborative and mutual support among group members from diverse background with various needs. The participants in this study showed that they still highly emphasised the role of educators and the formality of education. While I respect the participants' beliefs and have no intention to reject any of these deep-rooted values and beliefs, I can see the flaws in the traditional lecture mode of parent education in terms of the satisfaction of family and individual needs. The discussion of the final research question explores the shifting role of the educator and the function of education as essential components of parent education that respect the cultural context in Hong Kong, which in turn compensate for the need insensitivity of the existing parent education programmes in Hong Kong.

Chapter 7. The Stalactite Cave Adventure is not only Exciting but also Inspirational and Impressive: Conclusion

7.1 Research Findings

Within the parent education context, the existing parenting programmes reflect the Confucian and High Context culture (HC) values of social hierarchy and group harmony. Hence, both educators and learners are expected to adhere to the social roles of knowledge transmitters and knowledge absorbers, respectively. The impracticality and cultural insensitivity of such parent education programmes, together with the challenges faced by both new arrivals and Hong Kong locals in terms of adapting to the increasingly diverse sociocultural population of Hong Kong, indicate that there is a dire need to develop a model of parent education programmes to suit different families' unique needs within diverse sociocultural contexts. This study aimed to explore the essential components of need- and culture-sensitive programmes, based on three research questions: (1) To what extent do sociocultural factors affect group interaction among members from diverse backgrounds in Hong Kong? (2) What mechanisms affect group interaction among people from diverse backgrounds in parent education programmes in Hong Kong? (3) How can one formulate a parent education programme to suit families having diverse backgrounds, values and beliefs in the Hong Kong context? On the basis of the findings related to these three research questions, in this chapter, I will propose the essential components and guidelines for developing a model of parent education programme that caters to the diverse needs of families in Hong Kong.

Research Question 1: To what extent do sociocultural factors affect group interaction among members from diverse backgrounds in Hong Kong?

Self-perceived identities establish the foundation of perceived similarities and differences, and therefore ingroup and outgroup member differentiation, in group contexts. While Confucianism and HC emphasise group harmony and social hierarchy, the extent to which members perceive themselves as similar or different affect the extent to which they interact with one another. The SGD model revealed the mechanisms involved in establishing a shared identity, which enhances the perceived similarities and therefore positive group dynamics among group members. The application of SGD in this study revealed that self-perceived identity could range from an easily recognised one based on appearances to a deeper level comprising shared social roles and expectations from the adopted role, which require deeper understanding through intergroup communication.

The findings of the first research question suggest that an effective parent education programme for people from diverse backgrounds in Hong Kong should be founded on perceived similarities through the recognition of each individual's multiple social roles. The more the social roles group members recognise, the more likely they are to perceive similarities among themselves. This idea of perceived similarities particularly fits Hong Kong's Confucian- and HC-oriented context where direct confrontation avoidance, mutual good, social hierarchy and social harmony are highly valued. After establishing perceived similarities and Confucian values in group interaction as the foundation of parent education programmes in Hong Kong, SGD provides guidelines regarding the processes of member selection, moving from that based on a person's appearance or cultural roots, where identity

is regarded as static, to that based on shared social roles, expectations, values and beliefs regarding the person's adopted social roles, where identity is fluid and contextualized.

Research Question 2: What mechanisms affect group interaction among people from diverse backgrounds in parent education programmes in Hong Kong?

The study revealed that perceived similarities do not emerge in a vacuum. A group facilitator's intervention in promoting the awareness of multiple social roles in individuals and shared values and beliefs among group members can not only effectively maximize perceived similarities but also encourage the understanding, rather than mere tolerance, of intergroup as well as interpersonal differences. Hence, a group facilitator's primary role is not that of an educator who transmits knowledge but that of a context creator who embraces the power of making people aware of their multiple identities and similarities. Only by establishing perceived similarities among members can members enjoy status equity and, therefore, be sensitive to the social hierarchy and group harmony values advocated by Confucianism and HC. A perceived equal status promotes open discussion wherein people attach greater value to each other's experiences as valid sources of knowledge. Instead of applying others' experiences directly to one's situation, which would be insensitive to one's own contextual needs, individuals must be capable of analysing and manipulating these experiences to create knowledge suitable for their own unique needs. Hence, apart from promoting perceived similarities and equal status, a group context should provide the space and empower its members to engage in the process of knowledge creation, thus creating need- and culture-sensitive knowledge, which is currently lacking in the existing parent education programmes in Hong Kong.

Research Question 3: How can one formulate a model of parent education programme to suit families having diverse backgrounds, values and beliefs in the Hong Kong context?

This study does not aim to propose a step-by-step parent education programme for Hong Kong families; its objective is to suggest a model that will guide the development of parent education programmes suitable for families with diverse backgrounds, values and beliefs in Hong Kong. Based on the conclusions drawn from the first and second research questions, which describe the components essential for such need- and culture-sensitive parent education programmes in Hong Kong, the findings related to the third research question provide some guidelines on how to weave these various components together.

On the basis of the group facilitators' new role as context creators who (1) maximize intergroup similarities and ensure equal member status in open discussion among members, in line with the Confucian values of social hierarchy and social harmony, and (2) promote an understanding of differences, which facilitates knowledge creation through self-reflection among members, a need- and culture-sensitive model for parent education programmes is characterized by the recognition of individual uniqueness, empathetic understanding of differences and active roles in knowledge creation by members, who become mutual helpers in providing live knowledge, stimulation in knowledge reconstruction and construction and affective support.

7.2 A Proposed Model of Parent Education Programmes in the Hong Kong Context: The Family-centred Mutual Support Model

The above findings indicated that an authority figure is still expected to be present in education settings; however, the multiple roles, rather than limited to knowledge provider, of group facilitators or educators and knowledge creation power in participants should be clearly addressed to group facilitators, family educators as well as parents. With this, group facilitators are responsible for creating an environment that promotes group collaboration, empathetic understanding and mutual support to address the diverse individual and sociocultural needs of families. In this section, I will propose a model of a family-centred mutual support parent education programme that not only takes into account the roles of group facilitators, educators and parents but also incorporates the components required for fostering need and cultural sensitivity, as mentioned in the research questions.

7.2.1 Implications: Role of the Group Facilitator/Educator

Role as an 'Identity Identifier'

A perceived similarity is considered a key element for promoting favourable interchange among group members. Before their group interactions, the participants in this study were not consciously aware of their multiple identities. In their early encounters with other group members, the participants tended to determine ingroup and outgroup members based on physical traits; only through sharing experiences and discussion could they explore more about their own and others' identities. I have used the term 'identity identifier' to signify that a group facilitator should help participants become aware of their latent identities by

explicitly orienting them to discuss issues from the perspective of a shared identity, thus establishing a foundation for more in-depth discussion in an equal-status group context.

Role as an 'Affection Relater'

As discussed earlier, a shared identity does not guarantee shared social expectations, values, beliefs and therefore empathetic understanding in an audience. To develop empathetic understanding, the group facilitator should encourage storytellers to share their feelings and emotions so that the audience can understand the story from a holistic perspective. Empathetic understanding not only promotes the respectful acknowledgement of differences within a shared identity but also facilitates the sharing of other facets of the teller's life. Hence, I propose the term 'affection relater' to signify that a group facilitator should create a safe context where the members feel the need and are confident enough to share their inner thoughts and feelings. An affection relater creates an environment that conveys to the sharer, 'You are not alone. We understand you'. The emotional support and understanding of the group members, not just the group facilitator, serves as the foundation of a mutual support system for holistic understanding among group members, who can together offer help and support to individual members.

Role as a 'Cognitive Need Creator'

With the recognition of shared identities and empathetic understanding, the participants tend to respect each other's life stories and are more open to intergroup variations. By establishing mutual understanding and trustful relationships, a group facilitator empowers

the participants to engage in reflection for knowledge creation and integration by exposing them to different life stories from participants with diverse sociocultural backgrounds. To further facilitate reflection in participants, this study showed that it is necessary for participants to perceive the issue as related to themselves and be aware of their internal needs to bridge the gap between self and reality—namely, the discrepancy between existing knowledge and new information. In particular, individuals who seek help are likely to take the initiative in presenting their stories, and for those who are not help seekers, the group facilitator is encouraged to create or nurture 'cognitive impulses' by exposing them to cognitive disjunction or conflict or asking probing questions that make them aware of the differences between the known and the unknown, and then close this gap. However, the group facilitator is not the problem-solver; hence, I propose the term 'cognitive need creator' to signify the importance of creating a context wherein the participants become aware of their cognitive clash or disequilibrium and are self-motivated to interact with each other until they recognise and value each other's stories as legitimate sources of knowledge, or reality, for knowledge integration and creation.

Role as an 'Empowerer'

To develop faith in group members that they are capable of creating parenting knowledge that best fits their unique needs and context, the facilitator needs to motivate parents to be aware of their power and recognise their needs to create and expand existing knowledge. As discussed earlier, the participants did not regard their lived experiences as legitimate knowledge. While the new arrivals perceived themselves as 'not well-educated', 'not knowledgeable enough', 'not knowing good parenting practices' and 'likely to say

something wrong' (Chapter 5, Story 5), even the Hong Kong locals described their parenting knowledge as 'folk knowledge' derived from their lived experiences, not from evidence-based research, and therefore less creditable than that provided by 'experts'. Hence, there appears to be an urgent need to empower all participants to value their own and others' lived parenting experiences as legitimate parenting knowledge. I propose the term 'empowerer' here to signify a facilitator who not only addresses the participants' need to find 'their own power and strength' to control their future but also develops their ability to uncover their 'hidden' resources, such as life experiences, personalities, social networks and attitudes towards life, of which they are unaware and to value them as useful knowledge.

7.2.2 Implications: Role of Parents

To empower parents to be mutual helpers, they are encouraged to explore their shared identity with empathetic understanding through open discussion, after orienting them to have shared perspectives. At the same time, empathetic understanding among members helps them align their expectations from these perceived shared identities in order to interpret issues from the perspective of the teller—not only that of a mother, new arrival or Hong Kong local but also that of the adopted role associated with their own unique life experiences.

In the family-centred mutual support model of parent education programmes, parents are both learners and helpers; they are not only made aware of their need for knowledge creation and expansion but also assisted in exploring their potential resources (including social networks, life attitudes and personalities) for helping themselves as well as the group.

In this model, all knowledge is equally valued and all group members are helpers. Hence, parents become knowledge sources, while the authority figure plays various roles in the group to create the context for collaborative dynamics marked by equal status, acceptance and mutual understanding (Garvin, Gutierrez & Galinsky, 2004).

7.2.3 Implications: Need- and Culture-sensitive Group Dynamics

The group facilitator's multiple roles and parents' active roles as learners as well as helpers are contextually elicited throughout the process of group development. Based on the SGD model, in the initial stage (Process 1: dynamics of exclusion and inclusion), parents perform their identity with a full awareness of who they are and where they come from. Once the facilitator as the 'identity identifier' assists the participants in recognizing intergroup similarities and differences, the parents are now ready to share their stories, values and beliefs, with a respectful acknowledgement of their differences (Process 2: dual identity and group values). In this process, by exposing parents to different stories, the group facilitator, acting as both a 'cognitive need creator' and an 'affection relater', helps them recognise their similarities to 'seemingly different' parents and develop empathy and understanding towards the tellers' multiple aspects, particularly their values and beliefs (Process 2a: development of empathy and understanding). Relationships marked by empathy and understanding heighten the parents' ability to share and analyse an event from the teller's perspective (Process 3: salient dual identities and one-group representation). Throughout the process of sharing and analysis, although parents encounter knowledge disjunction due to sociocultural differences, the group facilitator, as the 'empowerer', helps them to confront this 'cognitive mismatch' positively, so that they can construct and

reconstruct the old and new knowledge with acceptance, acknowledgement and understanding. While at the same time, intergroup bias can be significantly reduced through an understanding of differences, which will also address the issues of social hierarchy and social harmony.

In conclusion, group dynamics elicits different roles from group facilitators and parents. With the group facilitator's encouragement during different stages of group development, the group develops member equality and an empathetic understanding of intergroup differences, and members engage in active roles with the assistance of an 'empowerer' who empowers them to create knowledge and help others (Garvin, Gutierrez & Galinsky, 2004). More importantly, the model is family-centred and enables mutual aid because the medium of sharing offers parents the chance to see the connections between private troubles and public issues. When private troubles become shared troubles, their structural (i.e. non-personal) sources can be more easily identified, and empathy and mutual support become possible. Mutual emotional support and recognition of shared issues are powerful tools in this model, wherein parents realise that regardless of their 'seeming' differences, they have an equal voice, equal say and possibly shared experiences, thoughts and feelings. The sharing context, therefore, features live stories as legitimate sources of knowledge, issue negotiation among parents with shared identities, and empathetic understanding wherein all parents are learners and helpers.

7.3 Reflection as a Researcher, Educator, Parent and Human Being

7.3.1 As a Researcher: Strengths and Limitations of the Methodology and Study

As a researcher, my own experiences as a new arrival, Hong Kong local, mother and educator allowed me to be more flexible in shifting between different identities and relating circumstances to my own experiences. Although I did not have the same experiences as the tellers, my 'similar' experiences allowed me to interpret their stories with affection and empathy. Since narrative inquiry goes beyond specific stories to explore the assumptions inherent in their shaping and retelling, it allows the deeply hidden assumptions of complex life stories to be brought to the surface within a short period of sharing time. My experiences of different identities helped me 'feel' the described situation in terms of how the teller might feel and think as a new arrival, Hong Kong local and mother in a particular cultural context, time and place. Thus, recognition of the close connection between my research and my experience is important in terms of not only understanding individuals holistically but also discerning the linkage between life and research. Given my awareness of the possible effects of my life experiences on data interpretation, through content verification from the teller and mutual understanding, I developed trustful relationships with the storytellers. In particular, rather than simply knowing the facts and making unsupported assumptions, the incorporation of my experiences in interpreting and presenting data illustrates not only what the differences are but also how they result. This definitely reflects the criteria of data transparency and trustworthiness required by narrative inquiry. On the other hand, my being an overt non-participant observer in this study enhanced data authenticity because the group facilitator presented me as a secondary figure in the focus group, while his/her programmes on parenting were the focus. Although

theparticipants might have had some assumptions about the group facilitator's expectations of parenting style, they posed no obstacle to one of this study's purposes—to explore the group learning of parents from diverse backgrounds. Hence, the participants in these focus groups were unlikely to respond in accordance with my expectations.

There are several methodological limitations of this study's research design. First, under the interpretive-hermeneutic approach, truth is situated in time and context. Hence, this study interpreted the representation of experiences and truth in relation to the time of experience and telling (Connelly & Clandinin, 1989). The 'critical events or stories' told by the participants were interpreted in relation to their motives and needs at the time of experience and when they shared these experiences with the group. It is difficult to assess truth relativity using the traditional methods generally preferred by government bodies for policy making; this study's findings can therefore be adopted as the basis for family life education development in Hong Kong. Second, exploring the implicit unspoken contextual information about what and why a particular story is told at a particular time requires a researcher's close collaboration with participants and the recognition that the constructed narrative and its subsequent analysis will form a 'new story' which is the responsibility and property of both the researcher and the participants and which conveys the values and beliefs of both parties. Therefore, the ongoing constructions of narratives into more refined stories are never free from my interpretation, particularly when the issues interest me deeply. However, such subjectivity is never regarded as a weakness that should be eliminated from narrative inquiry. Nevertheless, the interpretation of data is experience-bounded wherein the readers understand and interpret the new stories holistically from both

the researcher's and teller's perspectives to achieve data transparency and trustworthiness (Josselson, 1996).

On the other hand, regarding the potential influence brought by my role as the practicum supervisor on the group facilitation process of Site B and C, the group facilitators of these sites did not express their nervous feelings about my on site supervision nor did I see and sense their nervous feelings throughout the supervision process. I was confident that my presence would affect, if at all, to a very minimal extent as both of them claimed that they have been engaged in parent education for many years and were very experienced in delivering parent education related activities.

Finally, as a non participant observer for this study, I had no control over the facilitation style which may raise questions about the study in terms of whether the facilitator led the group in accordance with my expectation or in ways that meet his or her own needs. However, I am confident that the group facilitators were unlikely to facilitate the group either according to my study purpose or by leading the groups in ways that were characterized by one way knowledge transmission for two major reasons. First, each of the group facilitators had his or her own plan to be implemented wherein their facilitation style and processes were led by the purpose of their own plans. As a project assistant and practicum supervisor, I was well informed of these plans about the content and how they would lead their groups. Therefore, before I started to collect data from the focus groups, I was certain that the group facilitators had no intention to engage in leading a group that was characterized with one way knowledge transmission. Second, while the group facilitators at these research sites was either a trained professional or an experienced kindergarten teacher dedicated to parent education (Site B and C), the group facilitators of all sites

appreciated the values of group discussion and were aware of the downsides of one way knowledge transmission. Their appreciation of client or learner centredness is consistent with the hermeneutic interpretive approach of this study.

7.3.2 As an Educator

This study certainly contributes to the literature pertaining to teaching and learning in the Chinese context. While their beliefs regarding education and social interaction were guided by Confucianism and HC, the participants tended to be less bounded by these values if they perceived a shared identity and equal status among their group members. This perception prompted the participants to engage in sharing and mutual learning, through which they learnt to reflect on and value each other's life experiences and stories. The analysis guided by the SGD model revealed that the existing model does not adequately explain the process of how people from diverse sociocultural backgrounds can form a group entity characterized by mutually respectful understanding and the acknowledgement of differences. As discussed in Chapter 6, the existing SGD model not only assumes that shared identity can definitely promote shared expectations but also overlooks the affection account in group formation. This study, however, revealed that a shared identity can never guarantee shared social expectations from particular social roles and phenomena. Hence, it is necessary to include an additional stage that emphasises empathetic understanding among group members so that they can analyse a teller's perspective after fully and contextually understanding the teller's adopted values and beliefs. In this manner, the study findings not only contribute to the existing literature on group dynamics based on shared identities with empathetic understanding of differences but also assist parent

educators in Hong Kong by redefining their roles and functions of delivering effective and culturally sensitive parent education programmes. Also, I would advocate group work skill be included as part of the teacher training programme for two reasons: (1) values transmitted by parents at very young age, and (2) teachers are persons who have regular and close contact with both students and their families so that needs sensitivity can be addressed through case follow up.

7.3.3 As a Parent

Regardless of where they are from, all parents love their children unconditionally and try to protect them for one reason—they are their own children. Anything that is good for their children becomes the strongest motivator for parental participation in activities that promote parenting and children development. The parents in this study revealed that they experienced emotional problems derived from parenting, marital problems and financial difficulties. As a parent, I would benefit most from the emotional support provided by the other group members. Although a problem cannot be solved immediately after it is shared with other parents, the sharing context inevitably provides some emotional relief to the sharer. This relief does not require concrete solutions to solve immediate problems. Rather, an empathetic listener is an effective source of emotional support. Hence, sharing groups are not only useful for sharing experiences and knowledge creation but also provide a platform for emotional remediation, thus enabling effective parenting.

7.3.4 As a Human Being

Their capacity for affection, empathy and reflection distinguish human beings from other animals. The holistic understanding of individuals, based on empathy and reflection among group members, magnified the humanistic aspects of this study. The data analysis guided by the SGD model very clearly conveyed the message that 'there is always something we can share'. As a Hong Kong local, the empathetic understanding of multiple identities is particularly important for promoting social harmony in Hong Kong as its population becomes increasingly diverse. As globalization and technology increasingly blur the boundaries and differences between countries and cultures, the ability to adapt to ever-changing contexts and interact with people from other parts of the world becomes an essential life skill for all human beings.

In conclusion, given my view of parenting as a lifelong learning, parents at different stages encounter different parenting problems. The family-centred mutual support model of parent education programmes proposed in this study suggests that rather than being knowledge transmitters, family educators or group facilitators should redefine their roles as identity identifiers, affection relaters, cognitive need creators and empowerers. By adopting these roles at different times throughout the group development process, group facilitators or family educators can facilitate parents to recognise and acknowledge not only their own multiple identities but also their group members' shared identities and differences. Through the empathetic understanding of differences, parents can obtain a holistic and 'appropriate' understanding of other parents, thus providing them mutual support, either cognitively or affectively, which is more sensitive to their needs and cultural backgrounds than that offered by the existing parent education programmes in Hong Kong.

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Appendix 1

a. The reunification with PRC started a reform of immigration policies, resulting in the quota for the category of "family union" being dramatically increased. Many husbands-fathers are Hong Kong citizens who have married women from the PRC and later had children. Unfortunately, many of the women who have emigrated to Hong Kong as "new arrivals" have experienced adaptation difficulties. A social integration study found that some new immigrants find that their living standards are worse after they are reunited with their families in the territory (Lou & Chan, 2003). Lou and Chan (2003) further suggested that median monthly domestic household income of persons from the Mainland who had resided in Hong Kong for less than seven years (PMRs) was HK$12,050, significantly lower than that of the population of Hong Kong as a whole (HK$18,705). Their low social economic status and their lack of knowledge about community resources place them in a vulnerable position when it comes to participating in different social activities. Stereotypes of mainland Chinese, different values and beliefs carried by the new arrivals have created conflict and societal disharmony and sometimes tension through social interaction with Hong Kong locals (DeLisle, 2003; Chan , Griffiths & Chan, 2008).

b. The Cultural Revolution (1965 – 1968) was based on a set of beliefs that included the notion that school should be simpler, and the more books a person read, the more unintelligent they became. Mao Zedong, communist leader in China, attempted to brainwash Chinese society – especially young people – in order to

create a society with uneducated and mindless citizens (Rosenbaum, 1992). It was an attempt to create China as a country that had peasants, workers and educated people working together – no-one was better than anyone else and all worked for the good of China – a classless society (ibid.). Anyone who was deemed to have developed a superior attitude was considered an enemy of the party and people (ibid.). The process blocked many students from completing school, and many students dropped out and worked in factories and farms to earn money for their family (ibid.).

c. Newly arriving families in Hong Kong usually reside in rural areas where public housing is more available, the location is close to the mainland China border and new arrivals find mutual support in those communities. However, being located in a remote region, these families comprise isolated groups who generally encounter economic difficulties, particularly unemployment, and endure family problems with minimal social support.

> *Financial difficulties associated with unemployment and single parent families are particularly prevalent in this region. Given these social characteristics, it is therefore not surprising to see an increasing incidence of child abuse, spouse abuse, and youth problems. Indeed, Yuen Long District is leading the rest of Hong Kong in terms of new cases of child abuse, spouse abuse, and delinquency in juveniles and young people. (Lee & So, 2005; 96)*

d. Six core values of Confucianism (Slote & Devos, 1998; 138)

   i. Li (禮): ritual, propriety, etiquette (communication)

Confucians believe that society is ruled by etiquette which is moderated by "differences" between rich and poor (貴賤), superiors and inferiors (尊卑), senior and junior (長幼), and intimate and distant (親疏). All these differences function with their own rituals (各有其禮). An ideal and stable society cannot be achieved without these rituals operating properly.

ii. Hsiao (孝): love within the family: love of parents for their children and of children for their parents.

   Any confrontation from people of lower social level is regarded as disrespectful behaviour. As an extension of Li, love and respect among family members is the core of the societal stability.

iii. Yi(義): righteousness (responsibility)

   In Confucianism, the country is governed by morality, which is characterized by empathy rather than written laws which are characterized by rigidity. Moral people are charismatic and influential, as they can easily draw attention, admiration and acknowledgement. Therefore, morality must be the foundation of a country's sovereignty.

iv. Xin (信): honesty and trustworthiness (commitment)

   Extending from the belief of morality and its role in governing a country, Confucians believe that moral people are honest towards others.

v. Yen (仁): benevolence, humaneness towards others; the highest Confucian virtue (social orientation)

Morality is influential and is the major tool to transform a person in terms of psychological and behavioural aspects. Only if one is moral can he or she distinguish good or bad.

vi. Chung (忠): loyalty to the state (dealing with new situation)

All citizens must be loyal to the country and for the sake of collective interests regardless of circumstances.

e) Six dimensions the distinguish High Context culture (HC) from Low Context culture (LC)

i. Social Orientation. People in HC cultures are deeply involved with one another. The bonds between people start with one's family and extend to one's friends and community. The relationship is marked with commitment, expectation, and mutual good will. There is an emphasis on conformity and group orientation, with heavy distinction between insiders and outsiders (Hall, 1976; 113). In contrast, people in LC culture are marked with individualization, rather than mutual good for the sake of the society as a whole. The distinction between 'insiders' and 'outsiders' is rather blurred and each share equal status most of the time.

ii. Commitment. In HC cultures, people are highly involved with each other and high cohesiveness is resulted. Social bonding plays a very important role in group activities. Particularly, people in HC cultures tend to be extremely cautious and even reluctant to begin relationships with whom they do not know well (Kim, Pan & Park, 1998; Keegan, 1989; Hall, 1976).

Therefore an introduction by an insider to start a relationship is common in HC. In LC, people are not as bounded by commitment to complete an action.

iii. Responsibility. Top down management characterizes HC cultures (Kim et al., 1998). People in places of authority are personally and truly responsible for the actions of subordinates. In LC, responsibility is diffused throughout the system and rarely rests on one person or one body of authority.

iv. Confrontation. People in HC cultures try to avoid direct confrontation to maintain social harmony and intimate bonds between people, often through repressing self. Amenities and cordialities are to be maintained, no matter how one is feeling. Thus, there is a strong notion of face-saving in HC cultures (Tse, Lee, Vertinsky & Wehrung, 1988). One reason that HC people sometimes appear to express themselves in a roundabout way, especially regarding issues that might be disagreed upon, is to reduce chances of open and direct disagreement (Hall, 1976; 66). Because in HC cultures people are tied to one another with stronger social bonds, they are aware of the impact of one's words and deeds on other people. Open criticism rarely happens in HC culture (Kim et al., 1998). Therefore, people in HC cultures are more likely to repress self-interest to maintain harmony. In contrast, people in a LC culture are less likely to avoid direct and open confrontation at the expense of expressing and defending self (Hall, 1976), and criticism is more direct and recorded formally (Czinkota & Ronkainen, 1990).

v. Communication. In HC culture, intimate human relationships and a well-structured social hierarchy and norms (social expectations) serve as a broad

context in which human communication takes place. One needs to put any message in the appropriate context in order to understand the right meanings conveyed in the messages. Low-context messages tend to be more context-free, and much more reliance is placed upon explicit communication such as words and written documents (Keegan, 1989).

vi. Dealing with New Situations. As HC people are context bound, they lead their lives within their hierarchical, structured, norm dominated system. LC culture has comparably context-free structures in its functioning, so people can be more flexible, creative and innovative when dealing with new situations (Hall, 1976).

f) Research site information:

i. Site A: A community centre located in a rural area, Tin Shui Wai, (close to the border with Mainland China) where the residential population comprises mostly those who have arrived from China Mainland in the past ten years. This centre participated in a "Family Resilience" project funded by the government. During the liaison process, the centre reported that over ninety percent of their centre members are new arrivals who live in the housing estate where the community centre is located. According to the centre supervisor, the majority of these families rely on government welfare with father-husbands engaged in low income industries, such as construction workers. To avoid the labeling effect, the centre suggested to open the focus groups for all community centre members, with a

confidence that there will be a mix of new arrivals and Hong Kong locals. The project ran a total of five focus groups with one briefing session. For family resilience project, the project leader invited participants whom he believed that they were struggling with or had overcome family problems for individual interviews. The issues that were investigated in these interviews were determined by the resilience project. Rather than collecting the data from individual interviews for this study, conversations occurred in these interviews were only taken for reference and might extract when necessary with the participants' and project leader's consent. All participants were guaranteed their right to review the collected data and withdraw from either or both studies.

ii. Site B: A local kindergarten located in a developed urban area, Tseun Wan. The students' family backgrounds range from low income to middle class. The majority of these families are dual income families with half of them being new arrivals. The participants of the focus group were either members of the kindergarten's volunteer group or members of the church fellowship. Through daily contact, the teacher reported that many of these parents experienced parenting problems. The teacher organised focus groups for parents to share experiences and develop parenting knowledge through sharing.

iii. Site C: A local kindergarten located in a newly developed rural area,

Po Lam. Family backgrounds range from low income to middle class. Almost half are dual income families whereas the other half comprises single income families with the mother as a full time housewife. The majority of these families included three generations who live in the same household. The participants of the focus group were either members of a volunteer group of the kindergarten or neigbhours of the same public housing estate. Through daily contact, the teacher reported that these parents were considered as having parenting problems with a few children experiencing emotional behavior problems. Their class teacher organised the focus groups which served as a platform for parents to share their parenting knowledge and offer mutual help.

Appendix 2

Subjects' Background Information

Story 1 and Story 2 – Subjects are residents of a public housing estate in Tin Shui Wai (Site A).

Parent	Background Information
Mother A	New arrival with one kindergarten aged daughter. She has settled in Hong Kong less than 7 years. She is a full time mother.
Mother B	New arrival with two daughters (4 years old and 2 years old). She settled in Hong Kong less than 7 years. She is divorced. She is a full time mother. She is on welfare.
Mother C	Hong Kong local with a fifteen years old son. She is a working mother.
Mother Cg	A new arrival with a 5 years old son. She has high school education level. She spoke nearly perfect Cantonese. She has a stable marital relationship. She is a full time mother.
Mother D	A new arrival with a 4 years old daughter. She has settled in Hong Kong less than 7 years. She has a stable marital relationship. She is on welfare. She is a full time mother.
Mother E	A mother immigrated to Hong Kong over 20 years. Her Cantonese with mandarin accents. She has a 4 years old daughter. She is a full time mother.
Mother F	A new arrival with children attend kindergarten. She is a full time mother.

Mother K	A Hong Kong local with a fifteen years old and a younger child attends kindergarten
Mother M	A new arrival with two sons (9 years old and 4 years old). After one year separation with her husband and they now live together. She is a full time mother.
Mother X	A Hong Kong local with a 4 years old daughter. She is a full time mother.

Story 3 – Subjects are parents of a kindergarten in Tsuen Wan (Site B)

Parent	**Background Information**
Mother W	New arrival with one fifteen years old son and a four years old daughter. She has settled in Hong Kong less than seven years. She has marital problem. She is not on welfare. She is a working mother who engages in three part-time low skilled jobs.
Mother Ta	New arrival with a young child. She is full time mother.
Mother Yg	New arrival with two young children. She settled in Hong Kong less than 7 years. She is a single parent. She is a full time mother.
Mother An	A Hong Kong local has two children. She is a full time mother. She has stable marital relationship.
Mother Kk	A Hong Kong local with a four years old daughter and a fifteen years old son.

Story 4 and Story 5 – Subjects are parents of a kindergarten in Po Lam (Site C)

Parent	Background Information
Mother PLA	A Hong Kong local with a three years old son. She is a full time mother.
Mother PLD	A Hong Kong local with a 3 years old son.
Mother PLM	A Hong Kong local has two children. She is a full time mother.
Mother PLQ	New arrival with three children (two children attend kindergarten and one child attend primary school). She has settled in Hong Kong less than 7 years. She is a full time mother.
Mother PLX	New arrival with a three years old child.
Mother PLLoud	A Hong Kong local with a three years old son. She is a full time mother.
Mother PLYau	New arrival with a three years old daughter. She lives with her mother-in-law and her husband in the same household.
Father	A Hong Kong local. A husband of Mother PLYau.
Grandmother	Mother in law of Mother PLYau.

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