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Pre-service English Teachers' Perceptions of Newly-Arrived Children from Mainland China

This study investigated pre-service English language teachers' perceptions of newly-arrived immigrant children from Mainland China in Hong Kong. Seventeen participants, who had at least ten weeks of experience working with these immigrant children during teaching practicum, participated in four focus group discussions and shared their perceptions. The analysis of data revealed that the participants widely perceived these children in terms of deficits and consider them a serious professional challenge. Further examinations of the data helped identify media, life and teaching practicum experiences with immigrant children as crucial sources that contributed to the formation of these perceptions. The findings call for teacher education programmes to involve pre-service teachers in critical engagement with the mass media and their own experiences so that they can address the profound impact of this deficit model of immigrant children on pre-service teachers' professional practice.

Keywords: Initial teacher education, mass migration, newly arrived children, critical reflection

Introduction

Schools in many parts of the world face the challenge of increasingly diverse student populations because of mass migrations (e.g. Santoro 2009; Skinner 2010). To prepare teachers for this complexity, teacher educators have devoted attention to the development of teacher knowledge in research, including 'knowledge of pedagogy and

practice, knowledge of students and knowledge of self' (Santoro 2009, 34, also see Hamer 2013; Skinner 2010; Walker, Shafter and Iiams 2004). While it is crucial for teachers to acquire relevant knowledge and develop appropriate strategies when teaching diverse student populations, the development of appropriate pedagogical practices has to begin with teachers' understanding and perceptions of the students' capacity and needs. It must be noted that teachers' perceptions can heavily influence their professional practice and they are the key players in the process of facilitating the socialisation and acculturation of immigrant children (Adams and Kirova 2007; Garibaldi 1992; Llorca and Lasagabaster 2010; Tucker et al. 2005). Consequently, it has become necessary to investigate what views they had about immigrant children and how they developed such views so that relevant teacher education programmes can be adapted accordingly to prepare them for the challenge. Due to ongoing economic uncertainties, immigrants have been seen in increasingly negative terms worldwide, which further necessitate teacher educators to prepare teachers for the complexity of teaching immigrant children. To illustrate this necessity, this paper reports on an inquiry that examined a group of pre-service English language teachers in Hong Kong with regard to their views on newly arrived immigrant children from Mainland China. The inquiry constitutes part of a series of efforts to explore the impact of teaching practicum experiences upon pre-service teachers' perceptions of children in Hong Kong (also see Gao and Benson, 2012),

Due to the socio-cultural affinity and geographical closeness between Hong Kong and Mainland China, there have been a large number of cross-border marriages for decades. Consequently, there has been a significant increase in migration of school-age children from Mainland China to Hong Kong which helps reverse Hong Kong's demographic decline (Chan 2005; Chong 2011; Law and Lee 2006). Immigrant children

from Mainland China, called as *newly-arrived children* (NAC), make up 20% of the minors' population in the region (Census and Statistics Department 2011). In addition, a large number of Mainland Chinese parents, who are not residents in Hong Kong, started giving births in Hong Kong's hospitals in recent years and they accounted for 46% of Hong Kong's newborns in 2011 (Census and Statistics Department 2012). By being born in Hong Kong, these children are registered as residents in Hong Kong and entitled to free public education in the region, though they usually live with their parents in Mainland China before schooling starts. Such mass migration is likely to have a significant impact on teachers' professional practice in Hong Kong. The following sections will situate this inquiry in the international research on teachers' perceptions of immigrant children with reference to socio-contextual conditions of Hong Kong before describing how data about pre-service English language teachers' perceptions were gathered and analysed.

The Deficit Model of Immigrant Children

Research has noted the difficulties for teachers to develop an appropriate understanding of immigrant children since teachers, like many others, are not immune to a 'cult of deficit model', in which children are predominantly viewed in 'pejorative terms such as "underperforming"' (Boyle and Charles 2011, 303). Immigrants in most contexts are often defined as "'other'" and 'stereotyped according to a set of negative dispositions (lazy, volatile, strange, aggressive, etc)' (Devine 2005, 51). In the meantime, immigrant children are commonly perceived as academically incompetent and less intelligent in popular perceptions. Stereotyping involves 'classifying' individuals into 'groups' and 'attributing the same set of traits to each member of the group' (Benincasa 2002, 104-105). Consequently, it is frequently neglected in the process that 'there is a complexity

of profile in any group of children, just as there are complex systems of thought in those groupings' (Boyle and Charles 2011, 302). It must be noted that these negative views on immigrants can be regarded as 'a form of discrimination' and are 'deeply embedded within the power matrices of society and the systems of signification, legitimating and domination drawn upon to justify and support such power' (Devine 2005, 51). More than often, the mass media propagates negative images of immigrant children, which profoundly influence public perceptions, including those of teachers (Masanet Ripoll and Ripoll Arcacia 2008; Trebbe and Schoenhagen 2011)

There is no doubt that this 'deficit model' and stereotyping of immigrant children have worrisome impact on teachers and their professional practice. Research has identified that many teachers, including pre-service teachers, retain stereotypical beliefs about immigrant students (e.g. Bell, Horn, and Roxas 2007; Hamer 2013; Walker et al. 2004; Llurda and Lasagabaster 2010). Teachers holding negative beliefs about immigrant children were found to have had fewer interactions with these students and spent less time on providing quality feedback to them (Garibaldi 1992). Since teachers' perceptions, negative ones in particular, have a direct impact on their classroom behaviour (Tucker et al. 2005), it is crucial for teacher educators to examine teachers' views on immigrant students, especially those of pre-service teachers so that they can address this issue within teacher education programmes. It is also necessary to examine the conditions that give rise to these stereotypical views on immigrant children in particular contexts (e.g. Devine 2005).

Migration from Mainland China to Hong Kong

Unlike immigrants in many other studies (e.g. Devine 2005; Santoro 2009), Mainland Chinese and local Chinese residents in Hong Kong share the same ethnicity and cultural

heritage on the one hand. On the other hand, like immigrants in other contexts, Mainland Chinese immigrants have had dramatically different historical, linguistic, political and socio-cultural experiences from those of their local counterparts (Brewer 1999). Many immigrant children speak a variety of Chinese dialects and Putonghua, the national standard spoken variety of Chinese, but they do not speak much Cantonese, a regional variety of Chinese used as the lingua franca in Hong Kong. While people in many parts of Mainland China were still struggling with poverty, Hong Kong achieved an enviable economic success in the region. There are also disparities between educational experiences of Mainland Chinese immigrant children and local Chinese children. For example, English language education has been introduced in kindergartens in Hong Kong for years while many newly arrived children from Mainland China have not learnt the alphabet system even though they had years of primary education (Rao and Yuen 2001; Yuen 2002).

As ‘difference became deficit in the context of macro-power relations’ (Powell 2001, 73), Mainland Chinese immigrants have been represented negatively as ‘backward’, ‘ill-mannered’ and having a ‘foreign accent’ in Hong Kong’s media (Tsui 2007, 130; Ma 1999). Mainland Chinese immigrant children have also been regarded as easy targets of their parents’ negative influences (Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups 1995). Like in many other parts of the world, economic uncertainties caused popular perceptions of immigrants to worsen in Hong Kong. In recent years, Mainland Chinese immigrants have been portrayed as competitors for social benefits and welfare resources and they have been even mocked as ‘locusts’ in the media coverage, suggesting increasingly negative perceptions that the public have towards them (Foo 2012; Tan 2012).

These contextual processes likely reinforce the dominance of ‘deficit model’ in teachers’ perceptions of immigrant children in Hong Kong. For this reason, the inquiry was undertaken to investigate pre-service English language teachers’ perceptions of newly arrived children from Mainland China and address the following research questions:

1. How do these pre-service English language teachers perceive these newly-arrived immigrant children?
2. How did they develop such perceptions?

The Inquiry

The inquiry adopted focus group discussion as the methodological approach to capture the participants’ perceptions since such perceptions are believed to be dynamic and socially constructed. Focus group discussion allowed them to think about the issue in a context where they could hear others’ views and reflect on their own accordingly (Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun 2012). The presence of other participants from similar backgrounds created a much less stressful atmosphere for the participants and encouraged them to express their views more freely (Creswell 2012; Johnson 2004; Fraenkel et al. 2012). To further strengthen the ‘face validity of the data collected in the inquiry, ‘*small, moderated groups of acquaintances*’ were used ‘for the purpose of *understanding and interpreting* their experiences’ (Wilson 1997, 216, italic emphasis in the original). The first author had close friendships with the participants as he was once a student in the same teacher education programme with them while the second author came to know the participants as their lecturer in the programme. For these reasons, it was the first author that facilitated the focus group discussions to minimise the potential social desirability bias among the participants and enhance trustworthiness of the data (Mundia 2011; Näher and Krumpal 2012). In the meantime, the institutional ethical

clearance procedures were strictly followed in data collection and analysis. Before each focus group discussion started, the participants were informed of the purposes of data collection and their consent explicitly sought for participation. They were also ensured that their participation would remain confidential and anonymous. For this reason, the names in this paper are all pseudonyms.

Participants

Seventeen participants participated in four semi-structured focus groups voluntarily, each group comprising four or five. They were all female, Year 3 and Year 4 pre-service English language teachers in a four-year Bachelor of Education programme at a major teacher education institution. All participants are also local Chinese aged 22 to 26 and had attended local mainstream schools.

This inquiry focused on pre-service English language teachers because around 50-60% of newly arrived children from Mainland China were regarded by their teachers as weak learners who fail to meet the requisite levels of proficiency in English (Education Bureau, 2008, cited in Legislative Council Secretariat 2009, similar educational challenges are also reported in Skinner 2010 on migrants in Ireland). Therefore, these children are more likely to be a challenge for English language teachers. As part of a series of efforts to understand the impact of teaching practicum experiences on pre-service teachers, the inquiry involved participants who had at least ten weeks of teaching in two local mainstream schools and had the opportunity to teach newly arrived children from Mainland China.

Data collection and analysis

The focus groups were conducted in English by the first author who acted as the facilitator in the meeting (Appendix 1 has details of the focus group discussion

procedures). The focus groups, lasting for 40 to 60 minutes, were video-recorded and later transcribed verbatim.

In the analysis, the transcripts were read by both authors multiple times. The first reading was to have a general idea of the participants' responses without an intention to categorise them. The transcripts were then read for the second time with an objective to identify responses relevant to the research questions, that is, to determine participants' perceptions of newly-arrived children from Mainland China and how they had developed such perceptions. The third reading was an endeavour to interpret and categorise the identified responses of each participant into different themes, including these children's learning attitudes, academic performance and classroom behaviours (Table 1; it also illustrates the codes with data extracts). During the reading, particular attention was paid to the 'discourses of normality and "otherness", sameness and difference' that the participants used to describe newly arrived children in group discussions (Devine 2005, 51). The analysis also focused on how participants' discourses 'reflect and are influenced by ... society at large' (ibid.). A fourth reading focused on comparison of the participants' responses so that emerging themes from the previous readings were categorised and refined. It was then that complex perceptions of newly arrived children from Mainland China emerged from the data analysis, as captured in Table 1. Since the analysis involved two researchers, both researchers reflected on our analyses to identify how 'tacit theory' and 'formative theory', or 'sources of selectivity (or bias)' affected our interpretations of particular data extracts (LeCompte 2000, 146). Further rounds of reading were conducted to address any uncertainties or disagreement in the interpretation process.

Findings

After multiple readings of the data, the analysis revealed that the participants had complex perceptions of newly arrived children from Mainland China as reflected in Table 1, many of them echoing the negative perceptions recorded in previous research in other contexts (Bell et al. 2007; Boyle and Charles 2011; Hamer 2013; Llurda and Lasagabaster 2010). These findings speak for the necessity to address the dominance of ‘deficit model’ in pre-service teachers’ perceptions of immigrant children in teacher education programmes (Boyle and Charles 2011). In addition, the analysis also helped identify the sources that contributed to the formation of these perceptions

Table 1 Complex Perception of Immigrant Children from Mainland China

	Positive Perceptions	Perceptions of newly arrived children as a challenge
Learning attitudes	‘ <i>very hard-working</i> ’ (Katherine, Focus group 3)	‘ <i>lazy</i> ’ (Jane, Focus group 4)
Academic performance	‘ <i>acted perfectly normal, like an elite student</i> ’ (Rachel, Focus group 1)	<i>not competent be admitted into Primary One... insufficient aptitude</i> ’ (Jennifer, Focus group 1) ‘ <i>their English ability is weak</i> ’ (Elisabeth, Focus Group 2)
Behaviours	‘ <i>more involved in class</i> ’ (Katy, Focus group 3)	‘ <i>too shy to raise up their hand in class</i> ’ (Ginny, Focus Group 2) ‘ <i>Cannot follow the rules, they don’t have the concepts of being disciplined.</i> ’ (Elaine, Focus group 4)

1. Complex perceptions

As mentioned earlier, the participants had complex perceptions about newly arrived children from Mainland China, suggestive of ‘complexity’ in this group of children (Boyle and Charles 2011, 302). Such complex perceptions were shown in Katy’s descriptions of her previous socialisation with immigrant children from Mainland China, as follows:

... I didn't like to work with or talk to people from the Mainland...they were not very responsible and they were not polite... Until Primary 6, I had two friends... [who were] hardworking and their attitude was good... So my perception of them is not that bad... (Katy, Focus group 3)

Katy's account also suggests that these pre-service teachers' perceptions of newly arrived children from Mainland China are by default negative as she already had an impression that these children were not 'very responsible' even before meeting them. She did change her initial perceptions of newly arrived children from Mainland China after she had two friends who were 'hardworking' and had good attitudes. It can also be seen in the extract above that the participants' perceptions are not static but are dynamically constructed by their experiences. While it is important to note the dynamic nature of pre-service teachers' perceptions, their complex perceptions are closely examined in the following.

Perceptions of immigrant children as a challenge

Echoing findings from previous research on public perceptions of newly arrived children from Mainland China (Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups 1995; International Social Service of Hong Kong 1997; Chan and Chan 2004), the participants perceived these children as a significant professional challenge. It is noteworthy that they constructed negative perceptions of these children with regard to their learning attitudes, academic performance, classroom behaviours and their 'accents' when speaking Cantonese (See table 1 on 'perceptions of newly arrived children as a challenge').

As suggested by the data, the participants were highly concerned with immigrant children's learning attitudes. Six of them did not think the newly arrived children from Mainland China they knew of were active and motivated in learning. Three of them were particularly not satisfied with these students' learning attitudes as one of them complained:

Compared with their local classmates...they [Mainland immigrants] were very lazy...They were not really willing to respond to the teacher, even if the teacher encouraged them. (Jane, Focus group 4)

As can be seen the above excerpt, Jane compared the participation patterns of 'local' and immigrant children in class and concluded the observed differences were due to immigrant children's 'lazy' attitude towards learning (also see Devine 2005). Although three others in the study did not associate these children's withdrawal from class participation with 'laziness', they all interpreted it in terms of another type of deficit, that is, immigrant children's low English proficiency in comparison with their local counterparts. Indeed, previous research on these children's English attainment levels confirmed that they are weak in learning English, a perception shared by all participants (Census and Statistics Department 2002; Education Bureau, 2008, cited in Legislative Council Secretariat 2009):

... the educational level of some Mainland new arrivals is... not that high. During my practicum last year, some of my students were Mainland new arrivals, their...English is not that good ... just, a bit... weak in English. (Wendy, Focus group 2).

Wendy's observation was further supported by other participants who found some of the immigrant children even struggling with basic writing conventions and the alphabetic system in upper primary English lessons where they were supposed to write short paragraphs. As a result, they found it challenging to teach such students.

Moreover, at least five participants described newly arrived children from Mainland China as 'naughty', causing classroom discipline problems. For instance, Jennifer witnessed how a newly arrived child from Mainland China caused a situation that set the whole class against him:

[A Mainland student] lost his control, [kept] arguing with the student sitting at the back, then with another student from the other side of the classroom, threatening to kill him... [Some] would yell "shut up" whereas those naughty [one] would keep running around in the classroom and using foul language. (Jennifer, Focus group 1)

Another participant further added that these newly arrived students from Mainland China had 'the worst attitude' in learning and even felt 'entitled to do anything bad' because they 'know their classmates would call them "Mainlander"' (Victoria in Focus group 4). Situations as described in the extract above were a significant professional challenge for pre-service teachers like Jennifer in teaching practicum (also see Gao and Benson 2012). In the inquiry, at least three participants were noted to have associated such behavioural problems emanating from lack of family education. They believed that these misbehaving children might have been 'spoiled by their parents' since 'some families in the Mainland just have one child'

(Dorothy, Focus group 4). They implicitly assumed that local Chinese children were less likely to be spoilt and cause similar discipline problems because there is no ‘one-child’ policy in Hong Kong.

In addition to the perceived lack of proper family education, children from Mainland China were also constructed to be different because of their accents when speaking Cantonese. For example, Ginny confessed her unwillingness to have an extended conversation with these children as follows:

Ginny: ...Such Cantonese with an accent would make me unwilling to initiate [laughter] a comprehensive conversation with them.

Elisabeth: Even as a teacher you will do so? [laughter]

Ginny: Er... [hesitate] As a teacher I would but when I was in school... I would opt not... am not willing to initiate a conversation with them (Focus group 2)

While the participants did emphasise that ‘the teacher [does not] discriminate nor have a different attitude towards Mainland students’ (Katherine, Focus group 3), the excerpt above indicates that their negative perceptions of immigrant children might have impacted their professional practice.

In short, the participants perceived Mainland Chinese immigrant children negatively in terms of their learning attitudes, academic performance, problematic classroom behaviours and accented speech. These observed differences constitute major components of the deficit model in their perceptions of these children (Boyle and Charles 2011; Benincasa 2002). It must be noted that many immigrant children from Mainland China struggle in learning English, which has been well documented as a real

learning challenge these children (e.g. Census and Statistics Department 2002; Education Bureau, 2008, cited in Legislative Council Secretariat 2009). However, many local Chinese children also have similar struggles and these immigrant children may also have their strengths which are elaborated in the ensuing section.

Positive perceptions

The analysis revealed that some participants did have positive perceptions about newly arrived children from Mainland China, indicative of ‘a complexity of profile in any group of children’ that is usually neglected in the stereotyping process (Boyle and Charles 2011, 302). However, such perceptions were much less frequent than those seeing these children as a professional challenge and they were mostly about these children’s academic performance and learning attitudes.

In contrast to the participants’ perceptions of the newly arrived children’s poor academic performance, two participants reported that these children had excellent academic results. In specific subjects like Chinese and Mathematics, Mainland immigrant children’s performance was well recognised by at least five participants although they all thought lowly of the children’s English attainment:

...students from the Mainland are good at maths, their language abilities in Chinese are also better... (Elaine, Focus group 4)

Newly arrived children’s academic success has something to do with their learning attitudes, an important point that the participants did not fail to recognise. At least three participants appreciated that these children grew up in difficult conditions and they made strenuous efforts to overcome academic challenges. These participants

referred to newly arrived children as ‘very hardworking’ in stark contrast to other participants’ perceptions of these children being ‘lazy’:

There are always TV programmes from RTHK or TVB channel....I feel like the children are really hardworking because ... the setting is like they really have little hope and the kids are very hardworking although they are very poor. (Katherine, Focus group 3)

Katherine might have felt that Mainland Chinese immigrant children’s positive learning attitudes she noticed in the past might have to do with their family hardship. It is interesting to note that these positive perceptions were again built on the perceived differences in circumstances where immigrant children grew up in comparison with those of their local counterparts. Since ‘local families have bad impression on the Mainland as a whole’, Susan in the same focus group emphasize the importance of ‘really having sympathy... about Mainland students’ because of the ‘poor environment’ they grew up in. In some sense, such positive perceptions might have been related to ‘an orientation of sympathy for the position of migrant children ... and a desire to respond charitably to their needs’ (Devine 2005, 65). This excerpt also suggests that the participants’ perceptions of newly arrived children from Mainland China might have been closely related to the representations of Mainland Chinese immigrants in the mass media. This finding directed our attention to the sources contributing to the formation of the perceptions as recorded in the focus group discussions.

2. Sources contributing to the formation of the perceptions

The data analysis revealed two main sources contributing to the formation of participants' perceptions with regard immigrant Chinese children from Mainland China. First of all, the media coverage on Mainland Chinese immigrants was found to have been directly related to the participants' stereotypical perceptions. Second, participants reported that their life experiences and recent teaching practicum experiences significantly changed the initial impressions that they had about these children. Unfortunately, experiences were found to have reinforced participants' negative impressions more than often not. The influences of these sources on the participants' perceptions are discussed in turn.

Mass media

In the focus group discussions, 11 participants admitted that the mass media coverage on newly arrived children from Mainland China heavily influenced how they saw these children (Masanet Ripoll and Ripoll Arcacia 2008; Trebbe and Schoenhagen 2011). Unlike the other participants who had early life experiences with these children, these participants did not have any direct experience working with these immigrants before their practicum. Therefore, their perceptions of immigrant children were largely built on the mass media coverage:

...I think most of the time the media just sensationalises this issue, they just... take the most extreme cases, so that even if originally you are ok with the new arrivals from Mainland China, then your perceptions of these new arrival students will change since you are surrounded by all this kind of news every day. Actually how many people like us really meet these new

arrivals in person, or work with them? I do not think there are many. (Helen, Focus group1)

As critically reflected by Helen, the mass media coverage about Mainland Chinese immigrants is predominantly negative. The media may depict harsh conditions that children in Mainland China struggled for success as mentioned by Katherine earlier (Focus Group 3). However, Mainland Chinese immigrants have often been portrayed in the media as those who come to Hong Kong for getting social welfare benefits, without making any contributions to the society. They are even labelled as 'locusts' in recent media coverage (Tan 2012), as mentioned by Dorothy:

Dorothy: We may be under the impression that Mainlanders come to Hong Kong to compete for baby milk powder and other resources like maternity bed spaces in hospitals. Locals may feel that these Mainlanders are concerned only with their own interest and grab whatever they can before they go.

Elaine: I agree with what you said. Those negative aspects of Mainlanders are widely covered in media. (Focus group 4)

The portrayal of immigrants from Mainland China as competitors for social benefits in the mass media, as admitted by Helen and Dorothy, changes individuals' perceptions of newly arrived children from Mainland China. Pre-service teachers like the participants acquired negative impressions about these children from the media coverage or had their initial negative impressions re-enforced by it. These negative impressions could be negated by participants' life experiences with Mainland Chinese children if they were

positive, but they were more likely to be strengthened if their encounters with these children were negative.

Life experiences and teaching practicum experiences

In the study, only five participants had Mainland Chinese immigrant classmates in their primary and secondary schools. The group discussions did not specifically ask them to reflect on how their early life experiences influenced their perceptions of the newly arrived Mainland Chinese children. Nevertheless, it is not surprising to see that participants who have had positive experiences with Mainland Chinese immigrant children were more likely to have more positive perceptions of newly arrived children from Mainland China. For instance, Katy (in Focus Group 3) made good friends with newly arrived children and she made highly positive comments on these children. In contrast, most of the other participants had negative perceptions reinforced by their negative encounters with newly-arrived children from Mainland China during the teaching practicum.

First of all, this deficit model of immigrants was found to have been far too influential in schools where the participants had their teaching practicum. For instance, Susan was warned about a Mainland Chinese immigrant child's English level on the first day as follows:

I have been trying to go into the classroom being open-minded. But the teacher had highlighted her name. ... she started circling and highlighting everything. ... she is from the Mainland China. You know, her English is below average and she does not even know the alphabets. I just thought that ... it is wrong to judge her like that. (Susan, Focus group 3)

It is likely that this particular teacher might have wanted to prepare Susan for the challenge of teaching newly arrived children from Mainland China (as suggested by Christine in the same group). However, such efforts were seen by Susan, who wanted to be ‘open-minded’, as imposing negative perceptions of immigrant children upon her.

Second, participants derived their negative perceptions from their direct experiences of teaching these children as mentioned by data extracts presented earlier (e.g. Jennifer observing a Mainland Chinese immigrant child losing control of himself in class). As an example, Lily came to believe that newly arrived children from Mainland China were weak learners, especially weak English learners after working as a part-time tutor in an after-school tutorial centre:

... two or three ... out of four students in the class were newly arrived children from Mainland. Another one was a student with SEN (special educational needs). ... Mainland students were weak. ... hey were just... not so bright in my opinion. these children’s English is rather weak.
(Lily, Focus Group 2).

Like Lily, two participants even saw immigrant children from Mainland China as students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) as they all had serious learning difficulties. They considered teaching these children a challenge and therefore ‘would prefer teaching local students’ (Lily, Focus group 2).

In the discussions, two participants also reported that teaching experiences reconstructed the initial perceptions that they held about the newly arrived children. For

instance, Elaine explained how she changed her perceptions of Mainland Chinese immigrant children after teaching them in her practicum as follows:

...in the past, wow, they were all the top three in the form. But why do we not have such negative feelings [for today's new arrivals]? ... If today's new arrivals are just like their counterparts in the past... I will not have such negative feelings regarding them. (Elaine, Focus group 4)

Elaine had positive impressions about newly arrived children during her early life. After having taught quite a few problematic immigrant children in her recent practicum, she feels that she no longer has any positive views about them.

Unfortunately, the inquiry did not record any teaching practicum experiences that helped the participants change their negative perceptions into positive ones, which explained the widespread reluctance among them to teach classes with many newly arrived children from Mainland China. When the participants were asked to choose a class with more Mainland Chinese immigrant children, Katy, who retained positive perceptions about these children, was the only participant who consider this 'a good chance for me to understand their culture and learn how to teach them well' (Focus group 3). Other participants cited reasons like 'do not have the time' (Helen in Focus group 1), '[in]sufficient resources' (Kitty in Focus group 1), 'not have the experience and skills' (Ginny and Wendy in Focus group 2, Susan in Focus group 3), 'new arrivals ... cannot understand Cantonese' (Victoria in Focus group 4) to explain their reluctance. In spite of all these reservations that they had about teaching newly arrived children from Mainland China, the participants did insist that they should 'pay attention to their social differences, the cultural differences and integrate these students into

classroom' (Christina in Focus group 3). However, the findings emerging from this inquiry still necessitate teacher educators to address the dominance of 'deficit model' in the participants' perceptions of immigrant children and its potential impact on their professional practice given the rising migration from Mainland China.

Discussion

The complex and dominantly negative perceptions identified in this study reflect the dominance of the 'deficit model' in the participants' views on immigrant children (Boyle and Charles 2011). They necessitate teacher educators to adapt current teacher education programmes so that they can prepare pre-service teachers for the challenge of addressing classroom diversity emanating from the growing number of immigrant children. Teacher educators need not only to prepare pre-service teachers for the challenge in terms of 'knowledge of pedagogy and practice', but they also should encourage pre-service teachers to critically reflect on their 'knowledge of students and knowledge of self' (Santoro 2009, 34). The findings from this study suggest two critical issues that teacher educators need to involve pre-service teachers in critical engagement with, including the media coverage on and their encounters with immigrant children.

As revealed in the study, the mass media were found to have promoted the deficit model of immigrants among the participants. The media coverage perhaps also reinforced individuals' negative perceptions of immigrants, which might have been associated with a wider contextual process constructing mainland Chinese immigrants as 'backward', 'ill-mannered' and having a 'foreign accent' (Tsui 2007, 130). For this reason, pre-service teachers should be encouraged to critically scrutinize the mass media coverage on immigrants in teacher education programmes. In the case of this study, the participants need to seriously question the mass media coverage on

immigrants from Mainland China (Ma 1999; Tsui 2007) and acknowledge the 'complexity of profile' in immigrant children from Mainland China (Boyle and Charles 2011, 302). Even when the media coverage on these children encourages positive responses, they need to be invited to consider whether their responses can be associated with 'an orientation to sympathy', which justify their 'desire to respond charitably' and manage such student 'diversity' in 'paternalistic terms' (Devine 2005, 65).

In addition, pre-service teachers' encounters with immigrant children need to be seriously examined in teacher education programmes. The findings in this study indicate that life and teaching practicum experiences are more likely to reinforce the dominance of 'deficit model' of immigrants in teachers' perceptions if these experiences are not properly analyzed and re-interpreted (e.g. Santoro 2009). Pre-service teachers like the participants in this inquiry need to be encouraged to reflect on their life encounters with immigrant children to understand how their perceptions had been shaped by such encounters. Moreover, they need to evaluate their ongoing interactions with immigrant children as a crucial part of their professional engagement (e.g. Garibaldi 1992; Llurda and Lasagabaster 2010). Such self-evaluation may also help teachers to address biases in their professional judgments and develop appropriate strategies when teaching immigrant children (e.g. Santoro 2009). It must be noted that the mass media often reinforce stereotypical assumptions about immigrants and immigrant children which are already present in society. Therefore, it is important to encourage pre-service teachers to interrogate the wider socio-contextual processes that engender and sustain deep seated, long held views about immigrants and immigrant children in teacher education programmes.

Conclusion

As part of the series of efforts to investigate the impact of teaching practicum on pre-service teachers, the study examined how a group of pre-service English language teachers perceived immigrant children from Mainland China in terms of learning attitudes, academic performance and classroom behaviour. The findings confirm the dominance of the deficit model of immigrants among these pre-service teachers, which might negatively impact their professional practice (e.g. Bell, Horn, and Roxas 2007; Boyle and Charles 2011; Hamer 2013; Llurda and Lasagabaster 2010). The study also revealed that the participants' perceptions of immigrant children from Mainland China were closely associated with the mass media as well as their life and teaching practicum experiences (Masanet Ripoll and Ripoll Arcacia 2008; Santoro 2009; Trebbe and Schoenhagen 2011).

As economic uncertainties worldwide subject immigrants and immigrant children to be seen in increasingly negative terms by the public, it is the education process that likely transforms these children from being liabilities to assets to their hosting contexts. Therefore, further research on this issue is needed to prepare teachers for this significant professional challenge. In the case of this study, it must be noted that we only explored the pre-service teachers' *perceptions* of immigrant children but not their *actual* engagement with them. Given the limited scope of this study, future research should explore how pre-service teachers' *actual* engagement with these children in order to help them overcome their initial learning challenges upon arrival in Hong Kong.

The study also focused on a small number of pre-service English language teachers who were much aware of the immigrant children's English attainment levels. Although they did appreciate these children's academic achievements in other subjects, future research also needs to explore the perceptions of other subject teachers such as

mathematics teachers and examine whether this deficit model of immigrant children also influence teachers teaching other academic subjects. These ongoing research efforts will help teacher educators to better understand pre-service teachers' perceptions of immigrant children so that teacher education programmes can prepare them for the new challenges emerging in classrooms because of increasing migration.

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Appendix 1: Focus group protocol

Date:

Facilitator:

Location:

Participants: (labelled with anonymous ID)

Introduction

Facilitator: Welcome and thank you for attending this informal discussion. The purpose of this discussion is to see how you, as a pre-service teacher perceive newly arrived children, or for short *NAC*. In particular, we would like to learn your thoughts on why do you have such perceptions and how do such perceptions influence your everyday teaching or interactions with these children. We have prepared a series of questions to guide this discussion. However, you're free to raise any issues pertaining to the topic which you think are important. As a facilitator, my role is to gather your opinion and not participate in the discussion. Please share your honest thoughts and feel free to respond to others' comments. Is there any other question or concern? If not, we shall start our discussion.

Warm-up section

What do you think of the newly arrived children?

How do you define newly arrived children?

What is your understanding of the characteristics of these newly arrived children?

In-depth Section 1:

Why do you have such thoughts about these newly arrived children?

How do you develop such perceptions? Where do you get such understanding?

In-depth Section 2:

How do you feel about *teaching* NAC?

In-depth Section 3:

What would you prepare for teaching NAC?

If you have to teach a class with many NAC, how would you prepare for teaching this class?

Conclusion

Thank you for your time and contribution. Your input would help us understand pre-service English teachers' views on newly arrived children and how these perceptions influence their everyday teaching. Any information obtained in this study will remain very strictly confidential, will be known to no-one, and will be used for research purposes only. Codes, not names, are used on all test instruments to protect confidentiality. You can review the video-recording of the procedure. We will erase the entire videotape or parts of it if you want us to do so. Data will be transcribed and each transcript will have all personal identifications removed. If you have any questions or concerns about this research study, please feel free to contact us. Thank you!