The Enabling of School Participants' Access to Negotiation of Meaning: A Way of Improving Intercultural Understanding

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Abstract:

The International Baccalaureate (IB), as a curricular system of international education, has developed rapidly throughout the world during the recent 50 years. It is committed to cultivating values of empathy, mutual understanding, tolerance and appreciation of diversity. Since such values are viewed as an essential part of life in the 21st century, IB education gives us insights into students' and teachers' development in general. In order to gain more understanding of the process of promoting such values, this research proposed a case study on an IB diploma program serving mainly Chinese students. Drawing upon Wenger's (1998) views about 'communities of practice', the research discussed how certain ways of communication – mutual engagement, imagination and alignment – contributed to the enabling of school participants' access to meaning-making. This research identified issues that resulted in students' and teachers' inability, unawareness and unwillingness to communicate with others, involving the asymmetrical power resources, the vague institutional structures and the dominance of values with ideological significance.

Key Words: Intercultural understanding, Communities of practice, Negotiation of meaning

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1. THE VISIONARY AIMS AND PRACTICAL CONCERNS OF INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

Since the beginning of the 20th century, international education has grown rapidly throughout the world. In mainland China, with the Open Door Policy founded in 1978, international schools and educational programs have re-emerged in the big cities and coastal areas. In 1991, the International Baccalaureate (IB), a curricular system of international education offered by the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO), entered mainland China and grew fast over the recent 10 years.

Although the term of 'international education' has become a 'buzz word', it has yet to acquire a single, agreed-upon definition. Correspondingly, international schools and programs operate in a variety of ways in order to fit into diverse value systems and practical contexts. As James (2005) indicates, most schools have experienced, or are experiencing, the contradiction between their visionary aims and pragmatic concerns.

The visionary aim of international education gives much significance to the value of intercultural understanding. For example, Gunesch *et al* (2004) points out that an international school ought to offer a deeper cultural experience than advanced 'tourism'. Pasternak (1998) claims that multiculturalism is no longer an option for international schools, but an integral part of their educational aims. According to the IBO official website, international mindedness, involving values of empathy, mutual understanding, tolerance and appreciation of diversity, are the essential part of life in the 21st century. It is believed that they would contribute to students' and teachers' positive attitude to learning and teaching. A number of state schools serving Chinese citizens have begun to draw on such visionary aim of international schools as a point of reference.

The improvement of intercultural understanding, however, is difficult to observe and evaluate. A common complaint within literature is that cultural issues are viewed as being of less significance than pragmatics and, are therefore neglected. For example, James' research (2005) indicates that a number of international schools pay much more attention to practical concerns, seeking solutions to basic problems with regard to tuition fee incomes, the host country's legislation and competitive markets.

However, these pragmatic concerns are not always consonant with, and sometimes are even in conflict with, the value of intercultural understanding (Pasternak, 1998; Schwindt, 2003; Allan 2002). According to Walker (2002), in many international schools in less developed countries, both curricula and qualifications are merely viewed and therefore designed as passports to better jobs or to universities in developed countries. For example, the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programs (IBDPs), funded initially to provide internationally portable university-entrance qualification, has recently been attached significant value in mainland China due to the relatively scarce opportunities to gain access to higher education. In these

circumstances, it is argued that many students' and teachers' pursuits of academic success following criteria adopted in Western countries lead to passive adaptation to the dominant cultures, while relinquishing their native identities (Rizvi, 2000).

2. WAYS OF DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL UNDERSTANDING −'IDENTIFICATION' AND 'NEGOTIATION'

To gain insights into how school participants' intercultural understanding may be effectively improved, we need to explore the dynamic construction process of culture. Consonant with the way in which social anthropologists define culture, many researchers in the field of international education hold the view that cultures are neither entity-like knowledge which can be taught and learned as formulate, nor harmonious climates created by school managers to improve school effectiveness. Rather, they are 'product of negotiated and shared symbols and meanings; it emerges from social interaction' (Meek 1988, p.464). In this sense, a better understanding of intercultural learning seems to be deeply embedded in the contextual richness of the social lives of those who interact and communicate in schools.

With the cultural dimension highlighted, the social-participatory perspective of learning, promoted by Lave and Wenger (1992), has attracted increasing attention from theorists. According to Wenger (1998, p.45), learning could be viewed as practice, which connotes both 'doing' and 'connecting' processes. It involves not only each individual's pursuit of particular enterprises, but also 'the attendant social relations'. In this sense, as learning proceeds, certain social networks, as well as individuals' subject positions in relation to the nexus, are constructed and transformed. Wenger names the dynamic notion of relationship networks 'communities of practice' (CofPs). A school could be viewed as a 'constellation' of CofPs[1]; a school participant – either a teacher or a student – may hold various positions within or across different CofPs.

When people identify with particular CofPs, their perspectives and behaviors continuously influence, and are influenced by, those of others. As Wenger (1998) notes, social participation is, in its essence, a dual process, involving both 'identification' and 'negotiation'. That is to say, being an active participant in international education (either as a student or as a teacher) inevitably gives rise to the following questions: what does it mean to teach or learn international curricula? What does it mean to communicate with people of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds? Where the construction of meaning is more equally available to each student and teacher, mutual respect, empathy and appreciation of diversity are more likely to be cultivated in international schools and programs.

From this perspective, I linked the discussion about teachers' and students' participation in CofPs to that about their 'negotiability' – 'the ability, facility and legitimacy to contribute to,

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1 According to Wenger (1998), the term 'constellation' refers to a particular way of seeing things as being related; no matter that they may not be of the same kind or be particularly close to one another' (127).

take responsibility for, and shape meanings that matter within a social configuration' (Wenger, 1998, p.71). The discussion focused primarily on ways in which each participant's 'field of negotiability' could indeed be expanded, 'rending negotiable things that were not or had not been perceived as negotiable' (p.248).

To further describe people's ways of identifying with communities with negotiability, Wenger (1998) develops three 'modes of belonging'. They are 'mutual engagement', 'imagination' and 'alignment'. Mutual engagement depicts organizational members' direct experiences of interacting and communicating with others. But in the face of the physical limits in time and space of mutual engagement, people may 'imagine' a picture of their own positions in relation to those of others in a wider social context. That is, the effort of imagination emphasizes the connection between oneself and the outer world, and expands the scope of identity. Furthermore, in order to contribute to a broader enterprise or to 'fit in a broader structure', sometimes people may coordinate their energy and activities either willingly or reluctantly under coercion (Wenger, 1998, p.174). Thus, their sense of self comes from different forms of allegiance. This is the mode of alignment. In a school context, an in-depth analysis of students' and teachers' models of belonging may offer better understanding of their positions in the labyrinth of social relations, and therefore, their opportunities to get access to meaning-making.

3. A CASE STUDY OF AN IBDP IN MAINLAND CHINA

In this section, a case study is presented to further illustrate how Wenger's modes of belonging contribute to the construction of teachers' and students' memberships of CofPs, to their access to everyday communication, and thereby, to the development of intercultural understanding. The case is an IBDP in mainland China, serving mainly Chinese students.[2] In this case study, three issues were explored: First, what were the impediments that restricted communication among school participants, especially those of differing cultural backgrounds? Second, what accounted for students' and teachers' negative sense of self and their self-sealing values? What could they do to gain more access to negotiation of meaning? Also the research focused on an international education program – a particular type of schools, the exploration on the construction process of CofPs and memberships of CofPs would also shed lights into the healthy development of state schools.

In the selected IBDP, a 'class' – Class 2 Grade 11 – was taken to under investigation. In most Chinese schools, a class is the basic unit for organizing learning and teaching activities. Each class has a fixed classroom and a lead teacher responsible for it.[3] While giving lectures,

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[2] This program has a relatively long history and particularly highlighted intercultural understanding in its school's philosophy. It offered rich opportunities to undertake my inquiry and was stable enough to secure the research.

[3] The lead teachers are called 'Ban Zhu Ren' in Chinese. According to the MoE's *Temporary Regulations Regarding the Responsibilities of Ban Zhu Ren in Primary and Middle Schools* issued in 1998, Ban Zhu Rens are supposed to be the leader, the organiser, and the educator of a class, who are in charge of facilitating students' academic study, implementing classroom disciplines, organizing extracurricular activities, keeping in contact with subject teachers and parents involved in this class. In contrast to the general situation in public high schools in

teachers of different academic subjects come to the fixed classroom according to the timetable. Since class participants (including both teachers and students) shared a common geographic location and undertook joint enterprise, a class could be viewed as a naturally bounded organization. It was an ideal setting in which to explore the constellations of CofPs in their entirety and in a natural context.

In Class 2, my proposed research participants had differing institutional status and cultural backgrounds: four students, four academic teachers and a lead teacher (see Table 1 for information with regard to their backgrounds, age, gender and citizenship). [4] This research sample enabled me to provide a holistic picture of the communication web in the case.

The fieldwork for the research took six months. During this time frame, I conducted observation in each teacher's lessons twice a week. In order to capture what was occurring in participants' moment-to-moment interaction, I refereed to Hymes and Gumperz (1972)'s SPEAKING model as categories of observation notes. Each letter of the code word SPEAKING represents one of the components of a communication event to be described: settings, participants, ends, act sequences, keys, instrumentalities, norms and genres. [5] This model enabled detailed and systematic description on the norms of participation and roles taken by different participants. Based on the detailed description of linguistic features, I referred to literature on teacher-student conversations (Cazden, 2001; Gutierrez et al, 1995; Toohey, 2000)'s to identify types of the adopted discursive practice in Class 2. The final step was to connect these discursive patterns to people's identification practice – modes of mutual engagement, imagination and alignment.

Table 1 Background of the Research Participants

China, the lead teachers in this program do not teach any subjects at the same time as their other duties. Each of them is responsible for managing two classes.

[4] All names presented in this paper were pseudonyms.

[5] To be specific, 'Settings' refer to the physical circumstances of a speech events, including time, space and a cultural definition of an occasion – scene. 'Participants' refer to the identities of participants in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, social status and other relevant features. The participants take the roles of speaker, sender, addressor, hearer, receiver or addressee. 'Ends' refer to `the both individuals' and communities' purpose, as well as their expected outcomes of a speech event. 'Act sequences' explore ways in which massage content (what are said) and form interdependently (how things are said and in what sequential arrangements) contribute to meaning. 'Key' refers to the tone or manner in which a speech act is performed, such as humorousness or seriousness. 'Instrumentalities' involve language variety, channels (medium of transmission of speech) and paralinguistic cues, for example, intonation. 'Norms' of interaction refer to rules in relation to specific behaviours (e.g. turn-taking patterns) and proprieties (e.g. volume of voice) which govern the communication process. Norms of interpretation concern shared understanding, and belief systems of a community. 'Genres' involve categories such as lecturing, joking and gossiping.

Participants	Institutional Status	Citizenship	Gender	Age	Backgrounds
Yuki	Student	Korean	Female	18	Yuki went to primary school and junior high school in South Korea. She was transferred to this program until her parents started a business in China.
Mary	Student	Chinese	Female	17	Mary used to study at a leading junior high school. Since she did not do well in the high school entrance exam, she was sent to this IBDP by her parents.
Mike	Student	Chinese	Male	17	Mike used to study at a public high school. He went to this IBDP because his parents had started a business in the U.S. and wished him to have higher education there.
Ivy	Student	Chinese	Female	17	Ivy attended primary school in Japan. She was transferred to a private junior high school in this city, when her parents came back to China,
Matt	The physics teacher	American	Male	28	Matt had completed three semesters in this IBDP. He was in the US military and had no teaching experience.
John	The economics teacher	Australian	Male	64	John had completed one semester in this IBDP. He had over 30 years' experience in teaching economics in public high schools in Australia.
Joe	The chemistry teacher	Chinese	Male	28	Joe started his job here three months ago. He had six-years learning experience in the U.S.
Mrs. Zhang	The Chinese literature teacher	Chinese	Female	43	Mrs. Zhang had three years teaching experience in this IBDP. Before this, she had worked as a Chinese literature teacher in a leading public high school for 12 years.
Mrs. Dai	The lead teacher	Chinese	Female	45	Mrs. Dai was appointed the lead teacher of Class 2 at the same time as her students matriculated. Before working in this IBDP, she used to be a school manager in a public high school.

Interview was another strategy for gathering data. My interview protocol was mainly designed to explore respondents' experience of communicating with other program participants,

involving the subjects, contents, methods and outcomes. Instead of seeking answers to specific questions, I tried to keep the conversation flows unstructured and informal. In agreement with many ethnographers, such as Kvale (1996) and Holstein and Gubrium (1995), I saw this casual and unrestrained way of communicating with respondents as helping them to make sense of their own experiences, so generating a coherent interpretation of their roles as participants or non-participants of certain CofPs in the school context.

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 Mutual Engagement

Membership in a CofP is not a static social category, but a matter of mutual engagement – 'active involvement in mutual processes of negotiation of meaning' (Wenger 1998, p.173). In this IBDP, peer conversations in extra-curricular activities were places remarkable for mutual engagement. For example, in the weekly gathering of the Care Club,[6] Ivy and Mary appeared to be quite absorbed in discussing topics of interest and working on joint activities. Furthermore, in lessons, the foreign teachers – John and Matt – often let every four or five students engage in a group to discuss questions listed in handouts. Sharing relatively equal relationships with peers, most students felt much less hesitation in voicing their opinions than they did in front of teachers. Their voices were 'freed' to a considerable extent. On some occasion, Yuki, the Korean girl whose proficiency of both Chinese and English was low, drew on her close friendships with others and her expertise in drawing to gain access of influence, so as to facilitate her participation in these activities. As shown in Example 1 (see Appendix of texts), it was evident that Yuki was not able to follow Mike's speech, and therefore became distracted. However, by making faces with Steve, Yuki glossed over her embarrassment when her accent and her distractedness were laughed at. As I observed, being close friends with Steve and Jenny, Yuki was always able to find someone in the group to talk to. Although such communication appeared to be 'phatic', being of little relevance to teacher-mandated tasks, it could be viewed as positive for Yuki by providing her with a comfortable environment, which prevented her from being subdued by other students' expert authority to a considerable extent.

In large group instructions characterized by teachers' monologue, students and teachers were less mutually engaged with each other. When Mrs. Zhang, Matt, and sometimes John, were lecturing at the platform, the majority of the class engaged in developing an 'underlife', which was defined by Goffman (1961) as 'a range of activities people developed to distance themselves from the surrounding institution' (Gutierrez et al, 1995, p. 451). For example, many

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6 In this IBDP, there were two systems of student organisation. One were student clubs, run mainly by students themselves, the other as the 'Student Committee', led by school managers, including the lead teacher in each class. The latter is common in all public Chinese middle schools, high schools and universities. Student clubs are particular to this IBDP. In this program, there were five student clubs: the Care Club, the Debate Club, the Chinese Literature Club, the Choir and the Sports Club. All of them were established spontaneously by previous students who had already graduated from the school. Students from different classes and grades came together because of their common interest in a field. By contrast, Student Committee is common in all public Chinese middle schools, high schools and universities. Its operation is supervised by school managers.

students read other pages in the textbooks that were not taught or played with their cell phones hidden under desks. While the classroom underlife appeared to develop freely, in interviews, rarely did the teachers take account of this in their approaches to teaching. Their authoritative discourse and students' deviance remained separate, with neither open communication nor explicit contests. This contributed little to improved communication and ran counter to Vygotskey's (1978) promotion of engaging people in mutual zones of proximal development.

To some extent, the lack of attention given to students' underlife resulted in teachers, especially the Chinese teachers, being excluded from students' CofPs and the correspondent communication circles. This was the case in the relationships between the lead teacher – Mrs. Dai – and most students. Although Mrs. Dai often visited the classroom and organized a number of extra-curricular activities herself, she was not made welcome in the class. It may have been because her speech usually took the form of either command or admonishment, being observed as ignoring students' perspectives and expectations. According to the students' interview accounts, none of them wanted to let their lead teacher be involved in their club gatherings. Even though Mike was viewed as an unquestionably 'star student' in the eyes of Mrs. Dai, he told me that he would never initiate a conversation with either of her.

The program was also characterized by a lack of mutual engagement among teachers. The vertical administrative system between the Academic Director and the academic teachers, as well as the associations of academic teachers in the same grade – 'Jiao Yan Zus'[7], were slackly organized. As interviews with the foreign teachers revealed, the Academic Director – an experienced Chinese teacher – had rarely observed their classes, let alone comment on their lesson plans, their ways of lecturing and classroom management. Matt doubted that the Academic Director had sufficient English in communicating with foreign teachers beyond the level of just being polite. With regard to horizontal channels of communication, although each Jiao Yan Zu was supposed to arrange peer discussions every month according to the school regulations, attendance of those meetings was never required. Many teachers told me that they were reluctant to attend such activities because of the language barrier. For example, Matt always complained that the leader of the Science Department – a Chinese biology teacher – was not able to speak English, let alone supervise him and other foreign teachers.

Furthermore, the foreign teachers were not required to work in offices after class as their Chinese colleagues were. As a result, teachers rarely talked about their work with one another in offices or elsewhere on campus. Without sufficiently mutual engagement, it seemed that some of the teachers held a 'self-sealing' value, viewing others' work as totally irrelevant. For example, Mrs. Zhang told me that she did not care how her foreign colleagues performed in

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[7] The 'Jiao Yan Zu', which means 'a teaching and researching group', is a common professional organization for academic teachers in every Chinese primary, middle and high school. In this program, there were six Jiao Yan Zus under the supervision of The Academic Director, corresponding to the six groups of IB curricula. Each Jiao Yan Zu was led by an experienced teacher, either Chinese and foreign, in one of the subjects involved.

lessons because they taught different subjects in a different language, even though they were made welcome by students. With such a limited purview of their accountabilities in the organization, the teacher was unlikely to develop a sense of membership of the community of the overall program. This could therefore lead to her indifference in communicating others.

As Wenger (1998) notes, some CofPs may define themselves by virtue of their contrast to others. That is, membership in one community implies, and is defined by, non-participation in another. On these occasions, boundary crossing may be difficult. In this IBDP, this difficulty was mainly exemplified by the restricted communication between most students (especially those made mistakes) and the lead teacher, and between the Chinese and foreign teachers. In addition, people who were caught at the boundaries, without defining characteristics of one side or the other, found themselves marginalized by both groups. Joe was an example in this respect. On the one hand, since he had two Master's degrees from an American university, his salary was the same as that of foreign teachers, much higher than that of his Chinese colleagues, even though his citizenship was Chinese. However, as Joe described it, this privilege made most of his Chinese colleagues 'take preconscious against him' all the time. On the other hand, Joe believed that despite his studying experience in the U.S., he did not have much in common with Matt and John. He was seldom observed participating in the foreign teachers' social gatherings, such as playing basketball on campus.

4.2 Organizational Imagination

Since organizations are usually beyond the scope of people's direct interaction, imagination – activities of seeing connections between the self and the contexts by extrapolating from one's experiences – plays an important part in their participation in CofPs. When there is no effort made to imagine a broader context, one's relationship with the whole organization can remain distant and passive as a consequence.

According to Wenger (1998), in order to trigger one's imagination, the organizational nexus should be as transparent as possible, so that people can understand their part in the holistic picture. In this case, however, it seemed that most research participants had limited knowledge and an obscure view of the overall constellations of CofPs. There appeared to be three factors which might confine participants' imagination. They were: the ambiguity of student organizations in foreign teachers' eyes, the vaguely defined institutional accountabilities of the lead teachers, and the invisibility of the cooperation between this program and the IBO.

First of all, the system of student organizations was a labyrinth for the foreign teachers. I found that neither Matt nor John could give the number and names of the student organizations. According to their interview accounts, they were not familiar with the difference between the Student Committees and the student-led clubs, either, in terms of personnel management, main activities and their relationships with the school authority. As a consequence, their perceptions of individual students appeared partial. For example, during the eight months' fieldwork, the teachers had never mentioned Ivy's strong social abilities and charisma leadership in the Choir.

This might explain why John felt his communication with students was far from profound and meaningful, 'generally more on the surface'.

Furthermore, the foreign teachers appeared to be limited in conceiving of ways in which they might participate in students' extra-curricular activity, let alone actively contribute to its development outside the academic arena. For instance, in interviews, Matt often criticized that the opportunities for students to develop diversified hobbies in this IBDP were much less than those in American high schools. However, it seemed that he was not aware of students' active participation in various club activities which he could also have attended. For example, when Matt started to work in this program, he created a club – the Monkey Club – for students, organizing sports every week. Unfortunately, this club was abandoned at the end of that academic year because the teacher had trouble getting students to participate. Matt told me on several occasions that he was disappointed about the Chinese students', especially girls', indifference in sports. It seemed that he did not conceive of the possibility of collaborating with other students' clubs or consulting with the popular student leaders, such as Yuki and Ivy.

Second, in the four students' interview account, none of them was able to clearly describe the duties of the lead teacher. Ivy said: 'I just feel that they are managing us. But I cannot tell what exactly they are supposed to be in charge of. It seems, um, everything.' With even less clarity, the foreign teachers – Matt and John – did not have a clue about the lead teacher's work. They did not even know that who the female teacher was sitting in the office upstairs. Most ironically, I found that Mrs. Dai – the lead teacher – herself was not able to describe the scope of her job clearly in interviews. It seemed that what she did in the program – managing students' disciplines – was simply to follow the school managers' directions.

In the face of these ambiguities, many of the students seemed to assume that the lead teacher's authority overflowed everywhere, deciding everything in their school lives. As a consequence, they seemed to be inclined to take the teacher's directions for granted on most occasions, even when these directives were in relation to club activities, which were supposed to be within the aegis and responsibility of students themselves. For example, at the beginning of the semester, when Mrs. Dai let every student association report students who were seen dating on campus, most student clubs followed this order without any questions. Like the students, with little knowledge about the administrative system, the foreign teachers were likely to view the issue of student management as merely the business of the Chinese side. Thus, they assumed that the foreign teachers would not be welcome to participate in decision-making in this area. This might explain why Matt and John were reluctant to openly voice their opinions in front of the Chinese, even though either of them could give an example of the Chinese's hostile attitude to them.

Third, as one of the IB world schools, this IBDP was supposed to undertake tasks of training staff and spreading the spirit of international-mindedness, in addition to offering IB curricula. However, most teachers' identification with the notion 'IB educators' did not appear to be

strong. In interviews, the academic teachers seldom talked about their distinctiveness compared with those from the national education systems. Rather, I found both John and Mrs. Zhao often drawing on their experiences of working in public schools while discussing their roles as teachers. Although the lead teacher described her role as 'a mentor', in contrast with 'the managers' in Chinese public schools, she seemed to have difficulty accounting for how the mentor role might be carried out in her day-to-day work.

With regard to the teachers' professional competence, I found that all of them neither had prior experience of teaching IB curricula, nor had they received any training offered by the IBO while working in the program. In interviews, few of the teacher participants were able to describe the six groups of IB curricula and their interconnections as clearly as that written in the IBO web page. I also found that the teaching staff, especially the foreign teachers, did not relate their career development to the growth of the IBDP. As the Dean of this program informed me, the majority of foreign teachers only worked here for one or two years, viewing the job as temporary and transitional. This might explain why their desire to improve communication and collaboration with colleagues or students was not apparent.

4.3 Organizational Alignment

Alignment is another mode of belonging that is concerned with connecting people by controlling and unifying their energies and actions to serve a particular purpose. This form of identification could either be based on individual's willing commitment or submission to authoritative commands; it could be achieved either consciously or unconsciously. Taking an optimistic view, organizational alignment could lead to coordination and communication among organization members, and pessimistically, it may disempower people by decreasing the opportunities for negotiating meaning. Both the positive and negative effects of alignment were exemplified in the participants' everyday interaction.

As mentioned before, without teachers' presence, activities organized by some of the student clubs, the Choir for example, were generally characterized by a causal and cheerful discussion. In one of the club gatherings, which discussed the lead teacher's edict to report students who were seen dating on campus, Ivy, the club leader, described the given task as following, 'I will absolutely not report anyone's name. We are all schoolmates. How could we get along with each other if we followed her stupid command –"catching lovers"![8]' Her speech made little reference to the teacher's authority, but put forward her opinion in a forthright manner. This helped to create a climate of straightforward assertion of views. Thriving on intensive communication, diversified opinions were advanced and negotiated. Most members spontaneously and willingly aligned themselves with the proposition to not implement the lead teacher's direction but to employ an alternative strategy – to return a blank sheet to the teacher and to remind the students by making posters which convey a satirizing metaphor.[9]

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[8] The phrase 'catch lovers' was not the original term used in Mrs. Dai's speech, but Yuki's own creation.
[9] They drew a broom in a yellow background because in Chinese anti-pornography literally means sweeping the yellow color with a broom.

In contrast with the open discussion in the Choir, alignments achieved in the teacher-led student associations, between the lead teacher and students, appeared to be a one-way process of construction of meaning. In this IBDP, the Student Committee (SC) consisted of three hierarchical levels. Under the student chair appointed by the Master, there were several divisions in charge of different affairs, such as the Study Department and the Discipline Department. These departments led the Class Committee (CC) – a standing body in each class. A CC consisted of a chair and four student cadres with responsibilities corresponding to the SC divisions. Before the final exam, the CC of Class 2 organized a pre-exam psychological game for students. Mrs. Dai summoned several CC meetings, attended solely by student carders, to set up the plan of the game. As shown in Example 2 (see Appendix of texts), Mrs. Dai appeared to dominate the decision-making process with regard to the nature, the content and the procedure of the activity. By describing her own plan as a 'remedy' for the cadres' dereliction of responsibility and as being of importance in improving students' social abilities as required by the IB curricula, Mrs. Dai committed to the CC to putting her 'rationalized' plan into practice.

Although this CC meeting gained in prompt alignment, it lost in negotiation of meaning between the teacher and students. In this instance, it seemed that the student cadres were not encouraged in developing active imagination, connecting their own competence as student leaders to the operation of the student association. As one of the cadres, Mike exhibited lack of interest in the discussion in an obvious way. Throughout the 35 minutes' meeting, he bowed his head, rarely looking at the teacher and his peers when they were speaking. Others did not ask for his opinion either, even when discussing ways of preparing notes, which was supposed to be his responsibility.

On some occasions, the teachers' authority over students appeared to be less coercive, so remaining unchallenged. This was the situation when the three-part sequential exchange of conversation – Initiation, Response and Evaluation (IRE) – was adopted. That is, 'a teacher asks a question, a student responds and the teacher evaluates or follows up on the student's response in some way (Toohey, 2000, p.101). At the first step of IRE pattern, the teacher set up certain communicative framework and evaluative criteria serving mainly teachers' intentions, such as checking students' mastery of information or setting up correct examples. In this instance, the students' unquestioning allegiances led to the construction of knowledge in the 'correct' way established by the teacher rather than meeting their own interests and beliefs. Typical of the IRE pattern adopted in Mrs. Zhang's Chinese literature class was shown in Example 3 (see Appendix of texts).

In this example, it seemed that Mrs. Zhang's feed back to Oliver was not intended as a particular comment on his answer, but to teach 'you guys' – the whole class, demonstrating the 'correct' structure that should be followed when answering questions. In the following conversation with Mary, Mrs. Zhang gave directions (e.g, 'Remember, abstraction first') and

asked some leading questions (e.g. 'Examples?' and 'So?') to set up a communicative framework, directing Mary's answers step by step. In order to move the conversation flow towards the construction of the correct answer, Mrs. Zhang substituted Mike for Mary when the latter was unable to continue the communication in the way she expected. In this instance, Mary and Mike were given few opportunities to develop independent answers. Their alignments only 'privileged the perspectives of those who defined procedures (Wenger, 1998, p.261).

Furthermore, most participants (including both teachers and students) were on many occasions in alignment with the apparently powerful assumptions, with certain values attached. As Rogers (2004) notes, the universalized perspectives may lead to organizational members' consent or acquiescence, even when they were powerlessly positioned. In these circumstances, asymmetries in power relations seemed to be postulated as unquestionable and unavoidable. In this IBDP, the most salient examples of 'ideological alignment' were (Rogers, 2004, P.265): first, 'standard English' with American accent should be spoken by all school members, despite their linguistic backgrounds; second, students' management should be taken care by the Chinese side. By taking these representations for granted, the process of negotiating meaning stagnated in individuals' minds. As a result, many of the participants were far from being self-reflexive. For instance, Matt and John never asked themselves: 'why couldn't I learn some Chinese language and teaching experiences from my Chinese colleagues?' Few students reflected upon 'why was I laughing at Chinese and Australian teachers' accent in speaking English?'

5. REASONS FOR THE RESTRICTED COMMUNICATION

In this IBDP, it seemed that each teacher and student was confronted with either restricted or unhelpful communication with others to varying degrees. The limited participation in CofPs may have negative effects on the developing of his/her identities as an active participant in intercultural learning. Drawing upon the discussion about modes of belonging to CofPs, three possible reasons were pointed out, involving the asymmetrical power resources available to participants, the vague and disempowering institutional structures, and the dominance of values with ideological significance. Internalized in each participant's state of mind, these issues could be interpreted as his/her inability, unwillingness and unawareness with regard to communicating with others.

Specifically, first of all, many participants were unable to participate in the communication process. In this IBDP, the language of English became a source of power, dividing participants into powerful and powerless, and qualifying only the former as participants in the communication process between the Chinese and foreign sides. Due to this, some of the students, such as Yuki, had to be excluded from the teacher-student conversation in Matt and John's lessons. With the language barrier, most Chinese teachers were not able to communicate with their foreign colleagues either.

In addition to the language barrier, the disadvantaging institutional positions taken by students rendered them voiceless in the meaning-making process. As shown in Example 2 and Example 3, Mrs. Dai and Mrs. Zhang's control over the topics and turn-taking process appeared to leave little room for students to contribute alternative meanings to the construction of knowledge. Although many students became distracted while Matt and Mrs. Zhang giving lectures on the platform, the 'classroom underlife' was never deemed legitimate and, thus, had little influence on changing the teachers' scripts. In these circumstances, by merely pursuing alignment with the 'correct' answers, the teachers sacrificed students' participation in negotiation of meaning to certain extent.

Second, the limited or uncongenial communication was due to participants' unwillingness to interact with others. This usually happened between students and their Chinese teachers, especially Mrs. Dai. For example, since Ivy was always criticized for 'being spoiled', as I observed, whenever she bumped into either of the teachers on campus, she usually hid herself or took a detour to avoid speaking to them.

Reluctance to participate in communication was also evident when the participants maintained a negative sense of self, as inferior to their colleagues or peers. Mrs. Dai was the most salient example in this respect. In interviews, she valued the foreign teachers as experts in teaching IB curricula while viewing herself as an outsider. For example, she said: 'since we spend much money in inviting them (foreign teachers) to work here, we should learn from them, not interfere with them.' As a result, in addition to the language barrier, she hesitated to advance any opinions in front of the foreign teachers.

Third, there was a less explicit reason for the silent areas. That is, neither did the participants saw the need, nor did they express the desire to communicate with others. For example, in interviews, Mrs. Zhang said that there was no need for her to communicate with her foreign colleagues because they did not teach the same subject; the foreign teachers never talked to Mrs. Dai because they did not know who she was and what she could do to support their jobs. Among these participants, those who were excluded from the communication process seemed to be 'ignored' because of their perceived lack of relevance to others' jobs and lives. In other words, unawareness of the need to interact with someone may have stemmed from participants' isolated practices and narrow purview of their contributions to the constellation of Cof Ps.

Another issue meriting attention was that many participants seemed to be unaware of how disadvantaged they were by the status accorded them in the communication process. For example, the four student participants had never questioned their role as simply 'listeners' in Mrs. Zhang lessons. On one occasion, Mary told me that although she did not agree with Mrs. Dai's perspectives at times, she always tried to convince herself first and then to convince her friends in the class. I believe that the participants' unquestioning allegiance in these circumstances illustrated how the ideological significance attached to teachers' authority prevented those less powerful from meaning-making.

6. ISSUES FOR IMPROVEMENT

In this section, two main issues are suggested for improvement in this regard.

6.1 Improving participants' self-reflexivity and multicultural awareness

As discussed before, some meanings with ideological significance, such as 'standard English' should be spoken by every school participant, led to the maintenance of inequitable power relations and relatively rigidified identity categories (Rogers, 2004). They resulted in considerable inability, unawareness and unwillingness to negotiate meanings with others on the part of the participants. I believed a breakthrough would be made if each student / teacher had a multicultural perspective and was able to adopt a self-reflexive stance. This would help him/her to appreciate and respect diversity, leading to a continuously critical reflection on his/her own value assumptions. How could this kind of critical reflection indeed be promoted?

First, the 'professional development program' provided by the IBO could play an important part in improving teachers' international-mindedness and constructing their identity as IB educators.[10] However, drawing on the situation in this case, it seemed that this kind of teacher education service was in fact non-existent. In interviews, all teacher participants said that they had never attended workshops or conferences as planned in the IBO's annual calendar. If the planned workshops indeed were carried out by the IBO Asia regional office, I assumed that its supervision over the IB world schools was not sufficiently effective.

Second, with regard to IB curricula themselves, they could incorporate more content related to multicultural awareness and strategies of intercultural communication. Since I did not focus on the curriculum design of IB education, it was difficult to offer informed comment on this issue, although the disengagement of students in some lessons took its own story. It may prove useful, however, for researchers to further investigate how well the six-group IBDP curricula promote multiculturalism, and how well this curricular system connected with other systems, especially those adopted in primary and junior high schools in the host country. We should also bear in mind Wenger's (1998) suggestion that organizational learning should be not confined to delivering courses, but facilitate members' participation in the process of constructing and negotiating knowledge. In this sense, it could prove fruitful to organize more extra-curricular activities, involving all students and their teachers – both Chinese and foreign – in the decision-making process. If everyone were allowed to take part in the decision-making process, not merely acting as audience, it might serve to overcome many of the impediments to communication.

Furthermore, improved collaboration between this IB program and the other IB world schools is highly recommended. For example, if students were able to attend winter or summer camps

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[10] The professional development division is committed to 'the ongoing development of a worldwide professional learning community comprising internationally minded teachers, school leaders and school managers'. http://www.ibo.org/programmes/pd/. The four regional offices of the IBO conduct comprehensive annual programs of workshops and conferences designed to help teachers and schools to better understand and deliver the IB curricula.

in other IB programs all over the world, they would enjoy more opportunities for experiencing cultural diversity personally.

6.2 Reforming organizational structure

Based on the theories of CofPs, Wenger (1998) points out that organizational design, either for a business enterprise or for a school, should be in the service of practice. Therefore, in this IBDP, a reform of organizational structure was of importance in facilitating participation in negotiating meaning. First, the evidence pointed to an urgent need to further formulate and clarify the job responsibilities of each post in the institution, especially that of the lead teacher. It would also be helpful to make the configuration of student associations, including the Student Committee and student clubs, and the school's collaboration with the IBO as transparent as possible to all school participants. A possible approach might be to publicize these pieces of information on the program's website. Since the redeployment of teaching staff, especially the foreign teachers, occurred frequently in the program, school managers might consider including the information in the orientation projects for new staff. As discussed previously, a clearly defined and transparent institutional apparatus would also help participants to understand the part they could play in the constellation of CofPs and to engage themselves in a wider context.

However, defining work responsibilities in a clear-cut manner may run a risk of tying people to narrowly defined and mutually isolated positions within a bureaucratic system. The communication process would thus become top-down and impersonal. In order to avoid the negative effect of institutionalizations, it is suggested that instead of intensifying a layered hierarchy – from managers to teachers and then to students, horizontal networks could be strengthened, embracing collaborative teamwork. Joint enterprises in team work may provide organization members with a basis for making their own behaviors sensible and meaningful (Morgan, 1997). 'Jiao Yan Zus' were the most salient example in this respect. In order to bind teachers of the same subject together and to facilitate their communication, the evidence in this program suggested that school managers could make renewed efforts in two aspects. First, it would be better to formulate a set of mandatory measures to ensure attendance, especially that of the foreign teachers, in every Jiao Yan Zu meeting. Second, the school might consider employing professional English translators in these meetings in order to ease the communication between the Chinese and foreign teachers. This kind of teamwork could also be established between the academic and administrative teachers.

In this IBDP, many students and teachers were expected to merely take care of their own exams or lectures. As a result, they exhibited apathy to, and lack of interest in, others' learning and teaching in the organization. A further reform might be to allow greater democratic participation in meaning-making in every aspect of school life. First, as discussed before, the institutional apparatus – organizational structures, authority relations and job responsibilities – would need to be made visible to all school participants. In that case, they would be aware of what was going on around them in the organization. Second, it would be helpful to establish

mutual supervision among school participants. Instead of merely top-down supervision, students could evaluate their teachers, and teachers could comment on the work of their superiors. Taking into consideration the emphasis on harmony and saving face in Chinese culture, making the supervision surveys or other forms of evaluation anonymous would be important.

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APPENDIX OF TEXTS [11]

Transcription conventions [12]

YOU Capital letters are used to indicate an utterance that is spoken much louder than the surrounding talk.

°you° Degree marks indicate an utterance that is spoken much quieter than the surrounding talk.

↑you A upward pointing arrow indicates a rising intonation of sound it proceeds

↓you A downward pointing arrow indicates a falling intonation of sound it proceeds

(0.2) Number inserted within parentheses indicates intervals in the stream of talk, which is timed in tenths of a second.

⌈ A single left-hand bracket which links two utterances together indicates simultaneously started utterance.

⌈ A single left-hand bracket which links two utterances together indicates the beginning of overlapping utterances.

⌉ A single right-hand bracket which links two utterances together indicates the end of overlapping utterances.

= An equal mark indicates contiguous utterances spoken by the same person or group of persons.

((Description)) Items within double parentheses are descriptions of the speech.

(Translation) Items within parentheses written in italic indicate are translations of the Chinese quotations.

Example 1

In an Economic lesson, John let the students draw a picture showing what a poor Chinese village might look like ten years into the future, drawing on their imaginations and suggestions for change.

Mike: According to the description of the village, we should draw a mountain and a pond. Under the mountain, we should draw some restaurants and hotels, and tourists.

Yuki: a po:?

Mike: a pond. Water

Yuki: a pon:**d** ↑ ((Her accent made other members laugh))

Other members: Ha-ha.

Yuki: 太:快了 *(You were too fast!)* ((She made a face at Jack.))

Mike: Ok, first, we should draw a moun: tain and a pon: d. Under the mountain, there are some restaurants and hotels.

Steve: 什么东西？(*What?*)

Mike: 就是有山、有水、然后有饭馆、酒吧和游客 (*mountain, water, restaurants , bars and tourists.*）

Jenny: pond是池塘，对吧？

Steve: 我看看怎么写 *.(Let me have a look at the spelling of the word.)*((Jenny wrote down these English words on Steve's notebook))

Steve: O了, O了（*OK，OK*）。Yuki, 你来画. ((Yuki was showing something on her mobile screen to the girl sitting next to her – Rebecca – at that moment.))

Yuki: 啊？

Steve: 哈哈，又没听吧! (*Ha-ha. You were not listening again!*)

Yuki: 你又批评我！(*How come you criticised me again!*) ((Yuki kicked Steve and made a face at him.))

Steve: 饶命啊，我告诉你画什么。((Steve laughed and made a face at Yuki as well. At this moment, Mike and Jenny booed and hooed))

When Yuki was drawing the picture, Steve and Mike made fun with Yuki as they usually did. But they helped her to understand the words 'pond' and 'tourist' by explaining it in Chinese and by body language. Later on, Jenny asked Yuki why she drew lots of red fishes in a green lake, which she thought was not artistic, Yuki explained that as a tourist spot it was, people were supposed to raise ornamental fishes.

Example 2

At the beginning of the CC meeting, Mrs. Dai explained what kind of activities this would be and why it should be organized at this time of the year. She said:

> As you know, according to the IB requirement, every student should participate in a certain number of extra-curricular activities every semester. However, for you guys, this semester is kind of special, with a heavy load of exams. Therefore, study has been the main task. However, this should not be an excuse for not organizing any activity. You, the CC, have not proposed any plans by now. Without my reminder, you would get a zero in the CAS. Even if there is no such requirement, will you just, um, study and go about your own business? I have AWALYS emphasized that we should improve our social abilities in extra-curricular activities ((She uttered the word 'always', translated from "总是", loudly and in an extension of voice)). It is your participation in these activities that makes the difference between you and those who are in public

high schools, showing who is capable and who is not. Um (0.3) of course, I understand your situation. I thought up a plan for you. I believe that the activity should be related to exams – not merely playing, um, but neither over serious. So, we define it as a pre-exam psychological game. [i]

Example 3

While instructing Chinese Novels, on one occasion, Mrs. Zhang asked the students how personalities of the heroine were characterized in certain paragraphs of a novel. Oliver was nominated to answer this question.

Michel: The, um, when she talked about kung fu with Cheng Yuanyu, she said she took her teacher's advice, um, not indulging in excessive drinking. And later, later, Cheng Yuanyu found that she was really not drinking.

Mrs. Zhang: ꜛUm: °The lady was upright in character. However, YOU need to remember one point. ((She made a hand gesture to let Michel sit down.))That is, your TRAIN OF THOUGHT ((an extension of voice)) while answering this kind of question must be VERY CLEAR, just like when you are writing essays. You should give an abstraction at the first step, and then talk about examples in detail. This is very important. Others, do you have any other opinions? (0.3) Mary.

Mary: ꜛUm°

Mrs. Zhang: REMEMBER   abstraction first

Mary: Um, she sought ways to return other's kindness.

Mrs. Zhang: GOOD! Examples?

Mary: Um: she forgot money when she had lunch in the restaurant. At that time, it was Cheng Yuanyu who paid the bill for her.

Mrs. Zhang: So?

Mary: So, um, she sought ways to return his kindness afterwards.

Mrs. Zhang: What did she do? How did she return his kindness?

Mary: um…um (0.6)

Mrs. Zhang: Ok. You may sit down. Mike, how did Shi Yiniang return Cheng Yuan Yu's kindness?

Mike: She reminded him that it would be dangerous ahead, and later, she saved his life.

Mrs. Zhang: VERY GOOD! ((She wrote the term 'grateful' on the blackboard.)) You see, Mary and Mike gave us a very good model. [ii]

[i] "按照 IB 的要求，你们每个学生每个学期都应该参加一定的课外活动。咱们呢，这个学期比较特殊，考试任务比较重，所以一直就是以学习为主。但是这课外活动不能说就可以不参加了，是不是。你们班委会也不说自发地组织一些活动。这次要不是我来提醒，你们就等于没 CAS 的分了啊。再说了，且不说这是 IB 的要求，就是没有这要求，我们难道就只是死学习，各管各的了吗？ 我总:是：和你们强调要在活动中提升自己！越在这种时候，越能显出你们和那些普通公立学校的学生不一样。谁有能力，谁没能力，一下子就能看出来了。哦 (0.3)当然了我理解你们忙，所以我都为你们策划好了，这次活动一定是既要和考试相结合-不能是为了玩而玩，又不能搞得太严肃。所以咱们这次活动都定为一次考前心理活动游戏。

[ii] Oliver: 哦，这，哦，当她和程元玉谈功夫的时候，她说她听从师傅的教诲，哦，不嗜酒。后来呢，后来，程元玉就真的发现她是滴酒不沾。

Mrs. Zhang: °哦：° 十一娘是立心正直的。但是，你们大家记住一点啊 ((做手势让 Michel 坐下)) 就是说，你们回答问题的时候这个思：路一定要特别清楚，就像你们写文章时一样。你们第一步先得给出一个总括，然后下面再举具体例子。这是很重要的啊。其他人，谁还有什么要说的? (0.3) 谁来说说啊? (0.4) Ivy.

Mary: °哦 °（overlapping）

Mrs. Zhang: 记住啊 （overlapping）先要概括

Mary: 哦，她知恩图报。

Mrs. Zhang: 好！举个例子？

Mary: 哦，她在酒肆吃饭的时候没带钱。那次是程元玉帮她付的帐。

Mrs. Zhang: 继续呢？

Mary: 后面她就报恩了。

Mrs. Zhang: 她具体做了什么？十一娘到底怎么报程元玉的恩的？ Mike

Mike: 她提醒他说前面不太平，后来，她还救了他的命。

Mrs. Zhang: 非常好啊！((写板书：知恩图报))你们看啊，Ivy 和 Mike 给我个做了个很好的示范啊。