



The Reading Matrix
Vol. 7, No. 3, December 2007

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF LITERACY BY MALAYSIAN CHINESE PARENTS: PERCEPTIONS OF PARENTS TOWARD THE LANGUAGE AND LITERACY PRACTICES OF TWO TEENAGE CHILDREN

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Abstract

This paper is based on a qualitative case study on the perceptions of Malaysian Chinese parents towards literacy practices of their two children specifically in relation to the socialization practices they privilege at home. It looks at these literacy practices as choices made by parents for their teenage children at the intersection of home, schooling, community, national as well as global discourses.

The Past Into The Future

Malaysia obtained independence from Great Britain in 1957. During the postcolonial period, Malaysia has recorded remarkable progress in both social and economic activities. A key activity in its national development is concerned with literacy to bring its peoples into line with global discourses on development and economic progress. Malaysia is a multi-ethnic nation comprising of several ethnic groups of which the majority are the Malays, the Chinese and the Indians. The Malays, Chinese and Indians have their own mother tongue. According to the Statistics Department (2004), the Chinese make up 6.1 million or 25.4 per cent of the 24.0 million people who reported themselves as citizens of Malaysia (Research and Planning Department Malaysian Chinese Association 2005: 1).

In terms of the language context of Malaysia, the National Language is Bahasa Melayu or the Malay Language. It is the mother-tongue of the Malays. Bahasa Malaysia is used primarily in official contexts and was the main medium of instruction in government schools, until 1993. English is the second language of importance in Malaysia and it is widely used in social, economic and business contexts especially in urban areas. Malaysia is multilingual with a diversity of languages in use. However, there is variation in individual language use. Broadly, however, most Malaysians speak in at least two languages. Until 2002, the sole medium of instruction in government run schools is Bahasa Malaysia except for private schools. The English language proficiency of Malaysian learners in schools and university deteriorated over the last thirty years with the implementation of a national language policy where Bahasa Malaysia (BM) became the language of instruction in schools and higher education in the late sixties. In 2002, there was a radical shift in language policy in education where English became the medium of instruction for the teaching of science and

technology both in school and university. This was a government initiative in a concerted national effort to make Malaysian globally competitive. Current Malaysian economic planning is focused on the development of a knowledge-based economy in which human capital is of particular importance. In this respect, Malaysia's K-economy Master Plan focuses on the development of Malaysia's human resources as a means to lift economic growth to a higher level. To this end, educational, professional and vocational programs have been planned and designed to foster and match skills and abilities needed for employment and national economic success in an increasingly globalised context.

Complex changes in social, political, economic and civic life throughout the global world require new competencies and literacies. The political, sociocultural, economic processes of globalisation demand that Malaysians possess multiple literacies to help them cope with the enormous changes that have come in the wake of globalisation in the 21st century. New literacies include adequate language proficiency in at least a world language, for example the English language, the ability to access, understand, analyze and critique information, the capacity to produce knowledge from various sources including the Internet, the capacity to think critically, to work independently and to communicate well in different situations.

If we accept this as a likely perspective on learning in knowledge creating communities and schools, how does this compare with parents' perspectives on learning? How do contemporary educationist views on learning compare with Malaysian Chinese parents view of learning? How do these current discourses on schooling interact with parents' views of literacy especially in relation to the transmission of such practices to their children. This is the concern of this paper which situates the voices of Malaysian Chinese parents in relation to their personal and sociocultural histories, the larger sociopolitical discourses in the global context as well as in the national contexts.

Theoretical Literature

Definition Of Literacy And Literacy Practices

This paper draws on theoretical work which considers literacy as a social discursive practice (Wallace 1988; Gee 1996). Literacy practices are the historically constituted aggregates of worldviews, ideologies, values, attitudes, behaviors and thinking of particular communities in situated contexts. Literary practices are expressed through socially sanctioned performances and displays like acts of learning, critical thinking, listening, speaking, reading, writing and the production of texts for particular communities and contexts. Through these particular literacy practices membership into socio-cultural communities are recognized, such as the academic community, the e-learning community or the global community. Literacy practices can be inferred from the attitudes, expectations, values and feelings of literacy participants towards the languages of learning and the modes (print, digital, visual, audio, sensory) in which they learn, read-write-speak-listen and through which they access information and/or create knowledge. Baynham (1995:1) defines literacy practices as 'concrete human activity', involving not just the objective facts of what people do with literacy, but also what they make of what they do, how they construct its value and the ideologies that surround it. Scribner & Cole (1981: 237 in Serpell 1997) has defined literacy practices as a way of relating literacy in use not just to the immediate context of situation but also to the broader social context and the role of ideologies, discourses and institutions in literacy practices. Barton (1994: 36) summarizes literacy practices as using reading and writing in a particular situation and the ways in which people bring their cultural knowledge to an activity

In this paper, literacy is viewed as a social practice, one in which learners are looked at and situated in terms of their social contexts. Learners are situated in particular

sociocultural contexts and within those contexts, they take on particular social roles and purposes which in turn impact on the forms, uses and degrees of literacies that they acquire or are socialized into. For example, it may be seen that learners acquire habits of reading from their parents, siblings or teachers. They may also have certain common reading responses towards different kinds of books, as a product of their own educational and literacy experiences in schools.

The next section of the paper describes the dominant discourse relating to education in Malaysia. It describes the broader socio-cultural contexts within which the parents in this study is located, contexts which interpenetrate the teaching/learning space of Malaysian parents and their children as learners.

The Discourse Of Examinations Across Sites

The prevailing social practice of copying information has arisen in part, from the highly regulated examination-driven education system in Malaysia. It has a long established history of valuing the top-down transmission of knowledge and convergent thinking around standardized norms. This education system revolves around performance assessment, good grades and awards given for success in standardized achievement tests. Since these examinations value the reproduction of facts, it is hardly surprising that the ethos pervading all levels of teaching and learning practice reflects this. The literacy practices that operate within this context of learning a fixed body of knowledge which can be recited without imagination or critique. This orientation to education emerged under British colonialism which promoted a strong positivistic tradition. Malaysia is not exceptional in this regard.

The power of examinations in Malaysia is supported by private tuition businesses whose principal objective is to make money out of training clients to pass them. The principal diet for students in tuition centers consists of examination formulas, the learning of facts and mastering techniques on how to do well in examinations. As with schools students in tuition centers are trained to disengage their life-worlds from their learning experience especially if it conflicts with the purposes of the school and public examinations. These trends are also affirmed by a flourishing publication industry which produces revision books, study guides and extensive notes to help students pass examinations. Media attention on ‘successful’ candidates further reinforces the expectation of a particular kind of knowledge production in this climate.

The Discourse Of A Position-Oriented, Collectivistic Society

Arguably the general and marked absence of authoring-type literacy in Malaysia may be the effect of a hierarchical, collectivistic society (Hofstede 1988). In this society selected group interests and values are privileged over those of others; authority figures are given respect, and change is driven from the top-down. Any challenge by those in a lower position is viewed negatively. Having caused a loss of ‘face’ there is a price to be paid on the part of the person who makes the challenge. These characteristics may account for why authorial literacy practices are rare given that they would necessarily lead to perceived challenges to official discourse on significant issues. Authoring and voicing are a privilege accorded to people in positions with access to political, economic, material and symbolic power.

The Discourse Of Nation Building And Development

Living in a country where issues related to ethnicity are a socially significant political issue has tended to constrain and been used to constrain Malaysians. They tend to be cautious of any threat to existing inter-ethnic power relations. The focus has been on national economic development. Submission to dominant nation building discourses is as the safe option mobilized for maintaining prosperity and peace. The contestation of alternative views

in public spaces is avoided as the risks can be unduly high. There is a lack of well-functioning public spheres with open communication that permit discussions that could lead towards greater self-understanding. Nevertheless alternative media on the Internet is being accessed privately. However, the media is strongly regulated and controlled by the ruling political parties. Independent analysis and comment is generally constrained. Text production within the media is limited to officially sanctioned facts and opinions. The local media is constrained by 'nationalistic' policies that feed nation-building agendas.

The Interaction Between Literacy Practices In The Domains Of Home And Schooling Discourses Of Examinations

There is some evidence that the school and home play crucial roles in developing the literacy practices of learners. The family is an important socializing agency (Heath 1980; Wallace 1988), the home environment includes not only the encouragement given by the family members but also the availability of reading materials in terms of quantity and variety. The most common reading materials available in many homes are newspapers, magazines and storybooks. Parents have an important contribution to make, both to the development of reading skills and the encouragement of reading habits amongst members of the society. In this regard, the religious beliefs of parents, especially those in South East Asia where religion is an important sociological factor, may influence their views of education and literacy practices in particular.

In some societies, schools are regarded both as instrumental vehicles for intergenerational transmission of culture and as authoritative repositories of humanity's accumulated wisdom. The mission of the school is thus construed as essentially one of civilizing undisciplined minds (Goody 1977 in Serpell 1997: 589). This scenario can be found in middle-class homes in which the parents are often concerned about structuring learning for their children in the ways legitimized by the school (Brooks 1989 in Street 1995: 117). Research has shown that literacy practices begin at home. According to Morrow (1993: 40), parents are the first teachers children meet. They are also children's teachers for the longest periods. Beginning at birth, children's experiences affect their success in becoming literate individuals. Davidson (1988 in Wong 1996: 6) suggests exposure to literacy experience occurs naturally in the home and the help is provided by the child's parents and significant others.

Social Class Factors In Educational Achievement

Social classes carry different class cultures. Social class is associated with educational opportunities and with a person's occupation or profession. Education and occupation are in themselves powerful sources of cultural learning (Hofstede 1994: 17). According to Craft (1970), parent's attitudes towards the education their children are receiving, the sort of relationship they have with the schools and the roles they expect or wish schools to take in the upbringing of their children are likely to be related to characteristics of the parents themselves such as their own level of education and financial position of the family.

The Chinese Family In Modern Times

The Chinese word translated into English for "family" is a *jia*, which generally means the basic family group, those who are related by blood, marriage or adoption, living and managing their finances together. In a *jia*, the males are all agnatic (i.e. blood relations) (<http://www.inic.utexas.edu/asnic/boretz/china/family.htm>) The *jia* shares living space and finances. One male, the patriarch (the oldest competent male) has ultimate authority in all family matters. In the ideal *jia*, three, four or five generations live under one roof. Sons obediently follow the father's direction in choosing career and a mate. Every member of the *jia* works together for a single objective: sustaining and increasing the *jia*'s wealth and status.

In the story of the Stone, virtually the entire extended family lives together in one large compound and share a common destiny

<http://www.inic.utexas.edu/asnic/boretz/china/family.htm> The very large, very complex, multi-generational extended family in the Story of the Stone was/is the ideal. In general, only wealthy families were able to realize this ideal or sustain it for any period of time. In part, this was due to the emotional and economic tensions within the *jia*. (<http://www.inic.utexas.edu/boretz/china/family.htm>).

In contemporary times, the Chinese family has largely become a “nuclear family”. John Clammer (2004) describes the diasporic Chinese in South East Asia as having been indigenised polycentrically in terms of colonialism, postcolonialism, transnationalism and globalisation. Further, he argues that “Many overseas communities are of long standing and great historical depth of their own, as such have developed their own distinctive cultural traditions, which to my mind, should be regarded as authentically Chinese especially as we have suggested there is no single Chinese culture but rather a complex of culturally evolving although closely related regional and historical cultures” (Clammer, p. 199). Further he argues that what is claimed to be ‘Chinese’ is likely to be based on myths of the source or mother-country with different images built by succeeding generations. .

Chinese Parents’ Influence On Academic Literacy Practices

The Malaysian Chinese parents in this study may share some cultural traits with other Chinese parents in other parts of the world although, admittedly, they would share distinctive traits due to their location in South East Asia where cultures are indigenised and hybridized to adapt to the new environments. Cultures are in this regard, reproduced and transformed in context. .

In the Chinese community, parents perceive academic success of the children as ‘an important source of pride for the entire family and academic failure is considered to be a stigma to the family’ (Stigler and Smith 1985 in Watkins & Biggs 1996: 89). Some Chinese students consider schoolwork as a duty towards their parents. In fact, in Chinese communities, parents even dedicate themselves to help children cope with schoolwork. They spend from half an hour to more than 3 hours per day helping and supervising their children’s school work (Lin 1988; Bottomley 1990 in Farideh Salili 1996). Similarly in Bond’s study (1996), he found that education has a high status among traditional Chinese values; children are taught that all jobs are low in status, except study, which is the highest (*wan ban jia xia pin, wei you dushu gao*). Education is believed to be important not so much as a ladder up the social hierarchy but as training towards the better development of the whole person (Ho 1981; Mordkowitz and Ginsburg 1987 in Bond 1996; 112). Success in education has traditionally been used in Chinese society as a means of selection for further educational and career opportunities (Bond 1996: 115). Similarly, Heath (1983: 29) quotes from one of the older residents in Roadville who believes that “Folks that ain’t got no schooling don’t get to be nobody nowadays”. In Roadville, the people emphasize the success in education they expect their children to have and their assumption that education will carry their children away from the mill (Heath 1983: 36).

Research Methodology

The aim of this qualitative research is to describe the perceptions and views of two literacy figures in a middle class Malaysian Chinese family. The researchers have used interviews and ethnographic observations of the parents who form one set of key participants in the study, the other set being the teenage children themselves. . Due to space constraints, the focus of the paper is the parents in the family and not their teenage children per se.

Literacy Profiles Of The Participants In This Study

This study is based on a qualitative case study of the literacy situation prevailing in an urban middle-class Chinese family who reside in a town in the northwest corner of Peninsular Malaysia. Sungai Petani is the second largest city in Kedah after the state capital, Alor Setar. The total population of Kedah is about 1.5 million. The dominant ethnic group of Kedah is Malay (70 per cent), Chinese (18 per cent), Indian (8 per cent) and other races. Out of 1.5 million people in Kedah, 200,000 people are from Sungai Petani. In Kedah, the Malays have ancestral traces of Thai, Achenese, Arab and Hindu due to its close proximity to Thailand. The Chinese community here are mostly first or second generation local born Malaysians. Most of them are the descendants of the China immigrants from Fujian and Guangdong Province in South-east China. The main economic activities here include trading (largely support and agriculture activities such as rice, rubber and oil palm plantation), manufacturing of electrical and electronic components and production of molded plastic parts for the consumer products industry.

The focus of this paper is on the parents as literacy figures. The voices and perspectives of the father and mother in the study is highlighted as gathered from interviews and ethnographic observations on site.

The Father

The father in this study is 45 years old. He was educated in a Malay medium Government School in his hometown, Sungai Petani before furthering his studies in England where he graduated with a Diploma of Business Administration. He works as a manager in an insurance company and he comes what may be described as a conservative middle-class Chinese family in Sungai Petani. He is proficient in English Language, Malay Language and the Chinese languages such as Hokkien and Teowchew. But he communicates with his children mainly in English. After work, he regularly reads a local English newspaper, the Star and watches the 8 o'clock English news on a local government radio network, RTM2.

The Mother

The mother aged 47 used to work as a civil servant in the public services of the Government of Malaysia before becoming a full-time homemaker. She was born in Alor Setar, Kedah into a middle-class Hakka speaking Chinese family. She studied in a primary and secondary English medium government school. She speaks fluent English Language, Malay Language and two Chinese dialects which are Hokkien and Hakka. At home, she speaks English and Hokkien with her husband and children. Every morning during weekdays, she takes her youngest son to school. After finishing her household chores, she sends the eldest son to school and at the same time fetches the youngest back. During weekends, she brings the sons to the public library to borrow books or she buys them books from the local bookstores. She believes that in this way, it helps to inculcate the reading habit in her children. This mother strongly believes that the Internet is an important source of information. She encourages the children to access the internet once a week, Saturdays or Sundays.

Teenager Chong (13 Years Old Boy)

The elder son is 13 years old and studies in a national Malay school. This is a public government school where the medium of instruction is in Bahasa Malaysia and English. He hopes to be one of the top scorers in his school. He speaks English Language, Malay Language and Hokkien well. He communicates with his parents in English Language and both English and Malay Language with his teachers and schoolmates. However he uses Hokkien to communicate with his paternal grandmother, uncles, aunts and cousins. Most of

his relatives communicate mainly in Hokkien in informal context except for his youngest uncle who prefers to speak English. He is sent to three tuition classes, which are in the school subjects of English, Malay Language and Mathematics.

Teenager Beng (11 Years Old)

The youngest son is 11 years old and is in Primary Five. He communicates in English and Bahasa Malaysia (the Malay Language) with his parents, brothers, teachers and schoolmates. He is also proficient in Chinese languages Hokkien and Hakka. He has acquired a good proficiency in the Hakka language from his caregiver while the family was posted to Johor. Like his elder brother, he uses Hokkien to communicate with his cousins and other relatives. He attends tuition classes for Bahasa Malaysia, Science and Mathematics. His mother provides him with English lessons at home every Wednesday.

The Parents' Views Of Literacy Practices

Dominant Literacy Practices In The Family

Based on Confucian theory, the process of learning to become human must begin early enough in the family to lay the foundation for the child to become a future adult with proper manners and moral tenets (Bond 1996: 144). The early literacy practices such as storybook reading is an example of emergent literacies. The term “emergent literacy” describes the behaviour of young children around books and when reading and writing, even though children could not actually read and write in the conventional sense (Ramburg 1998). In this particular Malaysian Chinese family, the children have been exposed to early literacy at an early age of eight months. Through interviews with the mother, the researchers found that the mother reads to the children everyday. The children have been taught to treasure books since they were young. The mother exposed them to reading when they were eight months old with hard cover books “thrown” to them. The mother would read to them and get them to be interested in books. According to her, these literacy practices will help to build their interest in books. As they grew older, the mother would question the child based upon the narratives in the books and provide feedback from the comments of the child. The children were taught to read using a card system, and through performance singing and playing.

Interpersonal interaction consists of the literacy experiences shared with a child by parents, siblings and other individuals in the home (Morrow 1993). Besides reading to the children, the parents themselves often read and write messages or notes to the children as reminders. The parents have provided a great variety of materials including magazines, newspapers and work-related information. Both parents have different views on reading. The mother views reading as the first step to learning while the father views reading as knowledge and social activity. However, they value reading and writing as valuable and important activities. Books are also associated with pleasure.

The parents recognize the importance of parental involvement and guidance in the development of their children's reading behavior. The mother resigned from her job to be a full-time housewife to take care of their children. As stressed by the mother in the interview, *“Parents are very important. Now children cannot leave them alone, no doubt like last time we can still do well but not today, there are many bad influences and attractions ... Mother is very important whereas father has no time for them as father needs to earn a living, goes out to work”*. She added that *“No doubt they say working mothers can spend quality time with the children but from experiences, how much is the quality time. How much can you afford the quality time with them, is it enough and sometimes when they need you, you are not there?”*

Key Literacy Events At Home

Literacy is embedded in many everyday events in the home of the respondents where oral and written languages are used in various contexts for particular purposes. For example, the mother writes reminder notes, talks, discusses activities done in school and the teenagers' school problems, jokes with them, scolds them, writes notes for their their homework.

Since he is mostly away from home being busy at work, the father makes a point of interacting with the children as much as possible by writing brief notes and memos for the children and doing things together with his children such as keeping and sending greeting cards to family members. He also makes shopping lists whenever the whole family goes on regular visits to shopping malls during weekends. In his daily activities, the father would scan as well as read the newspapers to find out the entertainment schedule while watching the television at night after work.

During the school vacations, the family would sit together and plan for their holidays. It is their yearly family activity as promised by their father if the children get good grades for their examination. Among the topics discussed are the destination, the number of days to be spent on the vacation and the dates. Meanwhile, the mother would write down the suggestions being mentioned in their discussion. Later they would refer to the mother's notes and based on it they would finally come out with plans which are agreeable to everyone in the family.

Literacy Practices As Reproducing Middle Class Social Identity And Status In A Multicultural Society

It seems that the home is central to the children's developing sense of social and cultural identity. The father emphasizes English as a communicational languages, one which is important for the children to be proficient in, in order to help them in communicating with people from different language backgrounds. At the same time, he views the Malay Language as being important in terms of national identity and in terms of assuring his children's success in their school examinations. Language literacies in English and Malay are seen as providing access to social identity and status and as markers of in-group identities in a multilingual society.

Literacy Practices In English And Bahasa Malaysia For Academic Success And Future Work

In an information age, literacy is seen as a survival skill in terms of economic, social and political domains. In order to help meet the needs of what they see to be an increasingly competitive context, these parents send their children to school and those who can afford will employ home tutors or send their children to tuition centers. The parents of this case study find that the teachers in school are too busy and could not provide personal support to their children especially in large classes of forty or more children. In the interview, the mother pointed out that "The education system nowadays is stretched and may be the teachers do not have enough time to teach them... All children must depend on the parents to make them to be able to be interested in reading. Now cannot depend on the teachers. Teachers are too busy"

The father shares a similar opinion on what he sees as inadequacies in some school literacy practices. He does not think that the school curriculum provides enough opportunities for the children to read. He thinks that parents can guide their children in their studies to include those areas which are not "covered" adequately by their schoolteachers. He sends the children to three private tuition classes, for the Malay Language, Mathematics and Science. The researchers submit that there is a flourishing tuition industry supporting the schools especially in urban areas where middle class parents can afford tuition fees. In

order to obtain good results in major examinations which is one of the keys to employment , the parents send their children to tuition classes so that the teachers from the tuition classes would give a better academic guidance to the children and provide them with formulaic paths to examination success., a literacy practice which has emerged from an educational system which is excessively oriented towards examinations (Koo Yew Lie, 2004).

This shows the concern of the parents regarding certain subjects offered in school, which are English, Malay Language, Mathematics and Science subjects. These subjects are considered important to be learned and mastered. In this information era in which science and technology are emphasized, it cannot be denied that the parents emphasize Mathematics and Science as important subjects for success in the academic domain and for future work.

English is regarded as a very important language in this home as the parents regard the language as an international language which they argue, will provide access to jobs and social status. Both parents say that “English will help them to communicate with more people” and “It will be a passport to further advancement in all our future endeavors”. In this way, we can see that English language is seen as important in terms of providing opportunities for jobs and social mobility.

According to the father, the Malay Language is important for passing school examinations. The children ensure that they do well in the Malay Language to ensure academic success, to get good grades in public and school examinations which will provide them with pathways to public higher education. . In the mother’s words, “having the basics of Malay Language is considered enough” and that the “Malay Language can be learnt in school very fast and taken care if they go to school”. At the same time, the parents identify with the Malay Language as the language for national unity.

What emerges from the interviews with parents is the privileging of English which is viewed as a language of power, providing access to good jobs and social advancement. This is the perception of the parents here, a perception which is reproduced in terms of particular literacy practices. The literacy practices which privilege English have been reproduced according to the parents’ perceptions of socio-economic needs, their motivations for good job opportunities for their children and their participation in competitive global context.

In other words, various language literacies are associated with different domains of life such as home, school and work. English is considered important especially for school and work. Bahasa Malaysia is also considered as important for nation-state identity and for national unity although it is not viewed as directly important in terms of international access to contemporary knowledge and transnational jobs. .

Parents As Literacy Figures

There is no doubt that both parents function as literacy figures for the teenagers in this study. At night, after the mother finishes her housework, she would read her favourite magazine. The Malaysian Women’s Weekly which is a franchised copy of the Australian Womens’ Weekly magazine. She would also buy books on a regular basis from the local bookstore. Sometimes she would read religious books and materials. The religious books that she has at home were *Curbing Anger Spreading Love*, *What is Buddhism? And Why Worry?*. She stressed that *“Even now today at the age of 47, I never stop reading. I never stop reading”.. She added “Even though I’m not working, my information. I never miss up reading newspapers and buy a lot of books still”*

The father also enjoys reading a lot. He never fails to read the newspaper everyday. He would scan the Television section in the newspaper to see what is on that day. He enjoys reading magazines on weekends when he is not working. He would read magazines such as *Asiaweek* and *The Fortune* to gain knowledge and to keep in touch with contemporary developments. His literacy practices reflect corporate reading interests.

Literacy Practices Privileging Success And Face

The Chinese family has become a “nuclear family” in the modern era. Many Chinese have moved out from their parent’s house to build their own jia after marriage. However, the strong moral values of the Chinese such as filial piety, obedience and discipline are still being practiced by most of the Chinese family members. In this family, the parents are the third generation from those who first came from China to Malaya. Both parents were brought up in different parts of Kedah, a northern part of west Malaysia in an urban area. The father was brought up in Sungai Petani, Kedah while the mother comes from Alor Setar, kedah. The parents in this study come from extended families where they live with their grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins. However, after both of them got married, they moved out from the house to build their own nuclear family, an increasingly common practice in modern Malaysian Chinese families.

As Chinese culture is marked by collectivism, obedience and loyalty towards the family, the children in this study would try very hard to meet their parent’s demands and expectations for doing well academically. In addition, they also satisfy their own goals to achieve their ambitions as well as the goals set by their parents. Chinese people who have a strong sense of collectivism and face consciousness tend to be more achievement motivated (Wilson & Pusey 1983 in Watkins & Biggs 1996: 88). Therefore it made the children to study hard and the parents would play their role in encouraging the children to read by supplying more storybooks, workbooks, revision books and also sending them to private tuition. The research shows that the teenagers in the study spend more time on their studies than playing or participating in social activities, the former being considered as pathways to success, economically and socially. .

In the collectivist family, children learn to take their bearings from others when it relates to opinions. The personal opinion seldom exists. The children in Chinese family basically do not have a voice at home and depend on the parents to decide what is good or bad for them. In this family, the mother chooses the types of reading materials for her sons, especially towards the youngest son. She stresses that “when they are in primary, it is more on storybooks. I choose for them. They go and I will help them to choose. The younger one, I make him to take four books, two from the schools and two from the library in both languages, Bahasa Malaysia and English”. The mother does not allow the children to buy comics and entertainment magazines because she feels that these are mainly for entertainment purposes and the children do not gain anything from reading it. The children are only encouraged to read educational magazines. The mother only chose what she considers to be the best and most suitable reading materials for the children to read. Parents in Chinese family tend to decide as to what is good or bad for their children especially when it concerns education and knowledge.

The mother gives extra workbook and revision books to the children to do or read after they finish their schoolwork. The mother also makes the children to watch a little bit of television in order to get away from books. The children are being allowed to watch certain programs on television such as cartoons and news. Besides, the children themselves believe that having education and getting good grades in examinations would give them a chance to go to college or university. Therefore education is not a chore but a way of life in the Chinese family. It also brings the belief that Chinese culture places a high value on education for self-improvement, self-esteem and family honor.

In the Chinese community, parents perceive academic success of the children as “an important source of pride for the entire family” (Stigler and Smith 1985 in Watkins & Biggs

1996: 89). However, the father does not agree with this statement as he thinks that these would add to the children's tension. To the mother, however, er, "To the Chinese community, it is deep-rooted culture and practice that a learned man will be respected by society. As practice, the government officials of Ancient China are all respected 'scholars' who had passed the Imperial exams. As such until today, the Chinese will feel very proud if their children have achieved academic success as a learned man".

The necessity of maintaining the face and avoiding being shamed constitutes a primary method of social control in Chinese society (Brick 1991: 130). The only way to bring "face" to the family is a child's duty to excel in studies. The standard of achievement is often defined by other people rather than the person himself or herself. Malaysian Chinese parents often compare their children's academic achievements with that of others. According to the mother, expressing herself in Malaysian English, said "Parents are comparing. My sons and my daughter got number one. My son and daughter get number what? Got how many A's?".

It must be noted that there are tensions around this as increasingly, children are beginning to question the value of academic success in a global world where academic success may not guarantee economically successful jobs or happiness. The father in this family for example, disagrees with the undue pressure on the children to succeed. His voice provides an example of the contestations around dominant views of face saving literacy practices at a cost to personal happiness of children. In other words, he is a little critical of reproducing dominant discourses unlike his spouse who is less critical of such discourses.

Dominant Literacy Practices In Malaysian Schools - Largely Uncritical And Non-Reflexive

In Malaysia, schooling has largely focused on limiting practices such as memorization, study-type, revision and excessively examination-oriented practice books. Definitions of fixed information (debunked by radical changes in information technology) and study within communities demonstrate much too much attention on modes of learning characterized by the '*Read and answer the following lockstep comprehension questions*' ethos, the limited discourses around '*buat kerja ulangkaji*' (just focus on your revision exercises) and '*hafal ajelah*' (just memorise the facts).

At home, learners connect with one another especially through the internet across cultural borders. The transformation of communication and ways of being and ways of learning does not seem to be reflected in the parents talk about ways of learning. The dominant view of the parents is still very conventional where they view learning as information recall. Here you have a disturbing scenario of paradoxes and tensions, that whilst the parents wish their children to have important jobs especially transnational ones which arguably would require innovative and symbolic analytic work, the parents' socialization practices of their children tend to privilege learning generally in static terms as skills and information. Recent shifts in educational and around multiliteracies and multimodalities (Kalantzis and Cope, 2001) has not impacted fundamentally on parents ways with words in this study.

Radical changes brought about by communications technologies and global capitalism have led to a paradigm shift in the expectations of employers.. Creative and symbolic thinking is required in changing contexts characterized by knowledge and intense change. These contexts challenges ideas of fixed information and rote learning which a strong examination system has tended to emphasize, neglecting important skills such as critical thinking, effective communication, learner autonomy and independent study. There is, therefore, a big gap between what schooling has produced in relation to innovative and productive work argued to be important in future workplaces (Koo Yew Lie, 2004). Reflexivity around this did not surface in the interviews with the parents where there was a

strong orientation towards performance in school examinations although the father questions extreme conformity to 'standard notions of face-saving' as argued by the Mother in the family. There seems to be a discernible gap in terms of innovative and imaginative thinking in the socialization practices of the parents as far as can be discerned from the parent's concern for textual reproduction of facts for examination purposes. Books selected even for pleasure tend to focus on functionalist purposes.

If diversity and difference is a key characteristic of new learning environments (Kalantzis and Cope, 1997, 2001) with flexible learning, team-work, digital literacy and joint construction of knowledge from peers, interest groups, collaborative learning and knowledge networks, less teacher directed learning, multimodal designs of learning, communications strategies which support linguistic, visual and audio modes, and learner diversity, engagement with varied interests, identities and experiences, alternative learning pathways. In the face of this as a perspective of new learning, one is forced to challenge the dominant reproductive views of the parents in this study although it must be admitted that such a view persists due to the hegemonic influences of schooling system and a nation-wide discourse on success in examinations for higher education and employability. However, one could see their attempts at agency to empower their children through personal tuition at home as well as paid tuition in tuition centers which run alongside the schooling system.

It must be observed at the same time, that the difference of the two teenagers are normalized in the talk of the parents and it was assumed that what works for one teenager, is fine for the other. The essentialized views of literacy practices for their children are normalized which is of some concern in environments where increasing respect is paid to heterogeneity and diversity not least in ways of learning. Given the dominant discursive environments within which the parents read the demands of an examination-oriented system and competitive work environments, their pragmatic responses may be understandable.

However, it would seem important for reflexive educationists to make visible the operations of dominating literacies, articulating the benefits, costs and consequences of dominating literacies and resistance literacies, articulating ways of problematizing dominating and resistance literacies by critiquing them and focusing on possibilities for transformative literacies to one's community, vernacular linguistic and cultural resources (O Sullivan, 1999; Koo, 2005)

Conclusion

The study has revealed the fact that the family is an important socializing agency for developing the literacy practices of the teenagers. The intersections of home with community and strong national and global economic environments have led to the reproduction of dominant literacy practices within the family. However there are broader discursive framings of education around sustainable planetary globalism, those posed by productive diversity (Kalantzis and Cope, 2001) other than those valued by the development-oriented national educational discourse of Malaysia and the hegemonic economic agendas of globalism. The washback effect of this in the parent's talk and socialization practices of the teenagers are palpable.

Alternative discourses on education, social life and citizenry (Noraini Othman & Kessler, 2004) have posed challenges to questions on the kinds of literacy practices to be valued, social knowledge which matter in contexts of changes.

Reflexivity around the question of reproduction and transformation of literacy practices in relation to the discourses of community values, national development and globalization are important issues for the present and future. The fact is that radically changing literacies in changing worlds requires a reflexive consideration of what may be

considered as normalized discourses around what counts as knowledge, what is important social and cultural capital in contexts of change.

In this regard, one needs to situate taken for granted discourses of learning of the family, of the nation-state with other competing, if other or marginalized discourses of education some of which are oriented towards greater civil participation for social justice.

Nation-states with concerns may pursue the neoliberal agendas of economic change viewing education's primary role to be that of preparing learners for the capitalist workplace. There are other views of globalization which see it as an uneven process to be importantly mediated by local meaning-makers and citizens, where local knowledge is engaged primarily in terms of bridging local ways of seeing-doing-learning, sustaining vernacular life-forms with global ways which are sustainable. Sustainable and situated education needs to prepare curriculum planners, teachers, learners and citizens who are ready to engage in a pedagogy of reflexivity, plurality and complexity to negotiate meanings otherwise marginalized in deference to extreme economic discursive agendas for change, with its costs and consequences.

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