

Listen to children's heart

**- A study of 'voice', participation and child rights in multicultural
primary schools in China**

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MSc Thesis in Human Rights and Multiculturalism

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| Name: Li Liu | Date: 15.05.2014 |
| Title and subtitle: Listen to children's heart - A study of 'voice', participation and child rights in multicultural primary schools in China | |
| Abstract: This paper explores the extent of child participation in and beyond classrooms in Chinese multicultural primary schools. It draws on Freire's theory of critical pedagogy and on the insights of Hart (1992) and Lundy (2007) relating to child participation within the framework of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The research data is addressed through interviews with 18 students and 15 teachers from different cultural backgrounds, two classroom observations, textbook analysis and one workshop with teacher and child participants from the three primary schools in Wuxi City, China. This thesis investigates school rules and conditions relating to student participation in decision-making beyond classrooms, unveiling that Chinese multicultural primary schools are facing challenges: insufficient communication mechanisms; students' low capacity of expressing; and a widespread lack of legal or political knowledge of children's participation rights. It notes that schools need not only to improve facilities, mechanisms and policies, but also to facilitate students to express views and ensure these views are given due weight. The thesis examines curriculum and pedagogy regarding child participation in classrooms, arguing that Chinese multicultural primary schools are experiencing problems: inappropriate teaching methods; lack of critical consciousness; and an understanding of inequality. The thesis further suggests that teachers need to improve teaching methods (problem-posing education); to utilize the critical pedagogical approach; and to increase teachers' awareness. All these challenges or problems imply a "cultural shift" in teachers' consciousness by listening to children's "heart". By this the thesis implies that teachers need to go beyond the technical processes of listening. Moreover, to fully realize youth participation, educational reform is necessary, as is the development of a culture of encouraging child participation and child rights. | |
| Key words: child participation, child rights, China, primary schools, multiculturalism, critical pedagogy, social justice | |
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DECLARATION

I certify that this is all my own work. Any material quoted or paraphrased from reference books, journals, www. Etc. has been identified as such and duly acknowledged in the text or foot/end notes. Such sources are also listed in the bibliography. I have read the College's policy on plagiarism and am aware of the penalties for plagiarism.

I have retained a copy of my work.

Signed:Name:Li...Liu.....

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Abbreviations

CRC – Convention on the Rights of Child

EFA – Education for All

HRE – Human Rights Education

NCB – National Children’s Bureau

NGO – Non-governmental organization

NPCSC – National People’s Congress Standing Committee

SCWCWC – The State Council Working Committee on Women and Children

UDHR – Universal Declaration of Human Rights

UDCD – Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity

UN – United Nations

UNICEF – United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund

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1. Introduction

1.1 Research origins and reasons

My interest of research origins should be traced back to my study background. During my undergraduate period, I was a business student in accounting. When near the graduation, I thought about Martin Luther King's famous speech- "I have a dream". Then, I asked myself: "What is my dream?" Just as Martin Luther King's ideal to inspire people to fight for political equal rights, I also have an ideal of making contributions to social development. Although this seems to be a lofty ideal, but in my sincere belief, "without small streams, there would be no oceans."¹ In other words, if everyone makes small contributions, the world will be significantly changed and become much better. Moreover, recent challenges in China such as putting democracy into effect; enhancing human rights standards including children's rights and accommodating cultural diversity (which will be emphasized in this chapter later); these strengthened my faith in a new start in my student life- to study this Master program of Human Rights and Multiculturalism, a new discipline I never touched.

The reasons for choosing the topic of this thesis are linked to my study experience and social information I heard. During the period of studying in Norway in the past two years, I participated in the election for the new rector at the university in 2013, which I did not experience in China before. It was the first time that I felt the enthusiasm to participate in elections, which aroused my interests and attentions on the participation situation of citizens. This directly stimulates my keen interest to know more about citizenship participation.

Learning this Master program in the past two years is my first time studying abroad. I observe huge differences of education systems between different countries. From this program, I understand UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and child participation right for the first time. I also know from this program that most countries all around the world regard children's rights to protect and participate as important parts of basic education and

¹ A traditional Chinese saying: "不积小流无以成江海。"

human rights education (HRE). When I reminisce my past study experiences, I found that I rarely hear or see “child participation rights”. Basic education is a crucial period for adolescent to shape knowledge and values, thus this makes me more eager to explore the current situation of youth participation in Chinese schools.

Additionally, child rights are increasingly paid more attentions recently in China, Chinese education reforms are gradually grounded on child’s development, minority’s education is continuously developing; all seem to call for socio-cultural and educational changes in China. Hence, in view of this, this thesis attempts to contribute to social and educational development in aspects of child participation, child rights and multiculturalism.

1.2 Research question and purpose

As I mentioned in last part, the topic of this thesis is a complex one and it entails various themes, including child participation, child rights, education and cultural diversity. In light of this, I pose the following research main question:

To what extent do children participate in Chinese primary schools in the context of multiculturalism?

The themes’ conceptions will be mapped in later chapter (see Chapter 2- Literature review). Conducted around the main question, the thesis research involves both respects in schools- in and beyond classrooms. More explicit information about research fieldwork will be elaborated in Chapter 4- Methodology. The analytical tools will be discussed in Chapter 3- Theoretical framework.

My overall objective of this thesis is to develop a nuanced and deep understanding of the current situation of child participation through students’ and teachers’ “voice”. The purpose of drawing on children’s “voice” of their participating to decision-making on issues of school development and education improvements is to hear what they really think and need in their “heart”; While the aim of listening to teachers’ “voice” is to understand how they perceive

and how they respond to child's "voice". As I mentioned earlier, my primary reasons of undertaking this project are not only related to my experiences and social-political issues, but also my personal ideal of contributing to social and educational development in China. Although I acknowledge that I am not professional in the field of education, but I only pursue my ideal and hope to do my small part for social and educational development. This will also be elaborated in Chapter 4- Methodology. Hence, the purpose of this thesis is not simply to analyze the present situation of child participation, but make more contributions to education in China by providing some recommendations for adults to take appropriate actions to promote youth participation in primary schools with multicultural characters. My aim is to inject new ideas for education reforms in basic education in China. That is why in Chapter 5 and 6, I include both data analyses and suggestions. Specific objectives are as follows:

- To identify conceptions of children's rights, children's participation rights, schooling and multiculturalism from both international and Chinese perspectives.
- To analyze the current situation of youth participation which Chinese primary schools are implementing and promoting and how it is being understood by adults, teachers in particular.
- To evaluate and attempt to provide suggestions for children's participation in Chinese primary schooling in the context of diverse cultures.

1.3 Setting the scene through a cosmopolitan vision

The departure point of the thesis starts from viewing child participation rights and child rights through the cosmopolitan vision. For one thing, this study is more or less under the influence of international background, whilst for another it can grasp international development trend in this domain. Nowadays, children's rights have been increasingly drawn attentions world widely. Since Universal Declaration of Human rights (UDHR) presented over 60 years ago, with the highlighting of human rights, consciousnesses of children's rights have been increasingly recognized by democratic nations worldwide. This implies an adequate democracy for citizens, particular children's complete involvement.

In order to highlight and promote child rights, based on the declaration revised and expanded,

the UN Convention on the rights of the Child (CRC) in 1989 formally acknowledges children's rights for the first time in international law. It introduces a new children's status as rights-holders, rather than solely recipients of adults' protection and children's voices are entitled to be heard.

Up to now, the UNCRC has been ratified and acceded by 193 countries including all members of the United Nations (UN) except Somalia and the United States² (Child Rights Information Network, 2008; Amnesty International USA, 2008). Thereupon, on one hand, the public are delighted to see CRC being globally recognized in the world. It is unprecedented for an international convention to be acceded to almost universally in 24 years. On the other hand, while looking back on the practicing situation in various states, rights of millions of children are still violated. Violence against children happens everywhere: families, schools and public places. Assailants mainly include parents, teachers, and administrators. As Nelson Mandela reminds us, violence thrives in the absence of democracy and respect for human rights. "Violence against children persists as a permanent threat where authoritarian relationships between adults and children remain" (Pinheiro, 2006). Because realizing this, then there is a broad consensus especially among European countries- To fully realize democratic principles in our communities and societies we will require "a radical and cultural shift in adult thinking and behavior- from an exclusionary to an inclusionary approach to children and their capabilities" (Bellamy, 2002). Children's participation, as the right with basic value that ensuring all children's rights should be realized, is an embodiment of the "cultural shift", implying that children are their active rights-holders.

With regard to the meaning of child participation, firstly, it is beneficial for child's development. The state of the world's children 2003 clearly pointed out that "promoting meaningful and quality participation of children and adolescents is essential to ensuring their growth and development..." Moreover, in a broader sense, children as minors, they are going to inherit the cultural heritage and to build the civilization in the future, thus when children

² Both Somalia and the United States have signed the document but have not ratified it. Somalia had announced in late 2009, and again in November 2013, that it would eventually do so. South Sudan is set to ratify the CRC in 2013.

are involved, “they can make a difference in the world around them” (Bellamy, 2002). In light of this, children’s right to participation is important and it is necessary to make a research on child participation.

1.4 Children’s rights and participation right in China

The wave of attaching great importance to child rights and child participation right has been spread over every corner of the world, and China is no exception. In 1990, China became the 105th signatory states of the UNCRC. On December 29, 1991, the NPCSC³ approved China’s accession to UNCRC. On 2 March, 1992, China submitted the instrument of ratification to the UN, thus becoming the 110th country which ratified the CRC. On 1 April, 1992, China officially put CRC into practice. To China, as a member of the UN Human Rights Council, it is inevitable to pay attentions to children’s rights so as to fulfill international due responsibilities. This is also in line with the strategies of promoting democratic process in China.

Looking back over the past 20 years, by and large, the realization of children’s rights in China has been moved forward in a certain degree. “Since China participated in the CRC in 1992, China has been following the spirit of the Convention, actively performing the obligations, persisting in the priority of the principle of the child, implementing the strategy of children’s development, and promoting the realization of rights of each child”⁴ (Xinhua News, 2013). Chinese government and social organizations implemented large amounts of activities and projects for advocating children’s right, such as child rights investigations, organizing seminars, providing child workers training, organizing children’s rights forum. These are also with the helps of international organizations, (for example, United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF)) and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), (like the Save the Children UK). However, “while affirming those developments and

³ NPCSC is the abbreviation of the National People’s Congress Standing Committee.

⁴ This is translated by my own.

achievements regarding child living and protection, the situation of protecting child rights are still faced with difficulties and challenges” (ibid, 2013).

Interestingly, during the period of UN Committee’s observation on the implementation of CRC in China in 2013⁵, the authenticity of official data presented by Chinese delegates was disputed by UN Committee, despite some difficulties and challenges being elucidated. According to Chinese delegates’ statements, “many Chinese NGOs are faced with obstacles when attempting to participate in the preparations for submitting the report.” That is to say, due to national confidential system, statistics on child rights are not allowed to be reported, especially upper the provincial level. This directly results in the challenges that accurate realities are unavailable in public (ibid, 2013).

Regarding children’s particular right of participation, the 25th National People’s Congress Standing Committee (NPCSC) confirmed child participatory right as one of the fundamental legal youth rights. In response to the call of NPCSC, many regions across the country have put youth participation into practice. For example, in August 2004, young people were invited to participate in local legislative period in the Shanghai People’s Congress, to give their recommendations to formulate the regulation for minors’ protection in Shanghai (Yao, 2004); On December 1st, 2006, 11 student representatives attended the Guangdong Provincial People’s Congress. Their advices were absorbed and summarized into law provisions in the *Guangdong Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency Regulations*. These are new forms of exploring minors’ participation in legislation, and also new attempts to open the legislative door for children to participate (Lai, 2006). However, these examples are rare. So far as I know, it is a fact that studies on children’s living right; education right and developing right have been indeed emphasized frequently. While I also notice that during the process of oral reporting to UN committee’s observation on the implementation of UNCRC in China, children’s participation rights remain absent (Xinhua News, 2013). Hence, seeing those

⁵ Recently, on September 26-27, 2013, in Geneva, the UN Committee on the rights of the Child reviewed China’s implementation of CRC. This was the first comprehensive review in eight years. The Chinese delegation consisted of officials from mainland, Hong Kong, Macao and even National Defense, along with over hundred people from international NGOs.

deficiencies and challenges of relevant investigations, my interest was inspired to explore the real situation of children's participation rights in China.

1.5 Education in China

- Chinese educational legislative development and the education system

As the saying goes, "Rome was not built in a day." Chinese democratic education system and legislative framework what we are seeing today have been moved forward step by step. Since the establishment of People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, basic education, along with educational reforms in several decades has developed significantly.

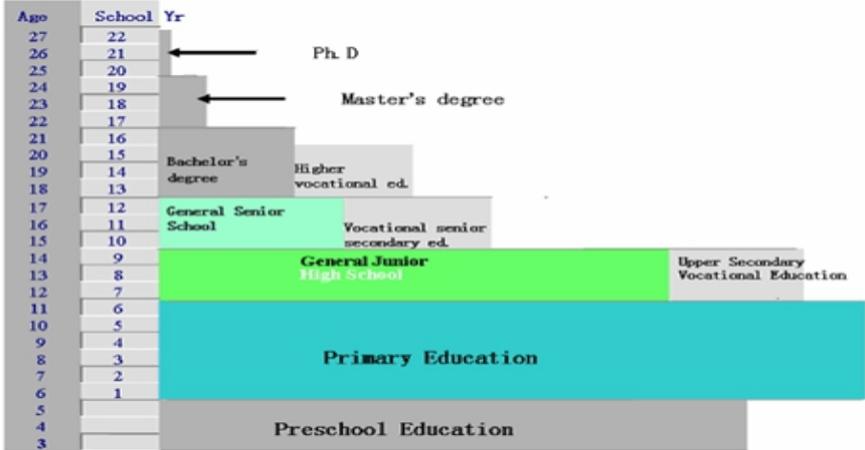
Before the opening up reform in 1978, "compulsory education" had not been upgraded to the legal level. During the period of the Cultural Revolution years (1966-1976) made the government realize that "the over-centralization will impede participatory democracy and suppress dynamic innovations in local communities, and... might lead to wrong decision-making" (Zhou & Zhu, 2007, p.6). Hence, it was recognized that to achieve the education *for* masses, education should be implemented *through* masses. This idea could be seen in the practice of "Nine-year Compulsory education" since 1985 and "Compulsory Education Law of PRC" in 1986. Afterwards, the development of basic education, especially compulsory education was speeded up across the country.

In addition, Chinese central government also deeply understands that it is governments' responsibilities for safeguarding compulsory education. The newly revised "Compulsory Education Law" states that "to establish a mechanism of compulsory education funds to safeguard the implementation of compulsory education system" (Compulsory Education Law, 2006). This marks that the implementation of free compulsory education has raised to national willingness. This is widely hailed as "significant milestone in the history of Chinese education development" (ibid, 2006).

“Over two decades since mid-1980s, more than 80 educational laws and regulations have been developed and under implementation”, involved and enacted each other after discussions involving all stakeholders such as Central Government, policy-makers, expertise, schools, teachers (Zhou & Zhu, 2007). All those legislative efforts intend to ensure education quality within Chinese education system.

When it comes to education system, it is necessary to talk about the education system framework in China. Figure 1.1 below demonstrates the framework of Chinese education system, regarding student’s age, school grades and years lasting during every level of education. Compulsory education in China lasts for nine years. Children enter primary school when they become the year of six. Before primary school, children may have attended preschool for several years. “Basic education” in China is composed of three-year preschool education, six-year primary education, three-year junior high school and three-year senior high school education. At higher education level, there are two or three year’s vocational-technical colleges, four-year colleges offering bachelors degrees, radio-TV colleges, and some other higher education institutions. Master’s degree programs take two to three years and doctoral degree program take another three years. In this thesis research, participants are students and teachers in primary schools. This will be illustrated in Chapter 4, and more specific information about research participants could also be seen in Appendix 4.

Figure 1.1 The Education System in China



Source: Yang Jin, “Basic Education in China”, a presentation at International Seminar on education, May 2005, Ministry of Education.

Additionally, it is worth noting the other key factor in improving the quality of education-curriculum, which could “reflect educational aims and conveys systematic educational content” (Zhou & Zhu, 2007, p.21). In recent years, Chinese education is continuously attempting and exploring through curriculum reforms. As Zhou and Zhu observed, “after the Conference on Education for All (EFA) held in Jomtien in 1990 proclaiming to ‘meet the basic learning needs’ and ‘expand the high-quality basic education’, basic education in China is on a new stage of improving the education quality via curriculum reforms” (ibid, 2007). Compared to the past, recently, the content of human rights education (HRE) and citizenship education start to be found scattered in the materials of ideological and moral curricula during the period of basic education. This illustrates that the importance of human rights education and awareness of children’s rights are gradually developing in recent years.

In this thesis, research sites are primary schools in Wuxi City, China. It is located in Jiangsu Province, which is one of the provinces on the way of continuous attempting the curriculum reform. Therefore, like I mentioned before, through selecting this place to conduct research, I hope this thesis could also provide some reference or ideas to curriculum reforms.

1.6 Multi-cultures and ethnic education in China

China is a country of multi-cultures. Having experienced over five thousand years of history, today’s China serves as a home to 56 distinct ethnicities, made up of the largest group- Han and 55 other ethnic minorities.⁶ Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (UDCD) developed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization affirms that “the wide diffusion of culture, and the education of humanity for justice and liberty and peace are indispensable to the dignity of man” and aspires “to greater solidarity on the basis of recognition of cultural diversity, of awareness of the unity of humankind, and of the development of intercultural exchanges” (UNESCO, 2001). Thus it is the nation’s duty to make ethnic unity and cultural co-prosperity.

⁶ There are no so-called indigenous people in China. “Indigenous people” are considered as opposed to “immigrants”, but seeing from Chinese history, all of the 56 ethnic groups are long-dwelling, thus China has barely ethnic minorities.

It is recognized by various European countries that to achieve the ethnic unity, a shift should be made “from suppressing sub-state nationalisms to accommodating them” (Kymlicka, 2007, p.70). And the state should “through a range of ‘nation-building’ policies” (ibid, p.62). To China, in order to make harmonious relationship between the majority “Han” and ethnic minorities and to achieve common development and prosperity, it can be observed that China has taken certain legal and political measures. However, when implementing those laws and policies, some challenges and problems are inevitably encountered.

First of all, in legal and political aspects, the Law on Regional Ethnic Autonomy in 1984 confirmed the regional autonomy right of minority groups. However, power conflicts and separatist forces in minority areas such as Sinkiang and Tibet are the long-lasting problems, which directly hinder the peaceful majority-minority relationship.

Secondly, in cultural respect, certain measures have been taken to protect minority cultures. For example, Cultural Heritage Protection Center was built up in Beijing. In 2010, Chinese government gave grants to protect and restore cultural heritage. Yet, many private investigations reveal that there are many places trying to dig economic benefits out from intangible cultural heritage (Meng, 2008, p.3). This directly leads to that ethnic cultures what we see are only for meeting tourist needs. More precisely, traditional ethnic cultures are often simplified as series of performances in fixed scenes; living cultures are “shaped” as settled and concretionary “essentialized” views in travelers’ minds. In other words, minority cultures presented in public are not natural dynamic cultures, but merely the “empty shell”.

Thirdly, on the matter of ethnic education, Chinese constitution formulates that “to receive basic education are rights and duties of citizens”, which implies that any school-age children including minorities should be ensured and allowed to realize the right to education. In fact, China had taken certain steps of encouragement and provided equal educational opportunities for minorities to study (Constitution of China, 1982). For example, Article 10 of the

Compulsory Education Law (1986) formulates the decision of tuition-free to guarantee children's compulsory education, regardless of ethnics; the policy of extra score enhancement for minority students in the college entrance examination could encourage minority children to develop education in minority regions.

Besides, on the aspect of language using in national education, minorities have the right of choosing language. Constitution of China (1982) stipulates that "minorities have the right of choosing language" and bilingual education could be used in multi-ethnic students' education. To those schools (classes) and other educational institutions recruiting minority students based, if conditions permitting, minority students could adopt textbooks and lectures in minority languages; and could be opened mandarin courses according to different grades, to promote the use of mandarin and standard Chinese characters.

Although it might be admitted that the purpose of bilingual education is to promote national language Mandarin and to protect minority cultural languages simultaneously, to those minority languages without writing languages like Tujia language and Hezhe language, widely writing mandarin might result in disappearance of their minority languages. I also find that no definite statistics of the implementation situation of bilingual education are available. Thus whether or not bilingual education is effective and practicable is questionable.

As shown from data of Chinese fifth national census in 2000, minority students in various schools were in lower proportion of students. The quality of school equipment (such as classrooms, dormitories, teaching equipment) and soft facilities (like teacher qualities and curriculums) are in the low level. In terms of illiteracy rate, six of the seven provinces with highest illiteracy rate are minority areas⁷ (Chinese Fifth National Census, 2000).

Generally speaking, Chinese multicultural education has some developments, along with challenges. This inspires me to explore the actual situation of education in the context of multi-cultures. In my thesis research, participants are teachers and pupils from different ethnic

⁷ Contents are translated by my own.

groups, including majority “Han” and four minority groups. Based on the gathered data, I will report multicultural issues in relation to social justice between majority and minorities in Chapter 5 and 6.

1.7 Outline of this thesis

This chapter introduces the research reasons, question and purpose, and briefly set the context of the thesis, which is divided into several sections. Firstly, based on some legal norms and policies, it depicts the situation of child rights and child participation from a cosmopolitan vision to Chinese vision. Secondly, I narrate Chinese educational legislative development and illustrate Chinese education system. Thirdly, I introduce and discuss multi-cultures and multicultural education in China.

Next chapter- Chapter two entails the illustration of the development from the conception of childhood towards child rights in the international perspective, followed by presenting the conception of children’s participation right and exploring the importance of youth participation in schools. Lastly, it continues with a brief overview of multicultural education world widely and a particular look into Chinese studies.

Chapter three creates a theoretical framework which is combined with three theories: Hart’s ladder of participation, Lundy’s model of reconceptualizing Article 12 CRC and famous scholar- Freire’s critical pedagogical approach. Based on the theoretical perspectives, I present and discuss how and where I utilize those theories respectively.

Chapter four outlines aspects on methodology throughout the research and fieldwork process. I also address my specific role of a researcher and relevant ethical considerations.

Chapter five and six are two parts of data analysis and discussion. Chapter five presents on current situation of school conditions beyond classrooms and Chapter six looks directly into the classrooms. Based on interviews, two classroom observations, textbook analysis and one

workshop, I attempt to analyze the current situation of child participation in Chinese multicultural primary schools.

The last chapter- Chapter seven makes a summary and provides recommendations for further relevant studies, Chinese educational reforms and looks into the ways forward.

2. Literature review and mapping key concepts

In Chapter 1, I set the general background of my thesis, and in this chapter, I will make a review on related literatures having been done. Due to limitation of Chinese literatures in this field, this chapter draws largely on the international literatures. As I mentioned earlier, the focus of this thesis requires hook-ups bringing steps together various themes. For this purpose, this chapter commences with the development from the conception of childhood towards child rights internationally, in order to shed light on the roots of children's participation right. Secondly, on the basis of the Article 12 in CRC, scholars' arguments on whether children should have the specific right to participate are discussed. Thirdly, it discusses the significance of children's participation on schooling, followed by contextualizing multicultural education. Lastly, standing on the angle of China, a general view of Chinese literatures regarding child rights, children's participation right and multicultural education is made.

In this chapter, various themes will be discussed and illustrated so as to lay a foundation for establishing a theoretical framework in the next chapter. While theoretical framework can also be a support for comprehending the more in-depth concept of children's participation in schools.

2.1 From the conception of childhood towards children's rights

When it comes to the conception of childhood, it could be traced back to the seventeenth century. "It was not until the seventeenth century that art started to give children a distinct place" (Johnny, 2006, p.18). Scholar Aries examines historical images of childhood and argues against the conception of childhood as natural phenomenon. He insists that children's childhood was not treasured, by further pointing out that adults lack understanding of childhood (Aries, 1962). While Archard (1993) holds a different perspective from Aries, he considers childhood itself as a transforming concept. For example, in past centuries, people did not always believe children should be kept innocent of sexual knowledge.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth century, to transform the notion of childhood began to be an ethos under the influence of literary works. In this period, a new understanding of childhood and children's rights was coming up gradually. For instance, both Rousseau and Wordsworth highlight children's natural virtues. He suggests that children ought to be protected from adults (Hendrick, 1997); Blake believes that childhood is the source of innocence. However, to confirm the importance of protecting children does not mean acknowledging children's social status. Until the period of industrialization, when a specific issue- children labor was highlighted, children's status in a society had been built up and childhood notion has transferred into a new one. At that time, "children's labor was seen as a social fact, rather than a social problem" (Hart, 1991). As Osler and Starkey observe, "in Europe until the nineteenth century, children were generally not perceived as a different category from adults and tended to be regarded as a different category from adults and tended to be regarded as the property of their parents, to whom they were expected to fulfill particular duties, often playing a key economic role in family life (Osler & Starkey, 2010, p.103).

In the late twentieth century, childhood reaches its peak. Political parties started to place children as a top priority on their agendas, noting that children were the key to the future (Johnny, 2006, p.20). This is due to the impact of feminism in the late 1960s. Feminists mainly revealed that women were vulnerable product of social construction. And child liberationists applied this thought to the conception of children, calling for a thought of children's emancipation. "Liberationists" like Holt (1974), Farson (1974) and Cohen (1980) claimed that children should have totally equal rights to adults currently have. According to their claims, changes should be made to discriminating treatment that children suffer from adults by taking effective measures to improve their situation. However, although child liberationist's argument has been considered and debated within scholarship over the past thirty years, its application has been less successful" (Johnny, 2006, p.22).

Under such a changing context of international deliberations, in 1989, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which calls upon adults and states to secure and protect children's rights; at the meantime, it is also the first legal instrument emancipating participatory rights of children to give children's views of decision-making in a certain degree. And there is no doubt that "the CRC corrects the adult bias of mainstream human rights." The highlight issues are no longer only child abuse, child labor, child soldiers, right to play, but those rights corresponding to a broad spectrum of children's needs (Eva Brems, 2013, p.206). In Freeman's opinion, this implies that the focus of claims regarding children's rights moves "from protection to autonomy, from nurturance to self-determination, from welfare to justice" (Freeman, 1992, p.3).

Since CRC articulated a wide range of rights for children, there are various alternatives of categorizing those rights to elaborate and facilitate the understanding of child rights. Verhellen insists that child rights in CRC coincide with the traditional five categories of human rights: adults civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights (Verhellen, 1997). And the UNICEF chose to promote the Convention by utilizing four categories, namely survival, protection, development and participation. This dividing way is similar to the four categories suggested by Save the Children UK: the right to survive, the right to be safe, the right to belong and the right to develop. However, Cantwell argues that this categorization has placed too much emphasis on survival rights. He prefers the categorization of "3Ps", which are provision of basic needs; protection from harmful acts; participation in decisions affecting their lives (Cantwell, 1993). In this regard, I agree with Flekkøy and Kaufman's opinions, believing that different categories of children's rights should be regarded as "interrelated and mutually reinforcing" (Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997). Osler and Starkey also believe that, "however rights are categorized, the rights enshrined in the CRC are invisible and serve to reinforce each other (Osler & Starkey, 2010, p.104).

2.2 Article 12 and children's participation right

Nowadays, participation right is often perceived as one of the "3Ps" rights in the CRC, and

“the principle of engaging with young people and taking their perspectives seriously in educational and other areas of decision-making is enshrined in Article 12.” Article 12 of the CRC states that:

1. State Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.

More specifically, on one hand, Article 12 of the Convention proclaims that children have the right to be respected and are provided with opportunities of participation to express their views in matters; On the other hand, this article reminds us their opinions should be listened and considered to be given due weight in accordance with their age and level of maturity. In the opinions of Osler and Starkey (2010), such “respect and consideration imply a cultural shift in the ways we understand childhood and in the social positioning of children.”

In fact, to compare with the 1959 Declaration on the Rights of the Child, except for provision and protection rights, the 1989 CRC encompasses the participation right as a “new added” right, which simultaneously aroused more controversy sound. There is a general view believing that children lack the maturity to participate, and their childhood will be taken away. Franklin (1995) hold the standpoint that children lack competence to make reasonable and meaningful decisions; children lack experience, thus they tend to make mistakes (Wyse, 2001, p.209). To argue against it, Lansdown defines a “self-confirming cycle” where children-perceived vulnerability would undermine their participation. She further points out that this is owing to the inaccurate understanding of childhood and an exaggerated sense of children’s vulnerability:

“It is the predominance of a protective model in the construction of our relationships

with children which has inhibited the development of appropriate recognition of children's real capacity for participation...A self-confirming cycle is established. Children are perceived as lacking competence to take responsibility for their own lives, and therefore as vulnerable and in need of protection. Because they need protection, adults are invested with powers to act on their behalf. Because children are denied the powers to make decisions or fully participate in them, they are rendered more vulnerable to the authority of adults (Lansdown, 1995, p.22).

Flekkøy and Kaufman considers that the point is not whether or not child has the competence for making decisions, or at which stage child has adequate maturity to make certain decisions. The focus should be "when there is a real need for consideration of the child." Therefore, "incompetence cannot fairly be a good reason for denying rights, for children any more than for adults. If this was done, many adults would also be excluded (Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997, p.48).

Moreover, seeing that child's insufficient competence could not become a reason for retreating from participating, others further note that, on the contrary, participation could be a means to gain more competence. According to Verhellen, "In fact the outcome of the debate on competence ought to be that it is essential that children's right to self-determination be (gradually) recognized because... they have gained more competence" (Verhellen, 1997, p.28). Agreed with Verhellen's views, having studied children's participation in different cultures, Roger Hart argues that youth participation into meaningful projects with adults is a significant training. "Children need to be involved in meaningful projects with adults... an understanding of democratic participation and the confidence and competence to participate can only be acquired gradually through practice" (Hart, 1992, p.5).

In addition to those discussions about "children's immaturity", others concern that too many rights given to children will lead their power over adults, thus they will show no respect for adults. Lansdown deems that

"children should not be led to believe that they alone have a right to have a voice...

Listening to children is about respecting them and helping them to learn to value the importance of respecting others. It is not about reaching them to ignore their parents...

Listening to children is a positive symbol of love and respect” (Lansdown, 2001, p.8).

In other words, encouraging children to participate should not to be regarded as a threatening to their respect for adults; on the contrary, giving the youth to participate can be seen as another way of teaching children know how to respect.

In my opinion, those standpoints of “inherent immaturity” and “no respect for adults” are misunderstandings to CRC, thus how to understand children’s participation in a correct way become particularly important. As Lansdown observes:

“It is important to understand clearly what Article 12 does and does not say. It does not give children the right to autonomy. It does not give children the right to control over all decisions irrespective of their implications either for themselves or others. It does not give children the right to ride roughshod over the rights of their parents. However, it does introduce radical and profound challenge to traditional attitudes, which assume that children should be seen and not heard” (Lansdown, 2001, p.2).

2.3 Children’s participation on schooling

This thesis set the domain as primary schools, then, it might be doubted about the particular meaning of children to participate in the concrete domain of schools. In other words, why is child participation in schools of importance? Thus this part will throw light on the significance of children’s participation on schooling.

2.3.1 For children themselves

To children themselves, participation can protect children better and lead them to their future fulfillment. Someone might argue that giving children’s rights contradicts with children’s need for adults’ protection. As discussed earlier, the Article 12 CRC does not give children all the same adult rights. On the contrary, it will enhance children’s competence (Verhellen, 1997; Hart, 1992). Chamber believes that this makes sense especially for pupils to help their

learning. Participation can increase self-esteem and personal control in children's lives: "Participation helps people to discover their potential, to realize their talents and raise their self-esteem. In turn this can help them to question their boundaries and explore issues, voice aspiration, identify needs and facilitate their learning and personal development" (Chamber, 2005, p.14).

Besides, Lansdown (2001) notes that "adults can only act to protect children if they know that is happening in children's lives- only children can provide that information." For instance, through encouraging children to talk, children can speak out to protect themselves from abuses and violations such as physical punishments, bullying, and other problems of inequality such as gender discrimination, racism; those phenomena will be found, not merely reliant on adults' protection. Moreover, speaking out to defend their rights and learning to seek better ways of their lives can also exercise their capacities and experiences, which can lay a good foundation for their future developments.

Additionally, the realization of child participation is also an achievement of child's fundamental human right (ibid, p.7). Article 19 of the Universal Declaration on Human rights (UDHR) stipulates that: Everyone has the right to freedom of opinions and expression. Undoubting, children belong to the domain of "human beings", thus to put human's basic rights into the first place is especially significant in the main place of cultivating children-schools.

2.3.2 For teachers and policy-makers

As far as teachers and policy-makers are concerned, children's participation- taking into children's views into consideration, can lead to better decisions for children. The National Children's Bureau (NCB) reflects the fact of values and principles that children are the primary focus of the NCB's interest, rather than policy-makers or service providers, including teachers and parents...Research that includes the perspectives of children is clearly valuable to policy-makers, although it might be argued for encompassing many different perspectives

of interest groups in a particular social context, including children, is perhaps of great value (Osler, 2010, p.27).

As Lansdown observes, “Schools involving children and introducing more democratic structures are likely to be more harmonious, have better staff/pupil relationships and a more effective learning environment” (Lansdown, 2001, p.5). Children have different perspectives from adults, and “children have a body of experience and knowledge that is unique to their situation”, thus only knowing what are children concerned about would children be far better protected by adults acting in a correct way. For example, in views of policy-makers or teachers, certain issues like policies or pedagogy is suitable for students, but children do not think so, thus it needs students’ expressing their views out to improve policy setting and education methods; some imperfect school facilities are overlooked by teachers, thus here needs students to request to optimize education environment.

2.3.3 For social democracy and human rights

Schools are ought to be regarded not only as the place that imparts knowledge and skills to pupils, but also as the environment of socializing for democracy. Although, over a century ago, Durkheim rejected the idea that education could be the force to transform society and resolve social ills. Instead, he deems that education “can be reformed only if society itself is reformed” (Durkheim, 1951, p.372). Until the twentieth century, this opinion had been changed into: education could be a democratic force for students to participate actively in all sides of democratic social life. One of the representative supporters is John Dewey (1940), who makes explicit the need for the processes of education for democratic citizenship to reflect democratic principles (Osler, 2010, p.120). In the later years, this was more acknowledged in the aspect of school curriculum guidance world widely. It is affirmed that:

“Democracy is best learned in a democratic setting where participation is encouraged, where views can be expressed openly and discussed, where there is freedom of expression for pupils and teachers and where there is fairness and justice” (Banks, 2004, p.13).

By this token, the aim of education for democracy is to fully participate in democratic life; In turn, it can also be inferred that the implementation of participation in schools is in accordance with the aim of education- for social democracy.

At this point, to further understand the significance of children’s participation in schools for social democracy, Carter and Osler (2000) democratize the school by proposing three pillars for schools where children’s rights are respected: democracy, inclusion and transparency (Figure 2.1).

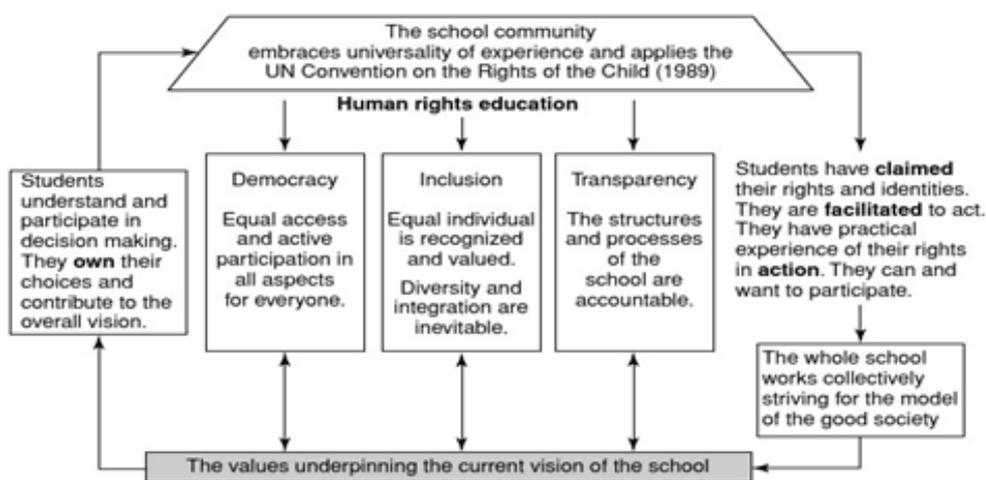


Figure 2.1 Democratizing the school. Source: Carter and Osler (2000)

“Democracy implies equal access and active participation in all aspects of school life for all; this can only be achieved if the principle of *inclusion* is operationalized: each individual needs to be recognized and valued, so that there is respect for diversity and integration of all groups into the collective life of the school; The third pillar, *transparency* means that appropriate structures and processes need to be in place and need to be subject to community scrutiny” (Osler, 2010, p.13).

Through the interrelations between the three pillars for underpinning values of the school community, students will participate in decision making, and own their choices and contribute to the overall vision. This will lead to a real democracy in the society.

2.4 Contextualizing multicultural education

It is overwhelming agreed amongst researchers that students from diverse cultural backgrounds conduce to their participation. “Students who are exposed to diverse experiences perspectives and ways of thinking that truly reflect the multiracial and multiethnic society... will be better prepared to participate meaningfully in it” (Chang, 2003, p.13; Milem, 2003). In this thesis, all the primary schools are with multicultural characters. Irene said that “no where is this truer than in multicultural education” (Irene, 2007, p.39). Hence, it is vital to review researches in the multicultural dimension.

As I presented in last section, one of the three pillars for democratizing the school is inclusion, with the purposes of promoting equality and a shared or integrated culture in the background of cultural diverse. As Trotman asserts, “multiculturalism tries to restore a sense of wholeness in a postmodern era that fragments human life and thought” (Trotman, 2002, p.ix). Hence, multiculturalism calls for greater mutual respect and acceptance between cultures. McNergney and Herbet (2001) propose a “melting pot” perspective, to reduce prejudice and discrimination and promote a shared culture, namely, a view of integration. However, it is argued that the melting pot perspective might not be applicable because students cannot or don’t wish to quit their own cultural characteristics. Therefore, different approaches of education are advocated by different scholars in praise of multicultural education.

Some researchers think that speaking about multi-cultures at schools is not a sound way. Jonhson (1995) considered that “the best way to avoid tensions is teaching ‘sanitized’.” Nevertheless, in order not to make students face difference, Narayan (1988) keeps the pedagogical environment “safe” by avoiding confronting aspects of cultural difference. It might be critiqued as unrealistic to completely reject multicultural part in schools, but it could be seen that the cross-cultural engagement is not an easy matter to deal with. Hereto, “dialogue across difference” in critical pedagogy is an uncritically accepted view (Darder, Baltodano and Torres, 2003). This approach is founded on Paulo Freire’s model of dialogue

which advocated teachers and students from different multicultural backgrounds to enter into reciprocal critical conversations.

“ Dialogue is not a simple exchange of ideas consumed by participants, nor a manipulation of one by another... It requires intense faith in others, and develops trust: Founding itself upon love, humanity and faith, dialogue becomes a horizontal relationship of which mutual trust between participants is the logical consequence” (Freire, 1972, p.64).

Although it might be questioned to what extent can this “dialogue” be guaranteed, but at least, it is a good way to examine power relations between the participating groups (McLaren, 1995), relating to a vast range of issues, from “awareness” or cultural values to politicized orientation to social justice (Burbules, 1993).

2.5 Looking into particular studies in China

By reviewing international literatures from children’s rights to participation right and then, to multicultural education, it can be observed that despite there has been always different views, children’s participation in schools and multicultural education are of great benefits, and both have a certain degree of research all around the world. Since my thesis being focused on Chinese background, it is necessary to look into particular Chinese studies.

2.5.1 Studies on child rights

China as one of the co-sponsors of CRC has always attached great importance and has made positive contributions to protecting children’s rights. However, despite some progressive studies have been made in relation to protecting child’s right, most of them are focused on provision and protection rights in 3Ps. Most Chinese scholars believe that children should be given special protection in aspects of laws, family education, and mass media. Zhou and some scholars considered that “the lack of legal protection is the major factor that makes the child protection situation worrying”⁸ (Zhou, 2011; Shan, 2005). Other Chinese scholars deem that to respect and protect children’s rights are new requirements of social development, which requires family education. Guan believes that “in the ‘system engineering’ of protecting

⁸ All those references in part 2.5 are translated by my own.

children's rights, families bear the primary, special and inescapable responsibility" (Guan, 2009, p.2). She also points out that the degrees of parents' consciousness, voluntarily, behaviors and abilities play a vital role in child's life and development, which also matter the rights of the child to be fully exercised and maintained. Yang and Hao through a survey in Shanghai found that recently children's rights in families have got better protection than before. They further note that children's sense of self-protection and parental awareness of children's rights are the main factors might affect the situation of children's protection (Yang & Hao, 2008).

Besides, there are large portions of Chinese scholars study on the influence of mass media on child protection (Liu, 2008; Li, 2013; Cheng, 2009). They believe that children's rights protection currently is not optimistic. And one typical reason is the bad impact from mass media on child rights (Cheng, 2009). For instance, some television shows undermine children's mental health and values, encroaching on children's right to development; some entertainment media causes the "secondary victimization" on children, making inroads on children's right to be protected. These also need adults' correct guidance and mass media's management (ibid, 2009).

Additionally, it should be ascertained that very few studies on children's participation rights in schools could be found. Most theses and articles in relation to child participation address on introducing the general condition of child participation. Hence, it is necessary to conduct more researches relating to child participation right in China.

2.5.2 Studies on education and multicultural education in schools

School is a microcosm of society, an important medium for implementing children's participation, and also an important area for children to participate in educational practice. There are many studies in Chinese schools drawing on citizenship education in China. Cong highlights that a fundamental task of schools is to implement civic education. He also believes that the important way to implement is the curriculum of social studies. As Cong discusses,

social studies curriculum is not a simple sum of geographic content, but “needs to be related to the content of the selection and arrangement according to the purpose of civic education” (Cong, 2002, p.21). Similar to Cong’s viewpoints, Gao also stresses the vital effect of curriculum on social studies: “social studies curriculum is the product of developing process of social democratization,” and learning social studies curriculum “could strengthen civic education in schools” (Gao, 2002, p.13). Furthermore, she addresses to train students to become responsible citizens with an ability of critical way of thinking” in social studies curriculum, in order to achieve the person’s self-realization.

In addition, a small part of researches about China in relation to schools are about social justice. Zhao’s study is based on a political background that in order to narrow the urban-rural educational gap, village schools are replaced by urban boarding schools, which aims for protecting students’ human rights and extending social justice. By moving beyond the matter of financial constraints, Zhao discovers that policy consumers, including children, are passive participants and overlooked. Moreover, he suggests that “a fundamental change to eliminate injustice and enhance human rights of the vulnerable groups must rely upon ‘government by discussion’” (Zhao, 2011, p.247).

When it comes to the precise dimension of multicultural education, most Chinese scholars study on multicultural education in western countries (mainly on American and England). They analyze historical development, policies and practices of multicultural education in the west, so as to make references for China to promote it (Lyu, 2008; Jin, 2009). Other researchers insist that “it is a necessary tool to deal with Chinese ethnic education problems by using theories and experiences of multicultural education for reference”, which is widely affirmed that the core is “to construct multicultural curriculum” (Liao, 2004; Tong, 2006). Yet, it should be noted that studies on multicultural education are mostly focused on ethnic schools, not ordinary schools with characters of cultural diverse.

2.6 Summary

This chapter mainly reviews and discusses literatures on child rights, child participation right, the importance of children's participation and multicultural education in the international perspective. However, by comparing with those mature international researches, it is noteworthy that the Chinese research field about child participation in multicultural schools seems to have rather a young status, particularly in ordinary schools with multicultural characteristics. Therefore, more research in this regard deems to be necessary and this could be another reason for me to do a research in this field.

Next chapter will discuss the assessment approaches or models for child participation and child rights in multicultural schools, which acts as a theoretical framework underpinning the entire thesis.

3. Creating the theoretical framework

“ The theoretical framework consists of the theories or issues in which your study is embedded” (Ranjit, 2011). This chapter provides the theoretical framework of this thesis, which combines with theories.

First, Hart’s typology of the ladder of participation depicts adult-child power relations. I adopt it to grasp the general degree of students’ participation and build upon and extend it to consider of the multicultural dimension of schooling (Hart, 1992). Secondly, Lundy’s model, reconceptualizes Article 12 into four specific contents: space, voice, audience and influence. Based on these four dimensions, I apply Lundy’s model to assess the concrete contents of students’ participation throughout the entire process of analysis. Besides, the equality between majority and minorities can also be viewed through Lundy’s model (Lundy, 2007). Thirdly, when stepping into classrooms, children’s participation is observed by combining both Lundy’s and Freire’s theories. Freire’s critical pedagogical approach proposes that during the teaching process, the banking concept of education should be substituted by a critical pedagogical approach. I utilize Freire’s theory as a tool to investigate teaching methods and interactive relations between teacher and students in class (Freire, 1970), drawing on Lundy’s concepts to supplement his theory.

This chapter establishes a general view of the conditions or criteria to evaluate and subsequently make recommendations for children’s participation rights in school in the following chapters. Chapter 5, via Lundy’s model and Hart’s typology, largely draws on views of both teachers and students on issues beyond the classrooms, relating to school conditions and organizational arrangements. Chapter 6 addresses on issues of curriculum and pedagogy in the classroom, which are discussed through Freire’s critical pedagogical approach and Lundy’s model.

3.1 Grasping the general status by means of the ladder of participation

Developed from Arnstein's Ladder- conceptualizing participation as power (Arnstein, 1969), Roger Hart's "Ladder of Youth Participation" is a modeling tool which uses the metaphor of "a ladder" to identify eight levels of children's participation ranging from low to high in the context of research projects. The emergence of the ladder was one part of the global driving force for youth participation and had a significant impact on discussions about the nature of children's participation in decision-making. Although it is designed for children's participation in projects, rather than in decision-making concerning their own care, it can be a starting point to encourage those working with children to think more closely about the nature and purpose of children's participation. (See Figure 3.1)

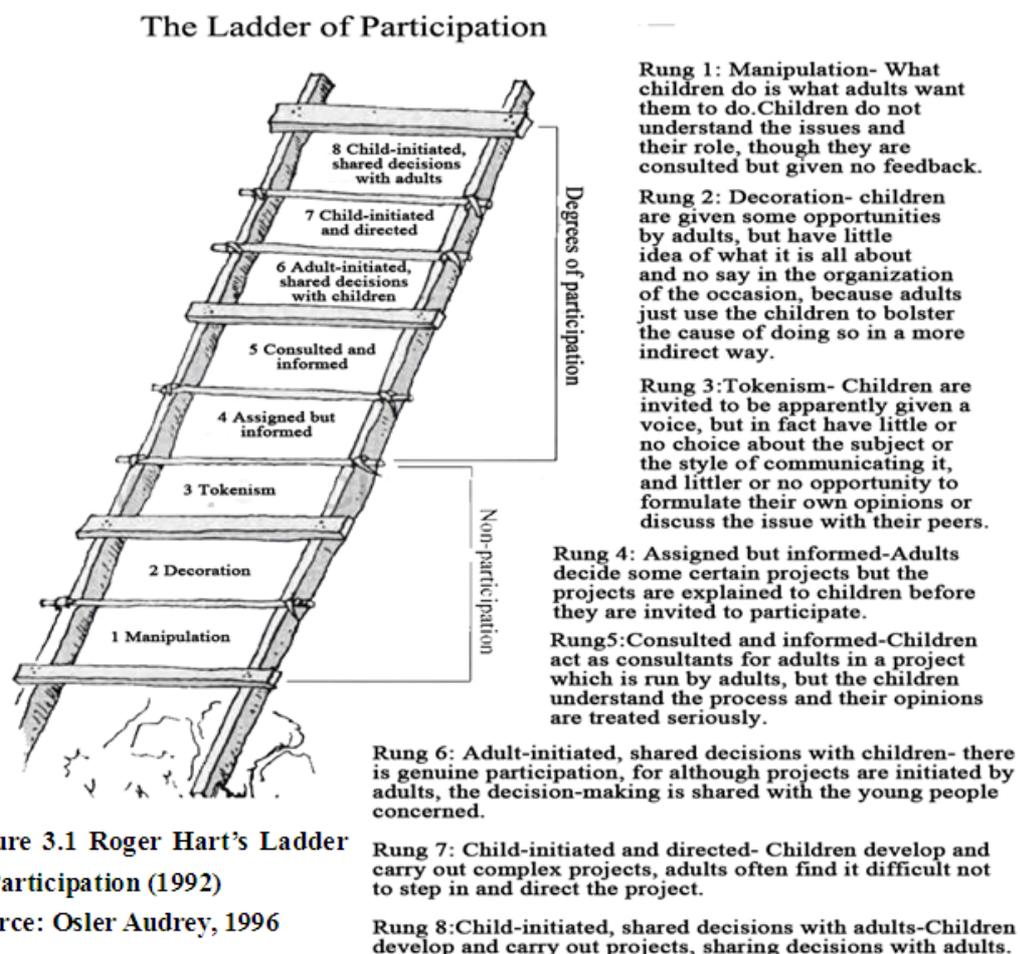


Figure 3.1 Roger Hart's Ladder of Participation (1992)

Source: Osler Audrey, 1996

According to Hart, the first three rungs at the bottom of the ladder, which consist of manipulation, decoration, and tokenism belong to "non-participation". On these levels,

children's participation is invisible. This means that children cannot present their views, or no change is made for them. Hart also outlines four minimum requirements to be participatory:

1. The children understand the intentions of the project
2. They know who made the decisions concerning their involvement and why
3. They have a meaningful (rather than decorative) role
4. They volunteer for the project after the project was made clear to them (Hart, 1992)

Therefore, the top five rungs range from rung four- assigned but informed, to rung eight- child-initiated and shared decisions with adults. The more active children's participation, engagement and involvement become, the higher rung one ascends. Only the highest rung is qualified for "true" participation.

However, some authors criticized that the ladder implies a hierarchy, with an ultimate goal which should be aimed for (Sinclair, 2004). Besides, in practice, the youth do not remain static or climb in one direction; instead they may move up and down the ladder. In other words, different degrees of influence over decision-making may be appropriate in different situations (Funk, 2012). Moreover, Hart also suggests that situations of reaching the highest ladder are relatively uncommon. On one side, adults often do not meet special interests of youth and it is usually only older teenagers who attempt to put adults into their design and management projects. On the other, even the highest rung- child-initiated, shared decision with adults falls short of completely autonomous decision-making by the child. Responsibility for determining the "best interests of the child" remains eventually in adult hands (Hart, 1992; Osler, 1996, p.36).

As mentioned above, in this study, Hart's model is applied to the power relations between adults and children, to comprehend and evaluate the status of children's participation situations for further upgrading and refining adults' actions. In addition, when taking the multicultural dimension into account, the first three rungs of this model can be given a broader meaning- a criteria against which we can judge the level of how majority and minorities are weighed in multicultural laws and policies concerning youth participation:

- *Rung 1: Manipulation*- What the multicultural policy presents is what the majority wants it to be. Minorities have no benefits from the policy. They know nothing about the policy and their role, though they are consulted.
- *Rung 2: Decoration*- Minority groups are given some opportunities, because by doing so, the majority attempt to bolster their “justice”. But in fact have little idea of what it is all about. They have little benefits from the policy and have no say in public.
- *Rung 3: Tokenism*- Minorities are invited to be apparently given voices. But actually they have little opportunity to formulate their own opinions or have little influence on the policy.

All three rungs belong to impracticable laws and policies. Conversely, if opinions of both majority and minorities have been taken into account, multicultural policies could then be called practicable and workable.

3.2 Reconceptualizing Article 12

As I outlined in Chapter 1, the research question of this thesis is to what extent children participate in Chinese primary schools in the context of multiculturalism. Through Hart’s model, a holistic valuation could be made to understand the level of children’s participation in Chinese primary schools. However, if the analysis relies exclusively on Hart’s typology, then overall situation of children involved, from the macro perspectives is incomplete. To detect the detailed content of youth participation matters, it is necessary to utilize Lundy’s model-reconceptualizing Article 12 CRC, which is not only a model for detailing Article 12, but also a criterion to assess children’s participation rights.

Children’s participation rights are the core terminology in this research. As I mentioned in the last chapter, “the principle of engaging with young people and taking their perspectives seriously in educational and other areas of decision-making is enshrined in Article 12” of CRC (Osler and Starkey, 2010). To correctly comprehend Article 12 in the UNCRC and children’s participation, Lundy proposes a model (see Figure 3.2), building on both aspects

reflecting in Article 12- the rights to express a view and have the view given due weight, with four key elements identified:

- Space: children must be given the opportunity to express a view
- Voice: children must be facilitated to express their views
- Audience: the view must be listened to
- Influence: the view must be acted upon, as appropriate. (Lundy, 2007, p.933)

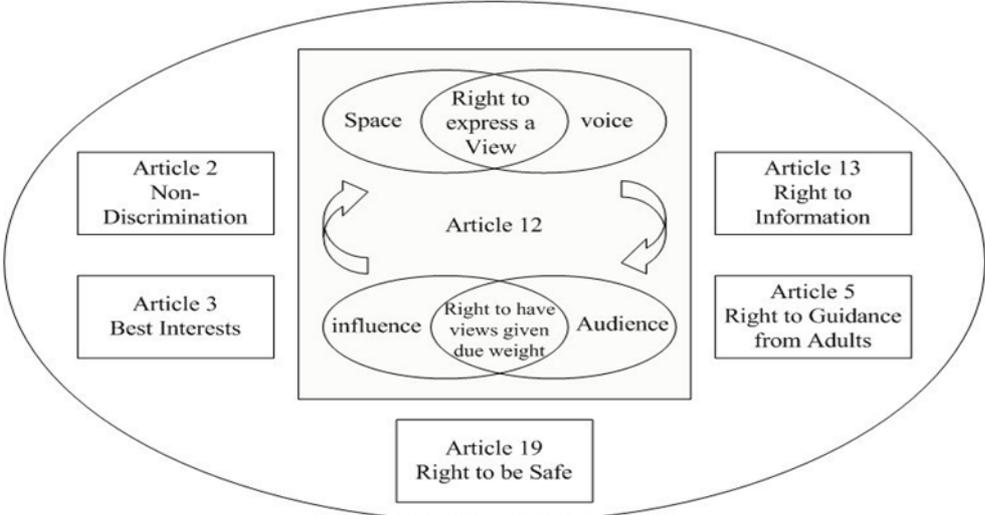


Figure 3.2 Lundy’s model of Reconceptualizing Article 12 in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
 Source: Osler (2010)

Lundy reconceptualizes Article 12 CRC to make the notion of children’s participation rights clearer. As I see it, Lundy’s model can not only be applied for clarifying child participation, but can also become a criterion to test and apply children’s participation, including right to express a view and right to have views given due weight.

Additionally, Lundy further argues that Article 12 also demands to be set in the context of other participation rights like the right to information (Article 13), overriding principles of non-discrimination (Article 2), best interests (Article 3), child’s right to guidance from adults (Article 5) and the right to be safe (Article 19), thus children can be ensured in a position to be properly involved in educational decision-making (Osler, 2010, p.18). It is noteworthy that when taking multi-cultures into account, Article 2 of CRC Non-discrimination is also the apparent embodiment of equal status between majority and minorities.

Moreover, in comparison with Hart's ladder model, Lundy's model is on a horizontal axis, reconceptualizing children's participation's contents as four divided domains- space, voice, audience and influence, while Hart's is in a vertical axis. Thus, Lundy's model can be regarded as complement to Hart's model of the ladder. Only all the four dimensions in full compliance with the standards are qualified for the eighth ladder.

Hence, the evidence of my research on children's participation will be examined within the framework of Lundy's model to understand barriers and opportunities of the current situation, and to seek suggestions to promote children's participation. "Space" is for assessing school environment and activities to check if children have been given the opportunity to express a view; "Voice" can be used for assessing whether students are facilitated to speak by teachers; "Audience" is for evaluating teachers' role in the relationship of teachers-students, so as to see if students' views are listened to; "Influence" could be utilized for assessing corresponding improvements showed that views are acted upon, such as the improvements of school's environment or teaching methods, and here students' subjective attitudes can also prove "influence" degree.

3.3 Observing classrooms by critical pedagogical approach

This study is in the arena of schools, so I will focus more closely on the classroom, which is the key place of education. When it comes to classroom and education, it is necessary to refer to the famous critical pedagogical approach of Paulo Freire, which is the chief ground for me to analyze research data of teaching and education in classrooms. As a Brazilian educator and philosopher in 20th-century, Freire was a leading advocate of critical pedagogy and his famous composition- *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, had a profound and lasting impact on the critical pedagogy movement. It is best known for Freire's attack on the "banking" model of education, in which teachers and students are in tension, the student is viewed as an empty account to be filled by the teacher. Freire observes that in this way, knowledge is seen as the wise fool to give a gift, "it transforms students into receiving objects" (Freire, 1970, p.77).

The “critical pedagogy approach” criticizes “banking” system of education and proposes using “problem-posing education” instead of teacher-students contradiction education. Problem-posing concept expresses opposition to the one-way teaching and pure knowledge store. On the contrary, Freire points out that education is a cognitive act, and the cognitive object is not the purpose of unilateral subject’s consciousness, but the carrier of both cognitive subjects- teacher and student.

Besides, just as the teacher-students contradiction education reflects the “banking” concept of education, Freire’s “problem-posing education” reflects the “critical pedagogy education”. This perspective emphasizes more on the role of “dialogue” of mutual communications in education. Essentially, the conception of critical pedagogical education is to make people realize critical consciousness, to learn how to study and how to think, in order to gain liberation. In this study, Freire’s “critical pedagogy approach” is mainly used for teasing out pedagogy, learning-teaching interactions in relation to pupil participation.

Moreover, as I presented in 3.2, Lundy’s model could not only assess relevant school facilities and organizational arrangements, but the major sites- classrooms. Hence, when investigating in the classrooms, in addition to Freire’s critical pedagogy, I also adopt Lundy’s model with four themes reconceptualizing the Article 12. To be more specifically, in the classroom, class climate is a safe “space” where children can express themselves without fear of disapproval and with everyone involved; child’s “voice” is given opportunities to speak out and child’s motivation is created to participate in learning and positive responses by teachers should be given; Teachers are ought to be as “audience” and genuinely or respectfully listen to what pupils have to provide as ideas, no matter they are right or wrong; teachers show “ influence” by acting on students’ feedback so as to do a better plan to make adjustments for further lessons.

Additionally, to connect it with Lundy’s model, “voice” and “audience” are the embodiments of “dialogue” and “mutual communication”, thus in line with the “concept of critical

pedagogical education”; “space” (classroom climate) and “influence” can be deemed as a safeguard of the critical pedagogy concept, so as to promote harmonious equilibrium of teacher-student communication. These will be specifically applied in Chapter 6. Therefore, in general, when the four themes in Lundy’s model have been reached, critical pedagogical education concept and the realization of true participation in the typology of the ladder will be achieved.

4. Methodology

In this chapter, I present and discuss the methodology used during the process of implementing research for my thesis. To get started, I reintroduce the research main question:

To what extent do children participate in Chinese primary schools in the context of multiculturalism?

My overall objective in this thesis is to develop a nuanced and deep understanding of the current situation of child participation. As I mentioned in Chapter 1- Introduction, although I am not an education professional, but my personal ideal of contributing to social development in China is my original reason for following this Masters program. Hence, I hope through this thesis, to make a small contribution to educational development in China and to inject new ideas for education reforms in basic education in China.

In order to find the answer to my research question and achieve research purpose, I conducted my fieldwork in three multicultural primary schools in Wuxi City. I selected qualitative approach, and conducted interviews with 18 students and 15 teachers from different cultural backgrounds, two classroom observations, textbook analysis and one workshop. Students and teachers were asked to express their views on issues of school rules and conditions, curriculum and pedagogy, and social justice in and beyond the classroom. These are demonstrated and discussed in the first three parts in this chapter. Subsequently, the field research process, the period of data analysis, research quality and methodological considerations are discussed. My role as a researcher and the research limitations are also considered.

4.1 Electing the method of data collection and study sites

In the social sciences, fieldwork is a vital element to connect theories to realities. With respect to fieldwork approaches, there are two different categories: quantitative and qualitative research.

According to Verhoeven, compared to quantitative research,

“Qualitative research has nothing to do with gathering numerical information; the search is not for caused relationships based on numbers. In qualitative data collection methods, it is about how people perceive things... It is the method that takes researches into the... reality” (Verhoeven, 2012, p.135).

As I mentioned before, this thesis examines teachers’ and students’ perspectives regarding children’s participation in multicultural primary schools and the actual situation of youth participation in schooling. The focus is to understand how respondents (teachers and students) perceive and act on children’s participation rights. These lead me to select a small-scale qualitative (interpretivist) research approach, which is in accordance with interpretive and critical methodological tradition (Willis, 2007).

My study sites are located in Wuxi City in China. The primary reasons of such choice are identity-relevant and pragmatism-oriented. Firstly, it is the place where I had lived there for eighteen years since I was born. It is much easier for me to get access to carrying out the research there. Secondly, as I mentioned in Chapter 1, I also hope that through this research, I can make contributions to my hometown in the educational development.

4.2 Choosing data collection methods and sample

This thesis adopts a range of techniques to collect empirical data. I applied semi-structured interviews (15 with teachers and 18 with students), two classroom observations, and one workshop with teaching staff. These methods were supplemented by my research diary. Those investigations occurred in January 2014 and in February 2014. Besides, ideological and moral curriculum textbooks for different grades in level of primary school were looked up and analyzed. The sections below expound these data collection methods in detailed, followed by an introduction of sample selections.

4.2.1 Interviews

“An interview is a conversation in which the interviewee’s perceptions are paramount...The aim of an interview is ‘to gather information about a particular subject, normally take the form of a dialogue” (Verhoeven, 2012, p.141). Therefore, interview can be applied to answer teachers’ and students’ attitudes and to comprehend their perspective more deeply. Kvale considers that “an interview inquiry is a moral enterprise, the personal interaction of the interviewer in such a circumstance may affect the interview and the knowledge produced by interviews may also affect the understanding of human situation” (Kvale, 1996, p.109). In this study, participants including 15 teachers and 18 students (See Appendix 4: List of Interviewees) were interviewed in semi-structured and face-to-face form, centering on children’s participation situation with interview questions’ checklist prepared in advance. (See Appendix 2: Interview questions for teachers & Appendix 3: Interview questions for students) What I aimed for was to create a comfortable atmosphere for participants to talk to me. Each interview session of every participant remains anonymous, thus I only used pseudonyms chosen by them, and I also disguised schools as School A, School B and School C (See Appendix 4: List of Interviewees). Interviews were recorded and saved in a separate folder for data transcription and analysis. An English version of the consent form is incorporated as Appendix 1.

4.2.2 Observation

“Scientific researchers also use observation as a method. Of interest are only those aspects of behavior that are relevant to the research” (Verhoeven, 2012, p.136). Thus to figure out teachers’ behavior and students responses, apart from interviews, I also gained source from classroom observation sessions. I attended two ideological and moral classes of grade 5 and grade 6 in School B and C respectively in Wuxi on 7th February 2014 and 10th February 2014.

These classroom observations were non-participant classroom observing, meaning that researcher I was an on-looker rather than a participant observer. My purpose was to understand teachers’ pedagogical methods and interaction between teacher and students with

guidelines prepared in advance (see Appendix 6: Observation Guidelines). Because people have limited capacity to observe everything that is going on in the moment (Anne, 2001, p.7), thus through observations, I made a form of notes in every five minutes, writing down actual behaviors of both teachers and students.

4.2.3 Research diary and reflexivity

During and after the entire research, I kept a research diary, as recommended by my supervisor. According to Nadin and Cassell,

“... the use of a research diary was grounded in the epistemological position of constructionism and the need for reflexivity in research... Given that the research itself a social encounter, we thus need to reflect the range of factors which impact upon the interpretations gathered...The research diary is one simple and easy to use tool which can significantly help researchers achieve aims and become more reflexive” (Nadin & Cassell, 2006, p.216).

“The use of a research diary is a potential tool for reflexive analysis” (ibid, p.208). I kept my diary during and after the process of data collection. Using a research diary helped me to record what happened and how every research went on throughout the process of data collection. During the process of analysis, it was a reflexive tool which prompted and reminded me of practices and thoughts.

4.2.4 Other data collection sources- content analysis and workshop

Interviews and observations are the two major methods I utilized, and research diary helped me record and reflected on research processes. In addition, I also adopted other techniques for gathering and analyzing data.

One was *content analysis*. “Content analysis is a complex and intensive method and as data collection option, by no means the easiest” (Verhoeven, 2012, p.148). After observing two lessons, I selected students’ ideological and moral textbooks of primary schools (two volumes for one grade, 12 books for six grades in total) to study, in order to consider how of children’s participation rights are presented in the curriculum.

On 6th February, 2014, I organized a *workshop* with 22 teachers and 2 students at one of the three schools- School B, where I conducted my research. All the teachers and two students I interviewed at School B attended the workshop (as shown in Appendix 4), together with some other teachers. Several issues in the students' interviews were raised up again for teachers to respond, reflect and discuss. At the beginning of the workshop, I organized a presentation about children's participation rights in schooling. By means of the workshop, I gained extra data about the Chinese educational system and how teachers felt and treated the issue of students' participation in schooling.

4.2.5 Sample

When it comes to applying theory to practice, the choice of sample is especially important. According to Glenn, qualitative research is “a field of inquiry that crosscuts disciplines and subject matters.” It aims to “gather an in-depth understanding of human behavior.” The discipline investigates the “why and how”, not just “what, where, when”. Hence, “smaller but focused samples are more often needed rather than large random samples” (Glenn, 2010. p.104). I do not intend to generalize from my research, thus I selected non-probability sampling, including convenience method and snowball approaches (Verhoeven, 2012, p.181). The reason for choosing non-probability sampling is not only convenience, but is a more appropriate way to encourage respondents to trust me and tell me more about their “realities.”

When choosing research sample, I gave precedence to diversity within the targeted group. I selected participants at three primary schools with, as far as possible, wide age group. The diversity of sex was also taken into consideration (three male teachers, 12 female teachers; eight schoolboys and ten schoolgirls). However, I have to state that this thesis will not make comparison according to age and sex, the aim of doing so is merely for understanding more personal information of participants. Moreover, teachers' years of teaching experiences are varied, while students are in different grades (grade one to grade six). In terms of multi-cultures dimension, both majority- Han and minorities were involved. Amongst teachers

interviewed, ten are of Han nationality, five are from minorities; while among students, 13 are of Han nationality and five are from minorities.

The interviewees include both teachers and students, and some of those interviewees are also workshop participants. Their precise information is compiled in Appendix 4- List of interviewees. All respondents are promised anonymity and have chosen pseudonyms for themselves, so that they can not be easily identified in my research report.

4.3 Fieldwork process

In January 2014, my first fieldwork began. But the time was restricted, so I only managed to interview 12 teachers and 14 students. This amount was less than expected. The reason was that when I proceeded with my first fieldwork, it was at the end-of-term, some teachers were busy making papers for final exams, and others were helping students review lessons for examinations. Thus I encountered some obstacles. For example, my plan to interview one teacher in 2nd January, 2014 was delayed till 13th January, 2014, because of the temporary assigning to make final exam papers. Besides, in my original plan, I expected to interview some school leaders, and on account of the special period, I could not manage this. Moreover, at the end of the semester, there were merely three major courses- Chinese, math and English classes. Thus the planed schedule of classroom observations was not completed.

Despite some unpredictable events, as far as the data are concerned, these are abundant in the dimension of diversity, which is embodied in ethnic diversity and diversity of opinions of both teachers and students. This also aroused my desire to explore further. Hence, I decided to postpone my second fieldwork till February, 2014. The second fieldwork was not only for expanding my sample size, but also for observing classes and curriculum textbooks with regard to children's participation rights.

With the help of my relatives to get contact with schools, I realized my second fieldwork in February 2014. Compared to the first one, my second field research was more interesting and

fruitful. Apart from successfully finishing two observations in classes, I was invited to join one workshop in 6th February, 2014, which was not part of my original plans. At the beginning of the workshop, I had a presentation of children's participation rights and human rights education, so as to universalize their knowledge in this field. Afterwards, teachers and I had a workshop together discussing about issues raised up by students in interviews. I cannot say that this presentation and workshop will necessarily advance children's right to participate, but at least, seeing from responses of teachers and students who attended, they had more in-depth understanding of children's participation rights. One teacher told me "Before attending the workshop, I didn't know that participation was a human right." Through this discussion I could reflect more on the current situations of Chinese primary school systems and teacher's views and opinions in relation to issues in schooling.

Reflecting on the two fieldworks, the process had both certainties and uncertainties. This reminds me of words from my supervisor when I was designing my fieldwork, "to prepare for the unexpected things." For instance, having interviewed two persons in my first fieldwork, I found my interview questions needed to be revised to give questions more pertinence. I divided questions into two separate sections: One emphasizes students' participatory conditions and opportunities in schools, the other focuses on the realization of rights by teachers and schools. In addition, during the process of doing my research, I interviewed some teachers who were not included in my original plan.

This fieldwork felt especially enriching. When I was in schools, I did not simply do research, but enjoyed moments talking and playing with children. Sometimes I felt drawn back to my own childhood. Skimming those emotional things, this fieldwork mapped me a holistic view of goodness and challenges of children's participation in Chinese primary schools, and let me have more firsthand understanding in dimensions such as students' opinions in fields of school conditions, organizational arrangements, curriculum and pedagogy, and teachers' attitudes and ideological values, which were worthwhile for me to explore and reflect on.

4.4 Researching as an insider and an outsider

“The issue of researcher membership in the group or area being studied is relevant to all approaches of qualitative methodology as the researcher plays such an intimate role in both data collection and analysis....Whether the researcher is an insider... or an outsider... is an essential and ever-present aspect of the investigation” (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p.55).

Seeing from this, it is important to clear the role I played as a researcher during the field research process.

On one hand, I am an outsider researcher. As I mentioned in the Chapter 1, despite my student life and Chinese background, I am non-professional in this field. I am only a master student and not acquainted with teaching specific knowledge and skills. In light of this, I would like to note again that due to my non-professional background, those recommendations in both Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 are simply my personal suggestions which might inform Chinese educational development, and the work of professionals.

Besides, while asking questions of some interviewees, I felt a power relation between participants and me. It made me feel a sense of distance between them and me. After all, in their eyes, I was a young Chinese researcher, who had the experience of studying abroad and was also researching for her master thesis. Dwyer and Buckle deem that “an outsider researcher is the outsider to the commonality shared by participants, the personhood of the researcher, including her or his membership status in relation to those participating in the research” (ibid, p.55). In view of this, I should be considered as an outsider.

On the other hand, I can be also regarded as an insider. “Insider research refers to when researchers conduct research with population of which they are also members so that the researcher shares an identity, language and experiential base with the study participants” (Kanuha, 2000; Asselin, 2003). Having never left China before studying abroad, I have same Chinese identity with my research participants. The Wuxi City in China where I conducted

my research is also my hometown where I was born and where I spent my childhood and student years. My personality and my way of thinking have been influenced deeply by this cultural context. On this point, I have to say that because of the same identity with respondents, they saw me as a fellow native. Owing to my student experiences, I was familiar to Chinese education system and environment. Thus during the process of interview, not many awkward circumstances occurred. Furthermore, I did not face with language barriers when communicating with interviewees. Because deep understanding to Chinese culture, it was much easier for me to grasp the hidden meaning behind their words and body language. This is beneficial for me to carry out the fieldwork. By this token, I can be identified as an insider.

According to Acker (2000), “perhaps it is necessary not to see insider-outsider as a ‘to be or not to be’ question, but to find a way to work creatively.” For me, I also think that I do not need to choose only one role during my research. Hence, my researcher role is that of an insider and an outsider.

4.5 Interpretation and Analysis

“You’ve collected the data and from this pile of information you have to distill your results” (Verhoeven, 2012, p.234). The data analysis is such a period of distilling results. “In qualitative research the main thing is the interpretation that the researcher gives to the analysis” (ibid, p.287). As regards the interpretation of gathered data, I applied both a reflexive approach and the grounded theory approach.

As I mentioned above, I have kept a research diary and this was main tool for adopting a reflexive approach. Jonhson and Duberleys (2003) assert that “Any reflexive researcher needs an understanding of their own epistemological assumption in relation to reflexivity”. According to Nadin & Cassell (2006. p.208), “the use of a research diary is a potential tool for reflexive analysis.” Using a research diary helped me to record what happened and to follow each twist and turn of the process of collection data.

Yet, the reflexive approach was also maintained during the process of fieldwork. When communicating with interviewees, I had to keep myself sensitive to their responses. I needed to link up their perceptions, experiences and cultural background, to pay attention to their reactions so as to know what it was behind their words.

Besides, a grounded theory approach was utilized. “One of the objectives of qualitative analysis is to gain insight into a given domain and to develop theories about it...This means that during the research we look for a theory that suits the data that has been collected” (Verhoeven, 2012, p.190). As is mentioned earlier in Chapter 3, I adopted a complex theoretical framework, including Hart’s ladder typology, Lundy’s model of reconceptualizing Article 12 CRC and Freire’s critical pedagogical approach. The aim for doing so is not to test preconceived theories, but through these theories and instruments to better explore the reality of youth participation in Chinese primary schools.

Additionally, concerning processing data analysis and interpretation, I started it throughout my fieldwork. I played the recordings again and made notes based on the reflections inspired by the recordings and research diaries. All my interviews have been transcribed, coded and analyzed. I read all the information I gathered and divided them by underlining in different color. Then I summarized them into certain key terms. Moreover, I also found the research phase not straightforward. Sometimes when I was analyzing, I discovered that I did not get the answer to the interview question. For example, one of my interview guiding questions is “Do children have the right to express their voices?” After I carried out interviews for two days, I found almost all answers that I got were barely “yes”. This was unable to achieve the purpose of comprehending whether children were really speaking in class. Thus the “iteration cycle” is what I have learned from this fieldwork experience.

4.6 Research Quality

In all research, the goal is to ensure maximum research quality. Here I will discuss about ways in which reliability and validity are addressed in my research.

4.6.1 Reliability

Reliability examines the extent which “random” errors are made (Verhoeven, 2012). Reliability is about demonstrating the operation of a study, if repeated, would give the same results (Yin, 1994, p.33). However, many critiques come in to play when trying to replicate qualitative research. “Because qualitative research uses an open approach, often involving the development of models during the research, there is no demarcated setting for a study that will produce similar results when replicated” (Verhoeven, 2012, p.303). It can be difficult assessing the reliability in qualitative research. In this study, what I did was to follow certain procedures and pay attention to details as much possible.

Firstly, I sought to be transparent to participants by informing them of my research purpose and question. Secondly, I maintained recording and keeping notes about the information throughout the entire interviewing process. Thirdly, considering “alternating data collection and analysis is a good thing for reliability” (ibid, p.305). I went through the analysis process as many times as possible, so that I could collect additional information when I found what I lacked. In addition, using various methods helps to guarantee reliability. This strategy involves looking at the same issue through a range of different methods (Basit, 2010). In this research, I adopted various methods to gather data: interviews, classroom observations, textbook analysis and the workshop, in order to comprehend data more explicitly.

4.6.2 Validity

“ Validity plays an important role in qualitative research. It tests the extent to which ‘systematic’ errors are made” (Verhoeven, 2012). As far as external validity is concerned, this research involves small-groups of people and non-probability sampling, implying that external or population validity might not be achieved. While “if generalizability has a role to play in qualitative research, then it involves theoretical generalizability, in other words: to what extent do the conclusions apply to similar situations” (ibid, p.306). This research aims for exploring the current situation of youth participation in Chinese multicultural primary

schools and to inject new ideas for education reform in basic education in China. Thus in my opinion, my research could become a small reference contributing to the development of Chinese education and education reforms.

Besides, internal validity is checking “whether the researcher has answered the question properly, in other words, whether the conclusions are unbiased” (ibid, p.308). There is a doubt that “qualitative researchers use the perception and interpretations that the respondent gives to a situation as the basis for internal validity” (ibid, p.300). In my research, apart from trying to guarantee my objectivity as a researcher, utilizing grounded theory approach for analysis could also be regarded as a safeguard of avoiding undue bias.

4.7 Ethical Considerations

“All aspects of the research process, from deciding upon the topic through identifying a sample, conducting the research and disseminating the findings, have ethical implications” (Khaemba, 2009, p.45). That is to say, when undertaking the research, every step will be confronted with ethical issues. In this section, I reflect on several ethical issues I encountered. Research diary is one tool through which I could give consideration to ethical issues, both as they arose, and retrospectively.

4.7.1 Before doing the research

According to NESH (2006), “research subjects are to be given all the information they require to gain a reasonable understanding of the research field in question, of the consequences of participating in the research project, and of the purpose of the research.” I prepared and translated into Chinese a consent letter (See Appendix 1), which made clear the content and purposes of my research to respondents. Consent letters were shown to some teachers and students to read and sign before carrying out the actual interviews. It was a voluntary process, thus there was no surprise that some teachers and students gave me feedback saying that they did not wish to participate. In my consent form, it was stated that participants may withdraw at any time if they wished to opt out. Amongst those participants who had signed the consent

letter, no one cancelled.

Informed consent is linked to guarantees of confidentiality. “Research projects can be initiated only after securing participants’ free and informed consent” (NESH, 2006). Some data might be sensitive or might cause harm to an individual’s or school’s reputation, thus I promised in the consent letter that the privacy and confidentiality would be fully protected throughout the study (both interviews and observations). I anonymised any data collected from this research, so that informants cannot be easily identified in my research report. They were free to choose their own pseudonyms, or otherwise I invited them to choose a pseudonym and also disguised school names as School A, School B and School C. Additionally, “informants give something of themselves to researchers and are entitled to get something back” (ibid, p.35). Included in the consent letter, I also mentioned that if they wish, they would receive the report after I finished the thesis.

Furthermore, “in any research session, making an appointment is vital” (Khaemba, 2009, p.48). Thus when it comes to getting access to participants, I made appointments by phone or e-mail. This ensured timing and locations were at informants’ convenience.

4.7.2 When carrying out the research process

During the research process, I tried as far as possible to act as a “neutral” researcher, especially when interviewing minorities. According to NESH,

“When performing research on vulnerable cultures, e.g. minority cultures, researchers must be particularly careful about operating with classifications or designations that give grounds for unreasonable generalization and that can in actual practice lead to the stigmatization of certain social groups” (NESH, 2006, p.24).

Concerning the ways of doing research, I gave freedom to respondents to choose interviewing ways. Because the time when I conducted my research was near the end of autumn semester, teachers were busy. Two interviews I did were done while teachers were checking students’

homework in their offices. Another older teacher hoped to answer my interview questions via writing. Based on the consideration of respondents' freedom to choose as agreed, I respected his requirement to answer questions through writing. All the rest of participants accepted the way of face-to-face interviews. I attempted to leave ample time for them to think. If they had doubts about the questions, I elaborated for them in order to let them comprehend better.

When I asked questions, I tried to formulate my words simply, particularly for pupils at lower grades, thus to communicate in "child language" was necessary. Besides, in order to show my respect to them and to avoid the "generalized" or "official" answers, I used more times sentences such as "in your opinion" or "according to your experience"; at the meantime, I encouraged them to share with me interesting things happening in schools. I was reflecting whilst they were expressing their viewpoints. Hence, sometimes I added additional questions. What I always bore in mind during and after the study to give warm thanks to all the informants involved.

4.8 Scopes, limitations and interpretive challenges

This study was conducted in three primary schools. Therefore, this research cannot depict the situation of Chinese multicultural primary schools as a whole. However, it was my original hope that this research could make a contribution to further studies in children's participation, primary school education and multicultural education in China.

It is undeniable that as a novice, I had not enough experience in time planning of field researches. Despite I had already predicted that researches could not be realized during the Chinese Spring Festival and had shifted to an earlier time than original plan, I still did not foresee that it was not easy for teachers and students to arrange interview time at the end of a semester. Hence, after carrying out a part of my research, I had to postpone it for a month and then continue.

What is more, since the complexity of translating cultural expressions, the analysis of data

source that I collected is on the basis of my own interpretations. Therefore, in this sense, conclusion of this thesis is a reflection of my own interpretation materials rather than a complete “objective” reality in this context.

5. Taking a look beyond the classroom

- Are schools appropriate for students?

This chapter (Chapter 5) and next chapter (Chapter 6) are two chapters for analyzing and discussing research data. As introduced in previous chapters, the topic of this thesis is a complex one, which includes various themes relating to child participation, child rights, education and multi-cultures. Hence, the interpretation of gathered data involves various methods (as indicated in Chapter 4- Methodology). Having seen the challenges of practice (as illustrated in Chapter 1- Introduction) and a lack of researches on child participation in Chinese multicultural schools (as discussed in Chapter 2- Literature review), it is necessary to conduct my own research. I acknowledge that the ambitious nature of my plan in covering wide-ranging themes in a Master thesis project may not have space to allow me to cover all below themes in-depth. Moreover, in the field of education, I am non-professional. Yet, I hope that based on limited data I gathered, I could make a little contribution to Chinese school development and educational reform in relation to child participation.

This chapter reports on teachers' and students' perceptions of school conditions and organizational arrangements in three primary schools with multicultural characteristics in Wuxi City in China. In this chapter, the data mainly focuses on interviews with 15 teachers and 18 students from different cultural backgrounds about schooling. This data source was complemented by the workshop with 22 teachers and 2 students at School B.

It is known that although classrooms are key areas for research, the place where youth participation occurs is not only in classrooms, but the involved spaces, beyond classrooms. What's more, a good and comfortable environment would assuredly facilitate students' learning and well-being. Thus it is imperative to extend study of schools beyond the classrooms and to study broader issues which students face at school (Osler, 2010). This chapter considers whether schools are suitable for children to participate and study. It reports on how students and teachers perceive specific issues, such as school rules and arrangements,

including relevant regulations, discipline and activity arrangements, and school conditions, including the environment, school facilities, security, meals and toilets and sanitary matters. All these are linked to students' perceptions about social justice.

5.1 Research context: cultural diversity, background variety and different voices

This research aimed to provide a better understanding of the issues in relation to students' participation rights in three multicultural primary schools in Wuxi City in China.

With regard to categories of Chinese primary schools, the boundary lines are vague. There is no unified explicit regulation about distinguishing ordinary schools and ethnic schools in China. Some authorities say that schools with more than 30% ethnic minorities (or more) of total school population are designated ethnic minority schools, while some others state that schools with over 90% minority students are the minority schools. Besides, it is not necessary for minority students to study in "ethnic schools"; ordinary schools are also open for minorities so as to give them freedom of choice. Therefore, despite the three primary schools where I carried out my research being designated ordinary primary schools, there were also ethnic minorities in these schools. Thus I refer to them as multicultural primary schools. It was impossible to ascertain informants' attitudes towards certain specific ethnic minority groups. However, this research did address the attitudes teachers' and students' from different cultural backgrounds, in order to gain a general view of cross-national and cross-cultural perspectives.

In addition to the diversity of cultural backgrounds, in my research, respondents were drawn from a wide age-range. The students were aged 6-13 and were in Grade 1-6 of compulsory schooling. In China, students are encouraged to enter primary school in the year they become 6. In fact, some students start school at an earlier age, while some begin their studying later. The teachers I interviewed were aged 27-53 with different lengths of teaching experience. In this study, the research methods adopted are interviews and a workshop, as discussed in Chapter 4- Methodology.

Stewart Ranson (1998, p.66) argues that allowing different groups “to enter a discourse” is important in “reconstructing a theory of citizenship.” From my point of view, analyzing and comparing different perspectives and even contradictory views could generate “increased understanding of alternative perspectives”. As Osler said, “democracy needs diversity” (Osler, 2010, p.56). To take diverse voices into consideration is also the embodiment of democracy. Hence, my research incorporated different voices from different cultural backgrounds and age groups to discuss common issues in respect of school rules, organizational arrangements, school environment and social justice.

5.2 School rules: disciplines, scheduling and arrangements

“Rules are guidelines for actions and for the evaluation of action in terms of good and bad, or right and wrong, and therefore a part of moral or values education in school” (Thornberg, 2008, p. 37). School rules are usually associated with school regulation, course scheduling and school activities’ arrangements. The following sections present students’ and teachers’ opinions addressing these three aspects.

5.2.1 School rules and regulations

More than half of the students consider school rules too strict. Apparently, along with breaking rules, punishments are harsh. Among the students concerned about rules, the students’ viewpoints below are representative:

School rules are too harsh, especially those set by teachers. Talking during the self-study course will be punished to copy *Pupils’ everyday behavior specification* 50 times. If we made mistakes of basic knowledge during exams, teachers made us copy more than ten times.

- Jojo, Grade 2, 01.01.2014

If we can’t recite the text, we are not allowed to have lunch until we manage it.

- Linli, Grade 5, 06.01.2014

One Monday morning, I forgot to tie “red scarf”⁹ during the flag-raising ceremony, I was kept standing in teacher’s office the whole morning.

⁹ Red scarf is Young Pioneer’s symbol and Young Pioneers must wear red scarves in school. Red scarves are dyed red to represent the suffering of martyrs when blood flows.

A small number of students suggested that when school managers are formulating those school rules and regulations, they should take student's demands and viewpoints into account, not just make students comply with rules. More straightforwardly, as one student suggested: "if there is a behavior norm for pupils, there should be one norm accordingly for teachers" (Aaron, Grade 4, 02.01.2014).

In terms of school rules and regulations, teachers' viewpoints are multifarious. Some teachers deemed that it is necessary to set the rules and to ask students to obey. Otherwise it will come into disorder and difficulties in class management, particularly given such big classes with over 50 students. Others admitted that in the matter of following school rules, sometimes their ways and approaches might be too harsh, but it was because students did something wrong.

5.2.2 Courses scheduling

My first set of interviews were conducted towards the end of the autumn semester, thus many students in the interviews suggested strongly that they still needed further courses in addition to the three major courses (Chinese, Math, English). The most common request was to have physical, music and art courses. According to student words, it would allow them to "become less-stressful and healthier at both physical and mental levels; it would be helpful for them to "concentrate more on major courses after alleviating stress in other courses"; It would also "give teachers some rest" simultaneously. However, there were some voices against this suggestion. Pritt, a girl who was faced with the junior graduation exam said, "It might make us lag behind students in other schools, unless every school does the same" (Pritt, Grade 6, 09.01.2014).

This topic was raised again in the workshop discussion. Most teachers agreed with Pritt's view, and some of them feel frustrated and sympathetic. Two teachers responded to this issue. Mrs. Tina said that although teachers know that students were tired, the situation is hard to change (Mrs. Tina in Workshop, 06.02.2014). Mrs. Jane analyzed this topic more rationally.

She thought that:

Teachers are in a dilemma: On one side, if we allow students to have those minor courses, then course plans could not be achieved, students' parents would say that we are irresponsible; On the other side, if not, students may feel too stressful and not satisfied.

- Mrs. Jane in Workshop, 06.02.2014

5.2.3 School activity arrangements

Seen from the students' interview data, activities organized by schools are rarely rich and glamorous. For example, "blackboard newspaper competitions", "decorating classrooms", "interest groups", "class cadre campaign". There were many club activities, in fields of "Chinese chess", "ocarina", "calligraphy", "choir club". Moreover, students also had other extra curricula activities like "spring and autumn outings", "gathering performance party", "donations" and so forth.

However, a widely-felt reaction was that students "participated for merely a few times" and "participated on the basis of finishing homework". Almost all the students claimed that "all of these activities are designed by school leaders or teachers"; "in the whole process of activities, we are barely playing the roles of 'performers'." They requested more school activities held by students or inviting them to attend the decision-making conference of activities. Some of the students took some explicit instances: Candy wished to have his own "interest group" (Candy, Grade 6, 01.01.2014); Fish expected that "school could discuss with students about the schedule of spring or autumn outing" (Fish, Grade 4, 13.01.2014); Max hoped that he could have a DIY activity which is completely led by students" (Max, Grade 5, 13.01.2014).

Additionally, there were requests for a holiday for celebrating minority festivals, both from ethnic minorities far away from their hometowns and from others who felt this would enable them to experience and engage in minority festivals. This theme will be discussed further in part 5.4.1.

5.3 School conditions

During my field research, mixed responses were found in relation to school environment, facilities and equipment, security, food and meals, uniform and toilets. These data were gathered through inviting students to comment on factors that they suggested make school a more enjoyable and comfortable place which would support them in their studying. These items were answered in detail and were regarded by students to have a significant influence upon their learning. Furthermore, building on this data from students, teachers discussed these issues further within their interviews and in the workshop.

5.3.1 School environment

One of the biggest problems raised by students was environmental challenges. They spoke of the lack of indoor space. “Corridors are too much hassle, especially during the break.” Class size in those three schools was approximately 40-50. In proportion to classroom space, “the classroom is too small.” As student Jenny described,

Every classroom packs as fully as a sardine tin.

- Jenny, Grade 5, 07.02.2014

During my observations at all three schools, I also agreed that schools should be less crowded so that both students and teachers could feel more comfortable and healthy.

When it comes to outdoor environments, it was nice to hear praise and compliments concerning campus landscaping in different seasons, such as “buds on the peach trees in spring”; “trees providing shade from the sun in summer”; “refreshing fragrance of osmanthus in autumn.” While only one student suggested that there would be more evergreen trees in schools because the bare trees are comparatively less vital (Jami, Grade3, 07.01.2014).

5.3.2 Facilities and equipment

In some students eyes, facilities and equipment had a lot to do with teaching quality. They asked for “new experimental apparatus”, “more computers”, “new basketball stands”. This equipment was said to be updated too slowly, having a direct influence on their learning and doing exercise. At one school, one of the strongest aspirations was the demand of air-

conditioner in classrooms. Student Angel told me that because “in such a freezing winter, it is too cold indoor to feel my feet now” (Angel, Grade 5, 07.02.2014).

Besides, at another school, students complained about that there was no place for students to have meals. Due to that “the classroom is filled with food smell everywhere after lunch”, students unable to focus on studying (Banana, Grade 6, 10.02.2014). Hence, many students further argued that there should be a canteen for them to eat lunch.

5.3.3 Security

The biggest problem which made students feel unsafe was too slippery grounds particularly in rainy or snowy days: “it is so easy to slip and fall in toilets and corridors”; “When snow begins to melt and the ground is covered with ice, the school turns into a ‘natural skating rink.’” Addressed on this problem, students gave their suggestions that the school could hire some workers to pave with little stones or to remove the snow and ice, otherwise it is very dangerous.

5.3.4 Food and meals

When talking about food and meals, at all three schools, feedbacks from students were about the hygiene and cleanliness of food and meals. Quite a few students responded that sometimes they “saw hair in their meals” and “snacks sold in small shops at school sometimes were expired.” Others spoke of dirty lunch-boxes and meal spoons with rice sticking on them.

Besides, there were also concerns about the menu, “school meal lacks diversity”, “everyday it is the same.” But comments I heard mostly were that “the dishes taste terrible, I can not bear another bite”, and “the lunch really has less vegetables.” A number of students recommended that school could recruit chefs to improve meal quality and to make meal become healthier. Some students even asked for specific items for the menu, such as dumpling soup, spaghetti pasta and Thai cuisine.

Specially, there were many requests for meal with pork across the schools, such as pork balls,

pork soup, but ethnic minority students from Hui rejected pork, because of their forbidden tradition to eating pigs. Hence, Hui students called for halal and vegetarian options. Most Hui students suggested like “a range of options” or “alternative dishes.”

5.3.5 Uniform

Through the investigations in three primary schools, I knew that in two schools, students were required to wear uniform only on Monday and other significant days. While at the other one school, students must wear uniform every day. With regard to whether or not students should wear uniform, all research respondents had their own reasons and opinions. Some supported to wear uniform because of its symbolic meaning, while others refused to wear uniform due to its bad design.

One of teachers I interviewed, Mrs. Belinda, held the typical view that “uniform represents equality and a sense of belong. It is conducive to eliminate the bad tendency of measuring against each other” (Mrs. Belinda, 15.01.2014). Among the students, some of them express similar views. Take Bob’s explanation for example:

Uniform can give me a sense of group honor and close the distance with other school mates. In short, uniform is good for the unity and equality of students.

- Bob, Grade 3, 15.01.2014

Yet some percentage of pupils opposed to wear uniform, especially at the school which required students to wear uniform every day. Complains were mostly on the grounds of materials, color, style. For instance, Aalie considered that “individual personality highlighted nowadays, but the uniform is unfashionable (Aalie, Grade 6, 06.01.2014). Kermit spoke out his own opinion that “the uniform is too thin and has only one layer, which cannot keep me warm in such cold winter” (Kermit, Grade 5, 15.01.2014).

Besides, one girl Nancy argued for differentiating boy and girl’s uniform, for example, pantsuits for boys and culottes for girls (Nancy, Grade 6, 09.01.2014). Some innovative students with creative ideas suggested drawing cartoon, and embroidering their names on it, which could make uniform attractive and nice-looking. Nearly every research participant

among the student felt strongly about the uniform, they sought individual expression and a way of voicing their concerns about the uniform issues.

5.3.6 Toilets

At all three schools, nearly a quarter of all pupils raised concerns about unhygienic and badly constructed toilets. It appeared that each floor has only four kneeling positions in women's lavatory and five positions in men's lavatory. While the situation was that there were approximately 300 students of 4-5 classrooms on each floor. The following descriptions from students were representative:

When class is over, students rush to go to the restrooms. Sometimes it is too crowded to wait for my turn, the class bell rings. The most unfortunate time is that I have to control or to drink less water so as not to go to the toilet.

- Aaron, Grade 4, 02.01.2014

Another student Nancy indicates that

Suppressing the urine influences student's health and mood. Moreover, rushing to the toilets would disrupt school order.

- Nancy, Grade 6, 09.01.2014

This issue was discussed in the workshop, a majority of teachers recognized that the access to toilets was a problem. Especially in the past two years, students were increasing, thus the toilet problem had become intractable. While on the other side, the expansion clearly demanded more budgetary support for basic facilities.

Apart from the lack of toilets, three girls expressed frustration at toilet doors. In all schools, no matter whether these were old toilets which have been used for a long time, or in newly built toilets, squatting pots had no doors. In the only one school with doors in toilets, most of the doors were broken. When someone was using the toilet, others were queuing up and waiting for toilets, staring at him/her alongside. Aalie explained her worries:

Boy's toilet is just close to girl's toilet, and the worst that we dread is that boys would misentry into girl's toilet. In that case, they will take in everything at a glance.

- Aalie, Grade 6, 06.01.2014

Under such circumstance, some girls formed a "mutual assistance group", which means that when one is using the toilet, other "group members" will stand in line as if forming a stone

wall to block the “outsiders” from looking inside.

Within the workshop, teachers had different point of views concerning reasons for this issue. Some considered that not putting doors were intended for good ventilation and fresh air. Others spoke out the truth that formerly there were doors, but due to high frequency of use, doors were quickly broken. Interestingly, one of the students- Amy mentioned the issue of students’ human rights, relating to human dignity and privacy.

I hope my right of privacy could be protected.

- Amy in Workshop, Grade 3, 06.02.2014

Another student provided his ideas for improving the toilet conditions, including providing more litter bins, more frequent flush of the toilet and providing toilet papers (Jami in Workshop, Grade 3, 06.02.2014).

5.4 Respect in power relations

In addition to the right *to* education confirmed in article 28 of the UNCRC, Article 29 stipulates the aims of education, including fostering education for people with different experiences, cultures, ethnic and religious backgrounds from their own to live together peacefully:

States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to... respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms... and preparation of the child for responsible life...in the spirit of peace...equality... and friendship among all people, ethnic, national and religious groups (Article 29 CRC, 1989).

That is to say, to place education within a framework of human rights, we should respect “the rights of the other as a fellow human being and not because s/he shares our values, culture, or nationality” (Osler, 2010, p.8).

The following section draws on exploring students’ and staff’s perspectives regarding social justice and equity based on data collected from interviews and the workshop. As I introduced in Chapter 4- Methodology, interviewees were 18 students and 15 teachers, including five minority ethnic students, five minority ethnic teachers and other majority Han teachers and

students. I attempt to unveil their attitudes towards specific issues of social justice in the three elementary schools and how they perceive their roles in power relations of majority-minorities and teacher-students.

5.4.1 Respect for ethnic minorities

The demands from ethnic minority students are mostly focused on food and holidays. In terms of food and meals, minority students requested for creating particular menus, such as halal food and vegetarian food. It can be seen from the Majority Han responses that they have a certain degree of respect, because nearly all of research respondents accepted and agreed with minority students' suggestions. But I doubt about whether or not they would carry them out, because only putting such "spoken promises" into practice would achieve actual respect.

In regard to providing ethnic holidays, two ethnic minority students called for taking a holiday on the special days in ethnic calendars for them to celebrate ethnic festivals.

We should be allowed to take a special holiday for us ethnic minorities to celebrate our festivals.

- Chay, Ethnic Minority Tibetan, 02.01.2014

To set a particular ethnic day is beneficial for Han (the majority) students to understand more about our minority cultures.

- Jami, Ethnic Minority Uyghur, 07.01.2014

This suggestion was also supported by some students who were from the majority Han, believing that "school life might be much more interesting and colorful if we have such special days to understand more about ethnic cultures (Linli, Majority Han, 06.01.2014).

While most teaching staffs in the workshop doubted about whether it might be excessive to have one day off to celebrate minority festivals. Just like one teacher deemed, "it might be an excuse for them so as not to go to school" (Workshop, 06.02.2014). Hence, I gave my advice in the workshop, "it might sound reasonable for the school to arrange optional activity classes, which could let students choose whether they would like to do other things or to join the ethnic gathering" (Workshop, 06.02.2014).

All the teaching staffs in the workshop, regardless of ethnic identities, agreed in broad terms with my suggestions. Mr. Jesse, one of the workshop participants, supported that:

It is not feasible to do so; otherwise the teaching plan could not be fully achieved. But we could try to open some activities to meet students' requirements in a certain degree.

- Mr. Jesse in the Workshop, Majority Han, 06.02.2014

Hence, reflecting on the above, "to show respect does not imply unconditional support or to follow other's ideas without thinking. To coordinate two sides of power relations, it is necessary to create negotiations or discussions to reach an agreement." (Research diary, 06.02.2014)

5.4.2 Teachers respecting for students

In interviews, only five pupils thought that teachers showed their respect for them. For instance, "teachers would say politely 'thank you' after students assisted them to handle affairs"; "teachers are patient and kind to explain more times if students could not figure out certain knowledge points."

However, the other 13 pupils appeared to be disappointed with teachers for showing a lack of respect for them. What I heard loudest among responses were punishments for breach of disciplines. When asked about the issue of punishing students, many teachers in the workshop, they admitted that certain punitive behaviors inadvisable. But one teacher- Healy pointed out that those conducts were merely for students' interest and well-being.

As the saying goes: 'spare the rod and spoil the child'¹⁰, otherwise, students will not have a bright future.

- Mrs. Healy in Workshop, 06.02.2014

In response to Mrs. Healy's viewpoints, two students attending the workshop participated in this discussion. Jami argued that teachers should have greater awareness concerning respect for students:

Teachers and other adults should start by hearing our voices. We are always doing what they (teachers) want us students to do. Things they think right and good might be wrong in our mind.

- Jami, Grade 3, 06.02.2014

¹⁰ "Spare the rod and spoil the child" (不打不成器) is an old Chinese saying. It means that certain punishments, for example, spanking and scolding child might lead him/her to grow into a useful person in the future.

Furthermore, Amy gave her advices like setting out rules governing the conduct of teachers. (Amy in Workshop, Grade 3, 06.02.2014)

5.5 Analysis and discussions

In the last part of this chapter, I intend to unveil the problems or challenges of child participation in decision-making in school conditions and organizational arrangements, based on research respondents' viewpoints mentioned above and other data not yet presented. As introduced in Chapter 3, the theoretical framework of this thesis is composed of three theories- Hart's ladder of participation, Lundy's reconceptualizing Article 12 CRC and Freire's critical pedagogical approach. The following part will look through the lens of first two theories- Lundy analysis on Article 12 and Hart's ladder of participation.

This chapter aims to examine to what extent Chinese primary schools ensure child to fully participate. As I clarified in Chapter 1 and 4, despite I am non-professional in educational field, but it is my passion and ideal of making a small contribution to Chinese society and education that trigger me to change study field from business to this program, hence, I would like that while analyzing challenges, some recommendations on how to make schools more responsive in line with Article 12 will be accordingly given.

Insufficient mechanisms and encouraging more views to be expressed

Article 12 declares the responsibility of schools to guarantee child's right to express views, which implies a mechanism to realize it. "The views of students are not simply heard when they chose to express them, but that a space is provided and the views of students actively sought" (Osler, 2010, p.110). Thus "schools should ensure that as many students as possible receive opportunities to participate" (Osler & Starkey, 2010, p.135). This is what Lundy (2007) called- "space".

Knowing from interviews of students, students have wide ranges of comments on school environment, facilities, security, food, uniform and toilets. But actually most of the teachers

knew nothing about those problems. Regarding teachers' punishments to students' who broke some disciplinary codes, 13 pupils appeared to regard such behaviors as the embodiment for a lack of respect, while one teacher did not think so. Hence, in my opinion, this implies insufficient mechanism for conveying students' opinions to teachers. I suggest that instead of certain mechanisms of listening to child views which have already had in schools, such as "Headmaster's mailbox" and "Intimate Sister's mailbox"¹¹, schools should put *communication mechanisms* into effect so as to make teachers know how students think. For example, schools could form student representative body which presents ideas to teachers.

Besides, according to the research data, with regard to participation activities, children have rarely "colorful" activities to take part in. Notably, all the campaigns- participations were designed and arranged by adults (school managers and teachers) and students' opportunities for "participation" was simply to obey requirements to study. As far as I understand, this might illustrate a lack of teachers' encouragements for students to speak out their opinions, which is against one of the four elements in Lundy's theory, that of "voice" (Lundy, 2007). Therefore, a suggestion could be made that students need to be encouraged by teachers to give more opportunities to actively participate in decision-making on schooling.

Low capacities of expressing and giving due weight to views

Children's capacity to participate relies heavily on adults' training and encouragement of them. Only if the whole society is willing to hear children's voice, providing substantial conditions for children's participation, children will not be silenced. Although a majority of the interviewees were already able to express their views clearly, they declared that "participation is a worthy experience" or "doing interviews is an interesting thing." However, during the process of asking for students' permission to interview, the number of students who declined to attend the interview is similar as the number of students who accepted. They believed that "no influences would be acted upon, despite of doing these interviews." Hence,

¹¹ "Intimate Sister's mailbox" is a way of contacted the teacher who is designated to support students resolving their problems- academic or otherwise.

in fact, my interviewees were a self-selecting group. Thus it appears that the number of children who believe they can participate in school affairs is relatively limited.

On reflection, the low level of children's participatory capacity reflected in their understandings is linked to the behavior of their teachers. It suggests that Chinese teachers in this study have not been ready to take up a role as an active "*audience*" (Lundy, 2007). This leads directly to students being unable to speak "children's language" or almost forgetting or denying their real feelings. To take one further example, facing the claim about taking one day off for ethnic festivals from minority students, teachers simply responded that "it is excessive", rather than looking for ways to taking child views into account. Thus on this point, teachers do not do well in playing a role of "audience". They do not see listening to children as a two-way process of negotiation, but more as a distraction from their established way of doing things.

In addition to having an active audience, according to Lundy, students should see the *influence* of their views, which implies that "children can see that their opinions have been heard, noted and taken into consideration in the decision-making process" (ibid, p.21). For example, regarding ethnic minority students' requests for special meals and holidays, teachers merely expressed their "spoken promise" to requests for special meals, and it remains to be seen whether promise would be realized. Hence, in my opinion, it is necessary to show students some influences on their opinions through discussion with students, rather than empty talk.

To make the influence clearer, more transparent measures should be established to make children see the results of their suggestions, which also incarnates respecting for children's right to information. Lundy argues that Article 12 needs to be set in the context of other participation rights such as the right to information discussed in Article 13 (ibid, p.18). "Decision-making requires information", as Osler see it, "this is a key aspect of children's participation rights." "Since a right cannot be claimed unless you know about it, this implies

education in human rights” (Osler, 2010, p.113). Accordingly, I suggest that concrete measures could be taken, such as posting reports as responses to students’ requests or informing students through schools broadcast.

Lack legal or political understanding and forming a practicable legal basis

Apart from those specific issues mentioned above, teachers were asked about their understanding of laws and policies on children’s participation and cultural diversity, and this was the only retained information.

From the gathered data, a few Chinese legal instruments relating to children’s participation in schools were known by teachers. Among 15 interviewed teachers, 5 mentioned *The Chinese Law of the Protection of Juveniles*, 7 teachers knew *The Chinese Education Law*. Merely two of them knew *UNCRC*. Given this circumstance, I encouraged other teachers to guess freely the content of *CRC*. The most issues they referred to were children’s living, protection and education rights while none of the respondents spoke about participation right. During the workshop, I made a presentation regarding children’s right to participate. When the workshop ended, one of the attendants told me: “Before attending this workshop, I didn’t know children’s participation is a human right” (Workshop, 06.02.2014). As I see it, the lack of child participation right is related to imperfect domestic laws on specific child participation right. Most Chinese laws and policies emphasize on child protection rights and the right to education. Child participation rights have not been incorporated into Chinese legal codes.

With regard to multicultural dimension, all teachers knew a number of laws of respecting and protecting multi-cultures, such as *Cultural Heritage Protection Law* and *Law of Regional Ethnic Autonomy*, and other policies like bilingual education and the exam score enhancement for minority students. Within the workshop, teachers thought that they did well in respecting ethnic cultures. While when ethnic students asked for special requirements, teachers found it difficult to achieve or expressed promised orally to “take minority students requests into consideration”, instead of “adding it in agenda.” Thus, under these circumstances, their

participation in decision-making tended more to the Tokenism in Hart's typology, which means that minorities have been given voices, but in fact they have little opportunity to formulate their own opinions and little influence on the reality. In my view, this might be because those multicultural laws and policies are not practical or not applicable in primary schools where there are few minority students surrounded by majority Han. Such laws may be designed more specifically for ethnic schools. This is an issue which warrants further research.

Reflecting on these situations, the basic legal knowledge of participation has not been widely recognized in a wide-range, implying that the legal system regarding child right to participate is imperfect. And the low level implementation of multicultural laws and policies reveals that it is necessary to establish more practical laws and policies for multicultural ordinary schools. Therefore, in my opinion, the most important and fundamental task for Chinese policy-makers now is to build up a set of comprehensive system of special laws in different domains to protect children and pay attention to carry through the basic principles of CRC, including best interests of children, no discrimination and participation. This is also in accord with requirements of Article 12, certain "policy or legal framework in which children's views is considered as a matter of course" (Osler, 2010, p.21).

All in all, utilizing Hart's model of eight rungs of children's participation to evaluate Chinese children participation in schools as a whole, from the analysis above, children's participation opportunities are in there to a certain degree, but insufficient. Hence, in this situation, it is not non-participation, but the level of engagement is too low. Students are able to join some activities and decision-making, and schools and teachers can also consult students' opinions, for instance, it is their choices to decide which activities they would like to take part in and to comment on some issues, according to their interests. However, those campaigns and decision-making children participate are all about study affairs (like interests group, and so on) or on the premise that those campaigns cannot influence study.

And with reference to legal frameworks and children's capacities, these are also underdeveloped. Thus I would say that Chinese children's participation is no higher than fifth ladder- Consulted and informed: adults design the projects, inform children and consult their opinions, which are treated seriously. The three main problems or challenges are insufficient mechanisms, low capacities of expressing and lack legal or political understanding. It is also noteworthy that in order to make schools more appropriate for students' development, schools need not only to improve facilities, mechanisms, laws and policies, but more necessarily, to facilitate students to express views and to give their views due weight.

5.6 Summary

By drawing on the perspectives of students and teachers, it would appear that school environment and organizational arrangements are not appropriate enough for students' participation, due to insufficient mechanisms, students' lack of skills in expressing and a lack of legal and political understanding, particularly amongst teachers. Those challenges inspire that in addition to forming a practicable legal basis, schools need not only to encourage child, but to facilitate students to express views and to give their views due weight.

As I indicated in Methodology Chapter, interviews were not only focused on issues beyond classrooms, but importantly on issues in the classrooms. The data gathering process of two classroom observations and textbook browsing were also conducted during the second fieldwork. Hence, next chapter will take a directly look on teaching and education issues in the classroom.

6. Looking directly into the classroom

- Are classrooms fit for students?

This chapter reports on teachers' and students' perspectives in the key space in school- the classroom, specifically emphasizing aspects of curriculum and pedagogy. In the last chapter (Chapter 5), I have presented students' engagement in decision-making on school conditions and organizational arrangements, while it was generally believed among both teachers and students interviewed that "school environment are subordinate, and the main theme should be studying", thus I find it necessary to present in-depth issues in the classroom. The research respondents were invited to comment and reflect on teaching and learning situations. Themes that run through the accounts are students' desire for extra curricular knowledge; their wish to have freedom to choose teachers and aspirations to improve pedagogical styles and introduce innovative methods.

As I discussed in Chapter 4- Methodology, in order to get an intuitive and detailed picture of the education present situation, I conducted two classroom observations of ideological and moral lessons and also leafed through students' textbooks during the second field research. By drawing on this source of data as well as on interviews during both fieldworks, this chapter attempts to answer to what extent education and teaching could meet learners' needs and whether students could become active participants in class. In addition, issues about equality and respect in the matter of education and teaching were also highlighted by research respondents. This is also a factor to consider in any analysis of whether or not youth participation is enough and effective.

6.1 Curriculum: content and choice

Curriculum is regarded as the most fundamental and important part in school teaching. This section discusses curriculum content and choice. The data source is mainly interviews and textbook analysis.

6.1.1 Curriculum content

By consulting textbooks, I learned that course books in primary schools are divided into two categories- “morality and life” and “morality and society”. Textbooks of grade 1-2 are named as “morality and life”, which emphasize on issues of kinship, friendship and habit-formation; while course books in grade 3-6 are called as “morality and society”, which concentrate on relationships of students and others (including adults and peers) in fields of school, family and society, and other domestic and international issues. Admittedly, textbook designers have given a degree of attentions to popularizing the protection of child rights and child citizenship. For example, in the textbook of Lesson Six in grade 5 volume 2, the lesson title is “I am a citizen of the People’s Republic”, which mainly introduces the rights and responsibilities of Chinese citizens, including children. In the figure below, I outline those rights of citizens included in the books (See Table 6.1):

| Citizens in different ages | Rights |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| From birth | - Civic rights |
| | - Personal rights |
| | - Human dignity |
| | - Right to protect |
| School aged children | - Right to education |
| Grownups | - Right to vote |
| | - Right to be elected |
| | - Labor right |
| | - Freedom of marriage |
| The aged | - Social insurance |
| | - Property right |

Table 6.1 Citizen’s rights in Lesson 6 in Chinese ideological and moral textbook of Grade 5, Vol.2

With regard to children’s rights, it is obvious that the textbook does not make explicit mention of children’s participation rights. On this point, I agreed with viewpoints from one of teachers I interviewed- Mrs. Ally, she considered that “this did not imply children should go without any chance to participate, just because despite the right had not been avowed” (Mrs. Ally, 07.02.2014). In fact, I found that youth participation could be seen in activity lessons, such as

acts of compassion¹², green small guards¹³ and other class campaigns. Those classroom activities could also be considered as a way to inspire student's initiative to engage in lessons.

Besides, six of the 18 interviewed students expressed the opinions that their enthusiasm of attending class activities could be aroused not only through activity lessons, but through teaching extra knowledge, especially in science and moral courses. Jami's comment was most typical:

It might be better if teachers could teach us knowledge beyond the textbooks. Then I would be more interested in positively learning these courses.

- Jami, Grade 3, 07.01.2014

6.1.2 Curriculum choice

Seen from the data collected during my second field research, I found that the issue of free choice of curriculum was also very important to students. This included curriculum choices related to option within subjects, and homework assignment:

Interest is the best teacher of all... If only I had an opportunity to choose courses, my curiosity and interests would become a motivation to help me study better.

- Angel, Grade 5, 07.02.2014

I have to stay up late at night to do homework. This affects the quality of attentive classes next day. So we would be able to learn much better if we are asked to choose the quantity of assigned homework.

- Banana, Grade 6, 10.02.2014

This topic was raised again in the workshop. Teachers expressed their worries about the feasibility of free choice. In their views, "choosing what they like would not change anything." Some teachers pointed out that "all students hope learning will be easy", but "if students are allowed to select courses, study tasks might not be completed" (Workshop, 06.02.2014).

This issue could be further tied to a pervading theme throughout the entire consultation with

¹² Acts of compassion is a class campaign for public benefit, such as donations to child in poverty, caring for the elderly in nursing homes and so on.

¹³The meaning of green small guards is that students to be volunteers to protect environment by planting trees.

students:

It would be better if teachers could listen to our (students') voices before they arranged curriculum and assigned homework. Then, our learning efficiency might be higher.

- Jack, Grade1, 10.02.2014

In my opinion, aside from the rationality of students' requests for free choice, at least it is worthy for teachers and educators to ponder over, the point of listening to students' voice. To make proper adjustments to the curriculum arrangement and homework assignments based on students' opinions could make study be accepted in their subjective willingness. This is also in accordance with the initial main idea of new educational reform- grounded on students' development (Curriculum, 2001).

6.2 Pedagogy: forms and methods

This part presents issues of pedagogy, particularly addressing on teaching styles and methods. Scholar Stager insisted that "pedagogy is important not just because of what "teaching" is, but for how teaching relates to what learning is, a far more important concept" (Stager, 2012). That is to say, pedagogy is not merely a matter of teaching, but a mutual relation between teachers and learners. Hence, in addition to observing teachers' teaching words and behaviors in class, students' views have also been taken into account, in order to understand how they perceive pedagogical themes throughout the teaching process.

6.2.1 Teaching styles

Among students, the words that occurred most frequently in their discussion of teaching styles were diversification and fun. They asked for diversified teaching styles which could also inspire their learning. Because there is no multimedia equipment in ordinary classrooms of all three investigated schools, two students, Chay and Nancy asked to "take class more frequently in multimedia classroom" and "have more equipment in ordinary classrooms" (Chay, Grade 5, 02.01.2014; Nancy, Grade 6, 09.01.2014). Both of them believed that multiple forms could make lessons more fun.

However, other pupils, approximately half of those I interviewed, thought it unnecessary to use more facilities. In their mind, too complicated teaching styles might distract them. Thus they suggested that instead of just listening to teachers talking in the classroom, some practices and activities such as group discussion session, role playing session, and organizing some fieldtrips, would help learners to comprehend course contents better.

Maybe more activities or practices could be organized. This might make lesson vivid and easier for us to understand the content of lesson. This is another way of “happy learning.”

- Pritt, Grade 6, 09.01.2014

Interestingly, I found that textbooks did include contents arrangement of all kinds of activities and discussion, but teachers seldom implemented these. When these requests were mentioned in the workshop, teachers spoke out their concerns. Some insisted that “it is the only way to manage limited time of a lesson by changing the discussion part in textbooks into common question-asking session.” The other teachers deemed that restricted funds for materials are also a restraining factor. Moreover, the problem of staff to guarantee children’s security (for example on field trips) was worthy of consideration (Workshop, 06.02.2014). Therefore, those practices or activities might be desirable active methods for learners, but difficult to realize.

To my way of thinking, on one hand, teachers’ worries are not without justifications; on the other hand, this might imply ineffective teaching styles. Teachers could take students’ opinions into consideration to make some changes to their teaching styles according to specific conditions. In this case, students would be able to see their voices have been listened to by teachers.

6.2.2 Teaching methods

On 7th February, 2014 and 10th February, 2014 during my second fieldwork, I observed two ideological and moral classes for grade five and grade six at School B and C respectively. Teaching method is one of the most important parts I investigated.

As for the teaching method of class, I noted the following in my research diary:

During the lesson, the teacher stood mainly in front of the classroom. The whole process was based on having questions-answers (QA) sessions in the classroom. Most situations were that the teachers asked, and students should respond immediately (Classroom observation, 10.02.2014).

As I make clear in these notes, I found that the tempo of the lessons was really fast. Students were unable to get ample chances to speak out their opinions. More precisely, there were two situations which arose in QA. In one case, many students had their hands up, eager to answer questions simultaneously. Then “the teacher would select one randomly.” While “if the learner was struggling to provide correct answer, teacher would ask other students without any hesitation or say the correct answer out directly” (ibid, 10.02.2014). However, in another situation, which occurred more often, no students wished to give an answer. Faced with a quiet class, “the teacher provided the correct answer immediately and continued the lesson” (ibid. 10.02.2014).

This reminds me of similar memories during my elementary study time. I would doubt about the effectiveness of this QA teaching method. This is especially the case when it comes to subjects like scientific subject, ideological and moral subject, which is complex for many young people. One student’s opinion actually revealed the flaw of this teaching method:

One student’s answering correctly does not mean that all others could understand well. Needless to say, teacher directly provides the correct answer.

- Angel, Grade 5, 07.02.2014

Hence as I see, this teaching method of barely addressing fast questions and fast answers might not be the best approach of teaching. This would make pupils feel the subject even more complicated, leading to a drop-off in teaching efficiency.

6.3 Equality in power relations

In the process of interviews, children did not simply talk about curriculum and pedagogy, issues of partiality and concern about teacher attitudes and behavior during the educational

process were also frequently mentioned.

6.3.1 Teacher-student relationship

During the interviews, students were welcome to express views about their relationship with teachers. Drawing on this data, two students considered teachers completely equal to students. They pictured teachers vividly as friends and peers. The reasons for saying so were various. For instance, in one student Fish's eyes, when they had outing activities, her teachers would "take pictures and play games" with her, and she felt teachers just like friends (Fish, Grade 4, 13.01.2014); in another student Candy's mind, he thought his teachers could "take good care" of him, reminding him to add coat in cold weather or feeding him medicine when he was ill (Candy, Grade 6, 01.01.2014).

While to my surprise, nearly three-quarter student participants did not think so. In their opinions, teacher is just teacher, the particular role in schools, with feelings of superiority and authority. Some introvert students said that if a teacher is strict, "students should do what the teacher asked them to do". Others expressed their worries about that there was a tendency for some teachers to engage in injustices as they exercised teachers' power. They provided some explicit examples; "if a student was absent-minded, the teacher will stare at him/her to make him/herself to notice"; "if a student did something wrong, some particular teachers would scold and speak sarcastically in front of other classmates in class". These behaviors, in their words, "make them feel embarrassed and dignity being heart-wounded."

When discussing about this topic in the workshop, teachers acknowledged that the ideal relationship between teacher and student should be equal friendship. But at the same time, they also felt that sometimes a sense of authority was necessary, which could help them to manage students. Besides, regarding students requests for teachers to listen to their opinions, teachers indicated that they were glad to listen to child views. But one teacher held negative views that "students have no ability to offer deep question or advice, most students are too lazy to think" (Workshop, 06.02.2014).

In addition to the hierarchy teacher-student power relation, the different treatments or even prejudice between good students and bad students were presented by two students. Banana told me that “seats in the classroom are arranged in accordance with academic records. Bad students are sitting close to the back of classroom.” (Banana, Grade 6, 10.02.2014). Teachers in the workshop thought that the phenomenon of “purity begets purity, like begets like”¹⁴ did exist, which implies the choice of companions of great importance. In other words, some disruptive students might disturb the class and affect other students’ study. Nonetheless, other teachers reached a consensus that this opinion was not absolute. However, addressed on this theme, Mrs. Tina’s pointed out that, “This is a misunderstanding that teachers should not prejudge academically poor student as a morally poor student” (Mrs. Tina in workshop, 06.02.2014).

The last comments from students appear to relate to some particular teachers’ punishments, which have a bad effect on poor students. Those experiences might undermine children’s self-confidence and undermine students’ dignity.

Student gives an incorrect answer; the teachers make the student stand in class for a long time. Some teachers criticize in front of other classmates.

- Bob, Grade 3, 15.01.2014

If I complain about teachers, teachers would regard me as a trouble-maker. Consequently, I might get punishments.

- Jack, Grade 1, 10.02.2014

In my view, although these punishments are some particular teachers’ behaviors, it can also reflect that some teachers have the traditional way of thinking, which is called by Osler as “teacher stereotyping” (Osler, 2010, p.81). Thus it provokes me the idea that it might be necessary to shift teachers’ fixed perceptions.

¹⁴“Purity begets purity, like begets like” (近朱者赤，近墨者黑) is an idiom evolved from the ancient time. Adults often use this idiom to make children understand that the choice of companions more important even than that of teachers and guardians.

6.3.2 Majority-minorities relation

As I mentioned in previous chapters, all three research schools are multicultural primary schools in the environment of majority Han. Students in interviews were asked about their perspectives on learning with students from different cultural backgrounds. Revealing from the collected data, different people have their different positions and views.

Generally speaking, most minority ethnic students felt no significant difference when they studied together with majority Han students. For example, students Chay and Jami said:

I have an ethnic minority friend. He and I are so close and just like brothers.

- Chay, Ethnic Minority Tibetan, 02.01.2014

I did not see any difference between us.

- Jami, Ethnic Minority Uyghur, 07.01.2014

Unexpectedly, it is commonly believed among majority students that “compared to some majority students, minority students are more easy-going” (Aaron, Majority Han, 02.01.2014).

As far as teachers are concerned, they were invited to talk about the advantages or challenges they came across when they got along with students from different cultural backgrounds. Among respondents, five teachers were from minority ethnic groups. Two of them posed a positive attitude towards multicultural form of education and rest three teachers supported their viewpoints:

Teaching and learning in the context of cultural diversity could foster cultural exchanges between Han and minorities.

- Mr. Irvin, Ethnic Minority Hui, 13.01.2014

By means of providing multiethnic students with communication opportunities, mutual understandings could be enhanced and the confrontation among different ethnic students could be alleviated.

- Mrs. Daisy, Ethnic Minority Hui, 09.01.2014

While amongst Han teachers, only one teacher stood out from the most teachers and found the positive viewpoints. In this win-win situation, Mrs. Marguerite anticipated that such learning environments would support the learning of Mandarin among minority ethnic students, and that all teachers would expand their own cultural horizons (Mrs. Marguerite, Majority Han, 01.01.2014).

Nevertheless, in sharp contrast to ethnic minority teachers' supporting viewpoints, "Han" nationality teachers generally believed that "there was no complete equality" and felt several particular problems or challenges: The first challenge came from the cultural differences. As Mrs. Oates perceived, "some particular ethnic beliefs or forbidden issues are like 'warning line'." If they don't know them, this would give rise to a really awkward circumstance (Mrs. Oates, Majority Han, 01.01.2014). Others considered languages problem as the barrier of communication. For example, they found it challenging "to understand ethnic minority pupils' meaning in class (Mrs. Victoria, Majority Han, 10.02.2014); they had to slow down teaching progress for minority ethnic students (Mrs. Ally, Majority Han, 07.02.2014). What is more, it also "poses a challenge to teachers' language requirement to speak more normatively (standard Mandarin) and in clear Mandarin (Mrs. Cecil, Majority Han, 13.01.2014).

When it comes to language use in the process of teaching and learning, I observed that "except for some ethnic minority teachers who speak ethnic minority language, all the other teachers in the three schools merely use Mandarin. This might not be in line with the bilingual education recommended in legal instruments." (Class observation, 10.02.2014) But if we look with an attitude of tolerance, it is understandable that teachers only speak mandarin in schools, because ethnic minorities are much fewer after all. It is not easy to realize the bilingual education in such ordinary primary schools without specific training and resources for teachers.

6.4 Analysis and discussion

In the following section, I would like to analyze and discuss the current situation of child

participation in classroom by utilizing theoretical instruments of both Freire's critical pedagogy approach and Lundy's reconceptualizing Article 12 CRC (as explained in Chapter 3). Based on the data I collected, I uncovered some problems and challenges of youth participation in Chinese primary classrooms. Furthermore, I would like to provide relevant suggestions to make pupil's participation in classrooms more effective. While I have noted in Chapter 4- Methodology, in the educational domain, I am non-professional, and I know that only by this small-scaled research data I may not conclude comprehensively. Yet, I hope that, at least, this research study could contribute a bit and have some reference for Chinese education development.

Inappropriate teaching method and adopting “problem-posing” education

Through the field research in classrooms, I discovered that the teaching method is inappropriate for learners. The pedagogy used in class was mainly founded on QA. Students in interviews responded generally that the method did not work well, because students should follow the set of lesson plan when they have problems of understanding. Learners' answers were uni-directionally judged by the teachers, and the teacher-student communication tended to be teacher-dominated. Thus, from Freire's theoretical perspective, such seedy asking and answering teaching method teachers' teaching method tends to what Freire criticized- the “banking” concept, “in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits” (Freire, 1970, p.72).

To make a change to the current teaching method, I would like to further recommend the significant method in Freire's critical pedagogical approach- “problem-posing education”. As “the essence of education as the practice of freedom”, this method emphasized on a mutual “dialogue” or communication between teachers and learners, rather than simply instilling knowledge into the learner's brain (ibid, p.87).

Regarding how to realize “problem-posing” education, it is necessary to connect it with Lundy's theory (2007). In my way of thinking, in class, a teacher need not only to encourage students to express their “voice”, but more importantly, to act as an equal “audience” to listen

to fellow students' voices. My suggestion is to slow down the tempo of lessons to listen to students' opinions. If time is too limited to give responses, teachers could communicate with students after class or during break. Only by doing so could the dialogues in class be equal and effective. Teachers would then be in a better position to comprehend the present situation of students' mastery of knowledge; and students could engage in learning more effectively.

Lack of critical consciousness and using critical pedagogy

In addition to the inappropriate teaching method, the research data also reveals a more or less lack of critical consciousness of both teachers and students. For example, when students claimed for the curriculum choice, extra curriculum knowledge, diversified teaching styles, they did not take obstructive factors (such as limited time and money, security...) into consideration; Most teachers, facing with students' requests, either promise orally or directly say "no". In my opinion, these are the embodiments of teachers and students lack of critical consciousness.

When talking about critical pedagogy approach, Freire deems that reflection and action are the two interactive elements in the praxis, which could generate critical consciousness (See Figure 6.2).

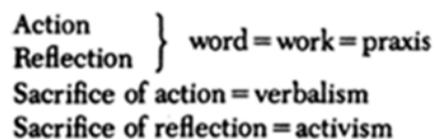


Figure 6.2 The Reflection-Action Relation. (Freire, 1970, p.188)

According to Freire, "When a word is deprived of its dimension of action...the word is changed into idle chatter, into *verbalism*, into an alienated and alienating 'blah.' It becomes an empty word... and there is no transformation without action" (Freire, 1970, p.87). While on the other hand, "if action is emphasized exclusively, to the detriment of reflection, the word is converted into *activism*. The latter—action for action's sake—negates the true praxis and makes dialogue impossible" (ibid. p.89).

To make it clearer, I would like to associate it with Lundy's theory. When teachers orally promised students' requests, they should take actions upon their words. Otherwise it would become "verbalism". Interpreted by Lundy's notion, even when students are provided with *space* - opportunities to express their views, if no *influence* is given, teachers' promises are just empty words. While if they have no critical consciousness, even though both *space* and *influence* could be seen, the practical action might not be the most beneficial for child well-being. Hence, when teachers have already adopted the "problem-posing" education and create a dialogue with students, the critical reflection is important to making such dialogue effective.

Nussbaum perceives that the critical thinking ...is one of the capacities to be developed in education for democratic citizenship (Osler & Starkey, 2010, p.133). Therefore, to further realize the democracy in classrooms, my suggestion is that both students and teachers should develop their skill of critical thinking. Students could temper their critical consciousness under the guidance of educators. For instance, educators can leave it up to children to make their own decisions on what, when, where and how to carry out their campaigns. At the meantime, teachers should also bear in mind thinking critically, which could lead to their more rational analysis of students' claims, to judge which requirements could be adopted and which demand consulting and discussion with students.

The cognition of inequality and making a change in teachers' awareness

In this study, many students spoke out the imbalanced power relationships of teacher-pupil and majority-minorities at school. Firstly, with regard to teacher-pupil relation, concerns that run through the students' responses were assumptions of teacher's superiority by teachers and distinct treatments between good and bad students. In the workshop, educators generally deemed that they would listen to pupils' reasonable suggestions, but they also felt that "sometimes a sense of authority was necessary". What is more, one teacher insisted that because children "have no capability" or "are lazy to think", most of their views were not workable. In my viewpoint, these views reflect the pervasive "paternalism" in China (Gregory, 2014).

It is the “social ‘paternalism’ today that adults...are often assumed to be best placed to assess children’s needs, take decisions on their behalf”, without due consideration of children’s own opinions (Osler, 2010, p.118). Although CRC as well as other international documents established “children as rights-bearing subjects (Grugel & Piper, 2007, p.112), but empirically speaking, children are questioned about individual incompetence, disability, autonomy/dependency (Jenkins, 1998). Freeman stresses “the duty to listen carefully to children, rather than make the assumption that they lack capacity or competence to think and act for them” (Osler, 2010, p.113).

As Lowden stated, “Until adults develop a more pragmatic ideology in relation to children’s rights then a true respect for children’s autonomy will not be achieved”(Lowden, 2002, p.107). Article 12 also implies that “it is not simply a legal or administrative change but also a cultural change”, shifting from “children’s right” to realizing “the right of children to have rights” (Liebel, 2012, p.11; Osler, 2010, p.21). In view of this, I consider that to eliminate paternalism thoughts is a fundamental step to make a change in adults’ consciousness.

Regarding what precise measures could be taken, in my opinion, an introductory curriculum on the CRC could be held in schools. By doing this, the content and meaning of child rights and children’s participation rights could be given more attentions. This in turn might encourage children to express themselves more and to be treated better by adults.

Concerning *majority-minorities* relation, it is ironically to see ethnic bias and discrimination in the perspectives of almost all majority Han teachers, which is not obvious in the student respondents. Article 12 CRC affirms that “all rights in the Convention most apply without discrimination of any kind irrespective of race, color, language, religion, national ethnic or social origin, disability or other status” (Article 12 CRC, 1989). Lundy (2007) also points out that all children can access their rights, with the principle of non-discrimination (Article 2) in operation.

For this reason, I recommend that teachers are expected to treat students with a more tolerant and equal attitude, and are offered training and support to address their concept of ethnic inequality. If ethnic minority students present teachers with a sense of feeling of challenges, then, teachers should cope with these problems in a positive way, not subjectively ignoring or applying different labels on minority students in their mind. Teachers should be aware that every child is a synthesis of strengths and shortcomings. It is teachers' responsibility to become every child in developing their personality to the full. Only by changing teachers' cognition of equality would students be able to fully engage in classrooms, no matter what decision-makings or other pedagogical strategies are put in to enable participation.

6.5 Summary

By drawing on issues of curriculum and pedagogy regarding child participation in classrooms, it appears that Chinese multicultural primary schools are experiencing problems: inappropriate teaching methods, lack of critical consciousness, and awareness of inequality. In such circumstances, I suggest that teachers need to improve teaching methods (problem-posing education) and utilize a critical pedagogical approach. Perhaps more importantly, but nevertheless, something which requires a longer-term development and on-going training, is the necessity for a change in teachers' consciousness.

7. Concluding Remarks

As discussed above, the development of child participation remains a significant concern for Chinese primary schools. Cultural diversity in schools might be the catalyst to encourage teachers to give greater emphasis to social justice- equality and respect. It can be said that child participation in multicultural primary schools is a process of practicing fundamental human rights principles, including respecting child rights and cultural diversity. Child participation is crucial in multicultural schools in relation to guaranteeing child rights and social justice.

This thesis seeks to explore the present situation of youth participation in and beyond classrooms in Chinese multicultural primary schools, through a study of three such schools. With regard to school conditions and organizational arrangements regarding students' participation in decision-making beyond the classroom, schools are facing challenges- insufficient communication mechanisms; students' low skills of expression; and a common lack of legal or political knowledge of child participation rights. This implies that in addition to implementing legal frameworks, schools need not only to improve facilities, mechanisms and policies, but also to facilitate students to express their views and to give their views due weight (Lundy, 2007). While in terms of curriculum and pedagogy regarding child participation in classrooms, schools are experiencing problems- inappropriate teaching methods, lack of critical consciousness and an understanding of inequality. Hence, teachers need to improve teaching methods (problem-posing education) and to utilize the critical pedagogical approach (Freire, 1970), and to increase teachers' awareness. All these challenges or problems imply a "cultural shift" in teachers' consciousness by listening to children's "heart". By this the thesis implies that teachers need to go beyond the technical processes of listening to children's "voice", to create space for children to express their voices and mechanisms to act on children's ideas and concerns.

7.1 Inspirations to education reforms in China

In this thesis, I have discussed that Chinese students do not have substantive right to participate. Admittedly, children may have participation and some opportunities to express their views. Children's participation is more "visible" in schools, through such means as student organizations, and various activity clubs. Nevertheless, their participation is restricted by various inappropriate and insufficient factors, in aspects of school facilities, mechanisms, educational policies, teaching methods and so on. And I have also attempted to argue that it is of utmost importance to make a "cultural shift" in teachers' minds in order to put child participation into practice.

Moreover, in my opinion, this should not be only confined to teachers. Teachers are the enactors of educational concepts, but education reforms, including curriculum reform (which has been mentioned in Chapter 1), as one part of the education system, is the embodiment of educational concepts. Education reform needs to be informed by an understanding of child participation rights. As Levin deemed: "education reform cannot succeed and should not proceed without much more direct involvement of students in all its aspects" (Levin, 2000). This implies that a cultural shift should also be made in Chinese education reforms, and students' "voice" should also be incorporated during the process of education reforms. Only by doing so, child participation in schools and education could change "from invisible to visible" (Osler, 2010).

As a final note, as touched upon in Chapter 2- Literature review, more research is needed in the field of child participation right in multicultural schools, particularly in ordinary schools with culturally diverse student populations. This would support education reforms and hopefully enable them to draw on new ideas and inspirations.

7.2 Ways forward- Disseminating beyond schools

There might be no short cuts or a specific model for practice when it comes to promoting

child participation in multicultural school. Nevertheless, I would like to emphasize that culture is not static but dynamic and changing. If Chinese teachers and policy-makers are willing to make progressive changes to child's "voice", then, it is important to explore areas that continue to reproduce challenges. Making a change in schools is just the initial step. It is a matter of joint efforts in and beyond schools, including other wider spheres like families, communities. Osler also believes that "in working to implement Article 12, it is clear that many young people will wish to express their views about a wide range of matters affecting them, not just those relating to schools"(Osler, 2010, p.132). This not simply because children will finally become adults and go outing of schools to step into wider society, but also because children's participation is not solely dependent on school settings, other aspects like families and communities are also important. Hence, it is crucial to disseminate youth participation beyond schools and to shape the cohesion of all elements in the society.

7.3 Concluding remarks

For current China, it is the core task to take active steps to substantively foster children's participation in multicultural primary schools in the future society. Over hundred years ago, the famous Swedish educationalist Ellen Key published a meaningful and effective "The Century of the Child", predicting that the 20th century will be the century of the child. Now the 20th century has passed, whether her prediction has been realized or not, different people have different views (Dekker, 2000). Meanwhile, we can also observe that although along with some challenges, the situation of children's whole lives in China has been indeed changing. In China, if everyone could listen to children's heart, if children's participation is gradually carried out and child's rights are attached more attentions; we can certainly believe that we will witness children's well-being in the near future.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Letter of Consent for Research Study

Name of the University: Buskerud and Vestfold University College

Name of the College: School of Business and Social Sciences//Department of Teacher Education

Name of the Program: MSc Human Rights and Multiculturalism

MSc candidate: Li Liu

MSc supervisor: Audrey Osler

1. Main Research Question

To what extent do children participate in Chinese primary schools in the context of multiculturalism?

2. Purpose of Research

The purpose of this thesis is to develop a nuanced and deep understanding of the current situation of child participation and to provide suggestions for adults to take further appropriate actions to promote youth participation in primary schools with multicultural characters. My aim is to inject new ideas for education reform in basic education in China.

Specific objectives are:

- To identify conceptions of children's rights, children's participation rights, schooling and multiculturalism from both international and Chinese perspectives.
- To analyze the current situation of youth participation which Chinese primary schools are implementing and promoting and how it is being understood by adults, teachers in particular.
- To evaluate and attempt to develop guidance for children's participation in Chinese primary schooling in the context of diverse cultures.

3. Specific Procedures

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Before you make up your mind whether or not to take part, it is important and necessary for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

● About the Process of Participation

During the interview process, it will take about 30 minutes for participants to answer the interview questions.

Besides, I want to observe how students respond to the moral and social curriculum.

● Voluntary Participation

In this research project you are totally free to participate or not. If you choose to participate,

you are free to withdraw from the interview at any time.

- **Confidentiality**

Your privacy will be fully protected throughout the study (both interview and observation). The content of the interview will remain confidential between you the respondents and me the researcher. I will anonymise any data collected from this research, so that you cannot be easily identified in my research report. I will not use your name but will give you a pseudonym (you can choose your own pseudonym, if you wish). I will also disguise the school in my respect and give it a pseudonym.

- **Recording**

I will ask you if I may record the interview. This is not essential but it will enable me to keep a precise record of your opinions. Again you are free to choose. Please be assured that I will keep the recording safe and confidential.

- **Research report**

I am writing a dissertation which is due to be completed in summer 2014. I also plan to write a short summary report which I will make available to research participants if they wish.

4. Contact persons

If you have any questions or doubts about this research, please do not hesitate to contact:

Li Liu. Telephone number: +4797942781. Email: liliu_hibu@hotmail.com

You can also be free to contact my supervisor Professor Audrey Osler. Email:

A.H.osler@leeds.ac.uk

I HAVE HAD THE CHANCE TO READ THIS CONSENT FORM, BE INFORMED ABOUT THE PURPOSE OF THIS RESEARCH AND I AM READY TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS PROJECT

| | | |
|--------------------|----------------|------|
| Participant's Name | Signature/Seal | Date |
|--------------------|----------------|------|

| | | |
|-------------------------|-----------|------|
| Master Candidate's name | Signature | Date |
|-------------------------|-----------|------|

I would like to receive a summary research report when the project is complete in summer 2014.

Please send it to email:

Appendix 2: Interview Questions for Teachers

● **Introduce and Inform**

I am a research student from Buskerud and Vestfold University College, Drammen in Norway. I am studying the children's participation rights in Chinese primary schools in the context of multiculturalism. The purpose of this thesis is to develop a nuanced and deep understanding of the current situation of child participation and to provide suggestions for adults to take further appropriate actions to promote youth participation in primary schools with multicultural characters. My aim is to inject new ideas for education reform in basic education in China. Thank you taking time out of your busy schedule for this interview, and I would like to ask you several questions with regard to this theme. The results of the study will be strictly confidential-your identity will be anonymous.

● **Interview questions**

A. Teacher's Background

1. How long have you taught in the teaching profession?
2. Which class do you teach?
3. What subject do you teach?
4. What is your nationality? Are there any minority children in your class?

B. Knowledge about relevant laws and policies

1. Could you tell me about any laws or policies regarding the protection of children's rights in China?
2. Do you think that children have the right to participate? Why, why not?
3. Are there any educational laws or policies that you are aware of relating to cultural diversity?
4. Have you heard of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)? If yes, how and what do you know about it?

C. Attitudes and Views

1. Who or what departments manage or organize school rules, course scheduling and school activities?
2. Are there any mechanisms that could listen to and solicit children's views?
3. Do you think the school conditions (such as school environment, facilities, security, food, uniform or toilets) and curriculum and pedagogy) suitable for children? If no, what/in which part does it need to be improved?
4. Do you think there are any challenges or advantages faced by the teacher in working with students from minority backgrounds?
5. What do you think the ideal relationship should be between teachers and their students?
6. Have your students ever given you their suggestions or advices about school environment and curriculum content? If so, how did you respond to them?

Is there anything you may wish to share with me in relation to the issue of children's participation in primary schools?

Thank you so much for your cooperation, all these information will be kept confidential and only used for the purpose of this study.

Appendix 3: Interview Questions for Students

● Introduce and Inform

I am a research student from Buskerud and Vestfold University College, Drammen in Norway. I am studying the children's participation rights in Chinese primary schools in the context of multiculturalism. The purpose of this thesis is to develop a nuanced and deep understanding of the current situation of child participation and to provide suggestions for adults to take further appropriate actions to promote youth participation in primary schools with multicultural characters. My aim is to inject new ideas for education reform in basic education in China. Thank you taking time out of your busy schedule for this interview, and I would like to ask you several questions with regard to this theme. The results of the study will be strictly confidential-your identity will be anonymous.

● Interview questions

A. General Information

1. Which class do you study in?
2. Which grade are you in?
3. What is your nationality? Are there any minority classmates in your class?

B. Attitudes and Views

1. Are you satisfied with school rules and disciplines? Why or why not?
2. Do you have extra curricula activities? Could you tell me some? Who organize those activities?
3. Do you students have certain mechanism for taking students' opinions into account? For example, student council, headmaster's mailbox, etc. Have your views really been adopted?
4. Are you satisfied with the school conditions (such as school environment, facilities, security, food, uniform or toilets) and curriculum and pedagogy?
5. How do you feel when you take part in activities together with your classmates from other ethnic groups? Do you feel any difference when you are communicating with them?
6. Have your teachers ever punished you? (Not necessary physical punishment, other situation such as extra tasks or homework is also included.)
7. How would you describe your relationship with your teacher? (friend, parent, family member, none of these)
8. Do you think teachers show respect to you?
9. Can you speak out your views or remain silent in most cases? What is the fact?
10. Have you ever given your suggestions or advices about teaching contents? How did the teacher respond to you?

Is there anything you may wish to share with me in relation to the issue of children's participation in primary schools?

Thank you so much for your cooperation, all these information will be kept confidential and only used for the purpose of this study.

Appendix 4: List of Interviewees

4-1: Teachers Interviewees

| No. | Interviewee | Age | Sex | Ethnic Background | Years of Teaching | Subject | School | Date of Interview | Workshop participant |
|-----|-------------|-----|-----|-------------------|-------------------|---------------------|--------|-------------------|----------------------|
| 1 | Marguerite | 39 | F | Han | 22 | Math | A | Jan. 1, 2014 | No |
| 2 | Oates | 28 | F | Han | 7 | Chinese | A | Jan. 1, 2014 | No |
| 3 | Pusey | 40 | M | Han | 21 | Math | A | Jan. 2, 2014 | No |
| 4 | Tina | 53 | F | Miao* | 35 | Science | B | Jan. 6, 2014 | Yes |
| 5 | Jesse | 44 | M | Han | 24 | Sport | B | Jan. 6, 2014 | Yes |
| 6 | Jane | 49 | F | Han | 30 | Ideological & Moral | B | Jan. 7, 2014 | Yes |
| 7 | Healy | 46 | F | Han | 27 | Math | B | Jan. 7, 2014 | Yes |
| 8 | Daisy | 29 | F | Hui* | 7 | English | C | Jan. 9, 2014 | No |
| 9 | Donna | 38 | F | Tibetan* | 18 | Ideological & Moral | A | Jan. 13, 2014 | No |
| 10 | Irvin | 52 | M | Hui* | 32 | Chinese | A | Jan. 13, 2014 | No |
| 11 | Cecil | 29 | F | Han | 7 | Music | A | Jan. 13, 2014 | No |
| 12 | Belinda | 50 | F | Han | 30 | Math | B | Jan. 15, 2014 | Yes |
| 13 | Ally | 45 | F | Han | 25 | Ideological & Moral | B | Feb. 7, 2014 | Yes |
| 14 | Miranda | 27 | F | Hui* | 6 | Ideological & Moral | C | Feb. 10, 2014 | No |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|----|----------|----|---|-----|----|------------------------|---|------------------|----|
| 15 | Victoria | 49 | F | Han | 30 | Ideological & Moral | C | Feb. 10, 2014 | No |
|----|----------|----|---|-----|----|------------------------|---|------------------|----|

*Miao, Hui and Tibetan belong to minority groups.

4-2: Students Interviewees

| No. | Interviewee | Age | Sex | Ethnic Background | Grade | School | Date of Interview | Workshop participant |
|-----|-------------|-----|-----|----------------------|-------|--------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 | Jojo | 7 | F | Han | 2 | A | Jan. 1, 2014 | No |
| 2 | Candy | 12 | M | Han | 6 | A | Jan. 1, 2014 | No |
| 3 | Chay | 11 | F | Tibetan* | 5 | A | Jan. 2, 2014 | No |
| 4 | Aaron | 9 | M | Han | 4 | A | Jan. 2, 2014 | No |
| 5 | Aalie | 13 | F | Han | 6 | B | Jan. 6, 2014 | No |
| 6 | Linli | 12 | F | Han | 5 | B | Jan. 6, 2014 | No |
| 7 | Jami | 8 | M | Uyghur* | 3 | B | Jan. 7, 2014 | Yes |
| 8 | Amy | 8 | F | Han | 3 | B | Jan. 7, 2014 | Yes |
| 9 | Pritt | 11 | F | Miao* | 6 | C | Jan. 9, 2014 | No |
| 10 | Nancy | 12 | F | Han | 6 | C | Jan. 9, 2014 | No |
| 11 | Max | 10 | M | Han | 5 | A | Jan. 13, 2014 | No |
| 12 | Fish | 9 | F | Han | 4 | A | Jan. 13, 2014 | No |
| 13 | Kermit | 12 | M | Han | 5 | B | Jan. 15, 2014 | No |
| 14 | Bob | 8 | M | Hui* | 3 | B | Jan. 15, 2014 | No |
| 15 | Angel | 12 | F | Han | 5 | B | Feb. 7, 2014 | No |
| 16 | Jenny | 10 | F | Han | 5 | B | Feb. 7, 2014 | No |
| 17 | Jack | 6 | M | Hui* | 1 | C | Feb. 10, 2014 | No |
| 18 | Banana | 12 | M | Han | 6 | C | Feb. 10, 2014 | No |

*Tibetan, Miao, Hui and Uyghur belong to minority groups. Generally, children at the age of years old are in first grade, and grades increase with their ages up. But because of other factors, there might be slight differences.

Appendix 5: Observation Guidelines

A. Pedagogy

1. What is the teaching form? Seminar, group work or other?
2. Are there any materials and equipments used in class?
3. Does the teacher motivate students to think critically? How does the teacher inspire them to think?

B. Curriculum

1. How do they balance the arrangement appropriate for all the students, both majority and minority.
2. Do students have their opportunity of choosing their curriculum?

C. Student/Teacher Behavior

1. How is the class climate? Do students show their great initiatives during the process of teaching?
2. Are students encouraged/ given the fully chance to express their views?
3. Does the teacher respectfully and carefully listen to what pupils have to provide as ideas, no matter they are right or wrong?
4. How does the teacher manage when many students are willing to speak?
5. Is there any difference for teachers to treat majority groups and minority groups?
6. Do they take their views into consideration and make adjustments in further lessons based on students' feedback?