

## ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation:           EUCATING URBAN INDIGENOUS  
STUDENTS IN TAIWAN: SIX TEACHERS'  
PERSPECTIVES.

Hui-Min Chou, Doctor of Philosophy, 2005

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A substantial literature supports the thesis that teachers' beliefs and attitudes strongly influence their perception and behaviors in the classroom (Byrnes, Kiger, & Manning, 1997; Clark & Peterson, 1986; Cross, 1993; Dillingham & Johnson, 1973; Kagan, 1992; Lewis, 1990; Nespor, 1987; Tabachnick & Zeichner, 1984; Villegas, 1992). While some believe that the macro-context is the most salient factor of urban indigenous students' education, other researchers point to teachers' perspectives about indigenous students as significant to student's success and hence an important topic of study (Tatto, 1996). This qualitative study examines six teachers' perspectives of indigenous students and reveals factors that potentially impede or promote the success of indigenous students in Taiwanese urban schools. Much of this study relies upon periodic semi-structured interviews and classroom observations.

From the cross-case discussion and analysis of six teachers' perspectives of teaching indigenous students, we learn that there is a need in the educational field

for a reshaped perspective of indigenous students, along with changes in curriculum, instructional methods, and practices and policies. It requires teachers who have (1) direct *experiences* with and thorough *knowledge* about the cultural values, learning styles, historical legacies, and contribution of different ethnic groups; (2) the *courage* to stop blaming the victims of school failure and to admit that something is seriously wrong with existing educational systems; (3) the *will* to confront prevailing educational canons and convictions, and to rethink traditional assumptions of cultural neutrality in teaching and learning; and (4) the *skills* to act productively in translating knowledge and sensitivity about cultural diversity into pedagogical practices. Hopefully, then, schooling experiences like those of indigenous teachers will be historical memories, not everyday occurrences, and their children will have more successful stories to tell about their school experiences.

EDUCATING URBAN INDIGENOUS STUDENTS IN TAIWAN: SIX  
TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES

By

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

I don't see a difference between my Indigenous students and my Han Chinese students. I find [children] to be basically the same; I think we should treat people as equals and not highlight their differences by interjecting culture in every aspect of education.

--Ling-Ling

I don't think that learning Indigenous languages is that important for them [Indigenous students] to succeed in society. Indigenous students have to live and work in mainstream society, so they need to learn to be like everybody else. They probably need to adjust themselves to Han Chinese culture.

--Ping-Ping

I know what it was like growing up as an Indigenous student in a predominantly Han school system, and I just wanted to be able to help them and let them know that I knew how they felt and what they were going through.

--Saoma

These three excerpts above represent the range of the perspectives of six teachers in this study. This interpretive study, focusing on teachers' perspectives of urban Indigenous students, responds to concerns about those students.

Research suggests that teachers' perspectives on students significantly shape their expectations about student learning, their treatment of students, and what the students ultimately learn (Irvin, 1990; Pajares, 1993; Pang & Sablan, 1998; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Teachers with an *affirming perspective* are more apt to believe that students from nondominant groups are capable learners, even when those children enter school with ways of thinking, talking, and behaving that deviate from the dominant culture's norms (Delpit, 1995). On the other hand, teachers with limiting perspectives are more apt to make negative forecasts about such students' potential. Dubious about those students' ability to achieve, teachers are more likely to hold low academic expectations for them

and ultimately to treat them in ways likely to stifle their learning (Nieto, 2000; Payne, 1994).

Regarding teachers' perspectives, I use Clark & Peterson's (1986) definition of *perspective* as "a reflective, socially defined interpretation of experience that serves as a basis for subsequent action... a combination of beliefs, intentions, interpretations, and behavior that interact continually" (p. 287). Given that the goal of this research is to understand teachers' perspectives of Indigenous students' education, the study substantially relies upon interviewing teachers and interpreting their classroom experiences.

In this study I examined six teachers' perspectives of Indigenous students and uncovered the factors that potentially impede or promote the success of Indigenous students in Taiwanese urban schools. Such an analysis of educators' perspectives is critical to understanding teachers' beliefs and attitudes and has powerful implications for teacher efficacy and student achievement (McAllister & Irvin, 2002; Pajares, 1992). In particular, I hope to contribute towards a deeper understanding of the ways teachers perceive the education of Indigenous students.

All six of the teachers who participated in this study were teachers of Indigenous students at elementary or high schools in Taipei and Tao-Yuan County. Chapter 4 through Chapter 9 document each of the six teachers' perspectives on the education of Indigenous students. Each chapter is structured to focus on four major components of each teacher's perspective on aspects of the education of Indigenous students in Taiwan cities: (a) the teacher's personal background and development as a teacher; (b) the teacher's beliefs about the factors that impact the education of Indigenous students; (c)

the teacher's beliefs about Indigenous students' potential and challenges; and (d) the teacher's insights to what it means to teach Indigenous students. Although the four components are presented individually and separately, they are inextricably related to one another and, in context, reveal patterns of consistency that are more significant than individually considered answers. The connections between beliefs and their contexts are examined in more detail in Chapter 10.

#### The meaning of 'perspective'

Following the work of Deford (1985) and Richardson, Anders, Tidwelil, & Lloyd (1991), a constructivist perspective on teacher beliefs is adopted for this study. From this perspective, teachers are seen as knowing, meaning-making beings, and this knowledge and meaning influence their actions. A definition compatible with this sociocultural approach was developed by Tabachnick and Zeichner (1984). Preferring the term *teacher perspectives*, they defined them as “a reflective, socially defined interpretation of experience that serves as a basis for subsequent action . . . a combination of beliefs, intentions, interpretations, and behavior that interact continually” (Clark & Peterson, 1986, p.287). Unlike more general ideological beliefs which can be decontextualized and abstracted, these are seen as situation-specific and action-oriented and include both the perceptions teachers have about their work (goals, purposes, conceptions of children, curriculum) and the “ways in which they [give] meaning to these beliefs by their behavior in the classroom” (ibid, p. 28). Although I use the more commonly understood term *beliefs*, I adopted the definition above. Throughout this writing, beliefs and perspectives are used interchangeably.

### Educational context in Taiwan

The current education system in Taiwan is comprised of basic education, intermediate education, advanced education and returning education (MOE, 2004). The present education structure supports twenty-two years of formal study. Normally, the entire process requires two years of preschool education, six years of primary school, three years of junior high, three years of senior high school, four to seven years of college or university, one to four years of a graduate school program, and two to seven years of a doctoral degree program.

Elementary and junior high schools mostly fall under the jurisdiction of county/city and municipal governments. Most primary schools and junior high schools are public. In the year of 2003, there are 2,638 primary schools and 720 junior high schools. The ratio of students to teachers was 18:1 for primary school and 16:1 for junior high schools. After implementation of the nine-year compulsory education, primary school graduates aged at least twelve qualify for junior high school education lasting for three years. Senior high schools are mostly run by the government or by private institutions. Junior high school graduates are required to take the Basic Achievement Test before they can be admitted to senior high school by applying, by meeting requirements and passing the entrance exam of individual schools for special subjects, by being registered and then assigned, or by recommendation for admission.

The Ministry of Education in Taiwan has prescribed unified standards/ guidelines for curriculum, instructional material and equipment for all levels of school education. The MOE also compiles, publishes and provides textbooks and teaching materials for elementary and secondary schools. The textbooks and teaching materials, prepared by

private companies, will be reviewed by the National Institute for Compilation and Translation before publication (MOE, 2004).

Curriculum standards/ guidelines follow the goals and policies set by the Ministry of Education, which in turn, follow governmental guidelines regarding the education of the citizens. The revisions of curriculum standards/ guidelines require the advice of specialists and committee study and recommendation. Currently, curriculum standards have been established for elementary and junior high schools.

### Understanding the context of urban Indigenous schooling in Taiwan

#### Language and Ethnic Profile of Taiwan

Taiwan is a multi-lingual, multi-ethnic country composed of four major ethnic groups. According to Huang (1993), the ethnic groups and the population percentage for each group are as follows: the Aborigines (speakers of Austronesian languages), 1.7%; Hakka, 12%; mainlanders, 13%, and Min-Nan (Southern Min speakers), 73.3 %.

Although the Min-Nan Taiwanese group is by far the largest, Mandarin has been the national language. Most mainlanders spoke languages other than Mandarin when they migrated to Taiwan, in and around 1949, with the Nationalist government. Some of the languages are very similar to Mandarin. The younger generations of those mainlander families, however, have switched to Mandarin. The Southern Min and Hakka groups' languages are related to Mandarin, as they all belong to the Han language family.

Nevertheless, they are very different languages from Mandarin.

The Aborigines can be further divided into two major groups, the Ping-Pu (the plains) group and the Gaoshan (mountain) group. The former consists of eight tribes: Ketagalan, Taokas, Pazeh, Papura, Babuza, Hoanya, and Siraya and the latter into twelve

tribes: Amis, Paiwan, Puyuma, Saisiyat, Yami, Atayal, Bunun, Rukai, Kavalan, Truku, Tsou, and Thao. The Ping-Pu tribes have almost totally disappeared over the past hundred years, the only exception being the 250 Kavalan speakers living now in Hualian country in the eastern part of the island. Evidence of the decreasing use of Indigenous languages among Indigenous youth can be found the work of Huang (1993, 2000).

According to calculation, based on a questionnaire survey of indigneous college students, he found that the attrition rate of Indigneous languages was estimated to be 15.8 percent over two generations, and 31 percent over three generations. Consequently, if Huang's estimates are not far off the mark, there is a likelihood that almost half of the existing Indigenous languages would disappear from Taiwan over the next generation. Another important study in this field is Lin (1995) whose work focused on junior high school students. After surveying one thousand junior high school students in twenty-five schools, she found that for the Indigenous students, only 37 percent report that their Indigenous language is the one most frequently spoken at home. Furthermore, only 68 percent claim that they can speak their parents' language, and within the latter group, only 16 percent claim fluency.

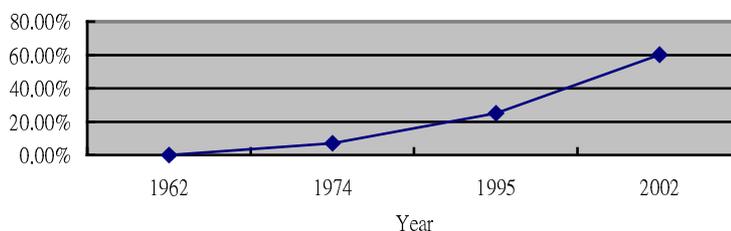
In 1992 indigenous education gained legal recognition in Taiwan when indigenous rights were incorporated into the Additional Articles of Taiwan's Constitution. In 1998 the Indigenous Education Act was enacted as a specific law to promote the development of education for indigenous people. It obliges the government to provide aborigines with opportunities to study their native languages, history, and culture at schools of all levels of education. However, most city schools in Taiwan have not been able to create native language program because the lack of qualified teachers, inadequate

facilities, and resources. Some indigenous intellectuals called for a critical reform on indigenous education that would enable indigenous people to have more autonomy on education and to recruit more indigenous language teachers in city schools.

#### Who are urban Aborigines?

Current census figures for Taiwan indicate a high rural-to-urban migration of Aborigines (Department of Statistics, MOI, 1997). Demographers estimated that by the year 2002 these new settlers have increased to become as much as 60 per cent of the total Indigenous population (See Figure 1). In recent years, the urbanization of the Indigenous people has accelerated because there is limited employment opportunities in the mostly rural Indigenous areas (Li & Ou, 1992). Displaced Aborigines, while drifting away from their original way of life and finding themselves in an unfamiliar metropolis, encounter numerous adjustment problems. Their problems extend into critical aspects of their existence: employment, education, marriage, family life, group relations, and a variety of other psychological difficulties (Cho, 2002; Fu, 1999, 2001; Li, 1982; Mai, 2000; Wang, 1998; Wuei & Jang, 2000). Although researchers have conducted numerous studies to examine Indigenous education in general, there has been relatively little research focusing on the schooling experiences of Indigenous students who live in the city.

Figure 1. Percentage of urban Indigenous population



Resource: Chen, Whang, & Chiu (2003). Urban Indigenous Life Counseling Plan. Council of Indigenous People, Executive Yuan. Taipei.

Based on their six-year urban Indigenous life survey, Chen, Whang, & Chiu (2003) concluded that few Aborigines were able to climb the socioeconomic ladder and participate in urban life. Other families struggled to stay employed and make ends meet. Some families maintained close cultural, linguistic, and family ties with their home tribes, often over great distances; others did not keep those ties for a variety of reasons, including marriage outside the tribe, attending school in different places, reaching higher levels of education, and so on.

At first glance, a move to the city might appear to be a wonderful opportunity for advancement. And it can be, but there is also a downside to be considered. When families are transplanted from a familiar home setting to a strange and hostile environment, they experience *culture shock* (Chen, Whang, & Chiu, 2003). Teachers who work with Indigenous students in an urban setting need to realize how such a move impacts students and their families and how students' behavior and school performance can be affected.

For the most part, the Indigenous population has a lower socioeconomic and educational status than other ethnic groups and is afflicted with high rates of unemployment, alcoholism, adolescent prostitution, and various other social challenges. Taiwanese Aborigines have for some time received special education, job training, and other benefits through provisions in the national Constitution. In recent years, social welfare and other such programs have proliferated. Still, the Aborigines remain largely

outside the mainstream of society. Few Aborigines are able to climb the socioeconomic ladder and participate in urban life.

#### School experience of urban Indigenous student

Taiwan's total population is currently 23 million. It may be broadly classified into four ethnic groups: Hoklo (15,100,000), Hakka (4,000,000), Mainlander (3,500,000), and Aborigines (400,000). However, ethnic diversity is rarely considered an important objective in the political development of Taiwan. One major reason for this neglect is the failure to recognize that there is any ethnic differentiation at all (Shieh, 1994).

Shieh (1994) was one of the first scholars outside of the Indigenous communities to report on the conditions of Taiwan Aborigines who had moved to cities. The hardships encountered when living in the city, coupled with the lack of promised opportunities and related economic benefits, created situations where despair became the norm. Teachers have been unprepared to work with Indigenous students, and many teachers misinterpreted children's cultural codes for reticence, lack of interest, or lack of the natural abilities needed to become normal students. Indigenous children were cast as the stereotypes that had long been promulgated to the Taiwan public and were still considered accurate.

Chen (1998) argued that most of the non-Indigenous teachers, especially those most experienced, hold stereotypes of Indigenous students as being lazy, having low intelligence, and having parents who are relatively uninvolved in their children's education. Younger teachers have not had much opportunity to understand Aborigines but tend to sympathize with the Indigenous students (Tang, 1998). The Indigenous children are perceived as lacking the required mental ability for success in school and as

little interested in schooling. In addition, poor self-concept of the Indigenous students is also attributed to be one of the causal factors of the problem. Tang (1997) argued that “there is much evidence that Indigenous students feel despair, disillusionment, alienation, frustration, hopelessness, powerlessness, rejection, and estrangement, all elements of negative views of the self” (p. 38).

Some non-Indigenous teachers, especially those who are new to their work, feel very uncomfortable with some of the Indigenous ways of life. Most teachers lack the knowledge, skills, and experience for the high degree of professionalism necessary to work successfully with Indigenous children (Chen, 1998). Though teachers generally feel confident in their ability to implement core teaching skills, many express reservations about their ability to teach students from cultures different than their own.

To understand urban Indigenous students more fully, it is important for teachers to gain a broader perspective on the differences between rural living and urban life for these students and their families. For the most part the rural context provides a setting in which the traditional culture of the tribe and the kinship system are respected and enhanced.

#### Teachers’ perspectives matter

On a national level, Taiwan has adopted a policy of *ethniracial blindness* in education by subsuming the needs of Aborigines under the more general categories of cultural deprivation and educational disadvantage (Tang, 1998). Without knowing my cultural background, a Chinese acquaintance at school asked, “Why bother to study Indigenous education? Is there any inequity in the school? They, like us, are educated in the same schools; what makes them different? The government treats them fair enough, doesn’t it?” It is not uncommon to hear such attitudes when people discuss the

Aborigines. The typical response of Han Chinese to the Aborigines perpetuates the generally held racist stereotypes (Chen, 1998; Fu, 1999); therefore, it is imperative to study teachers' perspectives about Indigenous students.

There is consensus among educational researchers that teachers play a significant role in Indigenous students' academic achievement (Tang, 1997). However, little is known about how teachers define and interpret these teaching experiences. Although general studies have been conducted on teachers' attitudes toward Indigenous students, few explore how teachers feel and think about educating Indigenous students in urban schools. This question becomes increasingly significant in the light of current census figures reporting that the number of Indigenous families in cities seeking a better life and education has sharply increased in the last decade (Department of Statistics, MOI, 1997). Rarely, however, do reports focus on the schooling of urban Indigenous students, whose success in school seems thwarted by many educational barriers (Tang, 1997; Wuei & Jang, 2000).

Many complex factors have been cited as contributing to or inhibiting the academic achievement of urban Indigenous students. Some of those factors reside in the macro-context in which schools exist, such as racial isolation in cities (Li, 1982), a high level of poverty (Lin, 2000), and the difficulty of learning adjustment (Chiou, 2000; Lin, 2001; Fu, 2001). Though macro-context may seem to be more salient factors in the education of urban Indigenous students, this study focused primarily on teachers at the micro-level, specifically their perspectives on teaching urban Indigenous students. In addition, my experience as an urban Indigenous student and, subsequently, a teacher in

city school made me believe that teachers' perspectives on Indigenous students play an important role in students' achievement.

Teachers have been viewed as a key variable in a child's academic success (Bennett, 1993). Irvin (1990) explained:

Teachers are significant others in their students' lives; as significant others, they affect the achievement and self-concept of their students.... Because schools are loosely coupled systems and teachers frequently operate autonomously and independently, teachers' impact on the lives of students is perhaps greater than one might imagine. (p. 49)

An Indigenous child entering school is still at the beginning stage of forming attitudes via 'significant others' and is learning to sort out from the school's complex structure the expectations and attributions that will encourage or hinder. Terrill & Mark (2000) pointed out that teachers with little or no experience with the backgrounds of their students are culturally limited in their ability to effectively interact with their students. Sung (1998) explored the effect of teachers' concepts of Indigenous students and found that non-Indigenous teachers usually attribute Indigenous students' academic failure to laziness, low IQ, and lack of parental support. Qiu (1998), studying the ethnic image of Indigenous students in an urban environment, found that most Indigenous students have been insultingly called "*Whana*" (barbarian). Chiu's study (1997) found that Indigenous students in cities were more likely to be assimilated into the dominant culture, while at the same time experiencing more discrimination in school and in the community (Chen et al., 1997).

Teachers' influences on the learning opportunities and academic experiences of urban Indigenous students vary. Some of those influences involve the cultural gap between students' and schools' cultures and the effect of teachers' knowledge and beliefs on their interpersonal relations, their pedagogy, and their curricula (Chuang, 2001; Irvine, 1990). Unfortunately, as Tan (1998) pointed out, when Indigenous students' performance has been considered, a deficit perspective has been used by most teachers to explain the overall pattern of failure. Depending on their beliefs about Indigenous students, teachers may form widely different interpretations of children's behavior, their language, and their abilities. As Lipman (1998) pointed out:

Explanations for the lack of school success of students in general carry cultural meanings linked to beliefs about race, class, opportunity and success in the role of schools and teachers. Teachers operate from these cultural subtexts and from their own race, class, gender, and other social identities. (p. 73)

The studies cited above highlight three points: first, many Indigenous students in urban settings have experienced social pressures; second, teachers' beliefs and attitudes have impacted the students' schooling; and finally, teachers' negative attitudes about low-achieving students are intensified in the case of many Indigenous children who are poor. Studies such as this one could provide a vital key to the improvement of learning conditions for Indigenous students.

#### Impetus for the Study

My interest in this topic is a natural extension of my Indigenous heritage and experience, first, as a classroom teacher and then as a researcher in the field of teacher education. When I was eight years old, my family moved to Taipei, an exciting

destination for an impressionable youth. My elementary school was jammed with over ten thousand students, and it was here where I first experienced any stigma for being an Aborigine, and the struggles inherent to that hostile environment. Mandarin was the only acceptable language in the classroom. My classmates frequently joked about my Indigenous accent. I worked tirelessly on my Mandarin and studied diligently to catch up with my Han classmates, hoping teachers and classmates would not discover my Indigenous identity. That experience led me to believe that what others thought about me, as an Aborigine, could have an overwhelming emotional and academic impact. Later, as a teacher, I became familiar with many different perspectives on Indigenous students, and realized that those viewpoints could have a tremendous impact on children. As an educational researcher, I have come to believe that it is important for teachers to examine their perspectives on students who come from other cultural backgrounds.

A substantial literature supports the thesis that teachers' beliefs and attitudes strongly influence their perception and behavior in the classroom (Byrnes, Kiger, & Manning, 1997; Clark & Peterson, 1986; Cross, 1993; Dillingham & Johnson, 1973; Kagan, 1992; Lewis, 1990; Nesper, 1987; Tabachnick & Zeichner, 1984; Villegas, 1992). While some believe that the macro-context is the most salient factor of urban Indigenous students' education, other researchers point to teachers' perspectives on Indigenous students as significant to student's success and therefore an important topic of study (Tatto, 1996).

The value and importance of understanding teachers' perspectives is becoming apparent. As Tatto (1996) stated, "Not only do teacher beliefs influence their teaching,

these beliefs are relatively stable and resistant to change” (p. 157). In order for teachers’ beliefs to be impacted by their training programs, Tatto recommended that

If teacher educators are striving to help teachers learn practices teachers do not value, it is likely that teacher education will not have much effect. These findings, combined with studies of the content of teacher education, make it clear that an important goal of many teacher education programs ought to be to alter teachers’ beliefs. (p. 157)

Teachers have preconceived ideas about issues of race, ethnicity, gender, and class. Like any other preconceptions, these beliefs and attitudes will play out in the actions and practices as teachers. It is, therefore, important to understand teacher’s beliefs and their relation to classroom practices.

### Research Question

The main research questions for this study are:

1. What are the relevant prior experiences (personal and sociocultural experiences, K-12 schooling, educational theory and teacher preparation, etc.) of teachers of Indigenous students in city schools?
2. What important issues do the teachers believe should be addressed to improve the education of Indigenous students?
3. What are teachers’ perspectives of Indigenous students?
4. What are the teachers’ educational philosophies about students, teaching, and learning?

The above questions aim to explore how teachers develop their understanding and interpretation of teaching urban Indigenous students. Because teachers’ perspectives are

complex and multifaceted, I developed open-ended and probing interview questions that were used to further uncover the specific views that, in turn, enabled me to respond to my guiding research questions.

### Limitations

Findings from this study cannot be used to determine the perspectives of the entire teacher population in Taiwan. The findings provide a summary of the perspectives of only those teachers who participated in the study. The in-depth descriptions of individual and collective cases allow readers to better understand teachers' perspectives about the Indigenous student population in city schools.

Another limitation of this study relates to the personal bias of the researcher. The design of this research is inescapably influenced by my own identity as an Aborigine and a teacher. This is not to suggest that the bias is controlled or eliminated; rather, confronting my subjectivity as an urban Aborigine and as a school teacher enables me to identify and analyze my own convictions. Therefore, I view my research as *an approach*, and not *the approach* to study teachers' perspectives on Indigenous students' educational experiences.

### Significance of the Study

In this study I provided a picture of teachers' perspectives of and experiences with Indigenous students in urban schools. Although some teachers did not explicitly state their feelings, their beliefs and attitudes toward students were always discernable in their interactions with students (Banks, 1987). A study such as this has the potential to impact the understanding of cultural diversity in teacher preparation and practice (Webb, 2001).

If teachers want children to accept and understand cultural diversity, they need to broaden their own outlook. It is crucial for educators to recognize how the dominant school culture is implicit in hegemonic practices that often silence subordinate groups of students, as well as constrain and disempower those who teach them. Such insights can also enhance the ability of teachers to work with students from dominant and subordinate classes so that they come to recognize how and why the dominant culture dictates their compliance and renders them powerless (McLaren, 1988).

The study of teachers' perspectives is critical to understanding teachers' attitudes and has powerful implications for teacher efficacy and student achievement (McAllister & Irvin, 2002; Pajares, 1992); it is only when teachers accept and embrace student diversity that they will be able to teach *all* children. Researchers have suggested that in order for teachers to interact effectively with their students they must confront their own racism and biases (Banks, 1991; Gillette & Boyle-Baise, 1998; Nieto & Rolon, 1997), and learn about their students' cultures. In exploring teachers' perspectives about how Indigenous students learn and how those preconceptions influence their practices, we can enhance our understanding of the education of Indigenous students. Moreover, understanding what propels teachers' beliefs may be the key to changing the social consequences of undesirable classroom activities.

#### The six teachers in the Study

##### Da-Wei

Da-Wei, a non-Indigenous six-grade teacher, was born in Lu-Kan Town, a small village in Western Taiwan. He graduated from National Taipei Junior Teachers College and began to teach in 1978. At the time this data was collected, he was at the end of his

twenty-fifth year of teaching. He came to An-Shi Elementary School in 1998 to join his wife, who was a second grade teacher at An-Shi Elementary School. Da-Wei taught Mandarin, art, and social studies in the sixth grade. His avocations were travel and photography, both of which he enjoyed during his summer breaks. Da-Wei was pursuing a master's degree in art education at the Taiwan Normal University.

### Ping-Ping

Ping-Ping, a second generation of Chinese mainlander, was born in Tao-Yuan County, where she lived with her husband and a baby girl. Ping-Ping went through grade school, high school, and college in Tao-Yuan. After graduating from National Chu-Yang University, she took a one-year Teacher Certification Program at Taipei Teachers College. Ping-Ping began to teach in 1988. Then she taught for fifteen years in elementary school. At the time I interviewed her, She was teaching Mandarin, math, and social studies in the third grade at An-Shi Elementary School. Her colleagues knew her as a caring, warm and generous person.

### Mayao

Mayao, in his mid thirties, was born in Hua-Lien County, eastern Taiwan. He was the director of teaching at Long-So Elementary School in Tao-Yuan County, where he had taught for twelve years. Mayao is of Amis heritage, and he moved with his parents to the city when he was 12. He was the only Indigenous teacher at Long-So. He has a four-year-old daughter and lived in the community in which Long-So was located. He taught science in grades four, five, and six. Mayao had volunteered to serve as a liaison between the Indigenous parents and teachers in his school. He also coached the baseball team.

### Saoma

Saoma was a fifty-four-year-old Amis mother of four who lived in Jan-Hua County, in western Taiwan. Her home village, Chen-Gong, was located in the southeast of Tai-Tung County. Before becoming a school teacher, Saoma taught Amis language to young students at her church for many years. In 1998, she was granted an Indigenous-language Certificate, and began to teach Amis language in schools. Saoma was very committed to Indigenous culture and language. She took pride in her cultural heritage which essentially became the focus of her work as an Amis language teacher.

### Ting-Ting

Ting-Ting, twenty-six years old, was in her third year as a non-Indigenous third-grade teacher at Din-Pu Elementary School. She was born in Chia-Yi county, southwest Taiwan in 1980. She was the youngest child in a six children family; she is the only one who made it to college. She went through grade school and high school on Kao-Hsiung City. Ting-Ting completed her B.S. in Elementary Education at Tai-Nan Teachers College. Although a novice teacher at Din-Pu, she was named Teacher of the Year in 2003. Ting-Ting expressed her appreciation to her experienced colleagues, who frequently offered her words of support and encouragement.

### Ling-Ling

Ling-Ling, a twenty-four-year-old non-Indigenous teacher, was born in Tai-Nan City, south Taiwan. Her parents worked as government employees. Ling-Ling received her teacher preparation at Taipei Teachers College. At the time this data was collected, she was a second grade teacher at Din-Pu Elementary School, and a new member of the

teaching staff. Young, energetic, and enthusiastic about teaching, she liked challenges and enjoyed putting her ideas into practice in her class.

### Overview

Chapter 1 introduces the readers to the key ideas of the study. The purpose of this study is to examine six Taiwanese teachers' perspectives on teaching Indigenous students in urban schools. The context for the study is provided in which I outline the immigration and education of Taiwan Indigenous children. Four research questions provide a focus for data collection and analysis.

In the review of relevant literature I explain how *critical theory* is a framework that I use to examine general issues of the education of urban Indigenous students, as well as specific issues involving teachers' perspectives about teaching Indigenous students. Research on teachers' perspectives about diversity and on teacher preparation for diversity are presented.

Chapter 3 traces my epistemological journey as a Taiwanese Indigenous researcher. Also presented is the research design, and how I came to re-present the personal backgrounds, beliefs, and philosophies of the six teachers who participated in the study. The chapter also explains how the design was implemented through the following procedures: selection of participants, profile of individual participant, data sources, data management, and analysis.

Chapter 4 through Chapter 9 provide description of each teacher through organizing the chapters around common themes. The first section of each chapter, describes the teacher's personal background and educational experiences. Also I share how the teacher was socialized and prepared to become a teacher in a city school. The

second section illustrates the teacher's perspectives on Indigenous education in general, including policies related to Indigenous education, urgent issues of Indigenous education, and the treatment of Indigenous students in urban schools. The third section focuses on the teacher's beliefs about Indigenous students and their learning in the classroom. The last section covers the teacher's philosophy of teaching and perceptions of the teacher's role.

Chapter 10 analyzes the six teachers' perspectives on the education of Indigenous students, using Sleeter and Grant's (1987) five approaches to multicultural education. Chapter 11 draws conclusions from the analysis and discusses implications for teacher education and professional development.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Educational researchers generally agree that what teachers think about teaching and learners is an important mediator in teachers' practices (Kagan, 1992; Rios, 1996). Teachers' beliefs filter their perceptions, interpretations, and actions. During the last two decades, teachers' beliefs about multicultural education, culture, race, and ethnicity have received increased attention; this phenomenon can be traced back to changing demographics in the classroom and divergent rates of graduation, standardized test scores, and other factors among different racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups (Rios, 1996; Solomon, Battistich, & Hom, 1996). Recently, researchers have begun to contextualize their studies of teachers' perspectives about diversity (Banks, 2001; Causey, Thomas, & Armento, 2000; Horenczyk & Tatar, 2002).

Although scholars in Taiwan (Chen et al., 1997) agree that how teachers think about their students significantly influence students academically, the related research is sparse. Most studies on teachers' beliefs focus primarily on the teaching of selected subjects (Lee, 1995; Lee, 1998; Lin, 2001; Lo, 2001; Shieh, 1994; Wang, 1995; Wu, 1999); few studies were conducted to explore teachers' beliefs about teaching culturally diverse students (Chen, 1998; Chen et al., 1997; Chuang, 2001). To adequately address the issue of cultural diversity, this literature review primarily discusses research conducted in the United States. It focuses on teachers' beliefs and perspectives about diversity, the relationship of teachers' beliefs to their practices, and the preparation of

teachers to deal with diversity. Included are empirical studies, in which teachers' beliefs about diversity are examined, either as its prime purpose or as part of a larger study.

This chapter is organized in four sections, focusing mainly on empirical studies dealing with cultural diversity. The first section, theoretical frameworks, discusses theories that serve as lenses for understanding the participating teachers' perspectives about teaching Indigenous students in city schools. In particular, Sleeter and Grant's (1987) five approaches to multicultural education are applied to discuss teachers' experiences with Indigenous students, as reported in Chapter 10. The second section deals with gender, race, and social issues and includes a discussion of the relationship between diversity and teaching and how gender, race, and social class interplay in the classroom. The third section, on thinking about diversity, examines the studies involving the experiences of preservice and inservice teachers. Because preservice and inservice teachers are on different developmental and professional levels (Haberman, 1995), they will be discussed separately. The fourth section, preparing teachers for diversity, is an overview of the courses and programs that prepare preservice and inservice teachers to deal with cultural diversity.

### **Theoretical frameworks: Ways of thinking about diversity**

#### **Critical theory**

The theoretical framework for this research provides a perspective from which to examine both the issues of the education of Indigenous students, as well as specific issues involving teachers' perspectives about teaching Indigenous students. Here, a critical-theory view (Giroux, 1983; McLaren, 1988; McLaughlin, 1994; Tierney, 1992) is

adopted. Critical theory offers a critique of the institutions, policies, and practices that have historically served as disabling and disempowering forces against various groups of students. It also suggests mechanisms for transforming historical patterns of school failure.

Critical theory acknowledges the need to analyze the nature of domination and resistance as they relate to culture and power. Giroux (1983) states, “Teaching for social transformation means educating students to take risks and to struggle within ongoing relations of power in order to be able to alter the grounds on which life is lived” (p. 30). The struggle suggested relates to power—power not only in the sense of ability to dominate, but also to act with effect. Tierney (1992) stresses the need for students to identify the practices that inhibit and constrain them and for educators to create conditions in which students can recognize and utilize the potential to empower themselves. Tierney states a rationale for a critical theory:

First, one key point of critical theory is that theory must be linked to action, so that the goal of such theory is the production, not merely of “*conceptual* thought,” but also of action that is meant to bring about change. Second, change should not be conceived as the sole possession of intellectuals or upper level administrators or any other group. All individuals have a role for protest and action in accord with “living within the truth.” Indeed, a key component of critical analysis is enabling the powerless to realize that they are not powerless and that they are able to change the social relations of their existence. Third, change is multifaceted, a “complex process.” It comes not only from dramatic reinorientations such an

overthrow of a government, but also from more minute developments that an individual may utilize. (p. 23)

Critical theory works from the assumption that social scientists are embedded in the contexts and structures that they investigate; they are never free from the subjectivities and values that constitute their investigation. No one stands removed from the world he or she studies; in effect, no one is an objective observer. Given that perspective, researchers must reveal not only their sources, but their values and beliefs, as well. For critical theorists, those values and beliefs are related to understanding the oppressive aspects of society in order to transform those features that seek to constrain and silence the oppressed.

Researchers have often recommended that to challenge misconceptions and change the status quo, teachers must engage in reflective practices (Milk, Meercado, & Spaiens, 1992). Encouraging teachers to examine their beliefs is important to help a reflective practitioner. When teachers engage in critical reflection, they gain insights that may assist their development as effective teachers. One way to address the marginalization of students in school is through a transformative pedagogy, which includes critical learning, action, and reflection and which provides teachers with the mechanism for self-actualization and empowerment (Freire, 1993, 1998). Given the significance of being a reflective practitioner in teaching, it is important to understand how teachers make sense of their experiences with Indigenous students. What roles do the teachers perceive they have in the students' lives? What do they think would influence the education of the students? How do they interpret their roles and responsibilities as teachers of Indigenous students in urban environments?

### Five approaches to multicultural education

In addition to critical theory, the research of Sleeter and Grant (1987) is important to this analysis. They conducted research and analysis of multicultural education practices in the United States and identified five approaches to multicultural education. Those approaches provide a useful framework for this study, examining the six teachers' perspectives about teaching Indigenous students:

1. *Teaching the Culturally Different*: This approach recognizes cultural differences among diverse groups. Teachers help students acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that allow them to participate in the public culture of the dominant group. Difference is viewed as problematic, while discrimination and inequity by the dominant culture is ignored and, as well structural and institutional practices of oppression are ignored. Teachers consider the low academic achievement of minority students as individual challenge rather than institutional challenge. They view the goal of teaching as providing bridges by which minority students may assimilate into the cultural mainstream and into the existing social structure.
2. *Human Relations*: This approach focuses on cooperation and communication between people of different backgrounds. This conception is aimed mainly at the *affective level*—at the attitudes and feelings people have about themselves and others. Teachers attempt to foster good relationships among students of diverse heritage in order to replace tension and hostility with acceptance and care. The major objective of this approach is to help students of different backgrounds get along, communicate better with each other, and feel good about who they are. Teachers would seek to promote positive feelings, unity, tolerance for each other,

assimilation, and acceptance of existing structures and practices. This approach gives no attention to social stratification or to political or economic constructions.

3. *Single Group Studies*: This approach focuses on the experiences and cultures of specific groups within society. Ethnic groups, as opposed to race, class, and gender groups, are investigated with an aim to develop acceptance, appreciation, and empathy for cultural differences and linguistic diversity. Curriculum receives the most attention; none is given to social stratification or institutional limitations. Teachers neither consider social change nor analyze the social-economic position of minority groups. Teachers advocate add-on curricula.
4. *Multicultural Education*: This approach promotes cultural pluralism and social equality by appreciating, protecting, and enhancing diverse cultures. Teachers seek to (a) promote the strength and value of cultural diversity; (b) develop a sense for human rights and respect for cultural diversity; (c) change discrimination in society; (d) develop acceptance for social justice and equal opportunity for all people; and (e) develop a sense for equity distribution of power among all individuals and groups.
5. *Social Reconstructionist*: This approach goes a step further by requiring multicultural education to also prepare students to question the status quo and to challenge the existing social-structure inequalities. It invites students to become skilled workers and thinking citizens who are also change agents and social critics. Teachers teach students about oppression and discrimination. Students learn about their roles as social-change agents so that they may participate in the generation of a more equitable society.

Sleeter and Grant (1987) argue that in order to address structural inequality in schools, multicultural education must be both multicultural and social reconstructionist. They assert that “others” can be different in race, class, and gender, as well as in ability (either challenged or gifted), culture, language dominance, and sexual orientation. Every classroom should reflect and celebrate diversity of every type. Extending the role of schools, classrooms should be a base for local social-action projects. Teachers should facilitate the coalescing of diverse groups to work toward social justice. Educators need to be encouraged to promote ideas towards a better society, and the authors help them understand how their view of “others” will dictate what a truly multicultural education will become in their classrooms.

Teachers and schools are not exempt from the effects of institutional racism and other forms of discrimination present in our society (Nieto, 2002). Although this study examines teachers’ perspectives about diversity, the institutional discrimination cannot be ignored. The major difference between individual and institutional discrimination is the way in which power is wielded. Institutional discrimination is wielded primarily through the power of the people who control the institutions such as schools, where the oppressive policies and practices are reinforced and legitimized. Individual discrimination is wielded through the personal interactions of individuals. Discrimination, then, can be understood also as a systemic problem, not simply as an individual dislike for a particular group of people. Because of the power of some groups over others, those groups with the most power in society are the ones that benefit from institutional discrimination, whether or not that is their intent (Nieto, 2002).

### **Diversity and teaching**

The construct of diversity is often used to mean racial or ethnic diversity—for example, a diverse classroom is one that contains students from many racial and ethnic backgrounds. Technically, diversity is much broader than race or ethnicity. A diverse classroom contains students who differ from one another in terms of socioeconomic class, learning style, family background, religion, sexual orientation, and sometimes even age. For the purpose of this study, however, the term will be limited to issues of gender, race, and social class.

#### **Gender**

Because children readily, perhaps naturally, divide themselves by gender, teachers often unintentionally foster and reinforce such segregation by using gender as basis for organizing their classes into sides for contests, for lunch queues, and for other activities (Jones, Byrd, & Campbell, 2000; Thorne, 1993). In a comparative study, Bigler (1995) found that in elementary classrooms explicitly organized by gender, children developed more gender-stereotyped views of occupations and more rigid assumptions about the homogeneity of males and females than did their peers in classrooms where gender differences were not emphasized.

Research findings indicate that students respond to academic success differently, depending on their gender (Grossman and Grossman, 1994). Of particular interest to researchers is the different treatment afforded girls and boys in mathematics, science, and computers classes, which remain primarily male-dominated. Girls' interest in those subjects declines between the ages of nine and fourteen (Kelly, 1987).

It is vital that classroom teachers raise issues of sexism directly (Weiler, 1988). Teachers should be willing to share with students their own beliefs and experiences regarding gender. Teachers must be aware of the gender bias imbedded in many educational materials and texts and of the need to take steps to combat that bias. Once teachers have recognized their own gender-biased behaviors, they need the resources to help them change. Teachers are generally unaware of their own biased teaching behaviors because they are simply teaching as they were taught, and the subtle gender inequities found in teaching materials are often overlooked (Jones, Evans, Byrd, & Campbell, 2000). Girls and boys today are receiving separate and unequal educations because of the gender socialization that takes place in our schools and the sexist hidden curriculum that students face daily. Unless teachers are made aware of the gender-role socialization and the biased messages they are unintentionally imparting to students every day, and until teachers are provided with the methods and resources necessary to eliminate gender-bias in their classrooms, girls will continue to receive an inequitable education.

### Race

For many years, researchers have concluded that racial minority students are given less attention, ignored more, praised less (Ford, 1985; Grant, 1992; Holliday, 1985; Marcus, Gross, & Seefeldt, 1991; Meier, Stewart, & England, 1989), and reprimanded more than their dominant counterparts by teachers in integrated classes (Cecil, 1988; Lipman, 1998; Troyna, 1990). Other studies have shown that even when students of both groups respond with the same answers, dominant students are praised more often than

minority students (Casteel, 1998; Cecil, 1988; Ford, 1985; Holliday, 1985; Marcus et al., 1991; Meier et al., 1989; Troyna, 1990).

Sleeter (1995) claims that white Americans and Americans of color grow up in different locations in the racial structure, although whites usually deny that there is a significant racial structure. Many whites view racism as individual prejudice and inequality, due mainly to so-called cultural deficiencies. In a study of how thirty teachers addressed cultural diversity in their own teaching and how they thought about various aspects of cultural and racial diversity, Sleeter (1992) found that most teachers believe that the social system is open to those who are willing to work, regardless of racial difference.

Noting the racial bias shown by many teachers, some researchers (Brophy, 1983; Cochran-Smith, 1995; Grant, 1992; Meier, Stewart & England, 1989; Mercado, 2001) have declared that teachers' treatment and attitudes can have a devastating effect on their students. The researchers also argued that such negative treatment can erode students' self-esteem, affect their motivation, and severely hamper their academic performance.

### Social Class

On a regular basis, younger children experience the effects of privilege or discrimination by watching their parents interact (or not interact) with the work world and agencies and institutions. Their images and expectations are being formed in subtle ways (Ramsey, 1998). Ramsey asserts that young children have a very limited understanding of social-class differences, and suggests that teachers need to help children see and critique how our economic system perpetuates economic advantage and disadvantage. In reviewing the data on SES effects on academic achievement, Biemiller

(1993) argues that many of the differences noted in the research are in fact attributable to school practices such as grouping and career counseling.

Teachers, most of whom come from a middle-class background, bring class-based sensibilities to their work—a curious omission of the teacher socialization literature (Zeichner & Gore, 1990). The teachers' sensibilities derive in part from their class of origin and in part from their professional and life experiences, which equip them to cope with the varied demands of educating students. Unfortunately, in many cases, teachers' social-class identities and past experience equip them poorly to deal with students whose social-class origins differ from their own (Bennett & LeCompte, 1990).

Sleeter & McLaren (1995) argue that race and ethnicity need to be considered in the context of social class and gender, because all these dimensions interact in individuals' lives, and oppressions are linked. The synergistic effect of race, gender, and class on the educational experiences of students is complex (Rasool & Curtis, 2000). Paula Rothenberg (1992) suggests that race, class, and gender are central to understanding social, political, and economic institutions. She further challenges teachers to consider the interconnectedness of those issues and to “reflect on the way these elements function together, to determine how we see ourselves and each other” (p. 1). To fully understand teachers' perspectives about teaching Indigenous students, it is important to consider the issues of gender and social class, especially because teacher expectations are, in part, determined by these characteristics of students (Erickson & Mohatt, 1982; Rist, 1970).

Diversity enriches society, communities, schools, and classrooms. Individuals from many different racial, ethnic, and cultural groups have made and continue to make

significant contributions to society (Bank, 2002). Diversity also poses serious challenges to society, to schools, and to classrooms. Boardman and Horowitz (1994) state, “it is important to recognize the fact that intergroup diversity frequently contributes to an increase in social incompatibilities” (p. 6). Likewise, Allen, Hutchinson, & Johnson (1995) claim that when students come together from different races, religions, and cultures representing different levels of power and privilege, misunderstandings, fear, and aggressive acts may result.

Therefore, it is important for us as teachers and educators to realize how diversity affects classroom teaching, and to develop teacher education programs that look critically at the effect of school policies and practices on students. That exploration will help educators concentrate on how schools can create conditions that make it possible for all students to learn. What follows is a discussion of the significant social determinants—gender, race, and social class—affecting classroom teaching.

### **Thinking about diversity: Preservice and inservice teachers**

The term “diversity” has not yet appeared in the field of educational research in Taiwan. The commonly used term is “multicultural” education, in which more attention is given to the issues of race and ethnicity. Most studies of multicultural education have focused on students, specifically Indigenous students, instead of teachers (Lin, 1995). Among the limited studies of teachers’ beliefs on multicultural education, Kuo’s (1996) study of preservice teachers was the first attempt to explore how teachers think about diverse learners. He found that many preservice teachers held positive attitudes about multicultural education but had very little knowledge about the subject because very few

teacher-education programs were able to provide a culturally relevant curriculum. He further observed that it is questionable whether the teacher-education curricula offered by teachers colleges have room for multicultural education, even though most teacher educators believe that multicultural education is important to address. Further research needs to explore this issue.

The following review is organized in two sections, with the main focus on empirical studies dealing with preservice and inservice teachers. The first section begins with an examination of the studies involving preservice teachers. Because preservice and inservice teachers are on different developmental and professional levels (Hamberman, 1995), they will be discussed in separate sections. The second section focuses on studies involving inservice teachers and the issue of cultural diversity. Although the focus of the current study is on practicing, not preservice teachers, it is important to consider preservice teachers' perspectives because most of the literature on diversity has been based on preservice teachers, and that literature has informed researchers' work with inservice teachers.

### Preservice teachers

The idea that teachers need specific preparation in order to work effectively with a diverse population is not new. Goodwin (1997) reports that the concept of including "cultural diversity training in preservice teacher education programs" (p. 9) began to surface in the 1970s. Gay (2000) outlines three components for multicultural teacher education: 1) knowledge, whereby teachers become literate about ethnic group experiences; 2) an open attitude toward the examination of feelings about ethnic, racial,

and cultural differences; and 3) skills to translate their knowledge and sensitivities into school programs, curricular designs, and classroom instructional practices (p. 48).

Paine (1990) explores in more depth teachers' perspectives about diversity, using data from 233 prospective teachers. Basing her results on written responses to various questions, Paine identifies four categories of beliefs about cultural diversity. The categories are: (a) individual differences, in which teachers view the sources and seek teaching solutions and learning solutions in the diverse children; teachers do not assign importance to differences of race or various ascribed cultural categories among their students; (b) categorical differences, in which teachers begin to view children according to ascribed characteristics such as race, social class, and gender, and at the same time try to minimize those differences; (c) contextual differences, in which teachers begin to embed categorical patterns within a social context; difference is understood to be socially constructed; and (d) pedagogical perspectives, in which teachers believe that cultural differences or "socially constructed differences" (Ross & Smith, 1992, p. 95) have implications for teaching and learning.

Paine (1990) found that most of the preservice teachers in her study tended to focus on individual differences and, to a lesser extent, on categorically different levels of thinking about diversity (p. 19). The teachers did not consider diversity in context; but, rather, viewed it as a static, not dynamic concept. That finding has been supported by other studies (Gomez & Tabachnick, 1992; Ross & Smith, 1992; Valli, 1995) and is referred to as a color-blind perspective, in that preservice teachers see children only as educational subjects, without regard to their individual life histories, as influenced by

race, gender, and social class; and that children's ethnocultural characteristics that influence their behavior and, in fact, make them "different."

Ross and Smith (1992) used Paine's categories to measure whether six white preservice teachers' beliefs about diversity were changed after a semester-long multicultural course. After the course, two of the six trained teachers attributed academic failure to individual differences and a family-deficiency model, characterized by Paine's categories as an individual difference perspective. Three of the other prospective teachers held a more complex view of cultural diversity and were identified as moving toward what, in Paine's model, is called contextual orientation.

In another area of her survey, Paine (1990) gathered prospective teachers' opinions on the use of certain practices, such as academic tracking. She found that, although some teachers discussed their beliefs about equity in the classroom, they also supported tracking, which historically has led to unequal access to school resources and experiences. Unfortunately, Paine did not examine the relationship between any of the prospective teachers' perspectives and their practices. Delineation of that relationship might have provided some understanding and resolution of the conflict between teachers' personal beliefs and their professional beliefs.

Sparapani, Abel, Easton, Edwards and Herbster (1995) surveyed 832 pre-service teachers in Alabama, Michigan, Montana, New York, and Washington. They found that most of the preservice teachers they studied agreed with the statement, "I would feel comfortable teaching in schools or regions where English was not the primary language spoken in the home" (p. 21). Yet, there was still a large group who disagreed or strongly

disagreed. Also, as a group, the respondents preferred to teach in a school setting similar to that in which they grew up.

Preservice teachers who have not adequately examined their own beliefs regarding cultural diversity typically appear overconfident about their ability to work with children in diverse cultural settings (Reiff & Cannella, 1992). The predominately white preservice teachers were more likely to rely on naïve, idealistic beliefs and to have neglected to examine their identities as members of a privileged white race. That leads to the adoption of a color-blind perspective that ignores and denies the fact that ethnic or racial differences can have pedagogical implications (Bollin & Finkel, 1995; Nieto, 2001). For many new teachers, this naiveté can become a form of “dyconscious racism” (King, 1991), a pattern of resistance in thinking about differences that is characterized by a chronic lack of self-awareness about one’s own assumptions (Gillette, 1996).

#### Inservice teachers

Inservice teachers have received much less attention than preservice teachers in research examining teachers’ perspectives about diversity (Gailos, 1997). That may be due to the increased difficulty of conducting classroom-based research or survey-based research with practicing teachers, who are not always a captive group of participants like preservice teachers. Inservice teachers have less time and inclination to devote to such research endeavors.

The literature on teacher perspectives demonstrates that teachers’ beliefs and perspectives affect their behavior in the classroom and can be significant indicators of their classroom practices. Teachers bring into the classroom a vision of teaching and act out that vision through their individual cultural lenses, prejudices, and stereotypes.

Indigenous students are “cultural others” to teachers (Montecinos, 1995). Montecinos (1995) argues that “Teachers should learn to examine how their own pedagogical practices and perspectives perpetuate inequalities or improve the lives of students who come from socially subordinated groups” (p. 301).

Though some studies (Chen et al., 1997; Wu, 1999) have explored inservice teachers’ perspectives about cultural diversity in Taiwan, most of them have been quantitative rather than qualitative. Researchers found that most teachers held a positive attitude toward multiculturalism (Chang, 2000; Chen, 1998; Chen et al., 1997), but how teachers interpret their experiences of teaching culturally diverse students and the underlying reasons for their interpretations remain unknown.

Chen (1998) studied 482 elementary teachers to understand their perspectives on multicultural education and the factors that produced those perspectives. She found that Indigenous teachers held more positive perspectives of multicultural education than non-Indigenous teachers, and those who taught in Indigenous schools showed more positive attitudes. Interestingly, she also found that teachers’ perspectives on multicultural education were not significantly affected by gender, the taking of multicultural education courses, or the teacher’s professional position. That raises the dilemma of how, then, teacher-preparation institutions would adequately prepare teachers to deal with the issue of cultural diversity in their classrooms.

Chen et al. (1997) studied 1,235 elementary teachers’ perceptions and attitudes toward Indigenous pupils in the inner city. The study found that teachers who have taught Indigenous students are more likely to believe that Indigenous students are less

intelligent than their mainstream counterparts. Most teachers believe that Indigenous students need special programs to help them academically.

A few current studies (Chung, 2003; Lee, 2003; Wu; 2000) have explored teachers' beliefs and attitudes about teaching Indigenous students. The research findings suggest that many participating teachers hold color-blind perspectives about their Indigenous students (Lee, 2003; Chung, 2003). Wu (2000) used a qualitative method to study a sixth-grade Han teacher who participated in a multicultural curriculum project. The study revealed that the teacher had many negative views about Indigenous students and struggled to teach in a cultural diverse classroom.

In the United States most of the relevant studies (Irvine & York, 1993; Lipman, 1998; Montero-Sieburth, 1996; New, 1996; Pang & Sablan, 1998) have dealt with teachers' beliefs about students of color, some specifically African American (Pang & Sablan, 1998) or Latin American (Montero-Sieburth, 1996). Most of those studies revolved around the question: Why do certain populations continue to fail academically and how do teachers feel about teaching those populations. Their beliefs often influence teachers' expectations and their interactions with students (Irvine & York, 1993).

Pajares (1992), summarizing research on teachers' beliefs, explains that teachers change beliefs only if their existing beliefs are challenged and found to be unsatisfactory. Even then, Pajares emphasizes, teachers change beliefs only as a last alternative. Clair (1995), in her ethnographic study of regular classroom teachers who instruct minority-language students, finds that teachers' beliefs about those children were based on "hearsay and misinformation." Because of lack of training, teachers often engage in teaching practices that are "based on naïve notions of language proficiency" (p. 189).

Irvine and York (1993) address the attribution of failure in a large survey-based study. In their survey of 474 teachers (90% white, 96% female) they find that teachers attribute academic failure differently, depending on the culture of the students. The predominant factor associated with failure among Vietnamese and Hispanic students was language; whereas, in the case of African-Americans, parents were seen as the cause of failure. Most of the factors cited as causes for student failure were considered to be beyond the teachers' control and suggested more of a negative attitude about students, especially African-Americans.

New (1996) examined a similar question regarding teachers' attributions of African-American students' academic performance. She studied two African-American kindergarten boys in two different, predominantly white schools. In one case, the teacher blamed the student's home environment and poor academic ability for his "stubborn and passive aggressive" behavior. She responded by trying to eliminate his unacceptable behavior. In the other case, New wrote of a teacher who held a similar deficit belief about an African-American boy. Because of his non-conforming behavior, the teacher believed that he was retarded. She also tried to control his behavior, but she did not accept responsibility for his responses to her controlling efforts or for the classroom environment. Neither teacher was able to identify any relationship between her beliefs about African-American boys and their subsequent actions or the students' behavior in the classroom. Both teachers held an assimilationist perspective, in which the teachers' responsibility is to assist the child, usually through control, to conform to the standards and norms of the classroom (New, 1996).

A negative attitude also was found in one of the few studies of “at-risk” Latino students. In the urban high school that Montero-Sieburth (1996) studied, most of the teachers attributed low academic achievement among Latino students to home, language, and culture. The teachers also exhibited a color-blind perspective, never viewing the at-risk Latino students any differently from other at-risk populations in the school. As in the Lipman (1998) study, the teachers of color did not support such a deficit view. They recognized the relevance of the curriculum in reducing at-risk conditions for Latino students.

Summaries and critiques of research on teacher education for diversity (Grant & Secada, 1990; Zeichner, 1992) also indicate that the perspectives of many United States teachers can be barriers to the effective instruction of substantial numbers of students. For example, in their summary of research concerning demographic diversity and teacher education, Grant and Secada (1990) point out that young, white, female, suburban, novice teachers are often assigned to classrooms and schools where their more-experienced colleagues do not wish to teach. The classrooms are often populated with children of color and students labeled as low-skilled. As the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) and Metropolitan Life surveys indicate, they are not the children that novices hoped to teach.

### Summary

Most studies focusing on preservice teachers or on teacher-student interaction in diverse settings do not describe a proper teacher-preparation program for diversity; neither do they identify teacher characteristics that might influence their work with diverse students. With few exceptions the literature does not look at teachers’ beliefs, in

the context of experiences teaching in diverse settings; neither does the research address the process of becoming a teacher in culturally diverse settings. Few studies of new teachers “prepared for diversity” follow them into their classrooms in diverse settings; consequently, there is little information on how their beliefs and training influence their interactions with students or how their perspectives and practices are shaped by experience.

Many studies of preservice teachers’ beliefs about cultural diversity have validated the results reported by Gomez (1996) and Pain (1990); namely, that preservice teachers tend to hold color-blind perspectives that fail to recognize cultural differences, and prefer, instead, to focus on the similarities of their students. Other studies focus on the different types of beliefs that teachers hold about diversity, such as stereotypes of different ethnic and racial groups, and perceptions of urban school children.

Most of the teachers who participated in the studies conducted in Taiwan and the United States shared a deficit view of ethnic minority students, except for those teachers deemed as successful or exemplary by their administrators and colleagues. In most of the studies, beliefs were discussed in the context of teachers’ practices with students. Interestingly, many teachers did not realize how their beliefs undergirded their practices and school policies (e.g. Montero-Sieburth, 1996; New, 1996). For example, in New’s study, the teachers could not articulate the connection between their self-reported beliefs about minority students and their classroom practices.

Studies of inservice, rather than preservice teachers reveal more of the complexities of beliefs structures, such as their nested and sometime contradictory relationships, as well as their relationship to other types of beliefs, such as efficacy

beliefs. Further exploration of teachers' beliefs about culture should include contextual variables, the relationships between different beliefs, and practices associated with those beliefs.

### **Preparing teachers for diversity**

#### **Teacher preparation and diversity**

Given that, increasingly, school populations are culturally diverse, then teacher-education programs must prepare future educators to face the challenges of that dynamic condition in classrooms. Indeed, administrators and educators have shown serious concern for multicultural teacher education programs. Yet, educational institutions do not agree on what constitutes an effective multicultural teacher program (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). The typical response of teacher-education programs for K-12 students has been to add a course or two on multicultural education, bilingual education, or urban education—but to leave the rest of the curriculum largely intact (Goodwin, 1997). Although such courses play an important role in preparing teachers for diversity, that approach to curriculum reform does not go far enough (Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Zeichner & Hoeft (1996) provide a comprehensive review of contemporary teacher-education programs preparing teachers for cultural diversity. The strategies they have found include (a) building high expectations, and encouraging reflection among prospective teachers for the learning of all students (Ahlquist, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Valli, 1994); (b) providing prospective teachers with cultural knowledge about the experiences, lifestyles, and contributions of various groups in society, and the contributions of various groups in society (Ellwood, 1990; Gomez, 1991; Grinberg,

Goldfarb, 1998; Hidalgo, 1993; Spindler & Spindler, 1993; Young, 1993); (c) providing teachers with opportunities to develop competence in building relationships and in teaching strategies that will help them to succeed in schools serving children and families with backgrounds different than their own (Ellwood, 1990; Garcia, 1993; Garcia & Pearson, 1994; Villegas, 1991); and (d) expanding prospective teachers' field experience by placing them in the local community (Noordhooft & Kleinfeld, 1991; Stachowski & Mahan, 1998)

One technique that has been used to address issues of cultural diversity in teacher-education programs has been the ethnic study approach. Ellwood (1990) asserts that an ethnic studies component in a teacher education program potentially does much to prevent mistakes by teachers rooted in cultural ignorance.

If student teachers studied Afro-American history and literature, gaining an appreciation for the immense love of language running through African-American culture, they might be able to recognize in their own Black students, skill and linguistic strength that could be built upon in the classroom. Similarly, if they gained an appreciation for the tenacious struggles minority people have waged historically in this country around education, it might be a little bit harder to jump to the immensely unlikely conclusion that "those parents" do not care about the education of their children. (p. 3)

In her teaching Ahlquist (1991) attempted to interrupt the pejorative beliefs about "other," held by thirty prospective secondary teachers. Her purpose was to teach her students "to challenge the status quo, hoping that they, as the teachers of the future, would choose to take a stand in the interests of social justice" (p, 158). Although her

students expressed curiosity about multicultural education at the beginning of the course, they also contended that sexism and racism no longer existed, and that she was “utopian and idealistic for advocating cultural diversity” (p. 160).

Noordhooff and Kleinfeld (1991), co-directors of the Teachers for Alaska program at the University of Alaska, studied post-baccalaureate non-education majors preparing to teach native Alaskan peoples in rural secondary schools. The students lived in and practiced teaching in communities of native peoples. The preservice teachers used a three-phase set of classroom and community experiences, as well as narratives or cases about teaching in rural Alaska, as tools for reflecting on what good teaching meant in that setting. Their analysis of the changes in the perspectives and practices of the first two cohorts of teachers enrolled in this program shows that teachers “began to take more account of a primary facet of the teaching context—their students—in preparing and implementing lessons” (p. 181).

Burstein and Caello (1989) describe the components of a course designed to help teachers develop awareness, knowledge, and skills for teaching diverse learners. They do not discuss the extent to which course activities were culturally responsive to the diverse backgrounds of course participants. For example, prior to training, thirty-eight per cent of the teachers in the study explained minority students’ school performance from a culture-deficient prospective, and fifty per cent understood it as a mismatch between the home culture and the school culture. Were these different opinions related to teachers’ ethnicity? The finding poses an important curricular question: How can these differences be incorporated into teacher-education curriculum?

To help prospective teachers work effectively with Native American students, Kleinfeld (1998) developed the Teachers for Alaska (TFA) program, using curriculum blocks. Each block focused on the teaching of a subject (English, social studies, mathematics, science, or cultural studies) but also brought in the material and issues usually dealt with in race, gender, and power relationships. Prospective teachers became able to teach subjects in a culturally responsible way. Based on her observations and evaluations, Kleinfeld found that many prospective teachers showed measurable improvement in cross-cultural teaching skills.

Meacham (2002) proposes a cross-disciplined and cross-departmental curriculum in Berkeley to restructure the teacher-education program. The faculty committee, he suggests, determines which courses satisfy the requirement. Faculty members from many departments teach cultural relevant courses based upon a common framework. The courses focus on themes or issues in United States history, society, or culture, and address theoretical or analytical issues relevant to understanding race, culture, and ethnicity in American society. One wonders what aspects have been negotiated in the development of courses. It may not have been easy to bring about a unanimous agreement of the faculty, given their various perspectives, expectations, and political views. What compromises were made? by whom and on what issues? Successful curricular change, I believe, requires an intellectual rationale and is best when that rationale is student-centered.

Colville-Hall, MacDonald & Smolen (1995) suggest that preparing teachers for diversity requires that they have certain knowledge, skills, and predispositions or attitudes. The requisite attitudes include a respect for cultural differences, a belief that all

students are able to learn, a sense of professional efficacy, the ability to understand one's own cultural background, and empathy with students. To prepare preservice teachers for diverse classrooms, the following elements and objectives should be considered:

### **Knowledge**

- To know lifestyles, values, and communication patterns of diverse ethnic groups;
- To comprehend the attitudes, learning styles, and cognitive processing styles of diverse learners;
- To understand the relationship between teachers' expectations and students' achievements.

### **Skills**

- To be able to create a classroom responding to the needs of diverse learners and promoting positive interactions between students from diverse backgrounds;
- To demonstrate the ability to make appropriate curriculum decisions for diverse learners.

### **Attitudes and Values**

- To be aware of self-attitudes and perceptions related to diverse learners;
- To embrace a philosophy reflecting commitment to promoting equal educational opportunity for all students;
- To develop respect for lifestyles, values, learning styles, and communication patterns of diverse learners and their families. (p. 296)

### Summary

Formal courses, observation, and student teaching comprise the foundation of teacher-education programs. Student teaching is often restricted to one or two semesters during the last year of the educational program. In Taiwan, most courses offered to preservice teachers seem to avoid issues relating to racism, ethnocentric practices, discrimination, inequality, interpersonal skills, and a teacher's classroom behavior as it relates to diversity. Moreover, aspiring teachers seem to be shielded from the reality of the classroom by postponing most inservice training until their last semester.

Zeichner and Hoeft (1996) provide details on the courses in teacher-education programs. Courses on multiculturalism typically approach the instruction as either *culture-specific* or as *culture-general*. The culture-specific approach looks for the trends and issues that can be attributed to a particular race and gender, while the culture-general approach prepares teachers with strategies and techniques to use regardless of the students' culture. One danger in the use of culture specific methods is the possibility that providing information about a particular ethnic group may reinforce stereotypes already held by the teacher candidates or instill new prejudices (Haberman, 1991).

### Professional development and diversity

Most scholars who have examined the literature on inservice teacher education for insights about how to better prepare teachers for cultural diversity have concluded that little attention is given to issues of diversity (Zeichner, Hoeft, 1996). Very little research exists as to what strategies provide results in schools.

Bagley's (1992) study of a local education authority's two-year project to provide inservice training for multicultural education reveals entrenched beliefs about race and

ethnicity as well as strong teacher resistance to any form of substantive change in the program. Teachers believed that “their professional development needs, if defined by school or state authorities, challenge their own personal and professional sensitivity toward ‘race’ and education as white teachers” (p. 245). Teachers resisted focusing on race because they did not perceive racism in schools to be a problem relevant to their teaching objectives.

Piscitelli (1990) describes a ten-session inservice teacher-education course designed to address the problems of content-area teachers in teaching limited-English-proficient (LEP) students. She suggests that teachers who participated in the course were more successful than other colleagues in mainstreaming LEP students into regular course work.

Sleeter (1995) describes a process that she has used with white preservice students to help them recognize the limits of what they know about social stratification so that they can begin to reconstruct their perceptions. She organizes her system by 1) having preservice teachers articulate their own beliefs; 2) directing preservice teachers’ attention toward barriers to access, rather than characteristics of people of color; 3) involving preservice teachers actively in constructing a sense of how discrimination works, drawing ideas out of their experience with the simulations and their investigations rather than imposing ideas on them. Sleeter’s system provides teachers with a foundation upon which they can continue to rethink how racism works, while understanding their own participation in racist institutions.

Schmidewind (2001) studied fifty K-12 teachers who participated in a thirty-hour voluntary professional development course. In the course, which was based on an integrated approach to diversity, teachers

- 1) Examined their own experiences with and attitudes about racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination,
- 2) Investigated ways in which bias, often unconscious and unintentional, exists in schools and society, and
- 3) Increased their repertoire of skills, strategies, and materials for making their classrooms and schools more multicultural and gender-fair.

In periodic follow-up workshops, teachers shared methods they used to foster anti-bias education in their classrooms and schools. One teacher commented, “Doing the course is good. I think linking racism, sexism, classism and other kinds of isms is important because the discrimination is similar and people are more able to understand what affects them. Then they can make the linkages to others”(p. 24).

### Summary

As educators, we cannot divorce ourselves as social beings from our beliefs since construction occurs within various sociocultural contexts. In all likelihood, beliefs about how learning occurs and impacts teachers’ approaches. Therefore, it is proposed that these epistemological beliefs become translated into observable teaching behavior or teaching style. Bidwell (1987) contends that “what is taught and how it is to be taught entail teachers’ moral judgments and commitments” (p. 208). Undeniably, the social reality created in the classroom often has life-long outcomes, especially for minority students (Rist, 1970). Ball (2000) concedes that often teachers expend only the amount

of cultural capital that reflects that majority-group experiences. Nespor (1987) argues that change in teacher beliefs requires a deep personality-related challenge, rather than a mere discussion of beliefs. Several recent practitioners suggest a focus on clarifying values in a supportive group climate, particularly in regard to beliefs about classroom diversity (Zeichner, 1995). Teachers reflect critically on their own interactions and learn from individual and group feedback. They must be able to reflect upon how the transmission of culture affects the production of knowledge and the relationships of power between teachers and students.

### **Conclusion**

The preceding review of literature is an important backdrop to this study about teachers' perspectives of teaching Indigenous students in Taiwan's city schools. This chapter explains concepts, theories, and practices addressed in published reports of cultural diversity. It began with an examination of critical theory, which serves as a theoretical lens through which to filter teachers' perspectives regarding urban Indigenous students. Next, it treated the meaning of diversity, in which focusing on issues of gender, race, and social class. It also discussed the relationship between diversity and teaching, and how gender, race, and social class interplay in the classroom. Only recently has an emerging body of research begun to document the inter-relationship between race, gender, and social class, and its effect in the classroom. Attention was then shifted to the central topic of this study: how teachers think about diversity. Although most classrooms are presided over by fully qualified teachers, much more research purporting to examine teachers' perspectives on diversity is oriented toward preservice teachers. Nevertheless, the literature concerning both preservice and inservice teachers reveals some predominant

and shared beliefs about the dearth of attention given to diversity. Foremost, when considering their students, teachers and prospective teachers hold color-blind or deficit perspectives that often correlate with practices that do not support the academic development of all children. Teachers who have been successful with children of different cultural backgrounds tend to hold different beliefs—such as the belief that all children can learn and the belief that the children’s cultures must be incorporated into the classroom (Ladson-Billing, 1994).

A central thread in this study is that teachers’ perspectives are crucial to any and all efforts designed to improve the quality of learning and life in our schools. This is not to suggest that teachers’ perspectives are the only valid voice or the primary perspective or the one that should determine what needs to change within our schools and classrooms. However, their perspectives are important in order to understand the education of urban Indigenous students. Moreover, if one wants to imagine that teachers play a more significant role in the education of urban Indigenous students, we need to uncover the beliefs of teachers who have worked with Indigenous students.

Education researchers conclude that a paradigm shift is needed in teacher education for diverse classrooms. Just as equipment and materials used in other practical pursuits become outdated, so in teacher education, programs need to be replaced by newer models. Teacher education is successful when it affects the thinking, feeling, and behavior of the teachers on crucial, even controversial, such as cultural diversity. If it fails to do so, it is ignoring a critical need in preparing educators for the classrooms of today and tomorrow.

Teachers' beliefs continue to be an important focus of study for researchers in teacher-education. This particular study of six teachers' perspectives about Indigenous students reveals that beliefs are complex and need to be examined and understood in context. Researchers need to problematize the contexts in which they study. In addition, researchers need to examine the relationships between and among beliefs and attitudes. Because of the complex nature of beliefs, various research approaches, both quantitative and qualitative, may be useful in examining those different relationships.

### CHAPTER 3

#### METHODOLOGY

Although research suggests that teachers' perspectives have great impact on their practices, the examination of those perspectives presents several methodological challenges for researchers (Kagan, 1992; Pajares, 1992). Perspectives are usually implicit and always challenging to uncover. While I certainly wanted teachers to truly share their beliefs on various topics, I was aware that participants might just provide me with what they thought I wanted to hear. Beliefs about diversity can be particularly delicate to talk about, because of teachers' wishes to be politically correct or because of their fears, or because of their vulnerability if they admit to beliefs that might be perceived as racist or prejudicial (Paige, 1993).

Some researchers have adopted an interpretive paradigm to understand teachers' beliefs (e.g. Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1995; Lipman, 1998; Montero-Sieburth, 1996). The interpretive models of research allow a focus on teachers' articulation of their perspectives, as well as the meaning they made from their perspectives. Rather than using inventories or predetermined matrices of beliefs, a researcher, often in collaboration with the teachers, draws from various data sources to understand the perspectives of participants. This type of data is often referred to as *emic*, because the local meaning is of central significance.

This study uses an interpretive approach to illustrate different aspects of teachers' perspectives. It addresses four research questions:

- 1) What are the relevant prior experiences (personal and sociocultural experiences, K-12 schooling, educational theory and teacher preparation, etc.) of teachers of Indigenous students in city schools?
- 2) What important issues do the teachers believe should be addressed to improve the education of Indigenous students?
- 3) What are teachers' perspectives of Indigenous students?
- 4) What are the teachers' educational philosophies about students, teaching, and learning?

Each of these questions is independent, yet closely related, given the centrality of my focus: to understand teachers' perspectives of Indigenous students in the context of school.

The first question focuses on teachers' background and the relationship between the teachers' personal and professional characteristics, paying attention to how the teachers were socialized and prepared to become teachers in city schools. The second question focuses on teachers' reflection and critique of Indigenous education. It also addresses the broader social context, in which teachers live and work.

Through the third question, I seek to understand how teachers make meaning of their experience of teaching urban Indigenous students. Of particular interest was the teachers' knowledge about their Indigenous students, and how they might change or not change their practice.

The fourth question draws out participants' philosophy of teaching and learning, and their thinking about the role of teachers. (See Appendix for the interview protocol.)

Given that there is little research about the schooling experiences of urban Indigenous students in Taiwan, this study begins to fill the void by examining teachers' perspectives about Indigenous students. Indeed, there are various dimensions and components of the schooling experience. This study focuses on exploring the pattern and central phenomena of teachers' perspectives about teaching urban Indigenous students. Research suggests that teachers play an important role in students' success or failure in school.

#### **Autobiographical note: My experience as an Amis**

I was raised in a small harbor village in the southeast coast of Taiwan. My parents, who had finished only junior high school, managed to raise their five children in a small house provided by the church. To help with our family's finances, my three older sisters went to work in a factory right after graduating from junior high school.

My parents decided to move to the city when I was eight. Once we settled in the city, my father sent me to school. We moved several times within the city for better jobs. As a result, I attended a number of different schools. Each successive school was bigger and more crowded than the previous one. I had few opportunities to tell my parents what was going on in school, because they always arrived home from work after I had gone to bed.

Although an Aborigine, I am a product of the city. My appearance, behavior, and speech shielded my cultural background. From schools, television, and movies I had heard much disparagement of Aborigines. Sometimes I would hear teachers and students ridicule us, even when Indigenous students and parents were nearby. I reinvented myself every time I went to a new school, but I always seemed to be academically several years

behind. Usually the only Aborigine in the classroom, I avoided, at all costs, putting myself in the spotlight. Fear caused me to hide my cultural identity. I behaved and spoke like my Han classmates, avoiding any conversation about Aborigines. I worked hard to hide my identity from both my teachers and classmates.

My most memorable learning experience was an art course in junior high school. Ms. Liao, a Han Chinese teacher, nurtured my individuality. She motivated me and stimulated my interest in things I probably would never have discovered on my own. Unlike my primary school teachers, she openly acknowledged my Indigenous identity and cared about what I was going through in city schools. She was the only teacher who told me that she loved Indigenous culture, and she made me realize that I had to appreciate and cherish my unique background.

For a long time I had suppressed my cultural identity. I was never encouraged to be proud of my Indigenous heritage. I went through a very long period of identifying with my Chinese peers. I wanted to be liked and to live like and to be accepted by Han Chinese, even to the point of hating my race and myself for being a part of it. I lost much of myself in my denial of and rejection of my people. This dissertation, in part, is important to the process of me reclaiming my identity as a Indigenous Taiwanese.

## **Methodology**

### **Qualitative research**

This qualitative research uses an interpretive case study approach, which is an appropriate methodology when a holistic, in-depth investigation is needed (Feagin, Orum, & Sjoberg, 1991), to understand teachers' perspectives about urban Indigenous students. Yin (1984) points to several reasons for selecting the case study method: "case studies are

the preferred strategy when how or why questions are being posed. When the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context” (p. 13). The case study is appropriate for this study, which seeks to delineate how teachers think about teaching Indigenous students and the meaning behind their statements. Tesch (1990) defines qualitative research as “all research not concerned with variables and their measurements” (p. 46). Yet this definition names what qualitative is not, as opposed to what it is.

In addition, the interpretive case study methodology that I used in this study has the following characteristics:

- 1) The case study is qualitative and provides an in-depth picture of a phenomenon in a naturalistic context (Borg & Gall, 1989). The case study follows the anthropological tradition of using “thick description” (Geertz, 1973). Because detailed information was gathered about the participants’ stories through observations and interviews, the teachers’ beliefs and attitudes toward Indigenous students were thoroughly documented.
- 2) The case study is grounded; it provides an emic perspective. That is, the study attempts to convey the contextual meaning from the perspective of the teacher/participant. It presents “a picture credible to the actual participants in the setting and it can easily be cast into the ‘natural language’ of the involved audiences” (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p. 376). This study is concerned with representing the viewpoints of the participants. Quotations have been selected to reflect teachers’ perspectives.
- 3) Cases studies are heuristic, which means they “illuminate the reader’s understanding of the phenomenon under study. They can bring about the

discovery of new meaning, extend the reader's experience, or confirm what is known" (Merriam, 1988, p. 13). These participants' narratives provide details of their experiences with Indigenous students. They may be used by teacher educators to revise their courses to better prepare teachers for culturally diverse students.

- 4) The case study is inductive. "Generalizations, concepts, or hypotheses emerge from an examination of data—data grounded in the context itself" (Merriam, 1988). The case study illuminates patterns and interprets meanings for the reader (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Through the conversations with the participants, clearly reveal their perspectives about teaching Indigenous students. This process provides a better understanding of how Indigenous students are treated in city schools.

One of the major characteristics of this research design is that it captures the "meaning" of how teachers describe, in their own words, the personal-life experiences and events that shape their perspectives. In the research I scrupulously moved, via analytic induction, from teachers' stories and related experiences, the collected wisdom, to a systematic analysis of my data. After reading the teachers' interviews about their experiences with and perceptions of teaching Indigenous children, I identified the commonalities of teachers' experiences and then in cross-case chapter looked across their experiences. I attempted to provide which portraits of each teacher through organizing the chapters around common themes. From the individual cases, I moved to a cross-case analysis to understand patterns of similarity and differences in the teachers' perspectives. This more inductive presentation is particularly effective in reporting research to teachers, prospective teachers, administrators, and teacher educators in multicultural societies.

### Selection of participants

The participants in this study selected were elementary- and high-school teachers of Indigenous students. The six teachers were selected, using purposeful sampling procedure (Frechtling & Sharp, 1997). Purposeful sampling is a process whereby a researcher selects the sample for a study based on a clear rationale and criteria (Cresell, 1998). It is useful for studying an issue because it enables a researcher to select samples based on their ability to provide in-depth information on the subject (Patton, 1990). In addition, this sampling procedure was chosen to eliminate as many variables as possible.

Site selection was an important initial criterion. Participants were sought from the greater Taipei area, where I had spent most of my professional career, and where I had developed professional relationships with numbers of school teachers and administrators who, I thought, might be interested in and supportive of my study.

In September 2003, I visited the Bureau of Education in Taipei County to obtain information about the education of Indigenous students. My objective was to find six teachers in urban schools with relatively large Indigenous-student populations. There were several possible schools in two urban areas of Taipei County.

Din-Pu Elementary School in Tu-Chen city was my first candidate school, primarily because its Indigenous-student population had been increasing for several years. Also, it had created an Indigenous resource center reflecting a commitment to create and maintain an educational climate that valued differences and diversity. The principal suggested five teachers. After they heard from the principal the study plan and the purpose of my study two of them, Ting-Ting<sup>1</sup> and Ling-Ling, both beginning teachers, with three and two years of teacher experience respectively, indicated a strong interest in

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<sup>1</sup> Pseudonyms are used for all participants.

participating. Ting-Ting had three Indigenous students in her class while Ling-Ling had two.

Just like Din-Pu Elementary school, the number of Indigenous students in An-Shi Elementary School in Taipei County had also increased. The principal and director introduced me to several teachers who he thought might be interested in participating. Upon hearing details of the study from the principal, four teachers tentatively committed to participate. Da-Wei and Ping-Ping were selected, as they contrasted with Ting-Ting and Ling-Ling in terms of the age and years of teaching experience. While Ting-Ting and Ling-Ling were younger and were beginning teachers, Da-Wei and Ping-Ping were both over forty years old and had more than fifteen years of teaching experience.

Another important criterion in the selection of participants was the ethnic identity of the teachers. I contacted a former colleague of Amis heritage who teaches at the Long-So Elementary School in Tao-Yuan County. He agreed to participate and referred me to Saoma, who is also an Indigenous teacher, and teaches Indigenous language at various schools in Taipei County. In our first conversation, by telephone, Saoma showed a strong interest in participating and immediately scheduled our first meeting. She also considered the study an opportunity to learn more about her own teaching. While Mayao and Saoma are both of Indigenous heritages, they differ in gender, experience, age, and educational specialties. The willingness of both Indigenous teachers to learn more about themselves certainly made my work pleasant and informative.

#### Individual participants

The above account of my selection of the study participants reflects several forms of diversity that exist within a seemingly homogeneous population. The following table illustrates even greater diversity among the participants.

**Table 1. Summary of participants' demographic data**

Name	School	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Y/T	T/L	Y/TI
Da-Wei	An-Shi Elementary School	Male	48	Fukienese	25	6 <sup>th</sup> Grade	15
Ping-Ping	An-Shi Elementary School	Female	42	Mainlander	15	3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade	10
Mayao	Long So Elementary School	Male	35	Indigenous (Amis tribe)	12	Science Teacher	10
Saoma	Indigenous language Programs	Female	54	Indigenous (Amis tribe)	15	Language Teacher	15
Ting-Ting	Din-Pu Elementary school	Female	26	Fukienese	3	3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade	3
Ling-Ling	Din-Pu Elementary School	Female	24	Fukienese	2	2 <sup>nd</sup> Grade	2

Y/T= Years of teaching. T/L= Teaching level. Y/TI= Years of teaching Indigenous students.

#### Data sources

Much of this study relies upon periodic semi-structured and informal interviews. This is a common method of data collection in qualitative research, due to the richness of the information. Four semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant. Each interview took about fifty minutes and was audiotaped. The audiotapes generated a considerable amount of data, and were analyzed for content, theme, language usage, and any other patterns that seemed to emerge from individual participants. The audiotapes (in Chinese) were typed into Microsoft word-processing software, translated into English, and then imported into Nvivo (qualitative research software). The purpose of interviewing was to document the teachers' experiences and to uncover meanings communicated by those experiences. How did the teachers interpret their experience of teaching urban Indigenous students? What issues did they think were important to address?

To gain a deeper understanding of the teachers' perspectives, the interviews were based on the elements in an ethnographic interview. "The three most important

ethnographic elements are its explicit purpose, ethnographic explanations and ethnographic questions” (Spradley, 1979, p. 59). The specific purpose of the ethnographic interviews in this study was to elicit information about teachers’ perspectives and attitudes toward urban Indigenous students. To make participants more comfortable with expressing themselves, they were invited to choose the interview locations.

The formal interviews often resembled intense and intimate conversations between friends. We sometimes went out to lunch, partly to find a private space removed from schools, and partly as a small form of compensation for their help. Participants sometimes had very positive feelings about the opportunity to talk about aspects of their lives in such detail and for such a worthwhile purpose.

Informal interviews, what I have come to call “chats,” were also important to this study. They occurred at random, opportune times, once a participant felt comfortable with the study and the process. Chats were usually documented soon after they occurred. They were the basis for participants to expand upon on their formal interviews or to comment on the day’s significant events and details.

Despite the numerous questions on the schedule, we did not necessarily follow it or cover all the topics. Time was left for participants to comment on issues they thought should be aired. One reworded a question to make it more to his liking. Another took me back to some of the questions that were important to her. Two people simply said, “that’s enough,” when they grew tired of talking or when they ran out of time.

Although I posed the same questions to each participant, several interviews traveled down paths every different than I had intended or anticipated. Some participants shared rather personal stories—tragedies, personal stresses, life histories and experiences.

Some took the opportunity to criticize administrative practices or policies of the past and present. Da-Wei let me know that he was dissatisfied with the current educational reform and what action he was ready to take. Mayao shared family stories that were emotionally meaningful to both of us.

The first interview with each participant gave me an opportunity to know each individual on a more personal and informal level, to respond to their concerns and questions, and to listen to the stories they wanted to share. Usually, the interviews allowed the participants to share stories, to reflect on the context of their lives and work, and talk about their experiences with Indigenous students.

### Observations

After the first interview with each participant, I observed their teaching one time in each teacher's classroom. The classes and times were chosen by the participants. I wrote field notes and memos during each forty-minute classroom observation. The fieldnotes were written to record each participant's mannerisms and interactions with students. Although the fieldnotes and memos were not for data analysis, they were especially helpful for understanding the teachers in action in the classroom.

Also, the fieldnotes and memos helped generate new questions and recall details for the reflective interviews. For example, in one fieldnote I wrote:

Ping-Ping came up with activities that involved her students creating and writing their own definitions for mathematics vocabulary. But instead of just telling the students to write definitions, Ping-Ping first had the students talk about the words. She wrote a word on the board (such as 'fraction'), the students brainstormed about that word, responses were mapped on the board, a key word was introduced (e.g. 'denominator'), the students discussed it, and ten students wrote their own

definitions of 'denominator.' A variation was when the students were paired up and told to produce a definition for a word, write that definition (if both agreed with the definition), and share their definition with the others. (October 15, 2003)

After the observation, I asked Ping-Ping why she used this particular activity to help her students comprehend mathematic concepts. She told me that she found it especially helpful for her Indigenous students. That teaching activity led to our conversation on the learning styles of Indigenous students.

In my notes I also asked perplexing questions, such as what are my background and training? Where did I come from and how did I get here? What are my personal values and feelings? What are my goals? In one memo I wrote:

We met in her [Ting-Ting] class, sitting at students' desks. She asked why I am so interested in studying Indigenous education. I didn't expect this. "I am an Aborigine." I told her. She seemed surprised, saying that I was not recognizable. I said I am, and do care much about what Aborigines have been through in the mainstream educational system.

I followed with a topic we talked about the last time: her experiences with Indigenous students. She was obviously not as talkative as when first we met. So I turned my question to her schooling. I knew something went wrong, but I didn't know exactly what that was. This meeting lasted only thirty minutes. Before she packed her bag, I asked for the third meeting. She said that she really doesn't have much to offer and that her schedule is tight. However, she agreed to meet me the following week. I realized that my being an Aborigine made something different. I just wanted to be honest. I couldn't imagine how irritated she would be when she found out. Sooner or later, she was going to know. 'I

really don't have any alternative answer for this question—why are you so interested in Aborigines? (October 17, 2003)

I became sensitive about how Ting-Ting responded to my questions. Had she told me what she really thinks? Will I be able to interpret her words objectively? Is what she told me during the research still valid? No artificial answer would possibly satisfy my inquiry. However, I realize that the nature of this study, through my attitudes, values, and goals, had a substantial effect on the process of my work, as well as on the final report.

#### Data management and analysis

As data were collected, I systematically reviewed my field notes, interview transcripts, and personal notes and comments written after observations and interviews, looking for phenomena and issues needing further investigation or follow-up questioning. I also looked for emerging patterns as I categorized the data.

All the data were kept in chronological order as they were recorded. After all the data were collected, they were read and analyzed thoroughly and used to compile a list of categories that became the preliminary coding system. This process was an attempt to identify recurring themes, images, metaphors, and references in the teachers' individual narratives. I compared and contrasted early positions, ideas, and statements with those that occurred in several interviews, trying to identify patterns and evolutions of beliefs and perceptions. Each narrative segment was analyzed separately, and the completed narrative was analyzed to ascertain what topics the participants gave attention, how they perceived Indigenous students, why they focused their attention on some areas. I attempted to identify any unique aspects of the narrative inquiries and those that suggested possibilities for work with teachers, as well as those aspects that might, in fact, work against the intended design and intent.

### Data analysis

Analysis of the data occurred in five stages (Marshall & Rossman, 1989): organizing the data, coding the data, generating categories, testing emerging categories, and searching for alternative hypotheses and explanations. A computer software program, NVivo qualitative analysis software package, was used to manage data coding, create categories, and examine relationships among the categories. The process began with open coding: an analytic process by which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered in the data (Strauss & Corbin 1990). I looked for concepts that could be grouped under more abstract categories, which, though fewer in number, might be more explanatory. I looked for ways to link those categories according to their dimensions, a process termed “axial coding” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), and around themes and assertions. For example, the term “parents involvement” was constructed from three categories that included: Han parents, Indigenous parents, and family environment. Each of those categories had been developed from smaller categories. For example, among the sub-categories encompassed by the term “Indigenous parents” were: parent-teacher relationships, educational support, poverty, and unemployment. These groupings were continually tested against the data sets derived from interviews. The NVivo program also provided a historical trail of new and changed codings and categories. The program enabled the intersection of categories or themes with specific participants.

An inductive approach was used to lessen the effect of research desire or influence from previously studied literature. All codings emerged from the contents of the data rather than predetermined applied categories. Pattern-matching created the coding categories (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988). Sentence-by-sentence coding

was used first, and then paragraph coding, using my research questions as a guide. Each coded excerpt was compared with the next, searching for similarities and differences. If excerpts were similar, they were placed together; when different, the excerpt would be compared with other piles or be placed in a new pile. Once all the data had been categorized, each pile of data was examined for congruity (Patton, 1990). The original 83 codes were checked for consistency and overlap, and then merged into four main categories that reflected the research questions.

The computer program generated reports of all the excerpts grouped under a selected coded category, such as “Teachers’ beliefs about Indigenous students.” Each excerpt was checked to determine whether it had been coded under other categories as well. Each excerpt was checked for consistency with the definition of the category. Excerpts that did not fit in the category were recoded to a more appropriate category.

Especially useful was a running analytical journal that charted the evolution of my thinking. Attached to each transcript and field notes were any written reflections that analyzed the data and compared them to other sources of data, paying particular attention to any nonconforming evidence that would challenge emerging conclusions or suggest alternative ways of looking at the data. In addition, a separate journal was maintained to chart methodological approaches and to record questions and ideas needing further examination. For Chapter 10, a cross-case analysis was begun by creating a meta-matrix, assembling categories from each case, in order to verify themes and pattern clarification.

#### Reflecting on my subjectivity

Admittedly, the way I conducted this study was influenced by my history, race, gender, socio-economic positions, experience in various educational position over the past fifteen years (teacher, administrator, graduate student), relationships with students

and other educators and relationship with people who are culturally different from me. I realize that others, of different background and experience, might interpret the compiled dialogues very differently.

Being “value-free” in an interpretive work such as this is impossible, since I was the instrument for data collection, analysis, and interpretation. I had to constantly monitor my subjectivity. Jansen and Peshkin (1992) point out that the function of a reflective journal is to record “a researcher’s reflections on self, method, and methodological judgment” (p. 17). Accordingly, a journal was used to record emerging questions, evolving feelings on particular situations, thoughts about my own subjectivity, ideas about what needed to be included, and issues that seemed worthy of my further exploration. The journal was especially valuable when writing began. The notes were reminders of on-the-spot feelings and values, as well as thoughts on and reactions to various ideas

A personal background as an Aborigine and a teacher provided an invaluable frame of reference for these interpretations. However, it was sometimes almost irrepressibly prejudicial. This is an element of subjectivity that I bring to this study. As a teacher, I readily relate to and understand the competition for teachers’ time and the demands on them physically, emotionally, and professionally. I needed to constantly reflect on myself. I needed to use my knowledge and experience to interpret what I saw, while remaining open to new ideas and possibilities that might emerge. Each participant’s “story” was unique, and what each one told me was somewhat unfamiliar and sometimes even uncomfortable; still, it needed to be analyzed and reported in detail. From what they shared with me, my understanding of the education of Indigenous students in city schools was deepened by the process.

### Validity

“Validity” in qualitative research is concerned with whether the observations, interviews, and content analysis contain the information that the researcher thinks they contain (Vockell & Asher, 1995). Qualitative research is subjective; therefore, it requires the researcher’s careful analysis to help manage that subjectivity. Wolcott (1990) suggests that there are nine ways a researcher can address validity in a study: (1) talk little, listen a lot; (2) record accurately; (3) begin writing early; (4) let the readers “see” for themselves; (5) report fully; (6) be candid; (7) seek feedback; (8) try to achieve a balance; and (9) write accurately (p. 127-135). Those principles guided me throughout the study. Each was applied in every chapter.

Generalizing qualitative results to other teachers or situations has been regarded as difficult and perhaps even unnecessary (Lincoln & Guba, 1981; Merriam, 1988). In this study, the focus was to provide a perspective on educators’ beliefs about teaching urban Indigenous students in Taiwan. I was committed to provide “thick descriptions, so that anyone else interested in transferability has a base of information appropriate to judgment” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 pp. 124-125, cited in Merriam, 1988, p. 177).

### Summary

This study was designed as a case study in order to better understand teachers’ perspectives of teaching Indigenous students in city schools. Therefore, I selected participants who teach Indigenous students in their classrooms. An interpretive approach was chosen to gain a better understanding of how these teachers think about cultural diversity in city schools. In this chapter I describe my experiences as an Indigenous student in the city schools. That account is important because it provides a context for

research this topic. The advantages of the case study for this study are explained. The periodic semi-structured and informal interviews were used to explore teachers' beliefs and attitudes. Classroom observations, though not analyzed, served to frame and generate new questions and determine details during the follow-up interviews. An inductive approach, involving five systematic stages, was used to analyze the interview data.

To summarize, the chapter shows how the design was implemented in the field through: selection of participants, individual participation, data sources, data management, and analysis. The following chapters provide a description and analysis of the six teachers' perspectives on the education of Indigenous students in urban Taiwanese schools.

## CHAPTER 4

### Da-Wei

#### Personal background, schooling, and becoming a teacher

Da-Wei, in his late forties, had been teaching the sixth grade at An-Shi Elementary School in Taipei County for five years. Before coming to An-Shi, Da-Wei had taught for twenty years in three different city schools. His colleagues knew him as an amateur photographer. Most of his spare time was dedicated to organizing the piles of photographs he took during his summer trips to foreign countries. His wife, Mei-Lan, was teaching at An-Shi long before he came to join her from a school in the town of San-Shia. In the summer of 2002 Mei-Lan gave birth to a baby girl, for whom the parents had been waiting for a very long time.

#### **Schooling**

Originally from Lu-Kan Town, a small village in Taichung County, Da-Wei had been in the city for many years. Most of the people in his hometown were farmers. He liked to talk about his childhood, and recalled playing baseball in a harvested field, fishing in shallow water, and stealing mangos. All he could remember was happiness, and his descriptions were vivid. Lu-Kan was adjacent to Taichung City, which the most prosperous city in Taichung County. Da-Wei finished his elementary and junior high education in Lu-Kan. His schools were close to Taichung City, so he could easily see the differences between his school and the city school. He told me:

I lived in a small town. The junior high school I went to only had around a few hundred students. It was small. About ten minutes walking distance away, there

was another junior high, where most of the students came from Taichung City, and it had over three thousand students. They were rich. You could tell from their clothes. They had better teachers and the buildings were gorgeous. The most important thing was that, from what I heard, its high school enrollment rate was the highest in the whole county. Seventy per cent of its graduates went to top ten public high schools, and we sent only five per cent. We lived in different worlds.

Da-Wei realized that city students were different from him in many ways. He observed that city schools had better facilities, and students were taught by “better” teachers, who helped students pass important exams. Da-Wei told me that the exams, especially the high school entrance examination, “meant everything to students, to teachers, and to the school.” As a student, he was placed in an advanced class, which focused only on the exams. He always came home with an “exhausted and fatigued body.” He remembered:

Basically, students were arranged into two different levels, A and B classes.

Students with poor grades were put in the B class. They could have fun in school, playing ball, wandering around, no one would stop them. But students in the A classes, like me, we were groomed for the high school enrollment exam. There were only two classes labeled A class. From the first period to the last, we took tests, got punished, and took tests again.... In the last year of junior high, the music, gym, and arts classes, all the supposedly fun classes, were replaced by testing.

Da-Wei’s schooling experiences seemed to be dominated by taking exams. The only goal for him, his teachers, and the school was to attain a high score on the high school

enrollment exam. He experienced severe academic competition in schools, where the highest priority was seemingly to produce test takers. The great pressure he experienced in school became an issue when educational reform was discussed.

He also recognized the differences between rural and city schools. He pointed out that the educational inequity still existed because “the rural-city gap is getting larger.” He believed that the government limited the educational resources to poor schools, because of immigration to urban areas. He told me, “City schools got bigger and more crowded, and the money went there.” Da-Wei’s stories were a microcosm of the Taiwan educational system of the 1970s and 1980s.

### **Staying on top**

Academically, Da-Wei had been among the best students in school. He studied relentlessly to achieve his goal: to do well on the tests. He said, “Taking tests was our only duty at school.” Da-Wei realized, and was so told by his parents, that education was the only way out of being poor and disadvantaged. He recalled how he made it to the top of the class:

I worked very hard during and after school. From seventh grade on, I said goodbye to many things that I always did for fun before I came to junior high school. From then on, I knew I would be going to the best high school.... My teachers encouraged me a lot, and sometimes they’d keep me in class after school to give me more tests. I became a tutor in many subjects in class. I had to comprehend what I was going to teach my peers, so I learned from that experience. I was one of the best students in school. Sometimes we’d have a luncheon with

the principal, you know, talking about our studies and progress, things like that....

The principal thought that we could add to the school's reputation.

Da-Wei believed that in order to succeed academically, he had to focus on his schoolwork. Staying at the top of the class meant receiving perks, such as the lunch with the principal. To him, that was a symbol of honor that motivated him to study even harder.

It seemed to me that Da-Wei had gained attention because of his academic success in school. He felt a *responsibility* to be outstanding, to fulfill people's expectations. Da-Wei helped his peers in several subjects, making the material more comprehensible for them. The experience of teaching deepened his understanding of learning problems and helped him decide his future.

#### **“Being a teacher was a huge honor”**

Da-Wei told me that teacher-preparation institutions in Taiwan attracted the best students from junior high schools around the country. The top junior high graduates in the 1970s and 1980s would go either to exclusive public high schools or to junior teachers colleges. After a family discussion of their financial situation, he set his sights for the Taipei Junior Teachers College, where the entire tuition and expenses were waived. He told me, “Being a teacher was a huge honor in our town at that time”.

Da-Wei said that he did not benefit much from teachers college. After the first year of teaching, he came to recognize a big gap between theory and practice, and became caught up in the struggle to figure out ways to motivate his students to learn. Da-Wei commented about his college courses:

They did not prepare me for how it really was. Seminars on teacher education assumed that you had an ideal thirty-five students who were motivated and eager to learn. Wherever my beliefs came from, it was not from college. They do not prepare you for what you get. There was not one thing that I learned in my education classes. I cannot see the value of any course except for the one about writing behavioral objectives. "All students can learn" came from the inservice workshops that I attended. I don't like looking bad.

Da-Wei suggested that the program and student-teaching experience he received in teachers college did not facilitate his development as a teacher. He told me that he had a hard time managing his class in the first two years of teaching.

Da-Wei's experience as a student allowed him to recognize the differences between rural and city schools. For example, as a student in a rural junior high school, he had witnessed educational inequities stemming from the fact that city schools received better educational resources than rural schools. Such experience, however, seemed to have a positive influence on his view of school success. He studied industriously to attend Taipei Junior Teachers College, hoping that he could become a good teacher. Later, as a teacher, he came to realize that although the teachers college had admitted only the best students, it failed to adequately equip him with essential knowledge and skills that a teacher must have.

### **Factors that influence the education of Indigenous students**

Da-Wei outlined a numbers of factors that significantly affected Indigenous students in Taiwan. In particular he identified teacher education as an important force

that needed to be changed in order to adequately equip teachers to teach culturally diverse students. He also came to realize that the affirmative action policy in education was a discriminatory practice that both hindered and helped Indigenous students in their quest to be successful in Taiwanese schools. In addition, his extensive travel to Indigenous villages led him to believe that Indigenous languages and cultures were facing challenges of preservation that, in turn, accelerated racial assimilation. For many urban Indigenous students, their precarious grip on their racial identity stemmed from their minority status in city schools.

### **Teacher education: Changing the system**

Da-Wei told me that teacher education in Taiwan had undergone significant change within the last decade. He said, “Qualified teachers must have a bachelor’s degree. That means teachers’ educational qualifications have improved.” He also noted, “Too many universities and colleges have been allowed to create their own teacher education programs. Some of the programs really leave teacher candidates ill-prepared.” Da-Wei believed that teachers should be prepared to meet the needs of local communities and schools with diverse cultures. He warned, “There are still a lot of problems with teacher education in Taiwan.” He believed that the system must be changed to improve education in Indigenous schools. He added, “The schools must employ more Indigenous teachers to teach students who also come from Indigenous backgrounds.” He explained:

Having Indigenous teachers in [Indigenous] schools has many benefits. It eliminates racism; the teacher is likely to understand the students’ social and cultural background; the teacher is able to be an identifiable role model for the students; relationship building is much easier; communication with the home is

assured; and the teachers have experienced similar struggles in coming to terms with school culture.

He saw increased recruitment of Indigenous teachers as one solution to the challenge of Indigenous education. Although he often visited Indigenous sites, he admitted that he was still not very knowledgeable about Indigenous cultures; therefore, he might not be able to teach Indigenous students effectively.

### **Indigenous teachers: Indigenous students need role models**

Da-Wei believed that students would benefit greatly if the teachers and students came from the same cultural background. He noted that although the number of Indigenous students in city schools had been growing, most still did not have Indigenous teachers. He told me that his teachers college, like many other teacher-preparation institutions in Taiwan, reserved spaces for Indigenous high school graduates.

I had two Indigenous classmates in my class while I studied in Taipei Teachers College. Every year, teachers colleges would reserve several seats for Indigenous students. They were admitted in this way. They did pretty well in school. They could speak Taiwanese, Hokalo, and Mandarin, but I never heard them talking about their cultures. I wish I could hear more about their cultures from them.

Although Da-Wei's Indigenous classmates succeeded academically, he noted that they seldom identified themselves as Indigenous people. After talking to another Indigenous teacher, he came to realize that an Indigenous teacher could be a role model for Indigenous students through cultural identification.

I happened to know an Indigenous teacher in my graduate program in Normal University in Taipei. He was a principal of an Indigenous school. The

community residents were mostly Atayal people<sup>2</sup>. We had talked a lot about Indigenous education. He was an activist and leader in the cultural revival movement. You know, the school principal was respectful of Indigenous communities. People like him are able to influence their fellows.

Da-Wei believed that when Indigenous people were put in positions of leadership, they were more likely to reclaim their cultural identity, which had been suppressed in Taiwan society. The Indigenous principal, whom he knew, could promote the preservation of Indigenous cultures, and he could serve as a role model for Indigenous children.

**Affirmative action: “In the long run, this is not going to help”**

The Ministry of Education (MOE) had been administering affirmative action for decades. In a policy implemented under the KMT<sup>3</sup>, Tibetan, Mongolian, and Indigenous students qualified for university admission with test scores lower than those required for Chinese Taiwanese students. Indigenous students were underrepresented at the secondary education level (Kao, 1999). To create a more *accessible* education for Indigenous people, an affirmative action policy was developed, lowering the requirements for high school and college admission test scores for Indigenous students. Under this policy, increased numbers of Indigenous students were able to enroll in highly selective schools, which were usually located in cities.

Da-Wei told me that academic competition was the big hurdle for Indigenous students in city schools. He was aware that affirmative action was developed to help Indigenous students gain admission to high school and college.

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<sup>2</sup> One of the Indigenous tribes in Taiwan.

<sup>3</sup> Kuo-Min Dang, one of the political parties in Taiwan.

Currently, high school and college enrollment exams have been abolished. It would seem that students would be exempt from the pressure of testing. But no; schools are still giving tests, and there is more pressure on students. Affirmative action allows Indigenous students to get into high schools and colleges with special admission status. I think this is a nice idea, but in the long run, this is not going to help them.... You have to get them ready for the academic competition in schools.... Some of them flunk out because they can't handle the overload of schoolwork.

Da-Wei suggested that Indigenous students benefited from affirmative action only if they were academically prepared. He pointed out that many Indigenous students found school alienating and disengaging because of the academic competition among peers (Fu, 2001; Guan, 1987; Kuo, 1996; Lee, 1998).

### **Assimilation into the school system**

Da-Wei told me that his Indigenous classmates in teachers college were then teaching at Indigenous schools. However, he noted, "They are teaching material that was created from the Han perspective." He was pessimistic about Indigenous education in Taiwan and believed that if the educational system resists change, "minority people will lose their culture within a matter of years." Since traveling a few times to mainland China, he had come to realize that these problems were difficult to solve.

The Nashi people in mainland China are also struggling with the problem of cultural preservation. But their culture and language are losing out so fast because the Han culture is so successful at dominating theirs. The young people don't like to learn about their history. The clothes they are wearing aren't the Indigenous

styles. They have been changed. I don't know, maybe their language will disappear within the next two or three decades.

Da-Wei saw some similarities in minority groups in mainland China and Taiwan, but he believed that Indigenous people in Taiwan were not aware of the risk of cultural and language extinction. He observed that they also found it difficult to preserve their cultures and languages. He gave an example, based on the practices, of his former classmates in teachers college:

My Indigenous classmates were a good example. They lived in the city and married Han Chinese girls. They lived in the Han community. You won't notice the difference if they don't speak their native languages. I don't think preserving native language is an issue for them.

Having traveled to rural areas in mainland China and Taiwan, Da-Wei expressed his concern about the extinction of Indigenous cultures. He believed that Indigenous teachers could have made a difference, but the prescribed curriculum kept them from doing so. To preserve Indigenous cultures, Indigenous people needed to be aware of the cultural crisis they were facing.

**Discrimination: "I am not going to make the same mistake"**

In addition to the influence of teachers, another learning barrier for Indigenous students, in Da-Wei's view, was discrimination. After observing his students' interactions, Da-Wei concluded that Indigenous students were more likely to be discriminated against by their peers. Although discrimination was rare in his own class, he noted that part of the problem stemmed from the non-Indigenous students.

We are going to have a three-day field trip next week. All of us are pretty excited about that. I want to be fair so I let them pick their roommates. It turns out that some of the poor and quiet students have been cut off.... They were pushed around, and I notice that two of them were my Indigenous students. They have no group to join... Some students have said to me in private that ‘They’re lazy and dirty, can’t sleep with them’... That’s just not true.

For other teachers, that might have caused frustration. To Da-Wei, though, it was a good opportunity to help his students “realize the importance of equity and justice.” In front of his class, he explicitly expressed empathy with the poor students, not giving them a chance to marginalize any one student. Da-Wei told me, “I know how they [the poor students] feel because my family used to be like that.” His teachers failed to take advantage of opportunities to help him develop self-esteem when they could, but “I am not going to make the same mistake.”

Although two of the poor students in Da-Wei’s class were of Indigenous heritage, he did not think they were discriminated against solely because of their race. He believed racial discrimination was then less prevalent in schools, since “we don’t talk about that in school; it’s an old story.” He explained:

I think we have improved the handling of racial relationships in society. In school I don’t see any incidents relating to racial conflict or tension or anything like that. I myself wouldn’t discriminate against them [Indigenous students]. I just think many Indigenous people need help with a lot of things, like finance, education, politics, and so on.... I did have some Indigenous students who, I felt, needed

additional educational support, but I won't let it [discrimination] happen in my class.

Da-Wei repeatedly avowed that he never discriminated in favor of brighter or better off students. Instead, he paid more attention to those who came from poor and minority backgrounds. He believed that the teacher's attitude was critical. Although a few of his students had revealed their prejudice against Indigenous students, Da-Wei remained convinced that racial discrimination was now rare.

### **Traveling to Indigenous sites**

During the two-month summer break, Da-Wei visited different Indigenous villages in Taiwan, taking pictures and talking to native people. He told me the cultural life and artistic works of the Indigenous people always amazed him. Whenever the topic of his teaching involved Indigenous cultures, he showed pictures to his students and shared with them his experiences with Indigenous cultures.

I also visited numerous Indigenous groups. My extensive travel allowed me to become immersed in Indigenous life and culture and to discover that our native friends are blessed with exceptional talents in music, sport, dance, art and sculpture.... I shared these experiences with my students. They may not think it's as interesting as I do, but this helps them to understand Indigenous people.

Because this is part of Taiwan culture.

Da-Wei believed that by passing on the knowledge gained from his visits with numerous Indigenous villages, he ensured that his students were better informed about Indigenous cultures. In addition, his appreciation of Indigenous cultures "has a significant impact on my students."

**“It’s humiliating when we’re not allowed to speak our home languages”**

The An-Shi Elementary School had thirty-five Indigenous students among its twenty-three hundred students. The Indigenous-student population was so small that the teaching director turned down the request from an Indigenous parent for an Indigenous language class. One of the explanations was that after they squeezed in the classes for the Min-Nan and Ha-Ka dialects (Chinese dialects), which were the home languages of most of the non-Indigenous students, all the classrooms were occupied. Da-Wei felt that “it is regrettable” for the Indigenous students in An-Shi. He realized how “humiliated they feel not being able to speak their home language.” He recounted an experience:

When I was in elementary school, Mandarin was the only language we could speak in school. No matter who you were and where you were from, speaking anything other than Mandarin was prohibited. Many of us have been punished for speaking Taiwanese in school. We were told that, in order to be successful, we needed to speak Mandarin fluently.... I was confused all the time.... I tried not to speak the Min-Nan dialect at school because I thought it was an ungraceful language.

As Da-Wei told me, it was fortunate that neither of his parents was able to speak Mandarin. He had to speak the Min-Nan dialect at home. He realized the beauty of his family’s language and spoke the Min-Nan dialect as often as possible with his friends, family, and colleagues. He added, “Because of cultural repression in the past, in which Mandarin Chinese was the only language allowed, we now have a situation where individuals cannot speak their native tongue well or even at all.” He believed that was why so many youths risked losing their cultural identity.

### **Speaking our home language**

Da-Wei expressed his concern about the mandatory curriculum in school, especially regarding issues related to historical and cultural issues. He believed in deepening students' understanding of Taiwanese history and culture. He realized that "Taiwanese history and native cultural accounts are missing in school texts and curriculum." Da-Wei told me that he worried about Indigenous cultures, which had been ignored in the school curricula. He believed that being able to speak one's home language is a right, and he explicitly expressed that to his students. He said:

All my students are able to speak Mandarin, but their home languages are different. We have Min-Nan, Ha-Ka dialects, and native languages. When I was teaching them a vocabulary associated with the reading, I would call on students to try it out in their home languages. At first, students felt stupid and didn't want to do it. I had to show my sincerity and tell them how grateful I was to have students able to speak so many languages.

Students' pride in their mother tongue was confirmed by my observations in Da-Wei's class. Many students were eager to speak out when he asked for volunteers to say words or sentences in their home languages. The three Indigenous students were also encouraged to participate. Da-Wei realized that his Indigenous students did not want to be singled out, but "whenever they volunteer to share something, I show my respect and appreciation to them so other students will do the same."

### **Stigma of Indigenous students**

I shared with Da-Wei a story about an Indigenous junior high school student denying his Indigenous mother for fear that his classmates would discriminate against

him. His secret was revealed by his parents, who could not take such rejection and turned him in at the police station, hoping the law could do something about it. The student studied in a big city school, where he was the only Indigenous student in his class. He told the police that he had long hidden his Indigenous identity from his classmates and was ashamed of it. Da-Wei seemed to be understanding. He said:

They are too small in number in the city schools. In An-Shi, we have over two thousand students, but only about thirty Indigenous students, with distinctions in languages and cultures. It is likely that they don't want to identify themselves as Indigenous people. They are afraid of being different. They are afraid of being abnormal.... This might not happen in the outlying schools where they have more Indigenous students.

Da-Wei told me, "This kind of thing happens all the time." What surprised him was that, for the first time, the media made it public, and the education community began to take the racial identity of Indigenous students seriously. He believed that many urban Indigenous students' precarious racial identity stemmed from their minority status in city schools.

**Cultural identity: "Feel free to express yourself"**

As noted above, Da-Wei believed that the racial identity of Indigenous students was a serious issue that needed to be dealt with in the schools. Having students from diverse cultures, Da-Wei came to realize the benefit of having students share their understanding of their own cultures. Da-Wei stated that learning about one's own culture "allows you to move on and kind of accept people for who they are and not what they are or where they're from." The process of learning about others "helps one to become more

aware of one's own culture," because "one must be comfortable with and understand one's own heritage before beginning to understand or be empathetic towards another."

I didn't realize this would raise the level of respect and appreciation among students until I began to ask them to share and talk about their cultures. They seemed to gain more confidence in themselves, especially the Indigenous students. Now, my students know who can speak Min-Nan and Hakka dialects, and who can speak Indigenous languages... I think this is the beginning of knowing each other and knowing ourselves better.

As Da-Wei suggested earlier, one should understand oneself in order to better understand others. Da-Wei therefore encouraged his students to talk about their cultures. He wanted students to understand the differences between the diverse groups represented in his class.

In summary, Da-Wei pointed out a few critical factors that influenced Indigenous education. First, teacher education failed to prepare them either to effectively or to meet the needs of a diverse student body. He suggested that teacher education programs should recruit more Indigenous teachers because they had more knowledge of native culture and could be role models for Indigenous students in city schools, which had been traditionally dominated by Han Chinese culture. Second, he believed that the pressure of the mainstream culture and of teaching in city schools had accelerated racial assimilation. Third, having traveled to numerous Indigenous villages, he had gained more knowledge about Indigenous cultures and believed that being able to speak one's mother tongue was both a privilege and a right. He observed that Indigenous students in city schools were often a minority in their classes and were lagging behind, which not only abetted their identity loss but also hindered their academic progress.

### **Beliefs about the learning of Indigenous students**

Having more than ten years' experience of teaching Indigenous students, Da-Wei believed that some critical factors needed to be addressed to understand the learning of Indigenous students. Those factors included gender difference, learning styles, peer relationships, and family. He believed that Indigenous students' achievement could be improved if those challenges were overcome.

#### **“They have potential”**

Asked about his Indigenous students, Da-Wei described them in detail. He also reported other teachers' opinions. He told me that teachers sometimes complained about the “misbehavior” or “slow learning” of Indigenous students. One thing that set Da-Wei apart from other teachers was that he saw strengths in those students. That was illustrated by his perceptions of Imoy, one of his Indigenous students, who was doing poorly academically, appeared sullen and withdrawn, and was frequently disciplined by teachers. Da-Wei told me:

Imoy is very different. I mean different people see her in different ways. She has a twin sister in another class, but her sister does very well in school work, gets a lot of rewards, and is very popular among teachers and peers. Imoy is also a lot smaller than her sister. They actually are different in many ways. She is a good writer though. Sometimes she will write something that surprises you in its maturity. And I have figured out that she likes doing it. So I have her read whatever she does in writing class to classmates. She didn't know her writing

was superbly good until I asked her to do so. She has gained some self-esteem from that.

Imoy's father had been in the armed forces and worked as a security guard in a big building. Da-Wei told me that her father often beat her. He then concluded, "That's why she shows a lot of disobedience to her parents. But she is smart." Da-Wei remembered that Imoy often got into trouble during her first month in his class. He noted that she had a negative self-image and distanced herself from others. He believed that increasing her self-esteem would improve her behavior.

Kumu, another Indigenous boy in Da-Wei's class, was of Amis heritage. He was mediocre in academics but outstanding in all sports, as Da-Wei described him. Da-Wei told me that Kumu "becomes a different person on the field, and everyone likes him." He believed that Kumu gained self-confidence through his athletic prowess.

### **Gender differences**

Da-Wei told me that the Indigenous male students in his class were outstanding athletes. He said, "They seem full of energy when they are out at the sports grounds or on the playing field." The Indigenous boys were recruited by the school's baseball coach, who had gone to Da-Wei personally, showing great interest in the two boys. At the same time, the Indigenous girls in Da-Wei's classroom tended to be interested in more cerebral activities, such as painting, writing, and reading. Da-Wei hypothesized that, for Indigenous students, there was a gender-based difference. He explained:

I have found that the [Indigenous] boys are more energetic and involved in sports. The [Indigenous] girls are temperate in speaking, and their attitude toward classroom studies is much better. This is the case in my class. I don't know about

the others... I don't think this difference is innate. This might have something to do with their experience or their families. In Chinese families, the girls are supposed to be gentle and obedient, and boys are asked to be strong and responsible... I am not sure... but I don't think it has to do with culture.

Da-Wei seemed unsure about why Indigenous boys and girls act differently. He believed the difference was related somehow to their past experience. In addition, Da-Wei also noted differences in the interests of male and female Indigenous students. He said, "The Indigenous boys seem more interested in science and math, but the girls are more interested in reading and literature."

**Learning styles: "They are just being careful"**

Da-Wei believed that people perceive the world in different ways, learn about the world in different ways, and demonstrate what they have learned in different ways. He, in general, reaffirmed those beliefs in his interviews, and he adjusted his teaching to accommodate various learning styles. In the classroom he had found that Indigenous students differ from Han Chinese students in their learning style.

When I give an assignment, my Indigenous students are reluctant to finish quickly or to correct their peers' papers. My Han Chinese students are quick to jump into the task. The Indigenous students seem to need time to think about things before they take action on their assignment. It is almost like they have to make sure they can do it before they try.

Da-Wei believed that Indigenous students "are not incapable of performing; they are just being careful." He allowed them more time to do their assignments and called on them to speak up when they were ready.

Da-Wei had another example of the learning styles of Indigenous students. He had observed them in their art and writing classes. He explained:

The Indigenous kids are image-driven. One of my kids is just a wonderful writer. Her writing is very evocative, imagery and pictures as opposed to the abstract. Even her prose feels like poetry. She's a good writer. Whereas, with Han kids, some of the best writers write poetry, but more theoretically. Something about that seems like there's a cultural difference there. Something about the way they see or experience.

When teaching art and reading, Da-Wei was able to observe the various learning styles of his students. He concluded that the differences between Indigenous and Han students may be associated with their cultures.

Da-Wei suggested that Indigenous students differed from the majority population in their learning style. They hesitated to point out other people's mistakes, yet they skillfully used their visualizing ability to write or paint. He believed the difference in learning styles between Indigenous and Han Chinese students was connected with their cultural backgrounds.

### **Peer relationships: A critical factor of learning**

Da-Wei noted that peer relationships were a salient factor in Indigenous students' learning. His Indigenous students did not "stick together" as Da-Wei had thought they might. Instead, they were drawn to other groups of students. Kumu, an Indigenous student with athletic talent, led a group of students who always played ball games during recess. Da-Wei observed, "Other members of his group helped him with his school work." He believed that Kumu identified with his peers and benefited from the help of

the other students who liked to play with him. On the other hand, Siki, a recently transferred Indigenous student, was very withdrawn when he came to Da-Wei's class. Da-Wei found that his academic position was improving, along with his relationships with other students.

Siki was isolated in class. He lived in his own world and rarely talked to anybody. So I seated a girl, Li-Li, beside him. She was very diplomatic and out going, and most important, she was a model in academics and good at helping other people. Anyway, they became good friends, Li-Li helped him with his work, and Siki began to make friends.

It seemed that Da-Wei viewed peer relationships as an important aspect of thriving in a group. Siki's case illustrated that students made progress when they built positive relationships with other students. Da-Wei helped Siki strengthen his relationships by allying him with students who were excellent in studies and who were considerate and generous.

### **Indigenous family**

Da-Wei believed that the family plays a critical role in the education of Indigenous students. He had had Indigenous students in his class every year, though the number was small. But the Indigenous students in An-Shi Elementary School were different from his former pupils. He explained:

A lot of Indigenous parents are too busy at work, so they might not be able to take care of their children's home work. I mean, they don't know how to help their children with school stuff. But here, my three Indigenous students seem a little better off because all their parents have steady jobs. Sometimes they'll call me up,

asking about their children's progress at school.... Two of the families were able to send their children to cram school, seeking extra help from paid tutors.... I was very impressed. Their families were much better off than I thought!

Da-Wei observed that Indigenous parents who had jobs could more easily support their children's education and were more likely to interact with teachers. Before he came to An-Shi, many of the Indigenous parents he had known were unemployed and poor. According to him, that was why they moved to the city. However, the three Indigenous students currently in his class were better off. But he had still another issue to deal with:

I just found out that Siki, an Indigenous student who transferred to my class two months ago, was of mixed blood. His father was an Amis and his mother was Indonesian. His father bought a house in our community, so I figured they must have been working in the city for a long time. But Siki had difficulty in reading and writing, a lot of difficulty.... His mother can only speak a little Mandarin.... His father came to me saying he was going to send Siki to the after-school programs.... Siki made a lot of progress. I was glad that he could make it.

According to Da-Wei, the length of time an Indigenous family stayed in the city made a big difference. He added, "You'll find a lot of problems in those Indigenous families who have just moved to the city." He believed that Indigenous parents who had a house and had a stable job in the city, like Siki's father, were more likely to give high priority to their children's education.

As for the learning of Indigenous students, Da-Wei believed that his Indigenous students had notable talents, and, as a teacher, his duty was to provide opportunities for them to develop and share themselves with others. Da-Wei accepted that humans differ

genetically, but that “it doesn’t matter.” Having many years of teaching experience, he had taught students from various cultural backgrounds, with different ways of learning and thinking. He also noted that his Indigenous students’ ways of learning were associated with gender and past experience. Moreover, he indicated two factors that impacted the learning of Indigenous students—peer relationships and family environment. By improving Indigenous students’ peer relationships, he found that his Indigenous students made progress on their academic work. He also believed that Indigenous parents were more likely to give high priority to their children’s education when they had stable jobs and owned a house in the city.

### **Beliefs about teaching Indigenous students**

In his interviews, Da-Wei discussed various philosophies of teaching. Recognizing that the existing curriculum did not benefit the Indigenous students, Da-Wei did not assign much significance to students’ grades. He cared about every student in his class and treated them equally. As a teacher, he believed that all students are capable of learning. To teach effectively, he claimed, a teacher had to know his or her students individually and had to allow them to set their learning pace and to determine how to achieve their learning goals.

#### **The grades: “Not a great concern in my class”**

Da-Wei was very critical of the existing curriculum and school texts. He believed that teachers should be allowed to create and develop curricula that are more specific to the needs of the students. However, the school curriculum was mandatory, and the evaluation of teachers’ instructional ability and efficiency was usually based on how well

they delivered and conformed to the prescribed curriculum. He did not think the existing curriculum was of great benefit to Indigenous students. He put it this way:

I myself have a big question on the curriculum and school texts. Like I said, the Indigenous cultures are not represented in the curriculum and school textbooks. There's no way to make them proud of their own cultures. To tell you the truth, I don't really care about their academic work. I mean, I don't think they have to get good grades to succeed in school or society. I want them to learn something that is useful and meaningful for their lives.

To Da-Wei, the curriculum and school texts were meaningful only if they adequately reflected the various cultures in Taiwan. He criticized the existing curriculum, based on the Han perspective, in which Indigenous knowledge was ignored and “seen as uncivilized.” He was more pragmatic about academic knowledge, believing it should be something that the Indigenous students could utilize in their daily lives.

### **Treat students equally**

Da-Wei had always believed in the individuality of each student. As a teacher, “you have to be sensitive to students’ needs.” As a sixth grade teacher, Da-Wei asserted that the biggest challenge was “making every student realize that you’re trying to be fair.” He realized that the student culture had changed, and that teachers must be more open and liberal:

Students today are very different from the students of my day. Students today are not as committed to education as we were.... [M]y sixth graders would be furious if you treated them unfairly; if you treat one student one way and treat the other differently for the same mistake, you’ll be challenged by your students. They

learn what you did. It's hard to get them to understand that I treat them differently because I want to be fair.

Da-Wei wanted his students to think independently. He allowed them to determine their learning pace and how to achieve their learning goals. "In this way," he added, "they should be able to take responsibility and treat other students as family members." Da-Wei told me that it was a challenge to meet each student's needs. He explained, "The teacher-student relationship is dynamic and subtle, and you don't want to push any of your students away." Da-Wei cared about every student in his class and realized that the best way to manage his own class was to treat them equally.

**The role of teacher: "Know your students individually"**

Da-Wei recognized that each student has his/her own unique characteristics, which "may have great impact on their learning." With that in mind he believed that a teacher should make an effort to understand students' family backgrounds:

You are an effective teacher when you know your students and when they are individuals rather than groups or racial stereotypes. There are huge differences among our Indigenous families in terms of their own beliefs and relationships with one another, and it would be quite dangerous to stereotype families....

[W]hat I did was to review students' documents very carefully before the semester began, so I was able to understand each student individually.

Da-Wei wanted to show his students that he sincerely cared about who they were and where they came from. In order to be effective, he believed, a teacher should be able to create a safe environment where *all* students are willing and able to share their own perspectives. Da-Wei's view of a teacher's role crystallized in his belief that "each

individual person has his or her unique personality.” Therefore, he believed, a teacher’s duty was to understand his/her students individually.

**Teaching Indigenous students: “All kids are capable of learning”**

Although Da-Wei often visited Indigenous villages, he believed that he still had much to learn about. He said, “I know what I am doing. I try to teach students to respect what they are doing and have faith in what they have achieved.” During an interview he described how that was accomplished:

Since my background is not the same as that of the Indigenous students, I have found that it has been very hard for me to create a link between my teaching abilities and the values of the Indigenous culture, but I do need to become more knowledgeable about Indigenous culture, so that I can make a stronger link between my values and those of Indigenous children.

To expand his knowledge of pedagogy, Da-Wei had recently begun work toward a master’s degree in art education at the Taiwan Normal University. He was motivated to begin the program by his wish for intellectual stimulation. “I need to be around people who have the big picture and ask the big questions, because too many of us get caught up in the little details that don’t amount to much,” he said. The courses he had taken had helped him organize his classroom as it then was. He added, “I had to take those courses to get myself started.”

Da-Wei viewed the classroom as a place to learn, as well as a place to teach; a place where everyone grows and develops. He described an activity that had recently taken place in the classroom:

In this mask unit that we did, I was learning things. If you are doing something in which even the teacher is trying, being a risk taker, trying some new things, then everyone is learning. It is exciting for me. The students came up with so many amazing ideas about art. I did learn a lot from them.

Although widely regarded as an accomplished teacher, Da-Wei felt he still had much to learn professionally. He said, “I’d like to familiarize myself with journals that are out there—ones I feel I’m getting behind on—and I’d like to talk with more people and I’d like to do some different things.” Da-Wei admitted he had high expectations for himself, but he tried to treat his goals as “having something to strive for” not as putting pressure on himself.

In addition, Da-Wei believed that adolescent issues such as gang violence, self-esteem, and home life are important concerns. He stated, “I truly believe many children do not feel good about themselves.” Da-Wei always comforted students who showed little confidence in learning new things. He said:

My view is that all children deserve lots of time to ponder what is going on in their world and to celebrate what they are doing and can do. I want to help them find out and get a fuller picture of home and school. I want to help make sense of what is happening. Many of my students have many things to deal with in their young lives. How to support them and, when necessary, protect them is an enormous responsibility and weight that I feel at times.

Da-Wei believed that all children are capable of learning, although they may learn at different rates and through different styles. He designed different activities to accommodate those learning styles.

**“They all have gifts and talents”**

While some teachers degraded the knowledge that students brought to school, Da-Wei used it as a basis for learning, conveying to students the value of their lives and experiences. That was clearly different from an academic environment in which some teachers see the students as deprived and deficient. In a world where test scores, academic tracking, an alienating curriculum, and exasperated teachers communicate that students are inferior, Da-Wei consciously reinforced students' confidence in their own knowledge and the worth of their own life experiences. He was impatient with a system that designated some children “gifted” and others as “regular.” “They all have gifts and talents,” he said. High academic expectations and high standards for all students was a hallmark of his teaching.

You'll see in my class the students talk a lot. Some teachers may think my class has a problem with discipline. Discipline is something that is unique to each teacher. What may be a discipline problem to some is not to others. I encourage my students to express themselves, at the proper moment, of course. For some teachers that may be a discipline problem. But you must give children an opportunity to express their creativity. You can't be so rigid.

Indeed, because of the rapport and mutual respect Da-Wei established with his students, he rarely encountered the discipline problems so many teachers complained about. “I never send students to the office. That's not necessary here,” he claimed. Additionally, his teaching, which was much more intellectually engaging than was typical at his school, gave students an opportunity to productively use their intellect and creativity. His approach acknowledged the temperament of lively and creative adolescents.

Da-Wei stressed the importance of treating his students equally but yet knowing them individually. He sought to build personal relationships with his students. In that way he believed that he was able to recognize students' potential and create a safe environment for them to learn and to share their ideas.

### Summary

Realizing that the teachers college admitted only the top graduates from junior high schools, Da-Wei felt that his acceptance to study at the teachers college was a great accomplishment for him. As a student in teachers college, he studied relentlessly, striving to become a good teacher. Still, he encountered many difficulties in his early years of teaching. As a teacher, he quickly came to realize that the teacher-preparation program did not adequately equip him with the knowledge and skill needed for effective teaching.

Da-Wei also argued that the college did not prepare him properly for teaching culturally diverse students. He had not received any course or training about Indigenous cultures. He realized that he had limited knowledge about his Indigenous students, and that he sometimes had difficulty reaching them. He suggested that teacher preparation program needed to provide more courses on Indigenous cultures.

As I came to understand Da-Wei's perspectives of teaching, I realized that his own experiences influenced the way he defined the success of school for all students. He believed that Indigenous parents who owned a house and had stable jobs in the city were more likely to give priority to their children's education. Certainly, Da-Wei had experiences that helped prepare him for understanding about diversity, in spite of his apparent social-class bias. He came from a background that provided extensive exposure

to diversity, and he appeared to have reflected on the meaning of those experiences. He exhibited some empathy, though it was tempered by his class attitudes and his distancing himself from Taiwanese Indigenous culture: “I want my students to know I care about them as a person, Aborigine or non-Aborigine. I want my Indigenous students to know I care about them.”

Da-Wei believed that Indigenous students had different learning styles from Han Chinese students. At one point he concluded that the difference in learning styles between Indigenous and Han students was, possibly, rooted in their differing cultural backgrounds. He found that his Indigenous students had different ways of learning and had various talents. As a teacher, his duty, as he saw it, was to provide opportunities for students to speak out. He came to realize that when his Indigenous students were reluctant to finish their work quickly, it was because, to avoid mistakes, they were very cautious.

Da-Wei reported a number of instances of his Indigenous students' learning. Much of his discussion focused on differences in learning styles of Indigenous and Han students. For example, he observed that his Indigenous students seemed hesitant to point out other others' mistakes, and they skillfully used their visualizing ability to learn. He believed that the differences in learning styles between Indigenous and Han students were rooted in their differing cultural backgrounds. In addition, Da-Wei noted that peer relationships had a significant impact on the learning of Indigenous students. His students made progress when they built positive relationships with other students.

## CHAPTER 5

### Ping-Ping

#### Personal background, schooling and becoming a teacher

Ping-Ping, the mother to an eight-year-old girl, joined An-Shi Elementary School in 1993. Her third graders surround her during recess. She was always smiling and was known around school as a nice person. Her husband, Lung-Lung, taught physical education and coached baseball at An-Shi. Lung-Lung, a native of San Shia Town, was the youngest in a thirteen-child family. On summer vacations Ping-Ping and Lung-Lung liked to travel away from Taipei, visiting friends and exploring nature.

#### **Schooling: “My father had a great impact on me”**

Like Da-Wei, Ping-Ping experienced the testing-for-all era. She told me that she was like an “unfeeling machine,” taking tests robotically. Her teachers came up with many ways to remind students that hard study was the only way to achieve their first objective: high scores on their high school entrance examinations. For example, in junior high school her teacher marked on the board the number of days remaining until the examination. As the day approached, they would take the practice exams more intensively, and the pressure became greater. She remembered:

The last semester in junior high was a nightmare. Since we were in the best class in ninth grade, even the best in the six “A-classes,” we were expected to go to the best public high school. You stepped into class, everyone had their heads down studying hard. Sometimes I thought I couldn’t hang on, that I was about to give

up, but you can't, you have gone that far.... I just wanted to wake up from that bad dream.

In addition to the academic competition at school, Ping-Ping felt that her father had a great impact on her life. He had been a high-ranking military man, retired for many years. Ping-Ping told me that her father was very disciplined both at work and home. She recalled, "He was handsome and dignified with his uniform on." Being the oldest child in a two-girl family, she learned to do whatever her father told her to do. She believed that she and her sister had been influenced by their father's way of raising them—disciplined and respectful. She recalled:

My father is twenty years older than my mother. He had a wife in mainland China before he came to Taiwan in 1949. As you can imagine, there was a big gap between them, especially in their child-rearing ideas. He wanted everything in our rooms to be organized and neat. I felt somewhat distant from him, but that was because I respected him. But he never failed to show us his love. He taught me a lot of things.... Basically, picking Chinese literature as my major in college was my father's decision. He thought I need to be more involved in *Chinese culture*, since we were from mainland China.

Ping-Ping experienced strong academic competition in schools, where the priority seemed, at that time, to produce test takers. The great pressure she experienced in high school became a recurring theme in her memories of her school experience. Another recurring theme was her rationale for fulfilling her father's wish by majoring in Chinese literature in college. Unlike the other participants in this study, whose ancestors

immigrated to Taiwan in the sixteenth century<sup>4</sup>, Ping-Ping was part of a group called “Mainlanders<sup>5</sup>,” who are relatively recent immigrants to Taiwan. This reminded her that her family’s roots were in mainland China.

### **Sustaining success in school**

Ping-Ping was one of the best students at her school. She remembered, “The wall in my room was full of academic awards. Hard work is a family value.” When the high school enrollment exam became the whole junior high school’s priority, Ping-Ping received special attention from her teachers and principal. She was placed in an advanced class; her school administrators were very supportive and eager to keep her in school at any cost. She recalled:

When I entered the seventh grade, we moved to Chun-Li city, about ten miles from my old school. Because I had an extraordinary record in school, the teacher, directors, and principal went to our house and convinced my parents to let me stay in the old school. They told my parents that they’d pay my commuter fee and a partial scholarship. You know, they wanted the best students in their school in order to increase their high school enrollment rates. I didn’t stay, because the new school’s staff also visited my parents....

The new junior high school that Ping-Ping attended was bigger and more competitive than the previous one. At first, Ping-Ping had difficulty catching up, because of the newness. Soon, though, she found herself more comfortable in the new school and made

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<sup>4</sup> The ethnic groups are normally classified into the four main categories: Indigenous peoples, Fukienese, Hakka, and mainlanders.

<sup>5</sup> In 1949, roughly 1.5 million mainland Chinese, from various provinces in China, migrated to Taiwan. These immigrants and their offspring have long been referred to as "Mainlanders".

huge academic strides. She felt that “you don’t want to be left behind; otherwise, you’ll be ignored.” Ping-Ping stated that she seldom encountered difficulty with schoolwork.

I learned about hard work from my father. I liked reading, and I read everything within my reach when I was little. It became a habit. In school, I was a good student, not getting into any trouble.... There wasn’t any setback in my studies. I guess I was just used to being at the top of the class.... Teachers liked me, and I think that might be one of the reasons I worked hard to stay on top.

For Ping-Ping, examinations were not stressful, as they were for most of the students. Being an avid reader, she could more easily handle her schoolwork. She believed that her industrious parents set an excellent example, and her teachers liked the results.

**Teacher education: “I struggle a lot ... in a real class”**

With the encouragement and support of her father, Ping-Ping attended an elite high school in Tao-Yuan County. Her distinguished college-enrollment scores allowed her to enter an elite university in her county. After consultation with her father, Ping-Ping decided to major in Chinese literature. To her father, the study of Chinese literature was a Han Chinese responsibility. In college, Ping-Ping never thought about becoming a teacher until near the end of her studies. She learned that teachers colleges had created an alternative one-year program to bring more college graduates into the teaching profession. The program was developed to address the teacher shortage in city schools, where the student population was rapidly expanding. Ping-Ping competed with two thousand other applicants to get into the program. She recalled the courses in this intensive teacher preparation program:

Normally, you have to study for four years in teachers college to become a qualified teacher, but we, since we already had a B.A. degree, took the one-year program. It was intensive, and most of the courses were theoretical foundations.... The truth was that I struggled a lot when I finished the program and taught in a real class. I learned from my experienced colleagues and my own trial-and-error experience. The workshops I went to also gave me a lot of ideas about good teaching that I could use in my class. I don't know about the others' opinions, but I really think the intensive teacher education programs didn't give me much.

Ping-Ping believed that her teacher preparation did not adequately equip her to become a classroom teacher. Of more significant help were: learning from experienced teachers, in-service workshops, and on-the-job experience.

Although the academic competition was keen, Ping-Ping had no difficulty overcoming the stress of exams. She realized that her diligent studying habits were the result of her father's influence. After graduating from college, she attended an intensive teacher-preparation program. As a novice teacher, she struggled with teaching because her teacher-preparation program did not prepare her adequately. She learned to teach, she readily admitted, mostly from her colleagues and from teaching workshops after she began to teach.

### **Understanding Indigenous culture and education**

Ping-Ping's understanding of Indigenous culture and education resulted from her visits to Indigenous villages and her experiences with Indigenous students and families. Those experiences led her to identify to a number of factors that impeded the education

of Indigenous students. Those factors included (a) a shortage of Indigenous teachers, (b) an under-representation of Indigenous culture in school curricula, (c) academic stress, (d) family history and environment, and (e) Indigenous languages.

### **Getting to know Indigenous culture**

During her summer vacations, Ping-Ping had made numerous trips to Indigenous villages, mostly accompanied by her husband. Her interest in visiting Indigenous villages stemmed from hearing beautiful Indigenous music in the village of Atayal<sup>6</sup>. She recalled:

Lung-Lung and I had three days off and we made a trip to an Indigenous village in I-Lan County. We went to a show that night. They were singing and dancing—a natural and beautiful example of Atayal culture. I was touched beyond words and fascinated by its unique spirit. I can say that its spirit still fascinates and excites me, and that it allows me to discover its beauty, which cannot be understood without the experience of seeing, touching, and smelling it in person.

Ping-Ping came to love Indigenous songs and managed to travel to several other Indigenous shows. The more she visited the Indigenous villages, the more she realized the value of Indigenous cultures. She told me that the only way to understand Indigenous culture was “to put yourself in the tribes.”

### **Han Chinese are more “competitive and aggressive”**

Ping-Ping’s visits to Indigenous sites have taught her that “they [Indigenous students] have different life styles, they have different world views.” She pointed out that the culture of city schools was the major factor that alienates Indigenous students. Ping-Ping told me that the Han Chinese are more “competitive and aggressive;” whereas, the Indigenous people are “cooperative and gentle.” She told me that her experience with

Indigenous people led her to those impressions. This is why, she said, so many Indigenous students were uncomfortable in city schools and refused to acknowledge their Indigenous heritage. She recounted a warm memory of her visit to an Indigenous village:

My first impression of Indigenous people was that they were very friendly and seemed content with what they had. My husband and I happened to visit an Atayal community. We were kind of lost, and stopped a young Atayal man who was passing by. He wasn't familiar with the place we were asking for, so he took us for help door to door. We still didn't get directions, so he invited us to meet his family and asked us to stay. We became good friends with his family. All of us were in tears when we had to leave. I was impressed. This would never have happened in a Han community.

Ping-Ping believed that most Indigenous people treated strangers like friends. She had felt the warm-heartedness and gentleness of the Indigenous community—an atmosphere that she felt was very different from that of the city. Ping-Ping believed this might be a factor in the ability of Indigenous people to adjust to city life. She thought Indigenous students were more likely to fall behind academically because of the competitive culture in Han-dominant classrooms.

### **Giwas's class**

When we discussed the education of Indigenous students, Ping-Ping mentioned her visiting Giwas, a former classmate from the teacher preparation program. Giwas was an Indigenous teacher in an Indigenous school in I-Lan County. She was very excited about Ping-Ping's visit. She invited Ping-Ping to her class to meet her students. Giwas's classroom was decorated with many Indigenous handcrafts. Ping-Ping was very

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<sup>6</sup> One of the Indigenous groups in Taiwan.

impressed. She remembered, “That was a place full of culture!” She also observed that Giwas’s teaching style and her way of managing her class were very different from her own. Giwas told her that she had developed her teaching methods by connecting the knowledge in the textbook with the cultural life of the Atayal people.

Giwas was a native of that community. She could speak the native language, and sometimes she would use both Mandarin and Indigenous languages in the class. I found that students were more comfortable in the class, and they learned their language, too. We came from the same teacher education program, but I know I wouldn’t be capable of doing that, even if I wanted to.

On visiting Giwas’s class, Ping-Ping decided that teachers with a background similar to that of their students could create a curriculum and an environment that would improve students’ performance. She saw that the students adored Giwas and were involved in their education. She proposed, “The Indigenous kids need more teachers like Giwas.” In addition, Ping-Ping believed that to help improve the education of Indigenous students, the curriculum must include content of relevance to Indigenous children.

### **Self-determination**

Visiting an Indigenous tribal village in Taiwan gave Ping-Ping a better knowledge of Indigenous culture. However, she had not talked about the experience with many of her colleagues because “you hear a lot of prejudice and misinformation going on.” When I asked her what issue concerning Indigenous people had been brought up most often lately, she told me that “many people are talking about *self-determination*.” Ping-Ping believed that the best way to reverse the “educational disadvantage of Indigenous people” was to give them the opportunity to develop their educational programs. In other words,

Indigenous people should be allowed to decide what should be taught in Indigenous schools, and how it should be taught.

A lot of people don't think they [Indigenous people] are able to do that, but I happen to know many of them who are extremely capable and willing to make changes in their schools. The mandatory curriculum keeps them from developing one that is more meaningful and culturally relevant to Indigenous students. This might not be easy for urban Indigenous students because their population is so small. They probably need to adjust themselves to Han Chinese culture.

Ping-Ping was impressed by an Indigenous teacher, Giwas, who had conceived of many learning activities relevant to Atayal students' experiences. She pointed out, "That is presently about all teachers can do, but, in the long run, the students have to be given the right to determine their own education." Ping-Ping suggested, however, that adjusting to the dominant culture might be necessary for Indigenous students to survive in city schools.

### **Indigenous culture: Invisible in school texts**

Ping-Ping told me that schools did not offer many opportunities for students to learn about Indigenous cultures. She pointed out that Indigenous-culture texts are very scarce. She said, "The texts in third grade do introduce Indigenous customs and embroidery, but I don't think it would provide a depth of understanding among students." Ping-Ping would take her collection of artifacts and photos to show her students whenever they were study a topic related to Indigenous people. While she believed that visiting Indigenous tribal villages led to a better understanding of Indigenous cultures, she did not think school policy allowed schools to do so:

Most Indigenous villages are too far to travel to. Transportation is a problem. I don't think that parents would pay for transportation. And safety is another issue. It would be nice if you could have your students stay in tribes for a couple of days, you know, talking to people, playing with the Indigenous kids, and attending the ceremonies. But many teachers wouldn't take on the responsibility, and the field trip application involves a long process. Parents could do that, but I doubt they would.

Ping-Ping noted that Indigenous cultures were underrepresented in school texts, leading to only a superficial understanding of those cultures. Although she managed to travel to Indigenous sites and obtain some information for her class, she felt that the extent to which she could pass on a deeper understanding was limited. She argued that visiting Indigenous tribal villages and becoming exposed to their culture was the best way to learn about them.

### **Dropping out: A way of escaping stress**

Beside the issue of curriculum, Ping-Ping noted that the needs of urban Indigenous students as a whole were ignored. She told me that there were two Indigenous students in her advanced reading class in high school. She realized that they were admitted through affirmative action, but "most of us didn't care, because they were always behind." Like Da-Wei, as discussed in the previous chapter, Ping-Ping believed that Indigenous students who enter high schools and colleges through special admission criteria needed extra help. Moreover, she was concerned that those two students also had difficulty adjusting socially and psychologically.

We all knew that they [the two Indigenous students] were brought in with special treatment. But I don't think we cared that much because everybody just minded their own business. These two special students were far behind, but they seemed to be working hard every day.... They were pretty withdrawn and less talkative.

They seemed completely weighed down by the stress of examinations.

Ping-Ping observed that many urban Indigenous students encountered great learning difficulties in Han-dominant classes. Academic readiness and psychological distress were the main issues needing to be addressed. She gave an example: "One of my Indigenous classmates dropped out when she was totally crushed by the stress." Ping-Ping suggested that counseling programs for Indigenous students might keep them in school.

### **Indigenous family**

Ping-Ping had three Indigenous students in her class. Two of them were raised by their single mothers, who were always busy with their work and never consulted with her about their children's schoolwork. The other student's father drank excessively. Ping-Ping remembered that he once came drunk to a parent meeting. She was worried about how such parents could maintain an environment in which children could get help with their education.

The mothers [of Indigenous students] are working day and night. They have so many children to take care of. I don't think they consider education as a serious matter.... You can't blame them. They have to compete with Han Chinese workers. That's why so many Indigenous people drink too much alcohol.... I don't think this is a good home environment for studying.

Indigenous people who migrated to the city for a better life, as Ping-Ping put it, varied in their ability to support their children, depending on how long they had lived in the city and how long their jobs lasted. Ping-Ping noted that Indigenous families suffered from the competitive culture in the city and from the fact that many of them consumed excessive alcohol to block out social- and work-related depression.

### **The economic plight of Indigenous families**

In 2003, Ping-Ping had been teaching in An-Shi Elementary School for ten years. She said that she had never heard of any teacher discriminating against anyone in her school. She claimed, “Some people might have some stereotypes about Indigenous people, but no discrimination.” Unlike the small population of Indigenous students in An-Shi, the population was higher at her previous school. She noted, “Indigenous families liked to live together, staying closer.” Observing that most Indigenous families were poor, she doubted that they were able to afford their children’s education.

They [Indigenous people] have many relatives and friends. They work at the same construction site or factory. I don’t think I have heard that Han Chinese in the community dislike them. They [Indigenous people] seem peaceful. Their only problem is that some of the families can’t afford their children’s tuitions and lunch money. Most of the Indigenous students have to apply for free lunches.

From what I hear, there is high unemployment among the Indigenous families. Ping-Ping viewed the economic plight of Indigenous families as more of a problem in urban areas, and her travels to the Indigenous tribes reinforced that belief. She seemed sympathetic to Indigenous students and could not explain the cause of the economic plight of their families.

**Parent involvement**

Ping-Ping believed that parents' support and involvement were very important for a teacher's success. She was surprised that most parents evaluated teachers in every subject based on the students' average grades. She said, "Some parents volunteer at school, and they have access to the school's computer system." She told me that she had brought up this problem with the principal, but it seemed difficult to stop. Ping-Ping felt that "there are eyes on your back, and you can do nothing about it." She further explained:

The academic competition is getting severe in my school. Many of the parents care only about their children's grades. The examination scores are kept in the school computer system. Some volunteers, mostly mothers, have access to the computer system and decide who is a good or bad teacher, based on the student scores. That is scary. Many teachers feel they are being watched.

Ping-Ping told me that all her Han Chinese students attended the after-school programs. However, she observed, "Indigenous parents show no interest in sending their children to the programs." Those parents seldom asked teachers about their children's grades but wanted to know if their children stayed out of trouble in school. The differences between Han Chinese and Indigenous parents showed up not only in the issues they cared about, but also in the way they became involved in their children's education.

**Language: A tool of communication**

Ping-Ping believed that all students needed to learn Mandarin and English to succeed in school. Her father came to Taiwan with the Nationalists, who were led by Chiang Kai-Shi, former president of the Republic of China (R.O.C, Taiwan), who was

defeated by the communists. Ping-Ping said, “I have spoken Mandarin all my life. It’s my first language.” She was a second-generation Nationalist. Everyone in her family spoke only Mandarin Chinese. She believed that Mandarin was the dominant and official language of Taiwan. Because Mandarin was the only language that teachers used in their classrooms, Ping-Ping expressed concern for the fate of Indigenous languages: “I am not sure how many native languages are going to survive. The policy doesn’t really support Indigenous people in their efforts to maintain their languages.” She expressed her view about learning Indigenous languages:

I think you have to see the big picture. Eventually, you have to live and work with people; most of them are Han Chinese. I don’t think that learning Indigenous languages is that important for them [Indigenous students] to succeed in society. So this is my perspective. Don’t force them to learn their own native languages. Isn’t Indigenous language important? Yes, but Indigenous students have to live and work in mainstream society, so they need to learn to be like everybody else.... I’m not saying that learning native languages is wrong. I mean people have a choice. If they want to learn, allow them to learn. If they don’t, that’s their choice.

Ping-Ping believed that her attitude toward the language issue was realistic. She believed that language is nothing but “a tool of communication.” To comprehend other people, it is important to be proficient in the most widely used languages, which, she believed, were Mandarin and English.

Thus, in addressing the education of Indigenous children, Ping-Ping identified several pressing challenges: the existing curriculum allotted insufficient coverage, which

provided only superficial knowledge of Indigenous cultures; more Indigenous teachers were needed to make the curriculum and the teaching more culturally relevant; Indigenous students lacking adequate academic preparation were more likely to encounter difficulties and stress and to drop out of school; and Indigenous parents were unable to provide their children with an appropriate learning environment.

### **Beliefs about the learning of Indigenous students**

As noted earlier, Ping-Ping had three Indigenous students in her class—two girls and one boy. She told me that they came from poorer families and needed extra academic help. She did not set the “same high standards for them” as for her other students. She explained, “I know their families can’t afford the after-school programs like other families can.” She allowed the Indigenous students to turn in their home work late, but “they have to do the work on their own.” Ping-Ping realized that their poor grades might make them feel inferior. However, their talents in art and sports offset their difficulties in class. She said:

They might not be able to beat other students academically, but they are really good at drawing and sports. Ina, one of my Indigenous students, can draw very well. She has real talent. Her paintings have won her many prizes. We like her, and the students like her.... Another student, Safi, is an athletic hero in my class. He is extraordinary in sports. He has been an all-around leader in sports in my class.

Ping-Ping found that her Indigenous students had talents that could make them proud. She had encouraged Ina, an Indigenous girl in her class, to develop her drawing skills and

had seen her win many school-wide and county-wide competitions. Safi, another Indigenous student, was a popular athlete in Ping-Ping's class. Both Ina and Safi, as Ping-Ping observed, had gained self-confidence through their talents.

### **Gender differences**

Ping-Ping told me of a conversation she had with her colleagues about Indigenous students. She recalled, "The gist of our conversation involved the misbehavior of Indigenous students in class." The conversation upset her so much that she made an excuse and left the room. Ping-Ping told me, "It is unfair to say that *all* Indigenous people are impulsive and aggressive."

I think it is prejudiced to think that all of them [Indigenous people] are easily categorized. Some of my colleagues have complained, "Indigenous students are explosive and short-tempered." Boys may be, but not the girls.... You'll see the roles of women and men in some of the Indigenous dancing. Indigenous men often perform a warrior or fighting dance, with a lot of movement. But the girls usually sing merrily and dance gracefully. That's their culture.

Ping-Ping disagreed with her colleagues' generalizations on the character traits of Indigenous people. She attributed the gender differences between Indigenous students to their culture, which can be understood through their traditional songs and dances.

### **Learning styles**

With over ten years of teaching experience, Ping-Ping supported the notion of "accommodating to students' learning styles." She had found that Indigenous students were easily confused by abstract concepts, such as in mathematics:

The Indigenous students have a hard time understanding complex equations.

Sometimes, I have to explain a few times to them.... you know, I have to make it concrete. When they are stuck, they don't know how to explain their difficulty....

During recess, I have them come in and get help.

Giving students more practice was one of Ping-Ping's ways of helping students who had difficulties. For example, she was interested in and tried different ways of teaching math. Realizing that her Indigenous students had different learning preferences, Ping-Ping described how she helped them by using visual and creative processes:

I figured that drawing a picture was one way of doing math, so I used art to teach them simple math or reading.... I asked them to draw a picture when they were trying to solve a math problem, so they could manage the equation by seeing it rather than pondering it in their brains. It might take time, but I think it's more important to really grasp the math. Actually, I wanted to do this, so that they would get a little bit of math and a little of reading.

Ping-Ping knew that Indigenous students differed from the majority population in their learning styles. Her use of pictures and drawings in math class helped her Indigenous students better understand abstract concepts. Also, she spent time during recess helping students overcome their difficulties, and asked good math students to tutor her Indigenous students.

Ping-Ping's teaching strategy helped her Indigenous students understand math, and her student tutors provided some of the assistance that would ideally have come from helpful parents. To students who were still confused by math, she offered extra help, giving them personal and intensive instruction.

In summary, Ping-Ping had pointed out a several characteristics of the learning of Indigenous students. She recognized the talents of her Indigenous students who should be proud of themselves. She also learned the fact that the learning of Indigenous students was associated with their cultures. To help Indigenous who had difficulty in learning abstract concept, she spent more time with them and gave them more practice.

### **Beliefs about teaching**

When talked about her teaching, Ping-Ping elucidated her principles of teaching: developing students' talents, acknowledging your students, believing your students, and meeting your students individually.

#### **“A teacher's values are important”**

When Ping-Ping was in junior high and high school, her life was full of tests. She remembered, “Students would be hit if they did not meet the standard set by teachers.” Her Indigenous classmates in high school were always punished by teachers when they did not pass tests. Knowing that high exam scores are often achieved by the result of corporal punishment, Ping-Ping decided to take another route.

I think this only benefits students who are better off. It's unfair to those who can't afford the private tutors. Think about it! If I were one who emphasized achievement, Ina [an Indigenous student] wouldn't have been so successful and self-confident. Some people have talents, but not in fields emphasized by the prescribed curriculum. So, I think a teacher's values are important. My colleagues give too much weight to academic achievement. I don't.

Ping-Ping believed that a student's potential was more likely to be overlooked when the teacher's emphasis was only on academic achievement. As a teacher, she assured, her goal was to help her students develop their talents, and she decided to make that belief a tenet of her teaching career.

**“Students want to identify with teachers”**

Ping-Ping told me that “teenagers need identity; they need to be acknowledged by their close friends.” She remembered that, as a high school student, she “wasn't really listening to my teachers.” Her close friends in junior high school had a much more immediate influence on her than the adults. She believed that adolescence was the most important period in the development of personal identity. Her third-graders were still a few years away from that stage.

I think my students are still too young to think about identity. They want to identify with teachers more than peers. Sometimes, teachers need to encourage them when they have a minor success, especially those who are less confident. I am not saying that they don't have a need to associate with their peers; they do care what other students think about them. If they are called 'stupid' or 'idiot' by other students, that really hurts.

Ping-Ping did not believe that her third-graders were overly disturbed about their peers' negative judgments, but were very concerned about what their teachers thought about their accomplishments. “That means teachers can have a great impact on their students,” she realized; therefore, teachers must be very careful about what they say and do in class.

**“Believe in your students”**

Ping-Ping was sensitive to her students' needs. She reminded me repeatedly that one of her teaching principles was “believing in your students.” That was confirmed by my observations in her class, where she gave every student an opportunity to share what they had to say. She emphatically expressed her appreciation and encouragement to everyone who made a contribution to the discussion. Rather than giving directions consistently and an overload of details, Ping-Ping just briefly introduced assignments before handing them out.

Some people don't think kids can learn by themselves. That's not the case in my class. I mean, when I gave students permission to find out for themselves, they'd come up with something that really impressed me. That is what I saw in the replay of my third-graders. I am seeing that students do not develop concepts by having concepts explained. Telling is not the best way to develop understanding.

You've got to believe in your students and help them only when they need you.

Ping-Ping's philosophy also caused her to have problems with traditional methods of evaluation. She did not believe in student grouping; instead, she allowed the children to help one another and work at their own level and pace. So, grading was difficult.

Likewise, she did not favor the standardized tests that are required in the first grade. She said, “I don't believe that the achievement tests really test reading ... and I don't think it's accurate as to where they plug the kids in as far as grade level. What is grade level anyway?”

Instead, Ping-Ping relied on more personal measures. To make her own evaluations, she observed students to see how they interacted with each other, she

listened to the questions they asked, and she used non-standard assessments. She told me that she kept anecdotal records on their progress in academic as well as social areas, focusing on strengths rather than weaknesses. She was continually searching for appropriate and meaningful evaluation methods to use in her classroom.

**The role of teacher: “I have tried to do my best”**

Ping-Ping’s philosophy of teaching was influenced by several beliefs about learning. One was that learning should be *intrinsic*. She said, “If I’m pushing it and it’s not motivated from within, you know, I really do believe—though I’m not always sure how to go about it—that the kids have to be responsible for their learning.” She added, “If they’re not ready, they’re just not ready, and by pushing them, I seem to actually obstruct any growth.”

Ping-Ping believed that school should be a positive experience for children, especially minority students because often they come from environments where their “parents might not have had a positive experience in school” and probably have passed their negative feelings on to their children. She believed that all students are somewhat affected by the attitudes of their parents, some of whom could be understandably hesitant to participate in school activities. She wanted to change that pattern and said:

I think I can provide them with an experience at school where they not only learn to love school ... but also are able to make their own personal experience a truly positive one. I want to make them feel that learning is something that they feel comfortable doing and that is exciting to them. So I have added more hands-on work in class and more games that make teaching interesting. I have tried to do

my best, to not pressure them. How much have they absorbed? I really can't control that.

Ping-Ping believed that learning occurs naturally because children are always learning and that "it doesn't have to be poured into their brains, it just evolves developmentally." She had gained support for this belief through her experience in the classroom. She said, "As I slowly but surely gained confidence that the kids would learn ... I relinquished control. And sometimes you're afraid to do that because we see our roles as controllers."

### **"Meet them as individuals"**

Although the Indigenous student is a new face in Ping-Ping's class, she did not view her racial or cultural background as a primary factor in forming her pedagogy. When asked about some of the greatest needs to be addressed in her classroom, she responded with another layer of culture—youth culture:

The greatest need to meet is the need of the person as an individual, not necessarily as Hakka, Fukien, or Aborigine. If you meet them as individuals—on their ability level, grade level, social skills level—I have found that being concerned about their heritage comes second or third to other requirements—just knowing them as a person, as a youth today. I have discovered that many of their social skills or their social problems or conflicts are universal, regardless of race.

In addition, she had personal goals that also reflected her desire to learn and change. She wanted to travel to mainland China, write a book and write articles about some of the things that "drive me crazy" about the world.

**“All students are capable of learning”**

Respecting her students was the core of Ping-Ping’s philosophy about facilitating children’s development. She saw her students as capable, perceptive, intelligent people—certainly entitled to privileges, positive experiences, a caring environment, and abundant materials with which to learn. Ping-Ping respected her students and believed in them. In return, they tried to live up to her expectations.

Students should be given problems to solve. All students are capable of learning, even though their learning styles may be different, and they may make some serious mistakes. As a teacher, my role is to accommodate the students’ various learning styles and to encourage them to use styles with which they may not be familiar. Most students today are visual learners; however, I encourage them to practice auditory learning because the visual may not always be available.

Ping-Ping believed that all students were capable of learning, although they may learn at different rates and use different methods. She designed various activities to accommodate her students’ individual learning styles. Her conversation illustrated that coming up with innovative strategies that met students’ learning styles put them on the path to accomplishment.

Instead of talking specifically about teaching Indigenous students, Ping-Ping claimed that her teaching goals were developed for *all* students. She identified several principles of teaching that she adopted as a teacher. First, she encouraged her students to share ideas and to contribute in class. In this way she was able to estimate students’ progress and recognize their ways of learning. Second, she believed that students,

regardless of their cultural backgrounds, were capable of learning, and that teachers should be able to develop various learning activities to meet students' needs.

### Summary

Like other participants in this study, Ping-Ping participated in severe academic competition in high school. Regarding hard work as a virtue, she dutifully focused on her academic work. Unlike most of her peers, she enrolled in an alternative teacher education program in Taipei Teachers College after receiving her B.A. from National Central University. That one-year program was, she recalled, very intensive; however, it failed to provide her with fundamental classroom management and teaching skills. The help she needed was, instead, provided by on-the-job experience.

Ping-Ping seemed to overlook the separate cultures of the Han Chinese and the Indigenous people, stating simply that Han Chinese are more "competitive and aggressive;" whereas, the Indigenous people are "cooperative and gentle." She accepted that the competitiveness of dominant culture had overcome Indigenous students in school. She seemed resigned, as a teacher, could do little to help her Indigenous students.

Having observed a classroom teaching of Giwas, a former classmate, in an Indigenous school, she strongly believed that teachers with a background similar to that of their students could develop a curriculum and provide an environment that would help their students' class performance. She had numerous encounters with Indigenous people but had consistently disengaged herself, opting to accept the negative stereotypes of Indigenous people. Even though she had various teaching experiences, she seemed unable to integrate them and use them to understand Indigenous students and their unique

needs. It seemed that she did not acknowledge the unequal treatment of Indigenous people; therefore, she did not feel any ethical or moral conflict.

Ping-Ping had lived most of her life in a society in which cultural and racial identity was essentially a non-issue. She did not need to deal with race. At the same time, she understood that there had been and continued to be Han racism, which dominated the Taiwan society. Cultural blindness allowed differences to be tempered and left at an unconscious level. She experienced a great deal of conflict in her personal and emotional dealings with students regarding race. She saw the problem of racism as simply an unavoidable reality for Indigenous students. She did not see or hear her self-contradictions and inconsistencies.

## CHAPTER 6

### Mayao

#### Personal background, schooling, and becoming a teacher

Mayao, the director of the Long-So Elementary School in Tao-Yuan County, was born in Hua-Lien County, on the east coast of Taiwan, in 1970. His family moved to Tai-Tung City, when he was twelve years old, after he had completed his primary schooling. Although most of his relatives lived in his home village, Mayao's father decided that urban employment would provide him with more opportunities, as would urban schools for his children.

Mayao came from an Amis<sup>7</sup> family. His parents were fluent in Amis but spoke only Mandarin with their children at home. He remembered, "My parents wanted us to be comfortable speaking Mandarin, because we lived in a Han Chinese community." As he told me, his middle-class status allowed him to attend an elite laboratory school in Hua-Lien City, where he was taught by Han Chinese teachers.

#### **Lesson in Mayao's schooling: Being top in the class**

Mayao's father, a respected man in his home village, was a police officer in Hua-Lien County. In many ways, Mayao tried to emulate his father. Mayao said that his father was seldom at home, but never failed to provide his wife and children with loving care. Mayao was the oldest of three boys. As he recalled, the family moved from place to place as his father's duty station shifted; consequently, Mayao had attended four different elementary schools. He never really had time to make a close friend. His first

two schools were located in an Indigenous area near his hometown, and had many Amis students, who knew one another well. He had many pleasant memories of his early schooling at Indigenous schools. However, his happiness was temporary and abruptly ended when his father was transferred out of the Indigenous community.

That was a Han Chinese community. Most of them were Hakka<sup>8</sup>. I was the only Indigenous student in the class. I spent a long time adjusting to this strange environment. I could hardly speak to anyone...not because I was new but because I was an Amis. It was hard, and I kept asking my father to go back to the old school.... I started rebelling against the school, I guess.... It was just not the place I had expected.

By the time Mayao was in the eighth grade, he had learned how to make himself comfortable among his Han friends, who appreciated his athletic talents. He came to be welcome on sports teams because people found that he could throw balls rather well. His Han friends liked to hang out with him, but Mayao was careful when some of his not-so-close friends tried to make trouble. The academic competition in Han-dominant schools certainly introduced Mayao to pressure. He believed that he had to work three times as hard as his Han peers to stay on top.

In high school, I was usually the only Indigenous student in any group: basketball, chorus, and all my social groups. I was extra cautious when my Han friends were causing trouble. Because I was the only Indigenous Taiwanese, I had to be better than the non-Indigenous students, both academically and athletically.

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<sup>7</sup> One of the Indigenous groups in Taiwan.

<sup>8</sup> One of the four major ethnic groups in Taiwan.

Mayao felt that being on top in class also gave him a sense of protection because “people wouldn’t look down on me because of my academic record.” His hard work in school earned him many academic awards. In Han-dominant schools, he was seldom called a “*San Di Ren*” (an offensive term, used in the past to refer to Indigenous people as mountain people) because “they [the Han students] thought “I was *different* from other Indigenous students, who usually were viewed as doing poorly in academic work.”

### **Family and school success**

Mayao’s parents were very supportive of their children’s education and made every effort to ensure that they did well in school. He recalled, “My Mon checked our schoolwork every day—homework, quizzes, report cards, almost everything.” Unlike other Indigenous families, his parents often visited teachers to check their children’s progress. As one of the outstanding students in junior high school and the oldest son in his family, Mayao believed that he was obliged to make his parents proud.

My two younger brothers were not into school work, really. They didn’t like studying, I think. But my parents valued education so much that they put their hope on me. I didn’t want to let them down. I did quite well, especially in junior high school. I was always in the top two per cent of the class. I gained some confidence in school and, believe it or not, I was getting to like competition, especially with my Han peers.

Although his family’s financial circumstances did not require his immediate support, Mayao considered getting a job after graduation from junior high school, as many of his cousins did. Liku, one of Mayao’s cousins had been employed as a road worker in the city and two years later returned to his home village with a brand new car. Knowing that

Mayao hoped to build a new house for his family, Liku assured him that he could realize his dream within two years if they worked together. But Mayao's teachers advised him against that route. As a top-section junior-high-school graduate, Mayao's next step, as they saw it, would be a junior teachers college, and they pushed him harder to study for the admission test.

I was one of the few students in school that teachers expected to enter junior teachers college. The examination was so tough that the acceptance rate was only 5 per cent. The Tai-Tung Junior Teachers College was the top choice of all the junior-high graduates at the time. My teachers told me that I might be able to get into junior teachers college. I was not quite sure about that because I was not the best student in the school, but my Indigenous background added twenty-five per cent to my points, so I got into the teachers college, as my teachers predicted.

As expected, Mayao beat thousands of competitors hoping to enter Tai-Tung Junior Teachers College. Since the students in teachers colleges were the best in the nation, he had to work even harder to keep up with his elite Han classmates.

A few students in Mayao's class came from different Indigenous groups. They soon became close friends. Mayao remembered, "We liked to hang out, making fun of each other, talking about our own villages. We were not as serious as our Han Chinese classmates." Bonding quickly with his Indigenous peers, Mayao eventually identified with them culturally. That was a new experience.

### **Studying in teachers college: A turning point**

Studying at Tai-Tung Junior Teachers College was a turning point in Mayao's journey to his Indigenous culture. Since most of his education was in city schools, it

never occurred to him that being an Amis would ever have a dramatic impact on his life. Then, one day, he was invited to join the Indigenous Student Club (ISC) on campus and to participate in the annual Indigenous-culture celebration, at which Indigenous students from various villages presented their traditional dances, songs, and customs. He made many new acquaintances and witnessed the wide array of Indigenous cultural performances. It was the first time Mayao realized that Indigenous culture was amazingly beautiful and somehow exotic. He said, "I'd never really experienced Indigenous cultures from this short distance so intimately. All the Indigenous cultures were represented at the same time." He was astonished. He began to ask, "Who am I? What do I know about my own culture?" He shared his experience:

I had little knowledge of my own cultural background. Other students, especially other Indigenous students, would ask me questions about Amis and my cultural background. I really couldn't answer their questions seriously. I went to the library and tried to read as much as I could about Amis culture. The library was pathetically limited, and all the authors were non-Aborigines. Actually, I began to believe some of the things that were written about Amis people.

After participating in the Indigenous-culture event, Mayao became active in the Indigenous Student Club. In his senior year, he was elected president of the club. He began to reorganize the group and talked often to other Indigenous students, inviting whoever was interested in Indigenous cultures to join the ISC activities, including Indigenous singing, dancing, and guest lectures. The more involved he became, the more he appreciated his cultural heritage and focused on what he could do to make changes.

This was the turning point in my life because it made me deal directly with my own culture and the culture of others. I managed to bring Indigenous issues out of the dark.... Some people don't feel comfortable, but I don't care. The ISC experience was perfect training for leadership. It also made me more aware of positive differences between cultural groups. These differences are important to recognize and maintain, since all of my formal education and training was meant for me to become as Han as possible.

Not being fluent in his native tongue made Mayao feel that he was only "half Amis." He felt comfortable identifying himself publicly as an Amis, but had difficulty talking to elders in Amis. He told me, "Sometimes you'd feel like an outsider when you were questioned by the elders about your ability to speak Amis." He started taking Amis-language courses at night school. He believed that only by using the Amis language could he truly learn his own culture and make himself spiritually whole.

I just think about making myself better. Like, eventually I'm going to learn how to speak my own language, Amis... It's our tribe and one reason I want to learn my language is so I can teach my son and so that he can keep it going.... I want to learn more about myself and my background and my heritage, because although I'm an Aborigine, most Indigenous people have so many cultures within them. So I do want to explore and learn more about myself, and then I'll be, I think, better with other people.

Before Mayao attended teachers college he had never "thought about my cultural background seriously." In Han-dominant schools, he had suppressed his Indigenous identity. However, his experience with the Indigenous Student Club was the turning

point in his cultural identity. He managed to learn Amis language; by doing so, he became more aware of his own culture.

Mayao's schooling experience was not unique. Many Indigenous children who moved to the city experienced the same alienation and conflict at school. Many, like Mayao, lost their native language or, even worse, "rejected their Indigenous heritage." As Mayao had remarked earlier, Indigenous students were "de-indigenized," fulfilling the Han Chinese promise to build a unified society. Mayao recognized the situation and tried hard to make a difference by running the Indigenous Student Club, which later became a "light house," helping many Indigenous teacher candidates "find the way home."<sup>9</sup>

### **Factors that influence the education of Indigenous students**

By the time I interviewed him, Mayao had been teaching science for nine years at the Long-So Elementary School in Tao-Yuan County. He and his wife, also a teacher, had married four years previously and raised their baby boy in the suburbs. The school was located in an urban district to which most of the students had moved from other counties. A few Indigenous families had moved into the community over the years. Most of the adults worked as laborers.

Mayao had many insights about the education of Indigenous students. Based on his experiences as a student and a teacher, Mayao argued that the following issues should be critically examined: (a) the school curriculum, (b) the tracking system, (c) discrimination in school, and (d) teacher expectations. He had been dealing these issues

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<sup>9</sup> Mayao read me a poem, written by an Indigenous writer that gave voice to Indigenous people in the city. See appendix D.

through out his schooling. Such experiences led him to believe that, as an Indigenous teacher, he could have positive impact on his Indigenous students.

### **Making the curriculum more relevant**

Mayao believed that the school curriculum posed a common challenge for teachers who were struggling with the education of a culturally diverse student body. He considered the prescribed objectives of the school curriculum as irrelevant to Indigenous students, yet felt limited as to what he could do. At the same time, he was beginning to see himself as a creative, energetic teacher:

I think it's incredibly important because one of the things—just from my own personal background—is that I had a very difficult time in school because I found that I just wasn't particularly interested in the actual curriculum. I had a hard time learning about Han Chinese history and things like that. When I went to school, there was never anything involving Aborigines at all. For that matter, very little Indigenous history at all was taught in school. ... I think I have the ability to make sure that the curriculum is more relevant, not just for Indigenous people but for anyone who lives in Taiwan.

In addition, Mayao told me that Indigenous cultures in Taiwan textbooks were underrepresented, and “no one seems to notice that.” Although, recently there had been more interest in educational reform and in moving curricula more toward localization, Indigenous cultures were still missing in school texts. Mayao charged that textbooks were a major cause of the inequity that Indigenous children suffered in school. He suggested that teachers should examine classroom materials for negative stereotypes of Indigenous people, focusing on how minority students were portrayed. He urged a

continuing assessment of materials for invisibility, stereotyping, selectivity, imbalance, unreality, fragmentation, isolation, and language biases.

### **“Our children deserve better”**

Mayao noted that Indigenous students were usually placed in the non-academic track, which typically included courses such as music, dance, and athletics. Mayao told me that many teachers did not support Indigenous students academically. He added, “Many teachers think Indigenous students are incompetent at academics; many Indigenous students just give up when teachers show this attitude.” Many outstanding Indigenous athletes and musicians had gained international recognition. However, Mayao said, “When an Indigenous kid does well at playing ball, his academic development is discouraged.”

I think their talents have long been ignored. I have seen many Indigenous kids being steered toward sports, because of the belief that Indigenous people are supposedly good at it. So you don’t see Indigenous people in the professional areas—business, technology, and scientific subjects. What we need is an opportunity to be involved in these areas.

Though most parents in the city paid for their children to attend after-school academic programs, some of the recently arrived Indigenous families were unable to afford that or create a proper intellectual environment for their children. Mayao claimed, “They may have a future in sports, but we do need more lawyers, university professors, and doctors.”

### **Experiences of discrimination**

Mayao experienced racial discrimination in his first year as a teacher. He remembered, “This was something that I knew was going to happen.” Mayao felt that he

was ready to take the challenge and “whoever did this to me, I’d show them I wasn’t the person they thought.” He told me of one experience:

It was my first year in Long-So Elementary School. I was new to the community and the parents. During a public session, a parent came up and demanded, “What are you? Are you going to teach my kids hunting?” I was stunned. I answered with a smile. The experience didn’t stop me from what I was going to do. I worked tirelessly at my job, teaching. Most parents ended up liking me so much that I have never experienced that kind of behavior again.

Mayao believed that many Han people still discriminated against Indigenous people. Even though teachers are respected in Taiwanese society, he realized that the “*colored eyes*<sup>10</sup> are still out there.” Teaching for five years in Long-So Elementary School earned Mayao a reputation for dramatically improving the academic achievement of students, especially those who were considered “at risk” students. Mayao sensed that his image as an Indigenous teacher had changed over the years, but that did not make things better when people saw “Indigenous people sitting outdoors, drinking and making noise.”

Mayao said, “Many television programs have misinterpreted Indigenous practices and twisted the image of aborigines.” He gave an example:

One major mistake is that Indigenous holy rituals have often been portrayed as sports events. Commonly, when Aborigines are finally given a chance to speak before a camera, they are usually expected to echo what the program host has already said. They are not allowed to voice their own opinions. We Aborigines are not tape recorders; we have our own opinions. It’s just ignorance really, a

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<sup>10</sup> By this he meant that the discrimination was still prevalent in schools; Indigenous students were still discriminated against.

lack of exposure to Indigenous cultural influences. If you hear about people from secondhand sources only, you tend to end up with stereotypes, with a really exaggerated, one-sided view.... I don't think a lot of Han Chinese people have any idea what it's like for Indigenous people in this country.

Mayao dealt with discrimination in his daily life. He believed that society systematically silenced Indigenous people. He also believed that Han Chinese people tended to have superficial or stereotypical images of Indigenous people. As a result, he wanted to educate both Han Chinese and Indigenous people about by challenging distorted preconceptions about Indigenous people's potential and ability.

### **They need 'higher expectations'**

Mayao talked about how he adjusted his curriculum to meet the needs of Indigenous students. For the more academically oriented subjects that he taught, he drove the students to work hard. He came to realize that to become an effective teacher "you need to be sensitive about Indigenous students' needs and have higher expectations for them."

I usually go more slowly and concentrate more on hands-on activities. I realize that these children are not slow. Many teachers think Indigenous students are incompetent at academic subjects. Many Indigenous students just give up when teachers show this attitude. They should not be treated as if they were. We just have to understand them—to work with them better. This is why I need to be aware of other cultures. Sometimes teachers adjust the curriculum by suggesting a lowering of expectations, such as not giving Indigenous students academically

demanding assignments. There is a fine line between wanting to adjust the curriculum to meet the student's capacity and actually challenging the student. Mayao believed that Indigenous children, whether in tribal villages or in cities, needed cultural affirmation, thereby raising their self-esteem and promoting self-respect. He suggested that such goals could be accomplished only with teaching programs that would integrate and emphasize positive values and would highlight the contributions of Indigenous groups:

There's a long, involved process. Part of it has to do with teaching, with reversing some of the damage that has been done, as much as we can, by having more information that would reflect what really happened in history, for starters—to implement our own writings and teachings in a new curriculum. I think that the other students also have to know about our history and where we came from, what we contribute, what we have contributed to this society—to their society.

Mayao believed that Indigenous students should be challenged to work to their capacity and that teachers who recognize them as individuals were essential to the process. He realized that many Indigenous students have been discouraged by teachers who “refuse to understand the world of their Indigenous students.”

#### **“We could do better”**

Mayao's first teaching position was at Chun-Shin Elementary School in Tao-Yuan County. Most of the school district's residents were Han Chinese. He was the only Indigenous teacher in the school. His appearance at school “really made some Han parents nervous.” Mayao understood their concerns about his teaching capabilities. He believed that “There was a lot of misunderstanding going on.” Supported by the

principal, Mayao tried to give more prominence to Indigenous cultures by organizing an Indigenous cultural exhibition for a parent-teacher meeting. Many parents expressed their thanks.

Right now people have begun to realize the importance of reviving Indigenous cultures, and we are ready to make an effort. I am rather glad about this, you know. Beside, the urban Indigenous students are increasing. Teachers are more likely to have had Indigenous students in their classrooms... We have an Indigenous teacher group. We have regular meetings, talk about our cultural events, teaching, and other things. We are not going to wait for the government. I don't think the bureaucracy will do any good.

Since arriving at Long-So Elementary School, Mayao had also led the Indigenous teacher group. He told me, "Some Indigenous teachers from other counties have shown a lot of interest in our group." He said that the group was making significant changes in their schools.

#### **"I know what they've been through"**

Mayao realized that he should be a role model for his Indigenous students, both in and out of school. Every day he was reminded that they needed a positive role model. Teaching at a large urban school was especially difficult because he did not have another Indigenous teacher with whom to share and develop his interests and concerns; consequently, he had little choice but to adjust to the Han mainstream school culture, although he was highly sympathetic to few Indigenous students. He understood their feelings because he had also felt them. Their experiences in the city were different from

those of their counterparts in Indigenous schools. Increasingly, he believed that Indigenous students should have teachers who understood their culture and language.

Of course, we need more Indigenous teachers in our schools. See, teachers who are now teaching our kids are non-Indigenous teachers. They don't understand us. They don't understand our culture and language. I was never taught by an Indigenous teacher in my early schooling. I wish I had been. It would be greatly beneficial if there were someone who really understood what you had been through.

Mayao tried to connect with Indigenous students. For example, being interested in baseball, he voluntarily coached a baseball team. The team included six Indigenous boys. Mayao led the team to the championship in countywide competition for each of the last three years. He believed that the six Indigenous players had played an important part in the team's success. Mayao described how he worked with the team:

We practiced after class. It would finish by 5 pm, and I'd keep them in the classroom, doing their homework. I'd rerun the materials that had been taught in class. I didn't want them to trade their academics for baseball. By the end of the semester, these kids, especially the Indigenous kids, improved remarkably in schoolwork. This was what I was trying to achieve.

Mayao's work with his baseball players was not in vain. Many of them improved their grades remarkably in subjects in which they had done poorly before they were on the team. What especially pleased Mayao was the fact that the Indigenous students did much better, both in the classroom and on the field, than their Han teammates. Now he told all

of his Indigenous students that they could make things better if they tried earnestly. Such encouragement from an Indigenous teacher had special value.

Mayao argued that the curriculum, the tracking system, discrimination, and teacher expectations significantly affected the educational experiences of Indigenous students. As a teacher, he sought to make the curriculum more relevant to students' experiences, and he tried to reverse the negative stereotype of Indigenous people in school. He believed that Indigenous students could succeed academically when their strengths and potential were seen by their teachers. As an Indigenous teacher, Mayao realized that he could be a role model to his Indigenous students and reach out to help them.

### **Beliefs about the learning of Indigenous students**

Having lived in the city for more than twenty years, Mayao considered the urbanization of the Aborigine as unavoidable. "Many Indigenous people cannot make a living in their home villages; there's no economy there," Mayao said. He believed that those who obtained jobs in the city, even low-paying jobs, would find a way to survive. He was more concerned with government support for urban Aborigines. He believed that "What they are becoming is more important." Mayao explained further:

You can't move us back to their tribal villages. This [the city] is our home. We have lived here for a long time, but many of us are trying to preserve our traditional customs and languages. Our *tribes* are in the city. We want to make a living in the city. We have power when we get together. What we need is

support from the government, helping us with jobs, education, and family situations.

Mayao believed that the family environment of urban Indigenous students had a strong influence on their educational success. The issue that concerned him most was that many Indigenous families were financially handicapped and could not supplement their children's education in the Han-dominant school culture.

### **Teachers could make a difference**

During his nine years of teaching in city schools, Mayao had repeatedly observed that Indigenous students were usually a minority in their classes. Mayao's story revealed the particularly important role of teachers in the academic success of Indigenous students. He showed that Indigenous students were as academically capable as their Han peers. The success of Indigenous students, he believed, depended on their teachers' higher expectations.

In junior high school, I was placed in the advanced class, which was mainly preparation for the high school entrance exam. My teacher once told me that I would be able to get into the best high school in the county or teachers college, which I preferred, because I was always in the top two per cent of in my class. Three other Indigenous students were also good. We spent time reading and playing together. We were trying to show our ability to beat out Han peers.

Mayao realized that teachers were especially important for Indigenous students, who were usually in the minority. He believed, "Indigenous students are more likely to achieve academically when teachers see their potential."

### **Gender expectation in Amis society**

Mayao recruited some Indigenous boys for his baseball team. Two of them were brought to him by their teachers, because “the kids have problems with paying attention and show no interest in books.” The teachers hoped that baseball might absorb some of their excess energy. Mayao believed that the gender roles were rooted in Amis tradition. He told me that in ancient times, the duty of Amis men was hunting and fishing. He added, “They were in either the depths of the forest or in deep water.” Amis men were taught to feed the whole tribe. He noted that Indigenous male students have typically gravitated toward vocational training or athletics. However, based on his own experience, Mayao believed that Indigenous boys could be successful in sports without neglecting academics. He believed that people around Indigenous students had not been adequately supportive.

I guess the most pressing need is support, with a lot of other things going on in their lives, so they can get on with and try and attempt some studies. A lot of Indigenous kids bring with them a whole lot of other problems and concerns and they seem to get a whole lot of extra responsibilities at a young age that perhaps our non-Indigenous students don't.... Indigenous girls are more likely to help their families and get to work early. The boys, you know, work as laborers.

Mayao explained that gender difference has cultural origins. In Amis society, there are specific role expectations for both genders, and those expectations have been passed from generation to generation. The different roles of Amis females and males had been created functionally “to support the survival of their tribes.”

**Feeling safe, they will learn**

Mayao said that when Indigenous students felt safe and not threatened—“that they’re loved and that you care about them—they will learn.” He believed that society was too quick to accept the rationalization that “they are Indigenous students and they are different.” “True,” he added, “we are different inside, spiritually. And the inside parts haven’t been touched often.” Mayao also believed that if teachers fostered a learning environment in which Indigenous children felt trusted and safe, everyone could succeed.

With Indigenous kids, you’ve got to educate the whole kid. You’ve got to worry about the whole self, not just whether or not they’ve got their math done. But you’ve got to deal with all these other things that they’re bringing in with them.

Once you get that straightened out, and they know that they can trust you and they feel safe and nonthreatened, then they can settle in, and they learn exactly the way that non-Indigenous students learn.

Having lived in city for a long time, Mayao understood what his Indigenous students were going through. He believed that teachers who recognize students’ strengths and learning preferences could be especially helpful for Indigenous students. He also suggested that the learning environment of Indigenous students is a critical factor that influences the learning of Indigenous students. Based on his experiences as a city-school student, he believed that teachers could help Indigenous students by creating an intellectually and culturally comfortable place for them to learn.

### **Beliefs about teaching Indigenous students**

#### **“Sieve out the stone from the soil”**

Mayao pointed out that a good teacher for Indigenous students should be able to teach students “the truth” about their people—a truth that was missing from school texts. Selecting a chapter in a history textbook, he pointed out recurring prejudices against Indigenous people. He said, “There are a lot of biases and prejudice in school texts, and they have been passed on from generation to generation.” The images of Indigenous people in school texts have always been negative and superficial. As teachers, he told me, “we have to sieve out the stone from the soil.”

A good teacher should be able to differentiate between what is accurate and what is false. A lot of teachers don’t care about this; they teach what they have been taught. Whenever I teach about the Indigenous culture, customs, and heritage, I give out as much information as possible to make sure that the students fully understand and appreciate Indigenous cultures.

Mayao’s beliefs about the characteristics of a good teacher placed a great deal of responsibility on himself. He had formed a county-wide group for Indigenous cultural study. Indigenous teachers met periodically to exchange ideas about teaching and other issues related to Indigenous people. The meetings provided him an opportunity to share his experiences, perspectives, and uncertainties. Mayao felt privileged to establish a forum that helped Indigenous teachers grow professionally and spiritually, and he pledged every effort to keep the group functioning. One of the group’s goals was to “prepare ourselves to teach Indigenous students in the city schools where we serve.” The

group also sought to develop their ability to screen out stereotyped and biased material and to teach those skills to their students.

### **Teacher expectations**

Quite unlike some of his colleagues, who emphasized nurturing for low-achieving students and academics for high-achievers, Mayao expected all his students to perform well academically and to conduct themselves appropriately. He said, “Students who fall behind may frustrate you somewhat, but when teachers encourage them to learn and make things more fun to learn, they show you a lot more than you expected.” He believed that the poor academic performance of many students, especially Indigenous students at Long-So, resulted from teachers’ low expectations and their inability to recognize students’ strengths.

I used to be seen as learning disabled when I first came to a predominantly Han school. Special education was what they thought I needed. When my peers were given a ton of tests, my teachers would leave me alone. I was pretty happy at that time [he laughs]. Only one teacher saw my potential and wouldn’t give up on me. By the time I reached the sixth grade, my grades surprised many people.

Therefore, I always believe that children have their own strengths. I know they can learn. What I do is to teach them things that they are already familiar with, especially in my science class.

Mayao recognized that higher expectations from teachers can make a difference. Some students had achieved great success in school because of teachers who uncovered their potential rather than their weaknesses. Mayao realized that that was especially true of

most Indigenous students, and he made extra effort to help them by “building a more caring relationship between teachers and their Indigenous students.”

**“We are family”**

“I talk to my Indigenous students more about their families,” Mayao told me. Before ever meeting students’ parents, he already had a good picture of what was going on in the families. Indigenous parents were more at ease talking to Mayao. Whatever the issues that brought them to discussions at school, they preferred that Mayao be present at the meetings. Other colleagues also saw him as a bridge between the school and Indigenous families.

I think we see each other as brothers and sisters. Although I can speak only a little Amis, you can recognize the trust between us. That’s why I treat Indigenous kids more like my own children. My background makes me more sensitive to students’ background, because I realize how difficult it is for an Indigenous student to adjust into a mainstream class. Other teachers may not think it’s important, but I would make some changes when I have Indigenous students in my class.

Mayao maintained a caring relationship with his students by validating and welcoming their knowledge. Students in his class could offer suggestions, such as how to change an assignment or carry out a different activity, and Mayao often responded by implementing their suggestions. During one of my observations, when the students were using microscopes to observe the structure of an algae cell, he asked an Indigenous student what he was drawing. The student answered, “I paint different parts of a cell in different colors.” Mayao thought that was a remarkable way to make the information stand out, so

he immediately had everyone drawing alga cells, as seen through a microscope. The innovative student proudly sat up and held out his paper to provide an example for the class.

### Summary

Mayao, a descendent of the Amis group, was the director of Long-So Elementary School in Tao-Yuan County. His family moved to Tai-Tung City in 1982, when he was twelve years old. Most of his schooling was in Han-dominant urban schools, where he learned to compete with his Han peers, and prepared to be a teacher. As a leader of the Indigenous Student Club in college, he had sharpened his racial identity and awareness.

Mayao's story is the evolution of his cultural identity and the ways that schools hindered the process. In our interviews he also described his relationships with teachers and peers, which both hindered and promoted his self-identification as an Amis. For a long time he had suppressed his cultural identity. In a Han-dominant school, he struggled socially and emotionally to "become as Han as possible," because he did not want people to know his cultural background. He wanted to stay at the head of his class because many people equate low academic achievement with Indigenous people.

In college Mayao became aware of his cultural identity and organized the Indigenous Students Club. He learned the Amis culture and language, but he struggled with cultural acceptance. He had to deal not only with his Han friends about his identity, but also with the people in the Indigenous community.

Mayao's experiences as a student and teacher led him to conclude that the level of government support for Indigenous education is insufficient. He proposed the

development of programs and curricula to help urban Indigenous students. Also, he believed that Indigenous students had been racially discriminated against and steered into non-academic tracks in school. Mayao was strongly confident about Indigenous students' academic ability and denied any negative stereotype that Indigenous students were less intelligent or intellectually lazy.

Mayao believed that many Indigenous students had taken to heart their teachers' negative opinions about them. It seemed that most teachers did not understand the inner world of Indigenous students, and viewed them as slow learners. Mayao's story demonstrated that Indigenous students were as academically capable as their Han peers. To help Indigenous students learn, their teachers, Mayao urged, must provide a safe and non-threatening learning environment for them.

Mayao's teaching philosophy was shaped, in part, by his own experiences in school. Some memorable teachers, who expected him to succeed, inspired his high academic achievement. As an Indigenous teacher, Mayao realized that higher expectations from teachers could make a positive difference in the lives of Indigenous students. Indigenous students could find more success in their schooling if teachers overtly expected them to succeed and emphasized students' potential rather than their deficiencies. Following that principal, Mayao maintained a caring, helpful relationship with Indigenous students who fell behind in class.

## CHAPTER 7

### Saoma

#### Personal background, schooling, and becoming a teacher

Saoma, a mother of four, was born in 1951 to an Amis family in Tai-Tung County. She had been living in Jan-Hua County, western Taiwan, for about 15 years. At the time of our interview, she was teaching Amis, a native language, at five different schools, ranging from elementary school to high school. This chapter reports Saoma's journey as a student and a teacher and her beliefs about teaching Indigenous students.

#### **Schooling: Speaking two languages at home and school**

From what Saoma remembered, her grandparents were primarily responsible for raising her and her two siblings. Her grandfather loved her so much that he provided her with everything she wanted, except one thing—a formal education. He was afraid that Han teachers would treat her badly, just as he used to be beaten frequently in school when he could not act and speak *properly* like his Han peers. Saoma's grandfather told her stories about how *Bai Lang* (bad people) deceptively and brutally took land and money from the Amis people. Saoma was scared when she was told that she had to go to school. In fact, it took a while for her to settle in at school. It was not until she entered the third grade that she adjusted to the school environment. She recalled her early school experiences:

Everyone was supposed to go to school. Since my grandfather had told us all that about *Bai Lang* [Han people], you know, I felt really isolated and really alienated

and really alone in school. My accent was so heavy that I was afraid to speak to anyone. At first, I was frightened.... Later, I was getting used to the school, and having friends around. When I went to the third grade, I became serious about my schoolwork and made more friends.

Saoma said that she tried hard to fit in at school. Not having much opportunity to speak Mandarin at home, she realized that people would make fun of her accent. Consequently, she decided to get rid of the accent by “reading the newspaper every day” aloud to her cousin, Wana, who spoke Mandarin without an accent. Her cousin would then correct her as she read. Saoma believed that speaking Mandarin without an Amis accent would make her school life easier because other Chinese dialects, such as Min-Nan, Ha-Ka, and Indigenous languages were prohibited at school.

One of Saoma’s more vivid school experiences was the banning of the Amis language in school. She told me that anyone who spoke a Chinese dialect in school was punished. Saoma’s grandparents did not know Mandarin and never spoke a language other than Amis. Hence, Saoma had to speak one language at school and another language at home. Although frustrated, she had to “get used to it.”

I went to school when I was seven years old. I was quiet and did what I was supposed to do. The only thing that you couldn’t do was to speak Amis. That’s about it. Not even when you were alone with other Amis because they sort of had spies all over, girls that participated in that, and if you got caught talking Amis, they would report you. So we spoke Amis at home only.

Speaking Amis in school used to be “shameful,” according to Saoma. “Even now, Indigenous people are reluctant to speak their native language in public,” she reported.

As a native-language teacher, Saoma wanted to erase that practice. She believed that speaking her mother tongue was the first step in “identifying who we are” and making a difference in our society.

### **Back to school**

Upon graduation from elementary school, Saoma was asked by her uncles to help support their large family; so, she soon found herself in a factory in her hometown. The factory employed many Indigenous girls of her age. Most of them had not finished their primary education. Saoma worked there for three years until, one day, an uncle took her to Tai-Chung City for better wages. Saoma then worked in a textile factory for ten years. There, also, she met Luma, whom she married two years later. Soon thereafter, they had their first child.

Both Saoma and Luma had finished only their elementary education. Therefore, when their daughter found schoolwork difficult, “we really couldn’t do much about it.” Saoma told me that she really wanted to go back to school and learn. She thought about taking courses at night school, but the family’s budget made that impossible. To Saoma, going back to school was a dream. Her husband helped her make the dream come true.

I had only finished my primary education. The math in high school was really a problem for me when my child brought it to me for help. We were not rich, but Luma decided to pay for my education at night school anyway. He did a great deal for me—for this family, really. When I finished high school, he even encouraged me to advance to college.... I owe him a lot.

Taking classes at night school was an extraordinary experience for Saoma. She told me, “When you are ready for something, you can connect to it quickly.” She wanted to learn

as much as she could. Then she became involved in church work. Being able to speak both Amis and Mandarin effortlessly, Saoma was called upon to help with Bible instruction in a church in which most of the Indigenous members were unable to read or write. She also taught the Amis language to the children after church services. She was amazed by the lack of Amis language skills among the children. So, when her stepsister asked whether she wanted to get an Indigenous-language Certificate for teaching in schools, she knew she had received her calling.

### **Becoming a teacher: From church to classroom**

Able to speak Amis fluently, Saoma was granted an Indigenous-language Certificate by the Committee of Indigenous People Affairs (CIPA) in 1998. The Indigenous Education Act (See appendices B and C), which was passed in that same year, enabled schools to create programs for teaching Indigenous students. Indigenous personnel with Indigenous-Language Certificates could be employed by schools as Indigenous-language teachers. That was the first effort ever initiated by the Taiwan government to preserve its Indigenous languages. Saoma applied to several schools and was duly accepted.

Saoma was very committed to Indigenous culture and language. In fact, through this research study I have learned a great deal about Amis culture from her. She told me that she worked very hard to help students learn Amis, but she also realized that “teaching is a complex and demanding task that requires a theoretical and practical foundation to teach properly.” Saoma understood that teachers with formal teacher preparation “have knowledge and skills that a good teacher is supposed to have.” When I asked if she worried about lacking that knowledge and skill, she answered:

The reason I can teach language is that I was raised in a traditional Amis home. People around me spoke Amis. When I grew up, I taught Amis in church and also learned English in church. That can help me in writing Amis.... I have been speaking Amis all my life. I know I did not have the formal education to be a *teacher*, but I also realized that my experience and zeal for teaching the Amis language would make up for that lack.

Realizing that Indigenous languages were not being used in many Amis families, Saoma volunteered to teach young children long before she became a certified Indigenous-language teacher. At church she taught Bible stories in Amis many urban Indigenous children. Although Saoma had lived in the city for most of her life, she had never forgotten her Amis identity and “why God had brought me here.” The church experience was significant to many aspects of her life. The church members were mainly Indigenous peoples who had come to the city over the years. To them—working in risky and poor-paying jobs and finding themselves alienated and marginalized in the city—the church represented a culture that was somewhat familiar and fundamental to them. It became a place where they could express themselves. It also allowed Saoma to contribute to her own children’s education and to develop a sense of purpose. The experience prompted her to choose teaching as a vocation:

I guess I kind of realized that this was a chance to educate Amis children in a way that would benefit them. And I don't think they had had that chance before, just as I lacked that chance. So I guess that my greatest goal is to educate Indigenous children about themselves through their own language.

Saoma believed that Indigenous teachers could have a positive impact on Indigenous students' education and lives. There is evidence in the research that an Indigenous student, to be successful, must have a caring adult during her adolescence (Chen, 1998; Fu, 1999). It does not necessarily have to be a parent. Often a teacher can provide the necessary support, especially one who has a background similar to that of the students.

As a student, Saoma had experienced frustration and had difficulty adjusting in a Han dominant school. She worked very hard to improve her Mandarin, but she never forgot her cultural identity. She came to believe that, for the young Indigenous generation, being able to speak an Indigenous language was a very important part of developing their identity and self-esteem. Saoma was later involved in church service and taught Amis to Indigenous children. That experience compelled her to become a teacher and to help more Indigenous students in schools.

### **Factors that influence the education of Indigenous students**

Saoma pointed out a number of factors that impaired the education of Indigenous students. First, she believed that discrimination still existed in schools, where Indigenous students were commonly considered 'less intelligent.' Second, teachers were not adequately prepared to teach Indigenous students. Third, Indigenous content was absent in schools' curricula. Fourth, there was resistance from students, administrators, and parents.

#### **Discrimination: "They made me think I was a retard!"**

Like many Indigenous children in Taiwan, Saoma suffered discrimination at school. It was painful for her to recall and share the pain:

There were some Han Chinese kids in my class. Sometimes they would call me “Dumb! Mute Whana!” [barbarian in Taiwanese] because I didn’t speak their language [Taiwanese]. They didn’t play with Indigenous kids. We were pretty isolated at the time. I was ridiculed by these Han Chinese students as “low and stupid.”

Saoma told me that those experiences “made me think I was a retard!” They hurt her in many ways, especially in her school work.

Most of the Indigenous students in my class were far behind the Han Chinese students. I could feel that teachers were favoring the Han kids. Indigenous kids received corporal punishment more often than the Han Chinese students.

Sometimes I would skip the class of a teacher who disliked us. I surely did want to catch up with those students but it just didn’t work.

Saoma realized that many of her current Indigenous students had been through the same ordeal. She made every effort to protect her Indigenous students’ feelings. She said, “I know that feeling, and I’ll be very careful not to hurt these kids in the same way.” Every time she entered class and looked at the children, the first thing that came to her mind was “to make them think they can learn and that they can learn much better than they think.”

After 1998, when Saoma was awarded Indigenous-language Certificate and was recruited as an Amis-language teacher, she taught at several schools in Taipei County, ranging from junior high to elementary school. Taipei County, the largest county in Taiwan and the county most heavily populated by urban Indigenous people, was much in need of her services.

**“They need teachers like me”**

When asked about how Indigenous students were taught, Saoma promptly replied that growing up she had never met an Indigenous teacher. She felt that “you were too small to think about this... As you were growing up, you’d ask yourself such questions as ‘where is the Indigenous teacher?’” Being an ethnic-minority teacher in an urban school, she felt responsible for helping Indigenous children. She believed that the students needed teachers who “better understand their culture and learning needs.” She believed that she could help those students use their mother tongue—the “first and most important step” to increasing their self-esteem. One of the difficulties she confronted, as did many other native-language teachers, was poor training.

The fact is that we did not receive proper training to be classroom teachers. We passed the native-language test, and then we went on to teach. All we got was a three-day seminar, at which some college professors lectured about teaching techniques, classroom management, and things like that. From what I heard, some quit teaching because they could not handle classroom management. Although Indigenous students in urban schools comprised a small minority, she believed that Indigenous teachers “have to be placed in classrooms to help these Indigenous kids.” She pointed out that the number of Indigenous teachers in urban schools was even smaller when she began her teaching career.

Saoma claimed that teachers played a significant role in the education of Indigenous children. She believed that an innovative, resourceful, and dedicated teacher could make use of many and varied materials to minimize classroom frustration and to

help the children “identify” and adjust during the learning process. She believed that she had the necessary ability to help them.

### **Students’ attitudes toward Indigenous language**

Saoma felt that it was her duty to help Indigenous children learn their native language, believing that good preparation is essential to the success of Indigenous students in city schools. She stressed that point because urban schools were dominated by Han culture, and Mandarin is the only acceptable language spoken at school. She worried especially about the loss of the Amis language when she realized the hesitancy of many Indigenous students to learn their native language.

I have to tell them that it’s true, though, from academic year 2006 onward, everyone who takes the entrance examination for high school or college will have to pass the native-language examination so that their acceptance score will be lowered by 25%. This would probably make them take the class seriously. This would work for the high school students.

Saoma pointed out that there was a big gap in teacher quality between city schools and rural schools. Indigenous students in rural areas receive “second-class educational resources.” For those who lived in the city, however, the mainstream culture helped keep them from learning their native tongue. Saoma felt that learning one’s native language was the first step toward learning one’s self. To motivate her Indigenous students she told them about the upcoming change in the affirmative-action policy: they would need to be able to speak their native language to qualify for Indigenous bonus points on their entrance examinations for high school and college.

**Curriculum: “Making it more relevant”**

Saoma observed that students would be more likely to learn and with better understanding if their learning materials were connected to their daily lives. She did not limit her teaching aids to materials provided by the school. In preparing for her classes, she thoroughly researched anything related to Amis culture. In the summer of 2002, she rented a pick-up truck and drove all the way to her home village. She returned with the truck full of relics, many covered with thick dust from her grandparents’ storage areas. Her students were fascinated by her treasures. She said, “They could never imagine their ancestors’ lives, and now they are seeing what they could only wonder about before.” Saoma wanted to connect the students with the history their ancestors had made. She wanted the students to appreciate the artifacts and to learn from them:

I came to realize that the information about the Amis culture in school texts was really scarce. So I went back to my hometown, digging in my uncles’ storehouses. Thank God, they didn’t throw out many treasures—stuff that our ancestors used in their daily lives—though my uncles thought they were useless. It turned out to be the best way for me to bring my Indigenous students back to the Amis world. My students really liked it.

Saoma compensated for the fact that the school curriculum did not include Indigenous cultures. She believed, “Most teachers do not know about Indigenous cultures, or, even worse, mistakenly deliver stereotypical material to their students.” Instead of seeking the history in school texts, she returned to her home village to recreate a meaningful connection for her Indigenous students.

### **Confronting the marginalization of Indigenous language**

Saoma came to realize that she would have to work hard to persuade schools to offer native-language classes. As a native-language teacher, she knew that her teaching and curriculum had to meet the standards set for every school. She visited each school administrator and inquired about available teaching materials for her class. Native-language classes were not mandatory; therefore, schools had limited facilities and resources, and they were often reluctant to set up such classes for the small number of Indigenous children expected to attend.

I don't think the schools really care about Indigenous languages. In three of the schools where I teach, my class is not scheduled on a regular basis, you know.

That would make me think the Indigenous students are not important. Min-Nan [a Chinese dialect] is taught in every class, whether the students are Taiwanese or not. They assume that every student needs to learn Min-Nan. That's not true.

Saoma came to realize that Indigenous language was not considered as the priority as she thought it should. She seized every opportunity to chat with other dialect teachers who had more teaching experience than she. It seemed to her that Taiwanese-dialect teachers received more resources and support than she did.

I happened to talk to a Chinese dialect teacher who was carrying a lot of teaching materials. I was told that the school would prepare those teaching supplies and materials for the teachers. But I didn't get any. I went to the dean's office, and he told me that since the number of Indigenous students was so small, we lacked the budget to buy the extracurricular materials for them. He promised me he'd bring this issue up with the principal to see what could be done next semester. I am

now beginning to see that what is going on in these schools is resistance.

Needless to say, I have felt very frustrated and at times quite annoyed with the administrators.

Part of the difficulty of being a native-language teacher in a big city school was the “frustration factor.” Saoma pointed out, “The assimilation policy has destroyed Indigenous cultures and languages.” She encountered resistance not only from school administrators who had no experience with supporting native-language classes, but also from her Indigenous students. Despite those obstacles, Saoma vowed to continued her mission

**Family involvement: “I can’t do it alone”**

Saoma believed that family involvement was a crucial factor affecting the education of her Indigenous students. From many years of teaching the Bible and the Amis language in church, Saoma had many ideas about how to teach Indigenous languages and how to gain support from the parents. Many administrators said Saoma was self-confident and “well prepared.” Saoma believed that her enthusiasm for helping others stemmed from serving her fellow church members.

I think the church experience helped me a lot. Different ages have different ways of learning. The teaching in the church goes pretty smoothly. The situation at school is somewhat different. One of the things is that people who live in the city don’t speak their native tongue at home. And I don’t think the one or two hours a week of practicing native language in the class can really improve their ability to speak Amis. The parents must realize they have responsibilities too.

As Saoma told me, many Indigenous parents in the city did not speak their native tongue. Saoma struggled with ways to encourage parents' active involvement in their children's language learning at home. She regarded language learning as dynamic and engaging. She wanted to try something new—a practice program for children and families, which she deeply believed in but had never attempted.

I don't think I can teach these children without their parents' help. Since many of these kids don't speak any native language, I can only teach the easiest and simplest phrases. I listened to other teachers, looked at my professors and at the paperwork they gave me, and I picked it up from different people. This is what I can do. I am doing my part, and hopefully, they can do theirs.

Saoma believed that neither she alone nor schools in general could save the Indigenous language; the communities and homes must also play a part. Her contribution to the mission was partly realized by developing language curricula where none had existed before and by integrating high-interest material, such as historical information on famous Amis warriors.

### **Beliefs about the learning of Indigenous students**

When she discussed the education of her Indigenous students, Saoma stated that she had confronted many obstacles. For example, it was difficult for her to connect her teaching materials with her students' life experiences, because her Indigenous students had very limited knowledge about their own cultures. She also pointed out that students had little motivation for learning their native language because many of them considered

it a burden. Moreover, she believed that gender roles in Amis society fostered different attitudes toward school work.

### **Urban Aborigines: Living in another world**

With her intimate knowledge of Indigenous students, Saoma raised concerns about the limited life experiences of those who were transplanted into urban areas. Some had never visited their home villages. Many had spent most of their lives in the city without a chance to speak their native tongue. Throughout her native-language teaching career, Saoma drove to tribal villages and photographed people, houses, and rituals. The more involved she became, the more she realized the separation between the city and the tribal village. It was like presenting “another world” every time she showed the photographs to her students.

These photos and pictures brought me back to my childhood. They aroused many memories, good and bad, that made me think more about where I’m from. The kids I taught have lived in the city too long to understand life in an Indigenous village. Sometimes they would ask questions: “What are they eating? Why are they wearing that? Why do they have tattoos on their faces?” They seemed interested but couldn’t connect to the culture. They’re ignorant, and that’s what I’m worried about.

Saoma sought to make connections between the students’ city life and their Indigenous culture. She wanted the students to realize their origins and to appreciate the Indigenous culture they were supposed to be familiar with.

**“They don’t find a reason to learn their native language”**

The learning of Indigenous students is the major concern of many researchers in Taiwan (Shieh, 1994; Shiu, 1987; Sung, 1998; Tang, 1998); however, as Saoma argued, the learning experience of *urban* Indigenous students has not received much attention. The Amis-language speaking abilities of Saoma’s students, who ranged in age from seven to seventeen years, were widely diverse. The diversity posed a particular challenge for her, especially “when you found yourself in a class full of teenagers.” Saoma reflected on her students’ approaches to learning native languages:

I love to teach in elementary school because there’s much more fun than in high school. Younger kids are easier to get along with, and they like to be with teachers. They love the stories I told and show more interest in what I gave them. The learning of native language in high school is more passive.... They might think it’s irrelevant, and boring.... They don’t find a reason to learn their native language.

Like most native-language teachers, Saoma confronted formidable obstacles. The possibility of language loss was related to other issues as well: the dynamics of language evolution, dialectical differences, and development of a common orthography of the language. One of Saoma's frustrations was that students would "forget what I've taught as soon as the class is over. I have to get them into intensive practice." She realized that many students considered native language a burden because English and Mandarin were more academically necessary in school.

### **Gender differences: A cultural tradition**

Saoma's view of gender roles was rooted in her cultural traditions. At the same time, she noted that Amis boys and girls participated in different degrees. Indigenous schoolgirls were gentle and liked academic pursuits. Many of the boys did not take native-language class seriously. To keep them on track she would occasionally give a quiz. Some of the boys turned in test papers bearing only their names. "They don't care, because they know the score won't appear on their report cards. They always came to class with toys and balls, not books." She admitted that she praised girls considerably more than boys. "In Amis society," Saoma explained, "girls are taught to be obedient and gentle. We take upon ourselves all the domestic work."

It might have something to do with our culture. In olden times Amis men took all the heavy work in the tribe, building the houses, reaping the rice, hunting, etc. The girls stayed home, taking care of babies, preparing food, and things like that. This is the way we lived. I believe most of the Amis families have experienced that life.

Saoma suggested that gender differences have cultural origins. In Amis society, there were certain role expectations for both genders, and those expectations have passed from generation to generation. She believed that the differences between females and males were important because they were rooted in functional responsibilities “to support the survival of their tribes.”

Since many of her Indigenous students had rather limited knowledge about their own cultures, Saoma had to present more materials that might encourage them to learn. Moreover, she found it difficult to motivate her Indigenous students to learn Amis because many of them considered it as a burden. It was especially difficult to involve the boys. She recognized the attitude differences between Indigenous girls and boys. She believed that gender differences of Indigenous students emanated from their cultural traditions.

### **Beliefs about teaching Indigenous students**

According to Saoma, in order to teach Indigenous students, a teacher should be able to (1) understand students’ life experiences; (2) critically examine school texts and deliver the accurate, and life-related information to students; and (3) show a caring attitude to students.

#### **“I know what’s going on” in their lives**

Saoma believed that she could teach Indigenous students effectively because she shared a common background with them. She said, “A teacher should also be super comprehensive to understand what's going on in the students’ world.” Since most of her native-language classes were composed of Indigenous students who had experienced

cultural conflict in schools, she believed that she was able to understand their frustrations and aggravations:

By now, I have lived in the city for more than twenty years, and I have met many Indigenous people who have trouble with the school system. I know what's going on because I raised my three children in the city. I have to figure out how I am going to help my kids to adjust to the Han-dominant school system. It's been a long journey, and now is the time to help others who may need what I did. Being a teacher helps me accomplish this job.

Saoma's experiences convinced her that many Indigenous students had difficulty fitting in at schools dominated by Han Chinese culture. She knew what they were going through, and her empathy created a rapport with them.

### **Teaching the truth**

Saoma believed that a teacher must examine school texts critically and make whatever adjustments were needed to make them meaningful to Indigenous children. She came to doubt that schools were ready to commit to Indigenous-language classes. No teacher's guide was given to her when she began teaching her native-language class. She was virtually on her own because few schools, if any, had ever created such a program. In her only handbook of Indigenous culture she found a great deal of inaccurate information. She was cautious about presenting such material to her class.

I probably ended up developing some sort of textbook for teaching native language [she laughs], you know. The information was so scarce. I spent most of my time looking for items that could help with my teaching. But many of the books or documents were written by Han Chinese, and I kind of disagreed with

some of the material. I have to check with elders in tribes to make sure the information I deliver is correct.

Knowing that school administrators were unable to provide her with the needed help, Saoma turned to searching out useful information and materials from any place and any one she considered a likely source. Soon, the documents and materials were piling up, and the evidence convinced her that many curriculum modifications were necessary to accommodate her Indigenous students.

### **Teaching philosophy: “Teaching things around them”**

A major principle in Saoma’s philosophy, one that she mentioned repeatedly, was that a teacher needed to acknowledge the learning and experiences that students brought to the classroom—built-in knowledge that helped them move ahead as far as they could, and “be thrilled that they have come to that place in my teaching.” Saoma asked her students to talk about their experiences in their home villages. Once, some recalled traditional foods they used to eat, such as glutinous rice, salt pork, and edible wild herbs. For the next class, Saoma managed to bring some samples for tasting:

That was hard! No one makes *hagha* [glutinous rice] and *silau* [salt pork], so I had to go back to my aunts, asking them to make these foods. Students remember things they can touch and taste, so I started by teaching them the names of many Amis traditional foods. They might take these names back to their homes, and their parents or grandparents might explain more to them. I think my job is to show them how Amis ancestors lived.

Instead of simply having students to recite their vocabulary, Saoma saw her main role as supporting and facilitating the students in their own education. When she told students

Amis myths, she came up with ideas for role-playing, and she would leave the major jobs to students, from character selection to playwriting. She believed that was the best way to learn Amis.

I don't know where the idea came from; it just popped up. I found students were so excited and seriously making things happen. They wrote the play in Chinese; then I translated it into Amis. They were able to speak whole sentences, not just single words in Amis.

Saoma believed that she made her classes more interesting and life-related. She believed that students were motivated to learn when they realized they could make contributions to the class. She explained, "This is not only motivating them to learn Amis, but also increasing their self-esteem."

### **Other mothering**

In addition to teaching the Amis language, Saoma supported her students by acting like "another mother," who advocated for her students and took some responsibility for their care. For example, when she learned that some families had financial difficulties, she told her Indigenous students about an opportunity to receive scholarships from the county government. She helped some obtain information, and she told them to remind their parents about the application deadlines. She even made telephone calls to the parents to inform them of the opportunities.

I love kids.... I know what it was like growing up as an Indigenous student in a predominantly Han school system, and I just wanted to be able, not to help all children but to let the little Indigenous kids know that I knew how they felt... and what [they] were going through.

Saoma supported her students by giving them opportunities to share their thoughts. That idea grew out of her language lessons, as students made connections to their own lives. Sometimes, she would modify her lesson plan so that Indigenous students could discuss a particular event, such as the harvest ceremony, that had taken place in their home village. One morning during story telling, some of her students shared their memories about ceremonies in their home towns, and other students were excited about the coming harvest ritual. Saoma confirmed the importance of the traditional ritual in Amis society.

Saoma had a variety of ways to connect with her students. Her caring attitude, shown through listening and story telling, made her popular with *all* students. Though I did not hear her students recounting stories about their experiences with the traditional rituals, she assured me in her interviews that her students do share such stories in her classroom.

### **Summary**

Saoma's journey of becoming a teacher was not an easy one, nor was it as accelerated one. It was one of many challenges. Saoma believed that, in her retrospection, she was determined to teach the Amis language as compensation for being forbidden to speak her mother language when she was a school girl. She later witnessed the near extinction of Indigenous languages among the new Indigenous generations, especially in cities. Teaching Amis in church made her realize that she could make a difference in school, where few Indigenous students were taught by teachers with a similar cultural background and with whom they could relate.

Saoma experienced racial discrimination in her early schooling. She was discouraged from speaking Amis in school. Only after leaving school did she begin to help young Indigenous children learn Amis, and she decided to become a teacher. She believed that, through her Indigenous-language teaching, her Indigenous students became proud of who they were. As a native-language teacher, she confirmed that learning one's mother tongue was a crucial turning point in increasing Indigenous students' self-esteem. She believed that city schools needed more Indigenous-language teachers to fulfill Indigenous students' needs. She put her beliefs into action by modifying the curriculum and by teaching in ways that Indigenous students understood.

Saoma encountered various difficulties as an Indigenous-language teacher. One of the most disturbing was when students told her their native language was a burden—not worth the effort—and that English and Mandarin were more valuable academically. She modified her teaching by connecting the curriculum to her students' life experiences, so that the students could comprehend and appreciate what they were learning. Creating a safe, non-threatening learning environment was, Saoma stressed, the most important responsibility of teachers of Indigenous students.

To teach Indigenous students effectively, Saoma believed that teachers needed to acknowledge their students' cultures and experiences. By inviting her Indigenous students to share their experiences from their home villages and by creating a caring relationship with her students, Saoma discovered cultural connections through which the learning process could be channeled.

## CHAPTER 8

### Ting-Ting

#### Personal background, schooling and becoming a teacher

Ting-Ting, a third-grade teacher at Din-Pu Elementary School, was born in Chia-Yi County, southwest Taiwan, in 1980. Her grandparents were farmers. Farming was the only economic lifeline for Ting-Ting's extended family of over forty people. When farming could not feed the whole family, her parents moved from Chia-Yi County to Kao-Hsiung City when she was eight years old. She recalled, "Raising six children was not an easy task in the city, but my parents took pleasure in doing so." Her mother was the pillar of the family:

My mother was a strong woman. She devoted her whole life to her family. My parents found jobs in a factory, with a very low wage. We were in a distressed situation for the early years in Kao-Hsiung.... She taught me all the crafts a "proper woman of the house" should know. By the time I was thirteen she was motivating me to cut patterns and sew my own clothes.... I think the biggest lesson my Mom taught me was discipline—along with a core set of family beliefs, values, and morals, plus a healthy dose of positive attitude. Discipline rounded out the role model that was my Mom.

Ting-Ting believed that her mother set a great example for her children. Ting-Ting told me, "She was never desperate or depressed, because she always knew that if she tried her best, everything else that followed was for the best."

Upon graduating from junior high school, Ting-Ting's older brothers and sisters went to work to help with her family's finances. Only Ting-Ting made it to college, because her parents could not afford to send more of their children. Ting-Ting's parents strongly supported her education, hoping that she could have a better life by improving her education. She said:

My parents knew that the further I went in school, the better life I'd have. They had to struggle to get where they are today. They have to struggle to make themselves comfortable. Going to school is like going to a place where one can get a chance to live on a higher level. I knew my parents would always be there for me.... Although they might not know school subjects or be able to help me with my schoolwork, they always told me that I needed to work hard to be successful.

Ting-Ting's father told her that he was sorry he was unable to help all his children with their education. His other five children worked as laborers right after graduating from junior high school. Ting-Ting told me that she would not have been able to study in college without the financial help of all her brothers and sisters. She promised her family that she would study diligently and work hard to repay them.

**Teaching: "A perfect job for a girl"**

Ting-Ting had wanted to be a teacher since early childhood. Her perfect academic record in junior high school earned her a scholarship to an elite senior high school for women in Kao-Hsiung. She studied even harder to maintain her scholarship for three successive years. She remembered, "I worked so hard because my family needed money." Implicit in this statement was the belief that success in school would

bring her a job with a good income. While all the other seniors in high school pondered their futures in college, Ting-Ting's father made the final decision for her. She recalled, "He said that being a teacher is the best career for a girl." Although some other possibilities crossed her mind, she was determined to study in a teachers college. For the most part, she believed that becoming a teacher was the right decision. She remembered:

I had wanted to become a teacher since I was in the second grade. I earned good grades, so teachers liked me. I was always given extra responsibility in class.... I chose a teaching career for a number of reasons, I think. One was my father, of course. And there were also some teachers I admired. They were role models, and I thought highly of them. I was always away from my family during the last couple of years of high school and college. Also, during that time some of the teachers provided me with life-style models. I also wanted a profession where I could do a variety of things: summers off, vacations, time to think.... I like the lifestyle it [teaching] allows. I have always liked people and kids. I like to talk to kids.

Ting-Ting's father wanted her to go to teachers college because she did not have to pay tuition at teachers college and he said, "You don't have to worry about finding a job." Her whole family was excited about her getting admitted to Tai-Nan Teachers College. She told me, "I think my father was right, I like teaching." Ting-Ting recalled the first day she went to the registration office, looking at the courses she was going to take. She believed that she could become like those teachers whom she had admired during her student years.

**Teacher preparation**

Talking about her teacher-preparation experiences, Ting-Ting told me that the training she received from college did not prepare her well for her first year of teaching. Although she had studied very hard, taking extra credits and the toughest courses in the teacher preparation program, she argued that she learned to teach by observing her experienced colleagues in her first year of teaching. In the second year she found her way by being with her students.

The training that I received certainly didn't prepare me for the actual classroom experience, because when I went into the school, the first month I spent preparing the kids to interact socially with each other and with people with whom they came in contact and spent little time on academics.... My colleagues also gave me a lot of ideas and advice. I wanted to create a classroom that would encourage my students to learn. Today, my students see my class as a family, and you'll see the learning in my class is very animated.

Rather than being able to rely upon what she had learned in her teacher education program, Ting-Ting realized that the lessons she learned from her colleagues and from her own experiences were more useful for her teaching.

**Working hard as a family value**

Ting-Ting believed in working hard, and was always looking for challenges. She was selected as an outstanding teacher in Din-Pu Elementary School for the year 2003. She was the youngest teacher ever nominated for that honor. She said, "I would do my best if I had to do something." That was the motto that inspired her in her schooling. Ting-Ting told me that, although her parents were not formally educated, "they placed a

great expectation on me and believed education was the only way of getting out of poverty.” All the members of her family were hard workers who did not believe in taking days off.

I wasn't sure about how I got nominated. There were many outstanding teachers in school. I have learned a lot from them. I think I will never stop learning and trying new ideas about teaching. And I am passionate about it.... I work with a group of creative teachers. I volunteered to try out new ideas in my class and had my colleagues observe. We discussed, critiqued, and came up with ideas. I really think that everyone can succeed if they do their best.

Ting-Ting believed that everyone could succeed “if you set high expectations and standards for yourself.” She told me that she was always looking for a challenge, and that by doing so she became more satisfied about her own life.

You are the only one who can turn yourself into what you want to be—even if you don't know what that is. You'll want more for yourself than just achieving a prestigious degree or acing a difficult job interview. You'll want to participate in making your life as artful and fulfilling as you can through learning, creating, belonging, and contributing—and by loving the whole process.

Ting-Ting received her first recognition for teaching at Din-Pu. It was another successful venture, encouraging her to accept new challenges in the future.

Ting-Ting was determined to be a teacher because of her father's expectations and because some of her outstanding teachers were her role models in her early schooling—not just because teaching was a highly respectable career, but also because it had a promising future “for a girl.” She set a goal: to pursue perfection in her life. To equip

herself with everything a *good* teacher must have, she studied hard, taking the most demanding courses in teachers college. However, the training she received in her teacher education program did not prepare her for her first year of teaching, during which she gained much more support, experience, and recognition.

### **Perspectives on the education of Indigenous students**

Ting-Ting talked about some of her personal relationships with Indigenous students. She believed that those experiences had great impact on the education of her Indigenous students. Also significant was her involvement with the establishment of Indigenous Resource Center at Din-Pu Elementary School. In addition, she had to cope with the absence of Indigenous culture in the school curriculum, making it difficult for Indigenous students to succeed in school. Moreover, she argued that educational affirmative action did nothing but demonstrate that Indigenous students are less intelligent than their Han Chinese peers.

#### **Indigenous Resource Center**

The Din-Pu Elementary School, in southern Taipei County, where Ting-Ting taught, had about two thousand pupils, about 150 of whom were from Indigenous families. Because of the large number of Indigenous students in the district, the government directed Din-Pu to create an Indigenous Resource Center, where all students could learn about Indigenous cultures and crafts. The Center opened in 2000 to pay tribute to the Din-Pu community's Indigenous populations.

When Mrs. Chen, the principal of Din-Pu, led me through the Center, I asked if anyone involved in the program might be willing to participate in my study. She

recommended Ting-Ting. I believed that it was important to understand the perspectives of teachers at Din-Pu, which had more Indigenous resources than other schools in the district. I assumed that teachers at Din-Pu might have different perspectives from those whose schools did not have an Indigenous Resource Center. Ting-Ting told me that her school had more Indigenous students than neighboring schools, and that she had a few Indigenous students in her own class. Ting-Ting expressed her views on the Indigenous Resource Center:

I think students should come often because there is an Indigenous group around here, and they can learn in the Center about Indigenous cultures and the way they live. Many of the students might not have otherwise seen an Indigenous craft or understood their customs.

Ting-Ting believed that the Center helped all students understand other people's cultures. She said, "I also got the chance to have a close look at Indigenous culture when I helped with the decorations." She told me that the Center was especially useful for urban Indigenous students who, otherwise, might not have the opportunity to understand their own cultures.

### **Ting-Ting's understanding of Indigenous families**

Ting-Ting considered the family a significant hindrance in the education of Indigenous students. She was a neighbor of an Indigenous family on Fifth Street, where she had moved a few months earlier. By talking with a few of the Indigenous parents, she learned that many had left their tribal villages for better-paying jobs in the city. Some came to the city together but were unable to spend enough time with their children because of the demands of their jobs. Ting-Ting told me, "Sometimes the Indigenous

students came to school with dirty clothes and did not have meal money.” As a result, she sometimes bought food for her Indigenous students. From her visits to Indigenous villages and schools, where many children were tended by their elderly grandparents and lived in poverty, she realized that Indigenous families faced many serious problems both in their villages and in the city.

I think they [urban and tribal Indigenous people] have the same problems: high unemployment, poverty, and alcoholism. An Indigenous parent came to school one morning because his child had recently beat up another student in school. I tried to explain the facts, but the father was too drunk to understand. He kept saying that he had been laid off from his job and that his wife had left the family.

I told him that I would watch his child in school.

Ting-Ting’s first experiences with Indigenous parents made her believe that many of the families struggled to provide a “proper environment” for their children in the city. She stated that urban Indigenous people suffered from unemployment and poverty. She also recognized that many children in the Indigenous villages were raised by their “illiterate” grandparents. She proposed that teachers who have Indigenous students should “provide extra effort to help these Indigenous children.”

### **The Bunun hunters**

Ting-Ting argued that school curricula should give more attention to Indigenous culture to prevent its under-representation in Indigenous education. She told me that she could not remember learning much about Indigenous culture as a student in school or by visiting Indigenous villages in her childhood. Although, she said, some of the issues regarding Indigenous people were getting some attention, but under-representation of

Indigenous culture in the school curriculum remained the same. The only memory of attention to Indigenous groups in her elementary school textbook was information about the Bunun people.

The Bunun people, who have made the high mountains in central Taiwan their home for thousands of years, are the best Indigenous hunters in Taiwan. One story was about the training of a youth to be a hunter. They live in mountains and hunt all day. That's my impression.... You can see the importance of hunting to Bunun society from the fact that even today all Bunun communities retain the *Ear Shooting Ceremony*. That is the only information about Indigenous people that I received from my elementary education.

There are at least twelve officially recognized Indigenous groups in Taiwan, but most of them are ignored in school textbooks. The Bunun hunter story was the only information about Indigenous people Ting-Ting could remember. She said, "Children might think the Bunun people are aggressive, that hunting is their only means of making a living, and that is just not the case here." She worried that many students would have a negative impression about Bunun hunters if they were not given information about the meaning and limitation of Bunun hunting.

**Affirmative action: "It's problematic!"**

Ting-Ting believed that affirmative action reached out to only those Indigenous students whose academic readiness was questionable. She suggested that the government should make more effort to improve Indigenous students' academic ability, rather than ignoring their academic struggle in high school and college.

On August 25, 2002, a local-newspaper article raised the issue of affirmative action in Taipei. After the enrollment tests for high school and college ended in mid-July, the newspaper reported that some Han Chinese parents and students objected to the affirmative-action policies by which a few Indigenous students were admitted to elite high schools and colleges. Their children could not enroll in those exclusive schools because of limited space. They complained that places in those schools were filled by Indigenous students whose test scores were originally far lower than those of their children's. Some Han students also charged that affirmative action gave minorities something they had not earned. Moreover, they believed that those "unearned advantages" came at the expense of "good, hard-working Han Chinese students."

Ting-Ting had read the newspaper article and expressed similar opinions. She believed that opportunity should go to people who earn it. She claimed, "People get confused when they are failed or lose their chances because of the ethnic group they belong to."

I had Han Chinese friends who worked really hard in high school to get in college, and they were angry when they got rejected because affirmative action changed the standards. I think we should get rid of affirmative action and start letting people know that if they don't really work hard to get into college, they won't really be successful.... I think it's a real disadvantage to let people into school because of their ethnicity. Would you rather be a poorly educated high-school graduate who can get into college anyway—but possibly flounder there because you are ill-prepared—or a well educated one who can gain admission on his or her own merits?

Ting-Ting believed that the policymakers should consider developing programs that would help Indigenous students improve their academic achievement. She suggested that affirmative action was based on the notion that “Indigenous people are less intelligent than Han Chinese people.”

### **Learning about Indigenous culture**

Ting-Ting was outgoing and willing to share her opinions. Most of her perspectives were influenced by her visits to Indigenous areas while in college. She considered Indigenous culture beautiful; it sometimes touched her heart. She admitted that she had never before seriously considered Indigenous culture. In her opinion, Indigenous people were very good dancers and singers. Every time she went to Indigenous villages, she learned more about Indigenous life by interacting with Indigenous friends.

I went to an Indigenous tribal village for the ceremonies of Amis and Atayal groups a couple of times, mostly with my friends. A lot of tourists also went. I thought the ritual was supposed to be quiet, but the tourists made a lot of noise.... We took many pictures, and sometimes we would dance with them—people with traditional custom, singing and dancing. That was beautiful. Totally different from other groups in Taiwan.

Ting-Ting told me that there were some taboos during the Atayal-tribe ceremony of. For example, tourists were not allowed to take pictures when the elders were talking in the center of the circle. Though curious, she did not break the rules, as some other tourists did.

For some of the rituals women were not allowed to attend. I was told that I was a tourist, and most importantly, I was a woman whose appearance would make men's spirit filthy during the ritual. I respect that. I stayed with women in the kitchen, eating and talking to Indigenous friends. I learned about a few Indigenous dishes made from plants that I haven't heard of or considered eatable. Tourists who rudely intrude upon the for-men-only rituals are not welcome at any Indigenous ceremony. Ting-Ting knew that well and honored the rule. She told me that when she left tribal villages, her heart was usually full of joy. It was difficult for her to visit Indigenous tribes often, as she worked and lived in the city. Ting-Ting's personal experiences with Indigenous people helped her understand Indigenous cultures.

**Indigenous languages: "That's their choice, isn't it?"**

When the subject of Indigenous languages was discussed in the interviews, Ting-Ting expressed her belief that people have the right to determine what languages they want to learn. As for the preservation of Indigenous languages, she was pessimistic about the probable outcome. She told me, "None of my Indigenous students are able to speak their mother tongue." She believed that Indigenous language would disappear if they were not used in people's daily lives.

The Indigenous-language teacher came to me and asked me if I had any Indigenous students who might be interested in learning the Indigenous language. I told my Indigenous students to discuss [the question] with their parents. It turned out that only one student wanted to learn. The other two Indigenous students told me that their parents speak only Mandarin at home, and their parents

want them to learn English instead. I don't think I should push them to learn the Indigenous language. That's their choice, isn't it?

Mandarin was not Ting-Ting's home language. Her parents could speak only Min-Nan, a Chinese dialect. She spoke the Min-Nan dialect with her parents and relatives, and helped children in her community learn it. She told me, "The government has come to make efforts to preserve and promote local Taiwanese culture." But first, she stated, "you have to help parents and children discover the benefits of knowing that there are many Chinese dialects".

### **Discrimination experience**

Ting-Ting embraced Indigenous cultures and did not consider herself discriminatory. She said, "I wouldn't discriminate against people for their ethnicity." She understood, however, that poor people are sometimes treated as inferior.

That was my experience. When I was in fifth grade, we were grouped for doing a project for science class. We ended up doing a very huge project that needed to spend money to buy some stuff. I told them I don't have money, so I suggested our project to be less complicated. They all looked down their noses at me and said, "Then get out of our group, poor girl." I was full of tears. I was isolated throughout the process. One of the group members even told my teacher that I did not contribute to our group project, so I got an "E" on that project. That's how I was treated because I was poor.

Ting-Ting vividly remembered that incident, which had hurt her so deeply.

Unfortunately, she occasionally witnessed similar incidents in her class. She said, "I understand how these poor children feel about themselves, and yet their voices have not

been heard.” The voices of vulnerable children were crucial to her solution. Ting-Ting believed their voices must become the focal point of our actions for helping the poor children. She added:

Children are born looking to us with love and hope, whether we deserve it or not. When they are made vulnerable because they are poor, homeless, without family, hungry, abused—or discriminated against because of race, gender or sexuality—they still look to us with hope that we will protect them and that somehow, somewhere they are cherished regardless of status or circumstance.

Born in a poor family, Ting-Ting empathized with the less fortunate. She told me, “I hope more people have come to realize there is poverty in our country.” She believed that the root cause of discrimination is lack of empathy, and she was committed, as a teacher, to help her every student respect people who are less fortunate.

Based on her personal experiences with Indigenous students, Ting-Ting pointed out numerous challenges faced by Indigenous students. For instance, she observed that many Indigenous families suffered from poverty, and therefore were unable to support their children’s learning. She also noted that many students, especially Han students, obtained only a superficial understanding of Indigenous people because their school texts lacked information about Indigenous culture. Moreover, from her perspective, affirmative action exposed many Indigenous students to academic work that they were ill-prepared to perform.

### **Beliefs about the learning of Indigenous students**

Ting-Ting expressed her concern about the learning of her Indigenous students. When she talked about her Indigenous students, she pointed out some obstacles she encountered in her teaching. She observed that the students performed poorly and seemed hesitant to take on challenges. She also noted that gender differences and parent involvement were critical factors that influenced the learning of her Indigenous students.

#### **Indigenous students**

Of the three Indigenous students in Ting-Ting's class at the time of this study, one was of Amis heritage; the others were from the Atayal and Paiwan tribes. The Paiwan student had dark skin; the others had a lighter skin. Ting-Ting told me that the three were different in many ways, but their school work was similar: poor.

They're [also] different in their confrontational styles. The Indigenous kids here seem to back away from it. They'll shut down or get away from the problem as fast as they can. If you confront them about missing homework, you won't see them in school for a couple of days. It's as if they avoid the problem, thinking it will go away. Other kids become very anxious. That's the main difference that I've seen.

It is widely recognized in the academic community that Indigenous students generally do not perform well on school tests. The reasons are attributed to the cultural bias of tests and the lack of students' basic skills, such as reading and mathematics (Kao, 2001).

Ting-Ting echoed those findings:

What bothers me is, if I give them math quizzes, the Indigenous students always are the first who hand me the answer sheets, and most of them are blank. It is just

too difficult for them. I have tried to teach them one by one but it didn't work out. However, I prepared myself to reach out and help these students. My feelings and attitudes were more sympathetic than judgmental, because of my beliefs that all people are equal.

One of Ting-Ting's difficulties was that her Indigenous students needed more individual instruction, but sometimes her tight class schedule did not allow her enough time.

### **Gender differences**

Ting-Ting noted that her students, including her Indigenous students, learned in different ways. She believed that all teachers should provide the best possible instruction and create the best learning environment, regardless of the students' learning preferences (Dimitrov, 1999; Murphy, 1996).

In my class I found that most girls like to follow [the] teachers' instruction or the textbook's steps to solve problems. Boys, however, like to use their own ways to solve problems. This occurs, for example, in math class. It seems to me that boys are more creative, and girls are hesitant to take a challenge. Another thing is that girls seem to prefer to work in a group. Boys seem to be more independent.

Recognizing that her Indigenous students learned differently, Ting-Ting tried to adapt her teaching to different learning styles. For example, in her math class, she divided her class into two sessions: one for group work and one for independent work, so that each student had an opportunity to reach solutions both in a group and independently.

### **Parent involvement**

Ting-Ting observed that schools did not seem to connect well with Indigenous parents. Transplanted Indigenous parents seemed to spend little time with their children

at home. Ting-Ting's Indigenous parents had only a primary education and could provide little help with their children's studies. Ting-Ting shared her thoughts about Indigenous parents: "I often shake my head in wonder at how Indigenous parents today take no active interest in what their children are doing." She added that Indigenous children "don't have anybody to make them do their homework or even say 'do your homework.' They have somebody at home who doesn't know [whether] they are doing homework." She reflected on her own childhood, as compared to that of her current Indigenous students.

Parents are really important. They really need to be involved in their children's education. School was our number one priority. My mother always pushed us to finish our homework and study while we're at home. I came to realize my mother often visited my teachers at school. Even though she couldn't help with our studying, she paid a lot of attention to our education.... They [today's Indigenous parents] rarely come to school, unless their children have been involved in some kind of trouble.

In addition, Ting-Ting told me that her Indigenous students' parents were reluctant to talk to her because they thought they had nothing to do with their children's education. Typically, they saw their children's teachers only when the school held "open house" or when a teacher sent a note requesting a parent conference, usually about a discipline problem.

### **Beliefs about teaching Indigenous students**

A recurrent theme in Ting-Ting's beliefs about teaching was the need to create a climate in which to build a trusting relationship with students, where they were comfortable in sharing their own ideas. Practicing that philosophy, she believed that she was able to better understand her Indigenous students.

#### **Building relationships with students**

Ting-Ting repeatedly avowed that the teacher-student relationship was crucial for successful teaching. Although she had only three years' experience at Din-Pu, Ting-Ting had learned many ways to build a good relationship with her students. For example, in her proposed solution to instructional problems, she identified specific strategies, particularly in the classroom.

I think with students there is a fair amount of emphasis placed on the relationship with the teacher. I think that if you haven't got that as a base level then you simply won't get any learning at all. But I think really that first level is the relationship with the teacher and of course on a wider scale with the rest of the school.

Ting-Ting's primary method for building the requisite relationship with her students was to have fun with them:

I spend a lot of time [on it].... I'm lucky that I enjoy playing sports a bit. I enjoy kids full stop and, basically, what you call playing with the kids, as in joking around and getting out there and playing basketball with them, that sort of thing.

For Ting-Ting, establishing a close relationship was crucial if students were to begin to succeed at school. She told me that she would pay more attention to students who

seemed withdrawn and isolated from other students. She attributed the behavior difficulties of students to frustration:

See, I think when kids blow up—like get angry and swear at a teacher—it's because they're not comfortable. Either they've been backed into a corner or they're not comfortable; they have to come out fighting and they feel helpless. So, I think if you give students a choice and don't try to dominate and control, if you let them know that they still have choices to make, they can choose this or that. But they're still in control and it sort of smoothes things over.

Building relationships with students was an essential part of Ting-Ting's approach to teaching. By spending friendly time with her students, she believed that she came to know them better.

### **Get them to work together**

Early in our conversations, it became clear that developing a climate in which all students are comfortable sharing ideas and collaborating with their classmates was a primary objective for Ting-Ting. She used her experience as an example:

I arrived at these beliefs on how students learn because ... I've witnessed it in my classroom and, more importantly, I've experienced it myself as a student. ... I saw my students come to life when I gave them the opportunity to work with classmates. I don't want to separate one culture from another culture. Let's keep it all together—accept each other for the people we are, not for the ethnicity.... When I was given the chance to interact with other classmates, I came up with a solution every time. I never gave up and built on the group's attempts. For all of

these reasons I don't just believe that students learn math in this manner, I know it. ... I have learned that I can let students discover information for themselves. Ting-Ting wanted her students to think independently, yet work as a group. She realized that her students were capable of making decisions about what and how they were going to learn, and only those who were willing to share and work with others could accomplish their assigned tasks.

### **Caring attitude through listening**

Ting-Ting asked herself several questions that challenged her beliefs about teaching Indigenous students who had difficulty getting interested in learning. For instance, she discovered that one of her Indigenous students, Fagu, was interested in sports. That discovery provided the impetus for her to develop a relationship with Fagu and thereby come to appreciate what Fagu already knew and where he needed to grow.

I had a hard time understanding Fagu, one of my Indigenous students. He didn't talk much and liked to be alone. One day I figured out that he was really into playing basketball, so I invited him to play during the recess. He began to open himself to me and to share his frustrations.

Ting-Ting shared examples of how she reassessed her Indigenous students. The longer she taught, the more she realized that the only way to stimulate learning was with a caring attitude, which was shown by listening. She loved her students and made each of them feel comfortable with talking whenever he or she needed to. To Ting-Ting, a teacher's most important responsibilities were (a) to make sure that students understood how to interact with one another and (b) to create a comfortable environment in which they were able to express themselves freely.

### Summary

Born in a family in which working hard was a core value, Ting-Ting realized that her parents, though poor, would spare no effort to support her education. Her parents saw education as the only way to escape poverty and disadvantage. She studied relentlessly and was successful academically. Being a teacher fulfilled her own wish and her father's expectation.

Ting-Ting's understanding of Indigenous people and culture was mostly based on her visits to Indigenous villages and her interaction with Indigenous students at Din-Pu Elementary School. Those experiences led her to realize that Indigenous students faced many challenges. She believed that their progress was seriously hindered by, first, the lack of information in school texts about Indigenous culture; second, the students' lack of preparation for academic work; and third, the majority population's limited knowledge about Indigenous people, which led to a narrow perspective and, ultimately, to discrimination.

Ting-Ting tended to view the learning barriers of Indigenous students as individual challenges rather than institutional challenges. Her understanding of affirmative action policy seemed to be a critical indicator of such perspective. She criticized the *fairness* of an affirmative action policy that advanced selected many Indigenous students whose academic readiness was questionable. When the students did not succeed, they were accused of being lazy and unwilling to study hard.

When the matter of cultural differences was addressed in our interviews, Ting-Ting seemed less direct, concrete, and open. She provided little elaboration on cultural experiences when she talked about the lives of her Indigenous students. In fact, the only

time she spoke of her relationship with Indigenous students was when she talked about the Indigenous student, Fagu, and his interest in sports. In her mind every individual, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, or class could set goals; and, if they were willing to work hard, could overcome obstacles and achieve their goals.

Building individual relationships with students was an important element of her teaching. She believed that such relationships enabled her to better understand her students. However, her beliefs raised questions about the role of relationship-building in providing a quality education. Particularly, once the relationship was established, how would that help students learn? She did not talk about Indigenous students' racial or cultural backgrounds as critical factors in her teaching style.

## CHAPTER 9

### Ling-Ling

#### Personal background, schooling and becoming teacher

Ling-Ling was born in 1983 in Tai-Nan City. When I interviewed her, she was a second-grade teacher at Din-Pu Elementary School. She was three years younger than her sister, her only sibling. Ling-Ling's parents had been government employees for over thirty years. As Ling-Ling recalled, she had no need to worry about her family's finances. She recalled, "My Mom and Dad were always talking about our future. They gave us everything they never had in their childhood." She admitted that her parents had the final say on her education, but "my parents are also very open, they listen to us, and we could do whatever we wanted to do," she added. She vividly remembered her life when she was in kindergarten:

My sister and I had private tutors for piano, dancing, and school subjects. My mother told us that we had to learn those skills in order to compete with others. Sometimes we felt overwhelmed. Our schedules were filled with the after-school programs. We were happy most of the time. I stopped the piano and dancing class when I told my Mom that I needed more time with my friends. My Mom and Dad never said no to me.

Ling-Ling recognized the early influence of her parents, who provided her with a foundation of love and respect. She recalled, "They valued my opinion. My Mom and Dad always made me feel like I was an individual, that my thoughts didn't have to be

their thoughts, that my thoughts mattered, and that even if I couldn't do a particular activity or something, my feelings about it were still important.”

### **Fighting fear of failure**

When asked about her life in elementary school, Ling-Ling told me, “I had always been at the top of the class.” She had many academic-award certificates on the wall in her room, and she won many music competitions. She attributed her success to her parents, who created an environment that made her like to read.

I enjoyed reading. There were a lot of books in our house. So I spent a lot of time reading. The schoolwork was never a problem for me. I think that's because my parents taught me how to read and spent much time with me when I had difficulty.... I was other students' tutor in various subjects.

Although Ling-Ling talked about her positive experiences, she had her own opinion about why so many people do not succeed.

Mostly, we don't really fail; we're just mortally afraid that we're going to. We get used to labeling ourselves failures even when we're not failing. If we don't do as well as we wish, we don't get a second chance to improve ourselves or raise our grades. If we do perform well, we think that we got away with something this time. But wait until next time, we think; then they'll find out what frauds we are.

We let this fear ruin our lives.

Ling-Ling believed that the only way to achieve her goal was to overcome her fear of failure, and her parents' support had made that possible. She always saw the bright side. She believed that her impressive academic record was a result of the way she approached

life. She seemed confident about her ability to make her life better, clear about her objectives, and likely to make every effort to accomplish them.

### **Becoming a teacher**

Ling-Ling's decision to become a teacher was made in consultation with her parents. She said, "My parents told me that teachers have a higher social status in Taiwan society." Actually, many of her relatives were teachers from elementary school to college level. She had lived with many teachers, who provided her with role models and support. She recalled, "Being a teacher was the first thing that came to my mind when I graduated from senior high school." Ling-Ling was excited about being admitted to Taipei Teachers College, although it was three hundred miles from her home. She was eager to enter the program that would prepare her to be a good teacher.

The teacher preparation program, however, did not make her "a good teacher," she discovered. She had encountered difficulties as a first-year teacher. She told me that she sometimes felt frustrated by her university preparation because "they did not always give me the techniques I needed to handle my classroom." She added,

My undergraduate teacher preparation focused on a mastery of lesson planning, accompanied by large doses of professional folklore. For example, I learned how to write lesson plans with clearly stated behavioral objectives for a hypothetical resource unit that was never used in any classroom. Classroom management was based on discipline. The instruction adequately prepared me as a novice *teacher*, but it did little to teach me how to get to know my students, which I believe a good teacher should be able to do.

Clearly, Ling-Ling wanted to be a good teacher, which to her meant more than learning how to write a lesson plan and manage a classroom. She believed that a good teacher should be able to sense students' needs as soon as she begins to lead a class. In addition to Ling-Ling's frustration about the teacher preparation she received, she felt that her university professors often failed to provide concrete examples for applying theory to practice.

My first year of teaching began with a disaster—no one had really prepared me for what I was expected to do. I never realized that I had so much preparation and planning to do for the lessons that I had to teach. I needed more guided modeling. And I think they tried to model. But they modeled things, like “What is your temperature?” and we would do that every day. They would model things, like this is a group dynamic thing, this is a jigsaw, this is a rubric. But I think where it fell short is concrete classroom practical modeling.

Ling-Ling identified a disparity between her teacher-preparation courses and her actual classroom experiences. Despite her criticism of her teacher preparation program, she did benefit from it in at least one way that she illustrated later in this chapter. She also noted the absence of the relationship building in the views of teaching presented to her. As a novice teacher, she believed she needed more guidance for handling the wide range of tasks that a classroom teacher needs to perform.

### **Perspectives about the education of Indigenous students**

Throughout our conversations, Ling-Ling's knowledge about Indigenous culture seemed limited. Although she had read some stories about Indigenous people, most of

her impressions were from the movies and television. She told me about a movie that caused her to have a long-lasting fear of Indigenous people:

I saw a movie called “Wu Fong.” It’s about a Han Chinese guy sacrificing himself to stop Indigenous people from head hunting. That’s a little bit scary because I saw the movie when I was very young, probably five or six years old. I saw barbarians bloodily hack many Chinese men to death and then take the heads back to the village. There was blood everywhere. I was crying, so my Mom took me out the theater right away. That’s my first experience with Indigenous people.

As I had seen the movie too, I told Ling-Ling that it was fictitious. It was produced by Japanese colonialists who were trying to set Han settlers against Indigenous people in order to seize their land. She seemed unconvinced by my version of the story. Ling-Ling learned about the Indigenous culture from the media, in which the Taiwan Indigenous people were usually portrayed as barbarians and uncivilized. She also learned about Indigenous songs and dancing from televised entertainment. Such experiences seemed to perpetuate negative stereotypes of Indigenous people’s lives, and represented only a superficial understanding of Indigenous cultures.

In senior high school, Ling-Ling had met two Indigenous students in her class. Asked whether she thought they were different from her Han peers, she contended that she did not see much difference.

They had darker skin. This was the only difference you could tell. I mean, as far as I knew they were born and raised in the city and educated in the city. They didn’t act the way I expected them to act. We didn’t talk much about race or ethnicity in school. We’re all Chinese. This is what we’re taught.

As an adolescent, Ling-Ling considered her Indigenous classmates just like everyone else: Han Chinese. As a high school student, she did not consider race an issue at school. Although her home language was Min-Nan, a Chinese dialect that is different from Mandarin, she chose to identify herself with Han Chinese. That action reflected how Taiwanese students were educated: all students, regardless of ethnicity, were considered *Chinese*.

### **Affirmative action**

When I asked Ling-Ling to reflect on the performance of Indigenous students in school, she referred to her college experiences as a way to talk about her beliefs. She told me that Taipei Teachers College reserved a certain number of slots for Indigenous senior high graduates every year. According to her, an affirmative action program was developed, theoretically, to provide Indigenous people with equal treatment. However, she disagreed with that philosophy:

I believe that Indigenous people have as much opportunity for advancement as we have. I feel that, if you put yourself out there and you find opportunities that you'll have the same opportunity to advance that we do.... I have read studies about people who get into college through affirmative action, and some of them didn't last. They didn't graduate. I don't think it's because of discriminatory practices. It may have been partly that. But I'm going to say that most of the problem was that they weren't ready...

Ling-Ling also said that educational statistics showed that the dropout rate of Indigenous students was much higher than that for non-Indigenous students at all educational levels. She believed that the majority of those Indigenous students have difficulty adjusting to

the competitive culture in Han-dominant classrooms. She argued that the special treatment of Indigenous students is problematic.

If you take the Indigenous students because you need to meet a quota, I just think that's terrible. It's almost making someone feel like, "Don't work as hard." I just think it should be the most hard working because I think it's going to come back and affect us if we keep trying to level things out but not go with merit as such.

Ling-Ling was critical about the fairness of affirmative action that benefits many Indigenous students whose academic readiness was a problem. Ling-Ling believed that affirmative action is the cause of Indigenous students dropping out of school. To her, it seemed that only students with high academic achievement should qualify for admission to elite high schools and colleges.

### **Indigenous Resource Center**

Ling-Ling began her teaching at Din-Pu Elementary School in 2001. As a struggling first-year teacher, she often visited other classes, observing and listening to experienced teachers and utilizing whatever she learned from them in her own teaching. Knowing that Din-Pu had more Indigenous students than neighboring schools, Ling-Ling said:

I came to realize that a large number of Indigenous families had moved to the community. The Indigenous Resource Center was created to help all students understand Indigenous cultures. I think this is a great opportunity for us to get to know about Indigenous people and their cultures. At the beginning of the semester, I was worried about how I was going to teach my Indigenous students.

I have so little knowledge about them. My colleagues told me “Don’t worry; go to the Center; you will learn.”

However, the Center did not satisfy Ling-Ling’s needs. She told me, “It’s about only ten square meters in size. A lot of information was unclear.” Ling-Ling was told that the Center was still under construction. For some reason, it had not received its grant-in-aid. The Indigenous Resource Center provided little support for Ling-Ling in answering her students’ questions about Indigenous cultures.

I took my students to the Center twice. They seemed pretty excited about Indigenous cultures. They thought all the stuff was from overseas. They came up with a lot of questions that I was not able to answer; like, “What languages do they speak?” and “What do they look like?” and so on. I think we need more materials, such as videos, pictures, and sculptures. I think the Center needs more people to organize everything.

The Indigenous Resource Center was created to illustrate diverse Indigenous cultures and to provide students with the opportunity to discover and appreciate the beauty of Indigenous cultures. It seemed, however, that the Center at the Din-Pu Elementary School did not achieve those goals.

### **Indigenous language**

Huang (1991, 1993) and Lin (1995) conducted research on the use of Indigenous languages in Taiwan. As mentioned in Chapter one, Huang suggested that the attrition rate of Indigenous languages was estimated to be 15.8 per cent over two generations, and 31 per cent over three generations. Consequently, if Huang’s estimates are accurate, or nearly so, almost half of the existing Indigenous languages would disappear from Taiwan

over the next generation. Lin's work focused on junior high school students. After surveying one thousand junior high school students in twenty-five schools, she found that only 37 per cent of the Indigenous students reported that their native language was the one most frequently spoken at home. Furthermore, only 68 per cent claimed that they could speak their parents' language, and of that group, only 16 per cent claimed fluency.

Ling-Ling accepted that language is a tool to communicate with other people: "You have to be able to speak the language that most people use." She identified Mandarin and English as the languages most people use. She argued that it is not necessary to require Indigenous students to learn an Indigenous language. Her point reflected Kuo's (2001) analysis, which notes that the population that speaks the native tongue is less than one per cent of the total population in Taiwan.

I just think of the reality, you know. I'm not saying that the Indigenous languages are not important. They are! But Mandarin and English are the languages that most people use. I think they [Indigenous students] have to master those languages in order to succeed. Igu's mother sent her to after-school programs, to learn piano and violin. She also does not think that learning the Amis language is that urgent.

Ling-Ling believed that in order for Indigenous languages to survive, they have to be used in daily life; otherwise, they will soon vanish from the Indigenous community. She viewed Mandarin and English as important tools not only to communicate with other people, but also to compete with others, especially at school. Paradoxically, she seemed to separate the language from the culture. She believed that all students have to learn

about Indigenous cultures in order to understand various ethnic groups in Taiwan, but that students should learn Mandarin and English for practical purposes.

### **Curriculum**

Since 1998, the official curriculum in Taiwan schools had been changed to contain more frequent and more favorable coverage of Aborigines. The government had also spent considerable funds on museums and culture centers, focusing on Taiwan's Indigenous heritage (Lin, 2001).

Ling-Ling showed her concern about the representation of Indigenous cultures in the school curriculum. She pointed out, "People began to make an effort to preserve Indigenous language and culture, but I don't think that's the case in school." She further commented:

The curriculum now looks pretty much the same as that which I had in my early school. It's only a few pages in the school text. The Indigenous Resource Center is certainly a place where our children can learn more about Indigenous culture, but I don't think it is going to provide the whole picture of Indigenous culture.

My second graders know only a smattering about Indigenous people.

Although the Center was intended to promote the Indigenous cultures in the Din-Pu Elementary School, Ling-Ling believed that the key to helping students understand Indigenous cultures is the school curriculum. She argued that the curriculum did not include information about Indigenous people. She proposed that a curriculum and textbook on Indigenous culture should be developed for Indigenous students.

### **Ling-Ling's understanding of Indigenous students**

To gain a better understanding of Ling-Ling's image of her Indigenous students, I asked her to talk particularly about the two Indigenous students in her class. Ling-Ling viewed the two Indigenous students as being very differently from each other. She considered Sigy, a boy from a poor and abusive family, "abnormal" because he was constantly involved in trouble. On the other hand, she labeled Igu, a girl from a supportive family, as gentle and quiet. In this section, she provided a glimpse of her understanding of the two students through her description of Igu's learning style.

#### **Sigy: "Always fighting with somebody"**

As noted, there were two Indigenous students in Ling-Ling's class, but she said that they were different in many ways. Sigy, one of Ling-Ling's Indigenous students, was perceived by teachers as disorderly. She said that he could not sit still for over ten minutes, and he would walk out of class without permission. Ling-Ling contacted Sigy's parents, but the situation had not changed. They told her they were too tired from work to deal with Sigy's problem, and they asked her to do whatever she thought would work. Ling-Ling felt helpless.

I found myself constantly asking him to stop disrupting the class! What bothers me the most is his speaking without raising his hand. I did make my rules explicit. He apparently was not able to follow my rules. Sometimes I could not help thinking that the part of the world he came from is really uncivilized.

Sigy also had difficulty getting along with his classmates. Ling-Ling told me, "He seems to have a problem with anger management, always fighting with somebody." Ling-Ling

had to deal with many incidents in which Sigy had hurt his classmates. She asked Sigy's father to come to school to discuss the incidents, but things did not change.

One day, Sigy was hitting another student, again. I broke them apart, and I called Sigy's father. He came to school showing frustration and anger. We were in principal's office. The father began to slap Sigy across his face even before I explained what happened. We were all astonished. The principal tried to calm him, and I took Sigy away. Sigy didn't cry. He looked at his father with hate in his eyes. I've never seen an eight-year-old boy with such a facial expression.

That scared me.

Ling-Ling told me that she could not help thinking that Indigenous men are rough. She believed that corporal punishment did not work, particularly for Sigy. She concluded that Sigy's disorder might result from his father's abuse at home. All a teacher could do, Ling-Ling concluded, was to watch Sigy closely.

### **Indigenous family**

Ling-Ling admitted that she paid more attention to Sigy than to Igu, her Indigenous female student, who was very gentle and quiet. Ling-Ling told me that Igu came from a "normal family," and her parents were salespersons in a big company in Taipei city. Ling-Ling compared the families of Igu and Sigy in this way:

You have two Indigenous students who look pretty much the same, but they came from entirely different situations.... Their worlds had been so entirely different.

The girl [Igu] from Taitung, seemingly comes from a much more well-to-do family, whereas the one from Pintung, [was] seemingly entirely different. I guess you can categorize it as being an idle-class Indigenous family versus a lower-class

one. Igu's parents were much more concerned about their children's school work, and have sent their children to the paid, after-school programs. But Sigy's parents don't... The reason these Indigenous students are left behind is that there is not a lot of home support. Education is not seen as important. They [Indigenous students] just don't care. This is because their parents don't care either. I don't see them in school as much as Han Chinese parents.

Ling-Ling believed that parents' involvement played a critical role in Indigenous students' learning. She perceived Sigy's family as "abnormal" and considered him different from "regular" students in terms of academic ability, attitude towards classroom learning, and family support.

### **Learning styles**

Speaking about the learning of her Indigenous students, Ling-Ling said, "The Indigenous girl acts and speaks just like everyone else in the class." Ling-Ling believed that her students had various ways of learning things, and that her students were more likely to comprehend "when I teach in the ways that meet their needs." Ling-Ling gave me an example of Igu:

When I think about the field dependent/independent stuff, Igu seems to be more field sensitive. In math, she would do better if I gave her a specific math problem. She would follow the steps without difficulty. She likes to work in a group rather than by herself—not that she is incapable of independent achievement. I think she needs support from other people. When she was given work that had to be done independently, I saw her struggle; so, I often assigned homework that required cooperation with people.

Ling-Ling discovered Igu's learning preferences by watching her solve a math problem. In order to help Igu, Ling-Ling adapted her teaching to provide Igu direction and assignments that required group effort.

Ling-Ling's perspectives of Indigenous students were based on her experiences with Indigenous students and families. She believed that each student's personality, family, and way of learning were crucial to learning. She paid particular attention to the behavior of both of her Indigenous students. In the case of Sigy, she paid attention to his bad behavior; in the case of Igu, to her good behavior. In her view, behavior in class was an important indicator for potential success. As a result, she tended to focus on her Indigenous student's behavior problems and his family environment, rather than discover the true causes of his problems.

### **Beliefs about teaching**

Ling-Ling's beliefs about teaching were revealed in several accounts of her experiences as a teacher. First, she learned from her parents to respect and honor her students' voice. As a result, she realized the importance of building a trusting relationship with her students. Second, she believed that learning materials and classroom activities should be connected to students' experiences. Although she was sometimes challenged by questions about her class-management style, she was confident about her ability to involve her students in meaningful learning.

### **Influence of mother**

Like many novice teachers, Ling-Ling encountered difficulties in her first year of teaching. She admitted that she had underestimated the complexity of the teaching task

and her ability to manage many agendas simultaneously. After a few weeks of teaching in Din-Pu, Ling-Ling was uncertain about her ability to teach, and went home to talk with her mother. She recalled:

At the beginning of my teaching, I had a really bad day with my students. I could not get them to listen or work together. After school I did what I always do when I'm discouraged—I went to see my mother. After I told her my story, she reminded me of the values that are really important: respect for myself and for others. She told me to remind the students, too, of who they are and what is important to their people. The next day I told my students how I had felt and what I had done. We talked about how important it is to carry our values into the classroom, so we can build a community there, too.

Ling-Ling believed that the conversation with her mother restored her confidence and “encouraged me to keep moving.” To build mutual respect between her students and herself she realized that she had to open herself to them, and to listen to whatever they had to say.

### **Learning to teach**

Ling-Ling recognized her parents' influence, which provided a foundation of mutual love and respect. The sense of validation that she received from them was a value that Ling-Ling carried to her students. She said, “I believe in respecting them and their viewpoints.” She valued lessons from her parents more than those from her former teachers as she dealt with her class. She said, “I had a few teachers that made me feel comfortable with myself...that's what I try to do [with my students]. I think I got it

mostly from my parents. My Mom and my Dad always honored my viewpoints.” She added:

I believe in valuing them [her students] and respecting their opinions, which we also talked about in the [teacher-education] program, honoring their views—and when I think about what I liked as a child and what I respond to as an adult it is this: being able to express my feelings—and that’s what I try to do.

This stance of honoring students’ viewpoints, which she gained from her university preparation, and which began to take on more meaning for her as she became consciously aware of “figuring out how to honor my own voice”.

The more I’m with these kids and in this room, I’m really more coming into my own and I’m leaving behind things that I did, and I’ll try new things and I’ll be a little more daring with things that I do and the phrases that I’ll use. ... To me, that just ties back to the fact that I’m finding my way. Maybe I’m wondering, too, trying to find that way. I’m not necessarily taking the direct path, but I think I am figuring out what’s better for me as a teacher in my own class.

Ling-Ling believed that her parents and her college experiences were positive forces on her teaching. With deep-rooted self-confidence, she was able to accept and strengthen her unique teaching skills. The more confidence she gained, the more she realized the importance of respecting her students’ positions and building a trusting relationship with them.

### **Authentic and meaningful learning**

Ling-Ling believed that in order for students to learn, classroom activities needed to have a real purpose, be authentic, and be meaningful to the students. She said that it

was important “not that an activity may mean something to me but that it has some meaning to them.” She encouraged students to share their ideas, interests, and experiences. That way, the children’s ideas came into her classroom. As she said,

If they bring themselves into it, they’re going to bring the ideas into it. Once they have their ideas into it, this creates a big picture that I think the kids relate to. This is what my students need. I find [children] to be basically the same; they have the same needs, wants, and desires. It makes more sense and makes them feel like a part of what’s happening here.

Ling-Ling’s beliefs about learning influenced the kinds of materials she used in the classroom. She never used dittoed sheets, rarely used workbooks, and avoided organizing her reading program around basic readers. Instead, the students chose the books they read, participated in a variety of writing activities, and focused on content that was meaningful to them. Often there were a number of activities going on at the same time, and the room was seldom quiet.

The pedagogy that developed from Ling-Ling’s philosophy and knowledge of how children learn was sometimes not understood by others. A volunteer parent once said to her, not intending to criticize, “Not everyone can tolerate this kind of chaos.”

Ling-Ling was disturbed by the remark. She told me,

I’m uncomfortable with chaos. This is not chaos. If it were, I would be working to make it something other than that. The kids are directed. They are moving around and they’re deciding what’s important to them on a particular morning, choosing to do what they want to do at that particular time. You have seen the kids engrossed in their work. It’s not that they’re just goofing around.

Ling-Ling stressed the importance of making the curriculum meaningful to students' experiences. Instead of choosing the reading for students, she encouraged them to decide what they wanted to read and learn.

Ling-Ling's perspectives on teaching were also evident in her resentment of administrators' control of her work. Din-Pu administrators were responsible for evaluating every teacher's performance. The evaluation system was instituted at Din-Pu because the Bureau of Education in Taipei recognized it as a school with high efficacy. Ling-Ling was sensitive to how her teaching was evaluated.

My most negative feeling is when others question my teaching ability. I had a case right here. An administrator came in and told me I was wasting time. He apologized later but it hurt because the initial allegation was demeaning and made in front of the students. The way he saw it, I could not control the class. He did not take the time to come in and observe. It made me realize how much administrators are out of touch.

Although an administrator questioned her teaching ability, she steadfastly maintained her belief in *student-centered* learning. She believed that "It is important that teachers be allowed to develop ideas about getting students to learn".

**“When a child says, ‘I got it!’ it’s all worth it”**

Ling-Ling encouraged students to bring questions to her. She spent time helping them individually. For her, knowing that she helped a student learn was the ultimate accomplishment.

A student was coming to me for help! I [had] started teaching two years ago, and now someone was finally coming to me. When I helped this child and saw that he

learned something from me, I got the best feeling. To me, this is what teaching is about, and ever since that day, I've been getting the best feelings when I see that I've helped a child learn something or that I've motivated a child to want to learn. Involving her students in the learning process was also a reward for Ling-Ling. Her teaching schedule was flexible. She changed direction whenever she thought it helpful her students' learning process.

I'm willing to throw out the lesson plan for the day and move to another topic [such as Pocket monster] that they might be very excited about discussing. And sometimes they feel really empowered because they've gotten me off of the planned topic and they're all talking at once and carrying on. And I just have a tiny smile inside, because what's happened is they have become involved in a math activity and my goal's been reached.

Ling-Ling's teaching method was to involve her students in the learning process. Also, she spent additional time with students having difficulty, and she readily adapted her teaching plan to accommodate whatever the classroom conditions warranted to meet students' needs.

**Parents' attitude: "They see only children's grades"**

Ling-Ling believed that parent involvement was an important indicator of students' attitudes toward learning. She welcomed parents' visits to school to see how she organized her class and taught. Unfortunately, most of the parents came to school to inquire about their children's grades, and she felt that "some of the parents don't appreciate what we are doing for their children. Their children's scores were everything." After teaching for two years in Din-Pu Elementary School, Ling-Ling

became to realize that there were many parents who were only concerned about their children's grades. She added,

I heard one of my students talking about how bad another teacher's teaching is. I asked him, "How do you know about his teaching?" He told me, "My Mom said his class scored the lowest on math in the second grade." I was kind of shocked, you know. I began to talk to parents about my teaching goals, and most of them approved. I think communication is important.

In spite of many parents' primary concern with grades, Ling-Ling realized that most of them cared about how their children learned in school. She said, "Grades are the quickest and most salient way of measuring their children's progress." She disagreed with the notion that a teacher's effectiveness is measured primarily by students' grades, and tried to convince parents to pay more attention to what their children learn.

Ling-Ling expected herself to treat all her students equally. Therefore, she did not single out her Indigenous students and modify her teaching from them. She said, "If I teach them according to their cultural styles, won't the Han students be discriminated against, and won't I be lowering my educational standards?" Ling-Ling's vow to treat all students equally reflected her parents' influence, which provided her with a foundation of mutual love and respect. Although her teaching style and strategy created a seemingly chaotic classroom atmosphere, it was her method of involving the students in meaningful learning experiences—that was the core of her teaching style.

### Summary

Ling-Ling's parents provided their children with a foundation of mutual love and respect. Her parents valued their children's opinions and respected them as individuals. As a student in elementary and high school, Ling-Ling was always at the top of her class. She believed that her parents had cultivated her by teaching her to like reading and by encouraging her to overcome the fear of failure. Such experiences, later, became a principle of teaching when she began to teach at Din-Pu Elementary School.

Ling-Ling admitted that she knew little about the cultures of her Indigenous students. She never visited an Indigenous village. Her impressions of Indigenous people came mostly from the media. Her limited knowledge and experience with Indigenous people may have caused her to neglect the cultural differences in her class.

Regarding education for Indigenous students, Ling-Ling addressed the issue of affirmative action. She claimed that the affirmative action program—which was implemented to help Indigenous students by adding twenty-five per cent to their college enrollment test score—actually increased the drop out rate of Indigenous students in city schools. She stated that many hard-working and *qualified* Han students were deprived of the college enrollment because of the special treatment received by Indigenous students. Her perspective on qualifications reflects an inherent belief in Han Chinese superiority in Taiwan. Han is synonymous for qualified, competent, hardworking and deserving.

Ling-Ling fundamentally believed that the family is the most critical factor in predicting Indigenous students' behavior and attitude toward learning in school. She described Igu, one of her female Indigenous students, who was from a “normal family,” in which the parents cared about their children's education and were able to pay for after-

school programs. On the other hand, Sigy, her other Indigenous student, was viewed as lacking in academic ability and as having a problematic attitude toward classroom learning.

Ling-Ling noted that Indigenous students learn differently from their Han peers. However, she did not provide an explanation as to why this difference existed. Talking about her students, she tended to focus on cultural similarities rather than differences, except when she talked about their families. She noted that some Indigenous families, like Sigy's, could not provide a proper environment for learning. Ling-Ling tended to view the nature of differences as problematic rather than rich opportunities.

Ling-Ling seemed to have very limited experiences with Indigenous people. She pointed out that the school curriculum and the Indigenous Resource Center in her school offered little information about Indigenous people, so that all students could understand Indigenous cultures. Therefore, she suggested that adding more Indigenous materials seemed to be the most effective way to help her students understand Indigenous cultures. She seemed to seek harmony in a *raceless* world that would be fair and just and caring. However, her approaches raised questions about the consequences of her beliefs and practices for the learning opportunities of Indigenous students.

## CHAPTER 10

### UNDERSTANDING INDIGENOUS CULTURES IN TEACHING

#### Introduction

The preceding six chapters present a variety of viewpoints on the education of Indigenous students from the perspectives of six teachers of Indigenous students. This chapter focuses on the cross-case analysis of six teachers' perspectives about teaching Indigenous students. The teachers' accounts disclose the knowledge, experience, and ideology underlying their positions in the face of cultural diversity. This analysis of teachers' perspectives draws from research that suggests (1) students' learning is impacted not only by teachers' intentional objectives, but also by what they unintentionally and unknowingly teach; and (2) teachers convey knowledge differently, depending on the filters through which they see and understand the world. Those subtle and subliminal aspects of teaching and teachers, about schooling, and about broader social relations often permeate our schools, emerging from our social relationship, curriculum, institutional norms, cultural values, and so on.

This chapter analyzes the teachers' experiences with Indigenous cultures and students. It draws upon Sleeter & Grant's (1987) approach to multicultural education, which is discussed in Chapter two. For my analysis I use four of the five approaches that they outline as ways to examine the six teachers' perspectives:

1. *Teaching the culturally different*: This approach focuses on teachers' beliefs about teaching culturally diverse students and on the factors that impact the academic achievement of Indigenous students. Teachers consider the low academic

achievement of ethnic minority students as individual challenges rather than institutional challenge. Difference is viewed as problematic while discrimination and inequity perpetrated by the dominant culture are ignored, as are structural and institutional oppression.

2. *Human relations*: This approach looks at teachers' knowledge and understanding of Indigenous cultures and students and at how they help Indigenous students learn. Teachers attempt to foster good relationships among students of diverse cultures. The major objective of teaching is to help students of different backgrounds get along, communicate better with each other, and feel good about who they are. Teachers seek to promote positive feelings, tolerance, assimilation, acceptance of existing structures and practices. They give no attention to social stratification or to political or economic positions.
3. *Single group studies*: This approach focuses on teachers' beliefs about school curricula. Given information on Indigenous groups, teachers aim to develop understanding for cultural differences and linguistic diversity. Add-on curriculum is given the most attention. No attention is given to cultural stratification or institutional limitations. Teachers do not consider social change or analyze the social-economic position of minority groups.
4. *Multicultural education*: This approach identifies teachers' experiences with promoting cultural pluralism and social equality. Teachers seek to (a) promote the strength and value of cultural diversity; (b) develop a sense for human rights and a respect for cultural diversity; (c) change discrimination in society; (d) develop acceptance for social justice and equal opportunity for all people.

Certainly, the above mentioned approaches do not completely capture either the unique personalities and experiences of the teachers who participated in this study or the nuances of their beliefs. In some cases, the teachers' beliefs tended to be multifaceted, even contradictory. Despite that complication, there was enough commonality among their perspectives in relation to above categories.

### **Perspectives that are cultural blind**

#### Treat students equally

“Treat students equally” was a recurring principle in four of six teachers' beliefs about their teaching. They tended to diminish the role of cultural differences of students in their teaching and focused, instead, on students' similarities. Race and culture were not considered crucial issues in classroom with cultural diverse students. For example, Ling-Ling, on recalling her own school experiences, stated, “We didn't talk much about race or ethnicity in school. We're all Chinese. This is what we're taught.” Such statements engender a perspective of difference that simply denies or erases any difference. Teachers who subscribe to “we are all the same” also probably embrace, often unconsciously, a commitment to assimilation (Giroux, 1983). This notion of ‘sameness’ was part of three teachers' perspectives:

**[Ping-Ping:]** I think we should treat people as equals and not highlight their differences by interjecting culture in every aspect of education;

**[Ting-Ting:]** I don't want to separate one culture from another culture; let's keep it all together—accept each other for the people we are, not for the ethnicity; and

**[Ling-Ling:]** I find [children] to be basically the same; they have the same needs and wants and desires.

Some of the teachers in this study believed that race and racism are non-issues that are no longer problems in Taiwan society and schools. As Ping-Ping remarked, “Why shouldn’t we teach the Chinese history; it’s the truth.” She explicitly advocated infusing her students with the values of the dominant culture. Similarly, Da-Wei could not or would not recognize racism in school, when he argued that his Indigenous students “were not discriminated against solely because of their race.” Such perspectives suggest a cultural-blindness and universality as the standard for engaging with culturally diverse students. Teachers did not consider the ways in which they approach may impact students through what they mean when incorporated into classroom practice, or how cultural blindness may conflict with other educational principles, such as maximizing human potential and using students’ prior knowledge in teaching new information and skills.

Teachers with culture-blind beliefs may profess a commitment to promoting educational equality, but they tend to ignore the implications and consequences of their personal and professional beliefs for the success of all students. As discussions about cultural and racial diversity move beyond general awareness toward specific instructional actions that challenge prevailing conventions, they seemed to resist such suggestions. It is signaled by statements such as, “[Ping-Ping:] Yes, but Indigenous students have to live and work in mainstream society, so they need to learn to be like everybody else,” and “[Ling-Ling:] If I teach them according to their cultural styles, won’t the Han students be discriminated against, and won’t I be lowering my educational standards?” As with awareness, some teachers assume that they become worthy promoters of equality and

social justice because they sympathize with ethnic minority groups. Absent from their explanations were the causes, motivations, depths, and manifestations of their beliefs, and commitments to ensure that the acts of discrimination would not be perpetuated in the future.

Student success: An individual challenge

On the issue of affirmative action the same four teachers concluded that student success is a factor of individual effort, rather than a challenge requiring the cooperation of both individuals and their educational institutions. That perspective reflects their belief in Han superiority and a seemingly culture-blind position. Some teachers used their experiences in school to talk about their perspectives of educational affirmative action. For instance, Ping-Ping mentioned that a former classmate, who enrolled in her high school through affirmation action, was struggled in school and “was dropped out when she was totally crushed by the stress.” Da-Wei, Ting-Ting and Ling-Ling explicitly expressed their opposition to affirmative action. Da-Wei suggested the Indigenous students could benefit from affirmative action only if they are academically ready. He pointed out that many Indigenous students have found school alienating and disengaging because of the academic competitiveness among peers (Fu, 2001; Guan, 1987; Kuo, 1996; Lee, 1998). He said:

Affirmative action allows Indigenous students to get into high schools and colleges with special admission criteria. I think this is a nice idea, but in the long run, this is not going to help them.... You have to get them ready for the academic competition in schools.... Some of them flunk out because they can't handle the overload of schoolwork.

Similarly, Ting-Ting believed that “the practice of affirmative action is based on the notion that Indigenous people are less intelligent than Han Chinese people.” Ting-Ting doubted the “equity” of affirmative action that targeted many Indigenous students whose academic preparation was questionable. She believed that the government should try to increase Indigenous students’ academic qualifications. She believed that the current policies ignored Indigenous students’ struggle in high school and college. Ling-Ling went a step further, charging that the special treatment of Indigenous students fostered academic laziness:

I believe that Indigenous people have as much opportunity for advancement as we have.... If you take the Indigenous students because you need to meet a quota, I just think that’s terrible. It almost makes someone feel like, “Don’t work as hard.”

Although Da-Wei, Ting-Ting, and Ling-Ling acknowledged individual differences among their students, they seemed to hold some beliefs that were probably problematic when working with Indigenous students. For example, a recurring theme in their interviews was that hard work is rewarded. This belief about hard working, they believed, was instilled by their parents. To them, working hard was “a family value” and “a promise of a bright future.” Their perspectives might suggest that when people do not succeed, it is because they are not willing to work hard. Such a perspective tends to reinforce the symbolic meaning most Han Chinese people attach to Han ethnicity, and upholds an ideology of individuality; they tended to believe that everyone has to work equally hard for self-improvement. This approach gives the appearance that all groups have an equal chance, in which ethnicity is a private matter, not a government concern.

Such a rationalization tends to avert a structural analysis of racism and inequality in Taiwan society, thereby implicitly reaffirming the superior position of Han Chinese.

A second theme that illustrates success as an individual challenge was revealed in their views of college admission policies. According to these four teachers, only students with higher academic achievement are qualified for admission to elite high schools and colleges. They infer here that some students are admitted who are not qualified, namely Indigenous students. Such perspective on qualifications reflects an inherent belief in Han Chinese superiority. “Han” being synonymous with qualified, competent, hard-working, and deserving.

#### Indigenous language

Teachers’ cultural-blind perspectives were also evident in their attitudes about Indigenous languages. Some teachers demonstrated a rather limited view of the value of Indigenous languages. For example, Ping-Ping, Ting-Ting, and Ling-Ling considered Indigenous language as nothing but “a tool of communication.” Although they stated that the Indigenous languages are unique and need to be preserved, they were pessimistic about the probability of preserving the Indigenous languages. Learning dominant languages was also viewed by some teachers as a way of succeeding both in school and society; consequently, Ping-Ping and Ling-Ling believed that their Indigenous students were academically disadvantaged because their Indigenous languages were spoken at home. Both teachers indicated that language is an important tool, not only to communicate, but also to compete with others.

**[Ping-Ping:]** I think you have to see the big picture. Eventually, you have to live and work with people; most of them are Han Chinese. I don’t think that learning

Indigenous languages is that important for them [Indigenous students] to succeed in society... After all, they'll work and compete with people who speak Mandarin... I mean, people have a choice. If they want to learn, allow them to learn. If they don't, that's their choice.

**[Ling-Ling:]** I just think of the reality. You know, I'm not saying that the Indigenous languages are not important. They are! But Mandarin and English are the languages that most people use. I think they [Indigenous students] have to master those languages in order to succeed.

As the teachers talked about learning languages, they tended to separate language from culture. Their beliefs about Indigenous languages may have serious implications for the way they understand and teach Indigenous students. When they underplay the significance of affirming Indigenous languages, they simultaneously elevate the importance of the dominant language. Dominant values are reinforced in ways that potentially suppress minority cultures and values. For example, teachers may think that Indigenous students fail in school because they do not work hard enough, and that hard work and determination are the most important characteristics for Indigenous student success. Consequently, particular values become integrated into their teaching: perseverance, hard work, individual responsibility, and working up to one's potential. Those qualities become a litmus test for student performance.

#### Views of the Indigenous family

Like Chiu (1997) and Chuang (2001), most of the teachers who participated in this study stated that Indigenous students generally did not perform well academically. Some teachers identified the family environment and parental involvement as significant

causes of students' poor performance. Ping-Ping, who had three Indigenous students in her class, described their families as follows: Two of them were raised by their single mothers, who were always busy with work and who never consulted her about their children's schoolwork. She said that the other student's father drank excessively. She believed that Indigenous parents do not consider education "a serious matter." For some teachers, that negative perception was the most common explanation for the Indigenous children's behavioral problems and low academic achievement. In essence, the connection between a supposedly 'deprived' family, culture, and social environment on the one hand, and academic deficiencies on the other, contributed to minority students' failure (Ladson-Billings, 1994). For those teachers the *deficit explanation* provided a convenient rationalization for their own inadequacy. Such perceptions, placing the problem outside the school and beyond the purview of traditional teacher responsibilities, were reflected in the following comments:

**[Da-Wei:]** A lot of Indigenous parents are too busy at work, so they might not be able to take care of their children's home work...they're beaten a lot at home.

You'll find a lot of problems in those Indigenous families who have just moved to the city.... Indigenous parents who own a house and have a stable job in the city are more likely to give priority to their children's education.

**[Ting-Ting:]** I think they have more family problems. You know, the alcoholism, poverty, and unemployment and so on. I don't think it's because they've been taught less. Home environment is the key. I don't think, in my case, the Indigenous parents are going to help their children in academic work. This is something that is beyond my ability.

Although the Han teachers considered themselves unprejudiced and open-minded, they seemed to harbor stereotypical beliefs about the Indigenous family. They conceived them as “poor” and “unemployed.” They also seemed to believe that the lower school achievement of Indigenous students was a consequence of their problem-filled home environments.

Teachers who attribute behavioral patterns of Indigenous students to family problems may suggest a deficit view of the students by blaming the family for their low achievement. Similarly, teachers in this study did not see themselves as responsible for students’ failure. They also did not see themselves as racial beings and often idealistically dismissed notions of diversity explicitly in their teaching. Gomez (1996) observed that many teachers “locate children’s problems of learning and achievement not as outcomes of teachers’ beliefs about and behavior towards children in school, but as consequences of children’s outside-of-school lives—beyond the purview of teachers, school and schooling” (p. 321). She also cites research conducted by teacher educators on novice teachers, which found that the majority of the novices affirmed the importance of equality in education and were oriented toward individual differences as opposed to group differences, such as race, class, and gender; yet, they were at a loss as to how to promote equity and justice in their classrooms. They viewed diversity as a “problem,” and they were more likely to approach diversity in a way that would perpetuate inequality, as well as hide the reality of racial oppression.

Similarly, the teachers’ disposition of cultural blindness likely enabled the pattern of marginalization to go unquestioned. In some instances, the teachers may have failed, or refused to recognize the differential impact of their actions on Indigenous students,

particularly males. If the teachers recognized that disproportionate numbers of Indigenous students were unsuccessful, the failure could be attributed to students' socioeconomic status and the "fact" that their families did not value education. Once the blame is shifted to the students, the teacher is relieved of any obligation to consider the impact of his or her actions. There is no need for the teachers to reflect on their practices.

### **Knowledge of Indigenous students**

Some of the participating teachers' understanding of Indigenous cultures seemed rather limited, and they attempted to deal with cultural diversity by adopting what is known as a "tourist curriculum," in which designated days are set aside to recognize other cultures in terms of food, clothing, and folk tales. Teachers sought to improve students' understanding of diverse cultures by presenting various cultural materials, which are typically irrelevant to students' daily lives. Another activity—cooperative-learning groups and -strategies—can, according to Sleeter and Grant's (1987) human relations approach, improve inter-group relationships among students. Human relations approach leans very close to assimilation, in which differences are taught only to the extent necessary to improve students' self-concepts.

#### Tourist perspectives

The first common theme in the participating Han teachers' understanding of Indigenous culture was their 'tourist perspective.' They learned about Indigenous cultures mostly through sightseeing and media. For example, Da-Wei, Ping-Ping, and Ting-Ting had taken advantage of summer vacations to visit Indigenous tribes and take the materials and experiences back to their classes. Da-Wei claimed, "My extensive

travel allowed me to discover that our native friends are blessed with exceptional talents in music, sport, dance, art, and sculpture.” They admitted that their understanding of Indigenous cultures was superficial because “I am an *outsider*,” as Da-Wei put it. Without ever traveling to an Indigenous village, Ling-Ling learned about the Indigenous culture from the media, which often portrayed Taiwan Indigenous people as barbarians and uncivilized. Such tourist experiences tend to perpetuate negative stereotypes of Indigenous people’s lives and present only a superficial view of Indigenous cultures.

With only limited knowledge of Indigenous culture, teachers are more apt to use a tourist approach to teach culturally diverse students. This approach addresses predominantly cultural otherness through celebrations and seasonal holidays, and through traditional food and artifacts. Culture is taught in isolated units rather than in an integrated way and emphasizes exotic differences, focusing on specific events rather than daily life. Derman-Sparks (1993) criticizes the “tourist approach” as patronizing because it emphasizes the exotic differences between cultures and trivializes the multiple dimensions of a particular culture. The problem with this approach is that it represents mainstream perspectives, rules of behavior, images, learning styles, and teaching styles. Other problems with activities *about* other cultures is that they are (a) disconnected, since they are only offered at special times; (b) patronizing, because the cultures are viewed as exotic; (c) trivializing, because important cultural traditions are represented only as a special day, which ignores the essence of the culture; and (d) misrepresentative, because the traditional practices are taught instead of the contemporary practices.

It is evident in the Han teachers’ interviews that they frequently made ambivalent comments about the cultural backgrounds of their Indigenous students. The second-hand

information they had received about Indigenous people from textbooks, media and friends and family had often been distorted by the negative, stereotypical attitudes that are so pervasive in the Han Chinese culture.

### Peer relationship

Among the participating Han teachers, peer relationship was the second common theme in their analysis of the challenge of teaching Indigenous students. Their beliefs mostly stemmed from experiences with their former Indigenous classmates. What seemed similar in their experiences was that Indigenous students tended to be isolated and withdrawn in class. Most of them also noted that Indigenous students lagged behind their Han peers academically.

The Hans' experiences led them to equate academic achievement with students' social relationships. For instance, Da-Wei believed that some Indigenous students were academically unsuccessful because they did not feel that they were part of their class, and that a better peer-relationship would help Indigenous students adjust in the school culture. Ping-Ping, Ting-Ting, and Ling-Ling also claimed that their Indigenous students' academic work improved when their relationships with peers improved. They had helped their Indigenous students strengthen their relationships either by allying them with students who were excellent in studies and were considerate and generous or by involving them in group-learning activities. The logic was that because these students had little attachment to their peers and teachers, they had little commitment to academic goals and requirements. Thus, breaking through their alienation and helping them attain a sense of belonging was seen as central to academic success.

Most Han teachers in this study espoused a philosophy that emphasized personal relationships with students in order to build a sense of identification with school. Their role was to *nurture* students in order to improve behavior and academic achievement. Unfortunately, their concern did not extend to the culture of the school as a whole in relation to its curriculum, academic expectations, tracking practices, or other structural and cultural aspects that could potentially contribute to students' alienation. To some extent, all Han teachers believed that academic or social difficulties were caused primarily by internal characteristics common to Indigenous students. Although internal factors are important, neglecting to acknowledge external factors, such as societal attitudes, political structures, and acculturation patterns, suggests a blaming-the-victim attitude (Ryan, 1976).

### **Teachers' beliefs about curriculum**

When we discussed the challenges that Indigenous students faced in school, all of the participating teachers expressed concern about the school curriculum. Most of them agreed that it was important to develop an understanding of their students' cultural differences. As they described how that objective was achieved, most of them tended to adopt an additive approach, described below. Except for the two participating Indigenous teachers, no attention was given to cultural stratification or institutional limitations in our conversations about Indigenous student's experiences in school.

#### Add-on Curriculum

All the participating teachers agreed that curricula and text books provided insufficient coverage of Indigenous culture. Da-Wei specifically commented that

“Indigenous cultures are not represented in the curriculum and school textbooks.”

Consequently, “There’s no way to make them [Indigenous students] proud of their own cultures,” he added. Ling-Ling referred to her early school experience, “The curriculum now looks pretty much the same as that which I had in my early school. It’s only a few pages in the school text.” Ping-Ping echoed Ling-Ling’s view, and suspected that the school text had led to only a superficial understanding of Indigenous cultures. Ping-Ping elaborated on the inattention to Indigenous cultures in the school curriculum:

The mandatory curriculum keeps teachers from developing one that is more meaningful and culturally relevant to Indigenous students. Time constraint is a problem. There’s no much time left after we finish packaged curricula and textbooks.... The texts in third grade did have some introduction to Indigenous customs and embroidery, but I don’t think it would reinforce a depth of understanding among students.

When asked about teaching diverse cultures in school, most participating teachers tended to adopt what Banks (2001) calls an *additive approach*, in which Indigenous cultures are added onto the curriculum and not fully integrated into their teaching. For instance, Ting-Ting and Ling-Ling spoke of their experiences with the Indigenous Resource Center in their school. They understood that the Center was created to promote an understanding of Indigenous cultures. However, they argued, “It’s about only ten square meters in size. A lot of information was unclear,” and more materials were needed. Other study participants, specifically Da-Wei and Ping-Ping, added more materials after visiting Indigenous villages. They believed that their visits to Indigenous villages provided them with a better understanding of Indigenous cultures. Having traveled to

various Indigenous villages, they had a collection of artifacts and photos to show their students whenever a topic related to Indigenous people. The teachers, however, did not specify what contents should be included in their teaching and how they should be used. Although they managed to travel to Indigenous sites and bring some information to their classes, Ping-Ping, at least, felt that what she could pass on for a deeper understanding was limited. It is important to note that Ping-Ping was able to gather more materials, but they were insufficient to convey a deeper understanding of Indigenous cultures.

The teachers' perspectives are consistent with Sleeter and Grant's (1987) review of multicultural education, in which they profess that teachers frequently use an *additive approach* because they do so without changing the organization and structure of the curriculum. In this approach, teachers insert isolated facts about ethnic and cultural groups or particular heroes into the curriculum without changing the structure of their lesson plans and units. Furthermore, when this approach is used, lessons about ethnic minorities are primarily limited to information about ethnic holidays and celebrations

An additive approach might be easier to implement, but it puts students and teachers at a disadvantage. While students receive a deeper and broader understanding of cultural differences through extending the curriculum, the new facts are perceived as "add-ons." They are disconnected from course material, suggesting that the information is not as important as the normal course material. Another tact used is to add a book, a unit, or a course to the curriculum that focuses on diverse groups or topics. As Banks (2001) notes, however, the students may not have a sufficient knowledge base to understand multicultural concepts, issues, and groups. Hence, ethnic minority students are afforded little opportunity to learn their own history while at school. At the same

time the dominant group learns little of the history and the contributions of other ethnic and cultural groups in their society. By having curriculum as add-on may implicitly perpetuate the negative stereotypes that students learn in and out of the school about Indigenous cultures.

The two Indigenous teachers, Mayao and Saoma, also recognized the insufficient information about Indigenous cultures in school curriculum. What differentiated them from the other four teachers was their ability to identify the ways in which information and cultural conflict were distorted in the school curriculum and textbooks. In other words, they provided a critical analysis of the school curriculum. Mayao criticized the school curriculum from a historical perspective. In recalling his own schooling, Mayao reported, “very little Indigenous history was taught in school.” He argued that when we examine classroom materials and textbooks for stereotypes of Indigenous people, we should focus on how they were portrayed in the dominant history. He called for a restoration of Indigenous history and an assessment of invisibility, stereotyping, imbalance, unreality, fragmentation, isolation, and language biases in the school curriculum.

Saoma believed that teachers were responsible for teaching accurate information of Indigenous cultures. She said, “Most teachers do not know about Indigenous cultures, or, even worse, mistakenly deliver stereotypical material to their students.” Being a native-language teacher gave Saoma an advantage in developing a curriculum that was more culturally relevant to her Indigenous students. Rather than searching for Indigenous history in the school textbooks, she visited her home village to collect materials that were meaningfully connected to the students. Saoma’s practice reflected this view:

I went back to my hometown, digging in my uncles' storehouses. Thank God, they didn't throw out many treasures—stuff that our ancestors used in their daily lives—though my uncles thought they were useless. It turned out to be the best way for me to bring my Indigenous students back to the Amis world.... Students remember things they can touch and taste, so I started by teaching them the names of many Amis traditional foods. They might take these names back to their homes and their parents or grandparents might explain more to them.

The educational perspectives of Mayao and Saoma were partly rooted in their own experience. Facing classrooms of bored and resistant students day after day convinced them that the standard pedagogical approaches and curricular simply were not working. Their schooling experiences implicitly indicated that the school curriculum reflected Han ideologies and ignored Indigenous cultures. Their beliefs about the curriculum seemed to significantly demonstrate their inclination and ability to recognize that schools' routine courses are imbued with an unequal distribution of power that produces and reinforces various forms of marginalization and exclusion (Rios, 1996).

Presenting more Indigenous materials and artifacts, however, does not translate into developing understanding of cultural diversity. More important is how teachers integrate that information about cultures into their teaching and how they engage students in learning about Indigenous cultures. Among teachers in this study, there was no clear consensus on how these tasks are best accomplished.

### **Multicultural Education**

As documented in this study, the two Indigenous teachers' experiences and perspectives reflected and embraced cultural diversity, developing a sense for human rights and a respect for other cultures, and challenging discrimination in society. Those two teachers differed from the four Han teachers in the following ways: (a) their schooling experiences, (b) their views of Indigenous students' underachievement, (c) their beliefs about Indigenous languages, (d) their expectations of Indigenous students, and (e) their connections with Indigenous students and families.

#### Indigenous teachers' experiences of schooling

Throughout their interviews Mayao and Saoma consistently referred to their personal and schooling experiences as influential in their perspectives about teaching Indigenous students. Those experiences were crucial factors that distinguished them from other participating teachers. For instance, on reflection, Mayao argued, "All of my formal education and training was meant for me to become as Han as possible." Before studying at the Teachers College, Mayao had never "thought about my cultural background seriously." It was there he began to realize how much he had suppressed his Indigenous identity. His experiences with the Indigenous Student Club motivated his quest to embrace his cultural identity. He believed that his involvement in the Club "made me deal directly with my own culture and the culture of others."

Saoma had difficulty adjusting in school because of her limited ability to speak Mandarin. As a student, she experienced frustration and had difficulty adjusting in her Han dominant school. As a result, she worked very hard to improve her Mandarin, yet she never forgot her cultural identity as an Amis.

There were some Han Chinese kids in my class. Sometimes they would call me “Dumb! Mute Whana!” [Barbarian] because I didn’t speak their language [Taiwanese]. They didn’t play with Indigenous kids. We were pretty isolated at the time. I was ridiculed by these Han Chinese students as ‘low and stupid.’

Both Mayao and Saoma experienced alienation and discrimination in school. Later they realized that many other Indigenous children suffered the same ordeal. When they became more critically aware of the marginalization of their cultures in Taiwan, they became keenly conscious of the differences in treatment between Han and Indigenous students in school and felt compelled to make a difference in school. Mayao said, “I don’t think a lot of Han Chinese people have any idea what it’s like for Indigenous people in this country.” The education of Indigenous students is a major concern of many researchers in Taiwan (Shieh, 1994; Shiu, 1987; Sung, 1998; Tang, 1998); however, the learning experiences of *urban* Indigenous students have not received much attention.

Mayao and Saoma developed a consciousness about their cultures that motivated them to become teachers who were eager to make a difference in Indigenous students’ lives. After Mayao finished his teacher preparation, he taught in a city school where Indigenous students were a minority. He chose the school because of the cultural composition of the student population. Saoma too chose teaching because of her commitment to Indigenous culture. After teaching Amis as a church volunteer for many years, she felt compelled to extend her influence by teaching in public schools. After receiving an Indigenous-language certificate, she taught Amis language in several schools in Taipei. Both Mayao and Saoma realized that many Indigenous students

attended public school and lived with a sort of dissonance because the culture of their schools was different from that of their homes (Lin, 2001).

Mayao's and Saoma's schooling experiences were not unique; they noted that many Indigenous children who moved to the city experienced the same alienation and conflict at school as they did. Just like Mayao, they noted that many Indigenous students lost their native language or, even worse, "rejected their Indigenous heritage." Their observations are consistent with Tang's (1997) research findings that suggest that Indigenous students in city schools "feel despair, disillusionment, alienation, frustration, hopelessness, powerlessness, rejection, and estrangement, all elements of negative views of the self" (p. 38). Mayao and Saoma tried hard to make a difference, not only by offering extra help to their Indigenous students, but also by extending their efforts to Indigenous families and communities.

#### The marginalization of Indigenous students

Unlike other participants in this study who blamed Indigenous students and their parents for the students' educational problems, Mayao and Saoma blamed racism and pointed out inequalities within school and society. For example, Mayao believed that Indigenous students were systematically marginalized in many aspects of education. He argued that in order to teach Indigenous students effectively, issues of school curriculum, the tracking system, ethnic discrimination, and teacher expectations must be seriously dealt with. He believed the school's valued cultural knowledge were alien and debilitating to Indigenous students. In addition, he described the curriculum as "Han-centric." That opinion was echoed in Saoma's comment that many schools did not consider Indigenous languages as important as other Chinese dialects. She reported that

she sensed resistance from administrators who told her that the school's limited facility was inadequate for another Amis language program. She suspected the administrators and principal of being "political," on the issue of Indigenous language. She argued:

I don't think the schools really care about Indigenous languages. In three of the schools where I teach, my class is not scheduled on a regular basis, you know.

That would make me think the Indigenous students are not important. Fukien [a Chinese dialect] is taught in every class, whether the students are Taiwanese or not. They assume that every student needs to learn Fukien. That's not true.

In the eyes of some teachers in this study, for example, Da-Wei and Ping-Ping, one manifestation of the challenge of Indigenous students' success was that Indigenous students had few positive adult Indigenous role models in the school. However, the lack of role models was viewed by Indigenous teachers as simply one aspect of a larger problem. Mayao agreed on the need for more Indigenous teachers in schools. But he believed that the main concern was the school's general marginalization of Indigenous parents, students, and teachers. Indigenous students had difficulty adjusting in an institution in which they felt excluded. That was evident in Mayao's accounts.

I had a hard time learning about Han Chinese history and things like that. When I went to school, there was never anything involving Aborigines at all. For that matter, very little Indigenous history at all was taught in school... I don't think a lot of Han Chinese people have any idea what it's like for Indigenous people in this country.

When the underachievement of Indigenous students was concerned, the two Indigenous teachers seemed to point to institutional challenges in explaining the problem. The heart

of their perspective was that many Indigenous students, particularly those from low-income families, were estranged from an institution whose culture, curriculum, pedagogical and learning styles, goals, and values excluded them because of their Indigenous origin. That was the participating teachers' only explanation that directly addressed the racism implicit in the low achievement by Indigenous students.

#### Beliefs about Indigenous languages

The importance of Indigenous language to academic success was a significant theme of the study's two Indigenous teachers. They did not share the Han teachers' embrace of Mandarin, and if students were deficient in Mandarin, it was therefore logical that they improve their Mandarin more so than their native language to be successful in school. Some teachers assumed that school failure was caused by insufficient exposure to Mandarin, largely at home. Although Mayao and Saoma were both of Amis heritage, they experienced different challenges with regard to their native language. Not being able to speak his native tongue fluently made Mayao feel only "half Amis." Although he felt comfortable identifying himself as an Amis publicly, he had difficulty talking to elders in Amis because he was not fluent in the language. He had to negotiate not only with his Han friends about his identity, but also with the people in the Indigenous community. He told me that "Sometimes you would feel like an outsider when you were questioned by the elders about your ability to speak Amis." He struggled with the tensions caused by his awakening to his cultural identity. He participated in Amis-language programs at night school because he believed that only by using the Amis language could he truly learn his own culture and make himself spiritually whole.

Speaking Amis in her school was seen as “shameful by teachers and students,” according to Saoma. She reported, “Even now, Indigenous people are reluctant to speak their native language in public.” Although ethnic minority children were no longer subjected to corporal punishment for using their home language, Saoma said that they were often the target of other, more subtle forms of rejection and isolation by teachers, administrators, and peers. Furthermore, the fear of being ‘different’ kept urban Indigenous students from identifying themselves ethnically, which, in turn, intensified the stigma at school. As a native-language teacher, Saoma wanted to reverse that practice. She believed that speaking her mother tongue was the first step in “identifying who we are,” and making a difference in our society.

Both of the Indigenous teachers had made a commitment to cultural diversity. They also shared the opinion that language was a key to understanding the culture of students, their community, and, more important, their “ways of knowing” or learning (Bollin & Finkel, 1995; Cochran-Smith, 1995; Mercado, 2001). That is especially important for teachers to understand because Indigenous students are more likely to feel comfortable in school when they believe their cultures are valued at school.

### Teacher expectations

In this study, Han teachers and Indigenous teachers had different expectations for their Indigenous students. Han teachers, for the most part, seemed to have low academic expectations for Indigenous students, which seems to be a logical extension of a *deficit perspective* (Irvin, 1990). Ping-Ping, for example, frankly advocated lower standards, based on the resources available. She explained, “I know their parents can’t afford the after-school programs like other families can.” Others based their lower performance

expectations on ability, explaining that Indigenous students were not able to comprehend complex concepts or to complete extended writing assignments. For instance, Ting-Ting suggested that Indigenous students need to work harder because “It [math quiz] was just too difficult for them. They are easily confused by abstract concepts.”

Rather than seeing the challenge of Indigenous students’ education as an institutional issue, they saw it as simply a challenge for individuals. To them, the teacher’s job was merely to transmit knowledge and evaluate students’ performance. In discussing achievement among Indigenous students, most teachers simply reiterate the conventional reasons for the discrepancies in Han students and Indigenous students. They did not seem to examine their own personal positions in relation to the issues or question these conventional explanations. Nor did they analyze how achievement is influenced by culture, class, and ethnicity. They seemed unable to imagine novel ways of tackling underachievement.

By contrast, Mayao believed in the power of education to make a difference in the lives of Indigenous students. His mission was to build on students’ strengths and to inculcate a sense of “yes, you can,” in Mayao’s words. That was a powerful theme in his beliefs about teaching Indigenous students. He did not agree with those of his colleagues who faulted Indigenous students and parents for their disinterest in education. The following excerpt from an interview with Mayao illustrates his beliefs about teaching Indigenous students:

I realize that these [Indigenous] children are not slow. Many teachers think Indigenous students are incompetent at academic subjects. Many Indigenous students just give up when teachers show this attitude. We just have to

understand them—to work with them better. This is why I need to be aware of other cultures. Sometimes teachers adjust the curriculum by suggesting a lowering of expectations, such as not giving Indigenous students academically demanding assignments. There is a fine line between wanting to adjust the curriculum to meet the student's capacity and actually challenging the student.

Teachers' expectations for Indigenous students may impact the way they teach Indigenous students. Brophy (1983) points out that the negative effects of teacher expectations can be either direct or indirect. Giving low-expectation students limited exposure to new learning material or less learning time will inhibit their learning in very direct ways. Many negative effects, however, are indirect. For example, the teachers give students negative messages about their capabilities and the extent to which teacher expectation effects can be modified by student perceptions. Teachers who hold such deficit views, who are unsympathetic to socio-cultural differences, and who are inexperienced in the education of minority students can fail to provide effective education (Partington, Richer, Godfrey, Harslett, & Harrison, 1999).

#### Indigenous teachers: We are family

Throughout our interviews, the teachers in this study had particular kinds of social relationships with Indigenous students. First, Indigenous teachers showed an intimate relationship with Indigenous people through their use of language. At the same time, Han teachers maintained their cultural distance from the Indigenous students they taught. These teachers made numerous distinctions between Indigenous students and the other students through their choice of personal pronouns, possessive pronouns, and possessive adjectives. Indigenous students and their families were referred to as “*they*” “*them*” and

“*their*” and the other students and their families were referred to as “*we*” “*us*” and “*our*.” That choice of language suggests a division between the two groups. On the other hand, Mayao and Saoma always referred Indigenous people as “*we*” and “*our*.” For example, when describing the life of Indigenous people in the city, Mayao said, “Our *tribes* are in the city. We want to make a living in the city.” In her retrospection, Saoma recalled, “We were pretty isolated at the time. I was ridiculed by these Han Chinese students as ‘low and stupid’,” and “This is the way we lived.”

Second, Indigenous teachers worked inside and outside the classroom as they developed relationship with Indigenous students. Mayao’s perspectives about the qualities of a good teacher for Indigenous students placed a great deal of responsibility on himself. For instance, he recruited a few Indigenous boys for his baseball team and ran an after-school tutoring program for them. He felt fulfilled when he learned that these Indigenous students had made substantial progress on their schoolwork. He told me he worked under circumstances that isolated him as an Indigenous teacher. For him, one way to overcome the isolation was to engage in collaborative inquiry. Consequently, he formed an Indigenous teachers group for Indigenous cultural study. The teachers met periodically to exchange ideas about teaching and other matters related to Indigenous people. The meetings provided an opportunity to share experiences, perspectives, and challenges. Mayao said he felt privileged to establish a forum that helped Indigenous teachers grow professionally and spiritually and pledged every effort to keep the group functioning. One of the goals of the group was to “prepare ourselves to teach Indigenous students in the city schools where we serve.” The group also sought to develop an ability to screen out stereotyped and biased material and to teach those skills to their students.

Third, Indigenous teachers shared more common experiences with Indigenous children and felt they could build a trusting relationship with them. Saoma agreed that the presence of Indigenous teachers in school was vital. As an Indigenous teacher and former Indigenous student, she believed “It would be greatly beneficial if there were someone who really understood what you had been through.” She was convinced that children would learn if there existed a relationship based on “trust and concern, like family.” Having witnessed the demise of the Amis language among the young Indigenous generation in the city, Saoma committed herself to teaching the Indigenous language in her church. As she told me, “my greatest goal is to educate Indigenous children about themselves through their own language.” She believed that those students needed teachers who “know what it was like, growing up as an Indigenous student in a predominantly Han school system,” and that she could help them by using their mother tongue.

Finally, Indigenous teachers seemed more able than Han teachers to take advantage of their connections with Indigenous churches, social and cultural networks, and common experiences. Although Mayao and Saoma were different in numerous aspects of teaching, they shared a common commitment, values, expectations for their students, and connections with families and community. They took their responsibilities beyond the classroom and the demands of their jobs. For example, Indigenous parents were more at ease talking to Mayao. Whatever the issues they brought to school, they preferred that Mayao be present at the meeting. Some of his colleagues also saw him as a bridge between the school and Indigenous families. Mayao’s initiative with an Indigenous-teachers group also provided him with a supported system outside of school.

Saoma's teaching Amis in church for a long time enabled her to connect with young Indigenous students more easily. As an Amis language teacher at school, Saoma invited Indigenous parents to participate in their children's education. Although both of Mayao and Saoma regretted the erosion of the Indigenous community and the family cohesiveness that had been a mainstay in their own development, they did not view the families as deficient. Nor did they use 'family problems' as an excuse for not teaching. Teaching for them was a calling. They demonstrated their sense of responsibility not only to the children and their families but also to the community.

Mayao and Saoma's experiences and perspectives are consistent with Qiu's (1998) study findings that suggest that Indigenous teachers are advantaged by understanding how the concept of family may be used as a motif for practice, where the teachers are perceived as parents, mentor, or elders. They understand the benefits of creating a sense of intimacy and trust with their Indigenous students that translates to a comfortable, effective learning environment.

### **Summary**

This chapter focuses on the six participating teachers' experiences with Indigenous cultures and students. It draws from Sleeter & Grant's (1987) approach to multicultural education, as discussed in Chapter two. The analysis uses four of the five approaches they outlined as a way to examine the teachers' perspectives. What is important is that the approaches outlined here are crucial to the understanding of teachers' experiences with Indigenous students and of how they interpret their understanding of the education of Indigenous students.

The four Han teachers in this study tended to hold culture-blind perspectives with regard to the issues of teaching and the challenges faced by Indigenous students. Their perspectives implied that there are standard ways to treat all students, using the same set of rules and requirements. Also, they assumed that all students entering school start on the same footing. Believing that the responsibility for success or failure lies within each Indigenous student corroborates Cummins' (1989) view that the focus of academic failure in minority students has always led to the conclusion that the problem lies within individual students, as opposed to problems requiring actions by the school.

The Han teachers' understanding of Indigenous cultures and the way they help Indigenous students learn can be compared to Sleeter and Grant's (1987) Human Relations approach, in which they seek to teach Indigenous cultures through celebrations and seasonal holidays. The Han teachers seemed to adopt "tourist perspectives" when they talked about Indigenous cultures. Teachers with such perspectives are more likely to perpetuate negative stereotypes of Indigenous people's lives. In addition, the Han teachers believed that a better peer relationship would help Indigenous students better adjust to the school culture and, in turn, improve their academic progress. Their concern did not extend to the culture of the school as a whole, its curriculum, academic expectations, the role of tracking, or other structural and cultural aspects that could potentially contribute to Indigenous students' low achievement.

All participating teachers believed that their schools' existing curricula provided only superficial information about Indigenous cultures. However, most of them tended to adopt Sleeter and Grant's (1987) Single Group Studies approach, in which they teach isolated facts about Indigenous cultures and people into the curriculum without changing

the structure of their lesson plans and units. Knowing about an Indigenous student's culture is viewed as an exercise that is either extracurricular (learned during celebrations, festivals or field trips) or the prerogative of a teacher's class.

The two Indigenous teachers' experiences and perspectives reflected the importance of promoting the strength and value of cultural diversity, developing a sense for human rights and respect for cultural diversity, and challenging discrimination in society. Their teaching practices and pedagogical beliefs came about as a result of their schooling experience in Han dominant schools. They demonstrated a sense of agency as well as a personal desire to make change for themselves and for their Indigenous students in city schools. The Indigenous teachers often acted as surrogate parents to the Indigenous children they taught (Foster, 1992; Willis, 1995). They seemed more able than Han teachers to meet the challenge through their connections with Indigenous churches, social networks, the culture, and common experiences.

## CHAPTER 11

### CONCLUSION

Educating all students well is a formidable challenge. While the institution of school, through policies and practices, plays an important role in the education of Indigenous students, teachers too have a significant impact upon the success of Indigenous students. From the cross-case discussion and analysis, we learn that the values and beliefs that teachers have about Indigenous students range from a culture-blind approach to a more critical pedagogical approach. This conclusion examines four themes: (1) cultural diversity in teaching; (2) teaching and institutional racism; (3) confronting educational inequality; and (4) developing culturally appropriate curricula.

#### Learning about cultural diversity

##### Experiencing cultural diversity

The teachers in this study agreed that educators needed more exposure to the realities of Indigenous life and culture. Unfortunately, in Taiwan the social structure and the geographical separation of the Indigenous community are such that most Han Chinese teachers have had little or no direct exposure to Indigenous cultures. Even the teachers of Indigenous students are likely to have little direct exposure to life in the Indigenous community. Da-Wei, Ping-Ping, and Ting-Ting took advantage of summer vacations to visit Indigenous tribes, returning with helpful materials and experiences. However, they admitted that their understanding of Indigenous cultures was superficial because “I am an *outsider*,” as Da-Wei expressed it. They were raised and educated in predominantly Han

communities. Their first-hand knowledge of Indigenous people, culture, and history was quite limited. The secondary sources they have received about Indigenous people from textbooks, media and friends and family were often distorted by the negative, stereotypical attitudes that are so pervasive in Han Chinese culture.

The participants' accounts also suggest that teachers' experiences with cultural diversity profoundly impact their teaching practice. One might expect a deeper understanding through experience, this, however, was not the case in my study. Experience alone does not make teaching cultural relevant. Teachers must develop their understanding of the values and meaning they give to Indigenous cultures and be able to construct pedagogical practices that have relevance and meaning to the students, socially and culturally. Teachers therefore need to be engaged in a meaningful learning process, by which they are able to connect their teaching to students' life experiences. Without meaningful, direct, and positive experiences with diverse others, teacher's knowledge and beliefs about cultural diversity may be limited to media images or often-negative personal or second-hand information.

#### Being reflective

To be effective with culturally diverse students, this study suggests that teachers have to recognize and understand their own worldviews in relation to their students' world views (McAllister & Irvine, 2000). For teachers to interact effectively with their minority students, they must confront their own racism and biases (Nieto & Rolon, 1995), learn about the students' cultures, and perceive the world through diverse-culture lenses (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Shujaa (1995) states that it is important for teachers to become culturally relevant in their teaching that they understand who they are racially and

culturally as human beings and how they have learned to view human beings who are racially and culturally different from themselves. Such change is, in actuality, dependent upon individual teacher's process of personal transformation (p. 200).

Such reflection may occur through contact with people different from one's self or through secondary sources. At this stage of reflection teachers are able to perceive the world through different perspectives (Banks, 1994; Gillette & Boyle-Baise, 1995; Hollins, 1996; Nieto & Rolon, 1995; Sleeter, 1992). To become culturally relevant, teachers need to engage in honest, critical reflection in which they challenge their perspectives and examine how their worldviews impact their students, whether in positive or negative ways. Critical reflection should include an examination of how race, culture, and social class shape students' thinking and learning both inside and outside of the classroom. Teachers have to be able to acknowledge how negative notions of diverse students continue to permeate traditional school thinking, practices, and placement, and then critique their own thoughts and practices to ensure they do not reinforce prejudicial behavior. Moreover, they need to recognize the explicit connection between culture and learning, and see students' cultural capital as an asset and not a detriment to the learning process.

### Understanding institutional racism

#### Stop blaming the victim

Han teachers in this study generally acknowledged that there were differences in average achievement along racial lines, but asserted that the reasons for the differences were related to individual socioeconomic status rather than cultural difference. In some

ways, they did not see a relationship between socioeconomic status and the cultural marginalization of Indigenous students and their families. Moreover, that position is culture blind, insofar as it fails to address the role of racism in impeding the educational achievement of Indigenous students. Furthermore, their view places the blame on the students and their families, specifically on the parents who “don’t put an emphasis on education.” The school and the educational system are left unquestioned as contributors to student failure. Finally, the connection between cultural diversity and socioeconomic status are left uninterrogated in evaluating the success of Indigenous students. Through their culture-blind views, the Han teachers avoided questioning how the school and they themselves were complicit in the reproduction of unequal educational outcomes.

If one accepts the premise that socioeconomic disparities will continue to impede the current generation of Indigenous children regardless of reform efforts, then one is left with a single conclusion: Indigenous students must be taught to achieve under whatever sociopolitical conditions exist. Such a conclusion does not negate the responsibility to address social injustice. It only recognizes that Indigenous children need special skills to combat social inequalities as social justice is achieved. Teachers must be moved away from using race or socioeconomic background as ‘excuses’ for the nonperformance of their students. Teachers who are effective with Indigenous students develop strong bonds, have high expectations, focus on the total child, and use familiar communications styles (Foster, 1994).

It is important for teachers to recognize that the challenges faced by Indigenous students are the results of both individual and institutional discrimination. The major difference between individual and institutional discrimination is the way in which power

is wielded. Institutional discrimination is wielded primarily through the power of the people who control institutions such as schools, where the oppressive policies and practices are reinforced and legitimized. Individual discrimination is wielded through personal interaction among individuals. Consequently, discrimination can be understood as a systemic problem and not simply as an individual dislike for a particular group of people. Because of the power of some groups over others, those groups with the most power in society are the ones that benefit from institutional discrimination, whether or not that is their intent (Nieto, 2002).

#### Indigenous parents

Some teachers stated that Indigenous parents fail to get involved in their children's education. Also, some believed that many Indigenous families could not provide an intellectual environment for Indigenous children. That was particularly noticeable in the perspectives of Ting-Ting and Ling-Ling. Their views of Indigenous parents' actions seemed to influence their assessments of children's abilities and potential. For example, Ting-Ting viewed the lack of participation by Indigenous parents as a major problem. She said that Indigenous children "don't have anybody to make them do their homework." Similarly, Ling-Ling believed that parents' involvement played a crucial role in Indigenous students' learning.

The cases reported here suggest that parents' attitudes are related to differences in teachers' beliefs. In particular, most of the participating teachers suggested that Han Chinese parents sought to control, shape, and supplement their children's school program, while Indigenous parents tended to leave education to the school. As a result, Indigenous parents often have difficulty pinpointing the nature of their children's educational

problems, understanding the dialogues at school, and making certain that their children complete their homework. Some teachers stated that Indigenous parents failed to get involved in their children's education. Also, some believed that many Indigenous families cannot provide an intellectual environment for Indigenous children.

### Confronting educational inequality

#### Affirmative action

Han teachers in this study tended to view affirmative action as a violation of a basic principle of justice. Most of them explicitly expressed their opposition to educational affirmative action. For example, Ting-Ting and Ling-Ling asserted that affirmative action not only implies that Indigenous students are less intelligent than Han Chinese, but also fosters academic laziness in Indigenous students. They believed that treating everyone in the same impartial fashion is a core element of fairness. Some believed that high school and college should admit students on the basis of their demonstrated academic abilities and achievement, without consideration of their ethnicity.

On the other hand, Indigenous teachers suggested that the policy helps, not hinders the equal treatment of all people. Without affirmative action, Mayao believed, Indigenous people do not receive treatment equal to the preferential treatment currently afforded Han Chinese people. Indigenous teachers in this study stood up for the legitimacy of affirmative action. During the interviews, Mayao and Saoma said that because of the underprivileged conditions of Indigenous students, they should not be held to the same academic standards as the "privileged" Han students. Thus, because of the

inferior education offered to them, Indigenous students “can’t be expected to perform as well on standardized tests, and they will obviously have a lower academic grade”.

The difference between Han teachers’ and Indigenous teachers’ perspectives regarding affirmative action policy may imply that most teachers have little understanding of the social processes that create and reinforce racism. Teachers clearly need that understanding in order to challenge it through their teaching. For teacher educators, this must give cause for concern, given the ever-increasing pressures within initial teacher training, where there is precious little time for exploring the social contexts of education in a way that will develop that understanding among students.

#### The marginalization of Indigenous languages

Teachers in this study had very differing attitudes about Indigenous languages. Da-Wei, who was once forced to speak Mandarin, believed that learning one’s home language and being able to speak it in public without fear were crucial to increasing one’s self-esteem and clarifying one’s identity. Other Han teachers believed that people have the right to decide whether they want to retain their mother tongue. For Ping-Ping, Ting-Ting, and Ling-Ling, to the contrary, the Indigenous language seemed to be nothing but “a tool of communication.” Although Ting-Ting believed that Indigenous languages were unique and needed to be preserved, she was very pessimistic about their preservation. Alice and Ling-Ling further indicated that language was an important tool, not only to communicate, but also to compete.

Indigenous teachers observed that their own language and culture were absent in their education, and they are only now aware of the need to draw attention to the culture of their Indigenous students. Mayao’s stories made reference to a “rediscovery of my

language and culture.” Saoma talked about her experiences of being prohibited from speaking her mother tongue. She stated that although minority children were no longer subjected to corporal punishment for using their home language, they were often the target of other, more subtle forms of rejection and ostracism by teachers, administrators, and peers. As an Indigenous-language teacher, she observed that many city schools do not really commit to provide or create Indigenous languages for Indigenous students.

Han teachers in this study adopted a culture-blind approach by “treating all students equally.” When they talked about Indigenous students, they tended to focus on cultural similarities rather than cultural differences. Culture blindness not only limits teachers’ acknowledgement of student characteristics and perspectives; it also fails to acknowledge important influences on schools and society. In particular, a culture-blind approach requires a willful ignorance of the impact of racism. This failure to acknowledge the racist structures in society and schooling must necessarily be accompanied by a failure to question and disrupt those structures. Therefore, despite the possibly well-meaning intentions of the cultural blind, that mind set prevents the questioning of assumptions and thereby serves to perpetuate a status quo of inequality.

Experience with Indigenous cultures does not alone make a multicultural educator. It is the interrelationships across identity, power, and experience that lead to a consciousness of other perspectives and recognition of multiple realities in our society. Mayao and Saoma seemed to have developed such consciousness. Because of their identity outside the mainstream of Han Chinese, they became conscious at an early age of how they were perceived as an Amis by Han people. As an ethnic minority, they came to understand the power of privilege that comes from being in the dominant group.

### Developing culturally appropriate curriculum

The school curriculum reflects the fundamental ideologies and corresponding purposes of school for Indigenous people. Teachers' beliefs about the curriculum significantly indicate their ability and tendency to recognize that routinized courses are imbued with an unequal distribution of power that produces and reinforces various forms of marginalization and exclusion (Rios, 1996). Indigenous teachers' critiques about the school curriculum were even stronger. In a retrospective of his own schooling, Mayao reported, "very little Indigenous history was taught in school." He argued that when teachers examine classroom materials and textbooks for stereotypes of Indigenous people, they must focus on how Indigenous people are portrayed. Assessment of materials for invisibility, stereotyping, selectivity, imbalance, unreality, fragmentation, isolation, and language biases must be a continuous process.

It is important to avoid perpetuating prejudices and stereotypes in the curriculum and the materials students are using. Low self-esteem and lack of pride in one's Indigenous identity stem, in part, from the stereotypical images of Indigenous people that can still be found in textbooks. The most important implication of that finding is that teachers, whose own cultures are frequently represented in school curricula, may not understand how they are influenced by the stereotypes learned in the course of their own schooling. For an effective education of Indigenous students, teachers' learning about Indigenous cultures outside of school seems to be a critical factor in bringing about the change in the classroom.

The study of teachers' experiences suggests that teachers have the pivotal role in promoting equity in their classrooms. They are responsible for creating the climate within which students learn and for the methods of teaching and learning that promote self-esteem and mutual respect. Teachers must learn to develop and present lessons that incorporate diversity into the curriculum. They must establish a classroom climate that values the diversity of all learners.

### **Implications for teacher education: Preparing teachers for diversity**

The cross-case analysis suggests a need for change that requires teachers who have (1) direct *experiences* with and thorough *knowledge* about the cultural values, learning styles, historical legacies, and contribution of different ethnic groups; (2) the *courage* to stop blaming the victims of school failure and to admit that something is seriously wrong with existing educational systems; (3) the *will* to confront prevailing educational canons and convictions, and to rethink traditional assumptions of cultural neutrality in teaching and learning; and (4) the *skills* to act productively in translating knowledge and sensitivity about cultural diversity into pedagogical practices. Hopefully, then, schooling experiences like those of Mayao and Saoma, described in Chapter 6 and 7, will be historical memories, not everyday occurrences, and their children will have more successful stories to tell about their school experiences.

#### Teacher preparation

The most obvious avenue to effectively prepare teachers to work with cultural minority students is through formal teacher education with both preservice and inservice teachers. Formal preparation in teaching culturally diverse students should include

carefully planned presentations and field experiences that focus on attitudes necessary to understand and appreciate language development and cultural diversity. Teachers particularly need to be sensitized to the important role language plays in maintaining cultural identity and social ties.

Teacher education programs are charged with the responsibility to prepare individuals to function effectively in the classroom. Unfortunately, most participants felt that their preparation was inadequate. Dissatisfaction ranged from “There is not one thing that I learned in my education classes” to “it [the training] didn’t prepare me for the actual classroom experience.” Minimizing the theory/practice gap requires that teacher educators understand the developmental nature of teacher knowledge and pedagogy. Centering the content of teacher-education courses on student learning might better prepare teachers to recognize and respond to students’ competencies and needs and to equip them to adapt their instruction and curriculum accordingly.

In addition, according to the six teachers’ statements, teacher education also failed to prepare them to teach culturally diverse students. All the participants agreed that teacher education should provide multicultural education courses, but as Mayao pointed out, teachers today are more likely to have Indigenous students because the percentage of Indigenous city dwellers has dramatically increased (Chen, Whang, & Chiu, 2003).

There are many challenges associated with preparing teachers to work with Indigenous children and parents, and often teachers have not been properly prepared to address those challenges. Da-Wei reported that issues of race and diversity within a cultural context are seldom taught or discussed among teachers. The Han-based perspective, as Da-Wei and Mayao pointed out, is dominant throughout all the

educational levels in Taiwan, leaving no space for students to see and think otherwise. Furthermore, race, gender, and cultural differences and needs are not included in their preparation programs. Consequently, teachers lacking adequate preparation for cultural diversity are not effectively teaching students who come from culturally diverse backgrounds. The results of this study mirror Kuo's (1996) study, finding that the teacher education curricula of teachers colleges in Taiwan are devoid of multicultural education, even though most teachers and teacher educators agree on the importance of multicultural education.

Nieto (2002) asserts that teachers who share the same culture as their students can be viewed as cultural brokers between linguistic minority children and the school and thus constitute a valuable asset to the teaching profession. The finding points clearly to the need to recruit and train Indigenous teachers. The significant emerging effects on ethnicity show that teachers who share the cultural background of their students are more likely to hold favorable attitudes toward the cultural diversity of Indigenous students. Thus, efforts made to identify promising Indigenous people and recruit them to the teaching profession are well worth the time and effort involved (Fu, 1999; Lin, 2001; Sung, 1998). Research findings here suggest that few non-Indigenous teachers have significant interactions with individuals who are racially different from them. They tended to adopt culture-blind ideologies in a variety of teaching contexts (e.g., urban, suburban, or rural). Such thinking could be detrimental to the education of Indigenous students.

However, if the problems facing the education of Indigenous students were only about matching teachers' and students' cultural, racial, linguistic, and ethnic backgrounds,

we should be able to find a solution in Indigenous schools that have more Indigenous teachers than the city schools. In other words, having more Indigenous teachers, according to all the participating teachers in this study, was deemed to be a way to solve the problem. But that has not been the case in studies about the achievement of Indigenous students in Indigenous areas (Li & Jian, 1992; Tsai & Lin, 1992). By studying the teaching efficiency of teachers in Indigenous schools, some researchers (Chen, 1998; Chiou, 2000, Chou, 1999) have found that Indigenous teachers are not necessarily more effective than Han teachers when both are evaluated for their teaching in Indigenous schools. The point of creating a more diverse teaching force is to ensure that all students, including Han students, experience a more accurate picture of what it means to live and work in a multicultural and democratic society (Ladson-Billing, 2005).

#### Professional development

What kinds of professional development can help inservice teachers learn more about cultural diversity and apply that knowledge to improving classroom practices? Short-term professional development would seem inadequate to help teachers transform their deeply-held, and limiting beliefs about Indigenous students. Teaching and learning is complex, and teachers need time to learn and experiment with new concepts in the classroom, just as their students do. To be successful, professional development programs must address teachers' beliefs and attitudes toward cultural diversity and toward students from ethnic minority backgrounds. Teachers need time to reflect on the meaning of education in a multicultural society, on the relationships between teachers and learners, and on social attitudes about language and culture that affect students (Clair, 1995; Gonzalez & Darling-Hammond, 1997).

The results of this study also suggest that most teachers who work with Indigenous students have not been adequately prepared to take advantage of the opportunities presented by the students' culture or to face the challenges they encounter in the school. Most teachers of Indigenous students complete their professional development courses without a limited exploration of Indigenous students' lives. There seems little or no attention to the benefit of examining the institutions, cultural traits, behaviors, values, and attitudes that Indigenous students bring to the classroom. They are unfamiliar with strategies for incorporating information related to Indigenous culture in every discipline and for using the information to motivate and inspire Indigenous students to continue and expand their level of achievement.

Professional development must be contextualized in as many layers as possible—for example, in the context of the individual student, the classroom, the school, and the school district. In professional development teachers need to problematize the context in order to uncover the relationship between their beliefs and their pedagogy.

Sometimes the school system or the classroom may cause teachers to invoke one belief over another to support a school district's goals, such as improving scores on standardized tests. A holistic approach that examines teachers beliefs within their teaching context will assist administrators and teacher educators in supporting teachers as they manage the tensions and constraints that manifest in their beliefs and practices as they educate all students well, and ensure that Indigenous students have full opportunities to fulfill their potentials.

Future research in this area needs to explore the following themes: First, an examination of preservice teachers' perspectives and dispositions about Indigenous

cultures. Second, examining practicing teachers' perspectives and practices of teaching Indigenous students. Third, designing and developing programs that address issues of cultural diversity within schools. I hope that in the future, additional studies will continue to consider what teachers are doing in the classroom that is working for cultural diverse students. Researchers could intensify the results of their findings by increasing collaboration with teachers, as they are the individuals with a finger on the pulse of our future society.

**Appendix A**  
Interview Protocol  
First Interview

Applicant:

Ethnicity:

Gender:

Interviewer:

School:

Date:

Time of Interview:

Location and description of setting:

Interviewer Guidelines:

What are the prior experiences (personal and sociocultural experiences, K-12 schooling, and background, educational theory and teacher preparation, etc.) of teachers of Indigenous students in city schools?

1. Give a brief personal history. Describe your life as you were growing up.
2. Why did you decide to become a teacher?
3. What is your most successful teaching experience?
4. Is there any one who has influenced you more than others? If so, describe his or her influence and its significance for you.

Interview Protocol  
Second Interview

Applicant:

Ethnicity:

Gender:

Interviewer:

School:

Date:

Time of Interview:

Location and description of setting:

Interviewer Guidelines:

1. What are the important issues that you believe should be addressed to improve the education of Indigenous students?
2. What are the most important issues facing the education of Indigenous people today?
3. How do the textbooks represent the culture of Aborigines?
4. What experience or observations formed your initial views of Indigenous people?
5. Can you remember how Indigenous students have been taught in your prior schools?
6. In what way do you think your school or colleagues value Indigenous culture?

Interview Protocol  
Third Interview

Applicant:  
Ethnicity:  
Gender:  
Interviewer:  
School:  
Date:  
Time of Interview:  
Location and description of setting:  
Interviewer Guidelines:

What are teachers' perspectives of Indigenous students?

1. What have been your experiences of teaching urban Indigenous students?
2. From your point of view, what are the differences between urban Aborigines and tribal Aborigines?
3. How do you think the issues associated with gender and social class influence the learning of Indigenous students in your class?
4. From your observation, do Indigenous students have different learning styles?
5. What have you found to be the most effective ways of adapting instruction to meet Indigenous student needs? (Probe to uncover how and when he/she uses these methods)

Interview Protocol  
Forth Interview

Applicant:  
Ethnicity:  
Gender:  
Interviewer:  
School:  
Date:  
Time of Interview:  
Location and description of setting:  
Interviewer Guidelines:

What are the teachers' educational philosophies about students, teaching, and learning?

1. Please talk about your educational philosophies.
2. From your point of view, what is a teacher's role?
3. What is your expectation of Indigenous students in your classroom?

## Appendix B

### EDUCATION ACT FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

June 17, 1998

President Decree Hua-tsung-( I)-yi-tzu-no. 8700121270

#### Article I General Provisions

**Section 1** Said Act is promulgated in compliance with Constitutional Amendment Section 10 that obliges the government to safeguard the education rights of Aborigines and upgrade the Aborigine ethnic education and culture, as dictated by the will of the Indigenous people.

**Section 2** Indigenous peoples are the center of the Indigenous people education; hence the government should promote Indigenous peoples education with versatility, equality, and reverence. Indigenous peoples education should uphold the dignity of the people, continue the ethnic lifeline, foster Indigenous peoples welfare, and enhance Indigenous peoples prosperity.

**Section 3** Every department of the government should provide active assistance, as well as ensure the equal education opportunity of Indigenous peoples and the establishment of an education system suitable to the demands of the Indigenous peoples.

**Section 4** The term education authorities herein refers to: central authority, the Ministry of Education; provincial (municipality) authority, the department (bureau) of education, provincial (municipality) government; local authority, the local county (city) government. The Indigenous peoples authorities concerned handles the planning of the Indigenous peoples education herein provided, as well as meets the executive education authorities concerned for implementation.

The executive education authorities referred in paragraph 1 refer to the government office handling Indigenous peoples education and the individuals engaging in an Indigenous peoples education. Said authorities are obliged to be familiar with the Indigenous peoples language and culture; native Indigenous peoples professional applicants enjoy employment priority.

**Section 5** The central Indigenous peoples affairs authority should organize an Indigenous peoples education evaluation committee to handle the planning, evaluation, and supervision of Aborigine education policies. Committee should be composed of teachers, parents, experts, and scholars; two-thirds of the committee's organization should be composed of Aborigine representatives. Organization procedure is separately provided.

**Section 6** The term "indigenes" or "Indigenous peoples" herein concerned is defined according to the relevant regulations of the central Indigenous people affairs authority.

**Section 7** The term " Indigenous peoples education" refers to the general education patterned after Aborigine requirements provided to the Indigenous peoples.

The term " Indigenous peoples ethnic education" refers to the education patterned after the Indigenous peoples ethnic cultural characteristics provided to the Indigenous people.

The term " Indigenous peoples public junior high and elementary school" or " Indigenous peoples classroom" refers to the schools or classrooms constructed for Indigenous students.

The term " Indigenous people district school" refers to a school where enrolled Indigenous students reached the required student population ratio; said ratio is determined by the central executive education authority.

**Section 8** Government authorities concerned should set the district school Indigenous student quota with a flexible consideration of existing requirements; moreover, upon the consent of the school district residents, integrate schools or implement a consolidated teaching system.

**Section 9** The central government should have a flexible budget scale and set Indigenous peoples education and Indigenous peoples ethnic education on a case-to-case basis. Minimum ratio is 1% of the total education budget of the executive education authorities.

## **Article II School Education**

**Section 10** The central government provides local governments a subsidy for the establishment of public kindergarten schools in Indigenous peoples settlements, thus providing preschool Indigenous children schooling opportunities.

Government authorities concerned should subsidize schooling expenses of Indigenous children attending private or public kindergarten schools, as per actual requirement dictates. Subsidy procedure is separately provided.

The central authority should also provide for Indigenous children daycare facilities, as provided in the foregoing two paragraphs.

**Section 11** The government authorities concerned should establish Indigenous peoples public junior high and elementary schools, or classrooms for Indigenous peoples schooling convenience and preservation of Indigenous peoples culture.

**Section 12** Indigenous peoples public junior high and elementary schools should offer boarding facilities in response to student requirements; fulltime guidance counselors should manage said boarding facilities. The central government should set a budget for board and lodging fee subsidies.

**Section 13** Senior high school and lower level schools should take the initiative in developing the special potentials of Aborigine students, as well as provide guidance based on their inclinations and talents for proper development.

**Section 14** Senior high school and lower schools should teach the Indigenous

peoples education curriculum to all enrolled Indigenous students. When Indigenous student population has reached the standard requirement of the executive education authority, an Indigenous peoples education resource classroom should be established for Indigenous peoples ethnic education and regular course guidance purposes.

**Section 15** A minimum of one school equipped with an Indigenous ethnic education resource center should be located in every municipality and local county (city) to support the Indigenous peoples ethnic education conducted in the regular schools located within the city/county area or neighboring areas.

**Section 16** Educational establishments (senior high school or higher) should safeguard the admission and schooling opportunities of Indigenous students; as well as reserve a quota for Indigenous students in their overseas education grants/subsidies to ensure the cultivation of Indigenous peoples talents. Procedure is as separately provided by the central executive education authority.

**Section 17** The government should urge universities to establish colleges/ departments or establish Aborigine university campuses for the development of ethnic academics, education of higher Indigenous peoples talents, and cultivation of potential Indigenous peoples educators and teachers, thereby fostering the political, economic, educational, cultural, and social development of Indigenous peoples.

### **Article III Curriculum**

**Section 18** The curriculums and textbooks taught in each class level and school should have a multicultural perspective and include Indigenous peoples ethnic historical culture and sense of values to foster intertribal understanding and respect.

**Section 19** The preschool and public education program of the government should provide Indigenous students an opportunity to learn their ethnic language, history, and culture.

**Section 20** Schools should respect the opinion of Aborigine people during the Indigenous peoples ethnic education curriculum development and textbook selection, as well as invite the participation of Indigenous peoples representatives in the planning and design stages.

### **Article IV Faculty**

**Section 21** The cultivation of Indigenous peoples ethnic education teachers should comply with the teacher cultivation laws, as well as guarantee a resource for Indigenous peoples ethnic education teachers. Teacher colleges, ethnic academies, as well as universities with education colleges, departments, postgraduate schools, or courses should have a reserved quota for self-paying or government-subsidized Indigenous students.

**Section 22** Indigenous peoples ethnic education teachers should study Indigenous peoples ethnic culture or multicultural education subjects to enhance their professional teaching skills.

**Section 23** Native Indigenous peoples applicants should be given priority consideration for the full-time teaching positions in Indigenous peoples public junior high and elementary schools, classrooms, and district schools.

Native Indigenous peoples applicants with director and principal qualifications should be given priority consideration in the appointment of directors and principals for Indigenous peoples public junior high and elementary schools, classrooms, and district schools.

**Section 24** Schools offering Indigenous peoples ethnic language, culture, and handicraft education should employ aged and respected Indigenous peoples or individuals possessing the relevant expertise for teachers; employment procedure shall be established by the central Indigenous peoples affairs authority.

### **Article V Social Education**

**Section 25** The government should establish Indigenous peoples ethnic promotion schools offering Indigenous peoples the following education:

- A. Literacy education
- B. School curriculum review or acceleration education
- C. Ethnic handicraft, special skill, or vocational training
- D. Parenting education
- E.

Traditional culture education F. Other adult education courses

Expenses for the foregoing first and second items are fully subsidized by the central government; subsidies for the remaining education courses are provided as circumstances demand.

**Section 26** In response to Indigenous peoples cultural education continuity and development needs, the government should set up specific education time slots and channels in public TV, educational broadcasting stations, radio stations, and public welfare cable TV channels, a website, as well as other educational broadcast media operations as circumstances demand.

**Section 27** Schools and social-educational institutions should integrate public and private institutions and social organizations in response to Aborigine needs in an effort to provide social education and cultural opportunities to Aborigines, as well as enhance Indigenous peoples parenting education.

## **Article VI Research, Evaluation, and Incentives**

**Section 28** The government should establish Indigenous peoples ethnic education research and development institutes or commission research services of relevant schools and academic institutions for the experimentation, research, and evaluation of Indigenous peoples ethnic education courses, textbooks, and teaching methods.

**Section 29** Indigenous peoples representative participation should form a majority in the Indigenous peoples ethnic education related experimentation, research, and evaluation planning process.

**Section 30** Government authorities concerned should offer educational grants to Indigenous students as well as implement appropriate privileges and incentives for schooling and job placement counseling.

**Section 31** Educational executive authorities concerned should offer incentives to outstanding schools, institutions, groups, and individuals engaging in Indigenous peoples ethnic education.

#### **Article VII Addenda**

**Section 32** The central executive education authority and central Aborigine affairs authority should jointly establish the implementation procedure of said act.

**Section 33** Said act shall take effect on enactment date.

## Appendix C

### **EDUCATION ACT FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IMPLEMENTATION PROCEDURE**

Ministry of Education, Council of Indigenous Peoples, September 1, 1999

Ordinance no. Tai-(88)-tsan-tzu-tu-88107008 and Tai-(88)-yuan-min-chiao-tzu-ti-8813469

**Section 1** Said implementation procedure is established in compliance with section 32 of the Education Act for Indigenous Peoples (hereafter referred as EAIP).

**Section 2** The provision EAIP in Section 1 safeguarding the Indigenous Peoples right to education refers to the safeguarding of all rights to education to which Indigenous peoples are entitled, as well as the ethnic culture development education rights.

**Section 3** Individuals familiar with Indigenous peoples ethnic language and culture stated in EAIP Sections 3 and 4 refer to individuals possessing any of the following duly certified qualifications:

- A. An individual who has completed 4 units of collegiate Indigenous peoples ethnic language and culture courses.
- B. An individual who has attended a minimum of seventy-two hours Indigenous peoples ethnic language and culture seminar conducted by the government or accredited private establishment.
- C. An individual who has written publications concerning Indigenous peoples ethnic language and culture.
- D. An individual who has worked in an establishment or organization engaging in Indigenous peoples ethnic language and culture pursuits for a minimum period of two years.

**Section 4** Indigenous peoples ethnic education measures and activities should be implemented consistent with Indigenous peoples history, language, art, and living customs, social system, ecology utilization, and value system.

**Section 5** The term " Indigenous student class" stated in EAIP Section 7 paragraph 3 refers to the specially designed classes catering to general school education and special Indigenous peoples education requirements.

**Section 6** The required Aborigine student quota for schools stated in EAIP Section 7 paragraph 4 is one-third of the total student population. However, the executive education authorities concerned may set exceptions to the one-third

quota on a case-to-case basis.

**Section 7** The "consent of the school district residents" stated in EAIP Section 8 refers to the consent of majority of the adult school district residents twenty years old and above expressed through open, democratic means.

The school integration measure stated in EAIP Section 8 refers to the integration of different grade levels of the school for multiple teaching, or the integration of several lower grade students into classrooms (same grade level) of neighboring schools.

**Section 8** The central government flexible budget scale stated in EAIP Section 9 refers to the budget allocation method and proportion. The central executive education authority should meet with the central Indigenous peoples affairs authority to determine said budget allocation.

**Section 9** The Aborigine settlements stated in EAIP Section 10 paragraph 1 refers to the mountain area, outer island, and remote area Indigenous tribes where children four years of age or of elementary schooling age number ten or more.

**Section 10** Regarding the fulltime guidance counselors stated in EAIP Section 12, a selection priority is given to college graduates; position should be filled by native Indigenous peoples.

The local executive education authority should regularly conduct living guidance and skill seminar to the foregoing employees.

**Section 11** The Indigenous peoples ethnic education provided in EAIP Section 14 should be diversified, formal education, as a rule. Related subjects and other education activities relevant to Indigenous peoples ethnic culture may be taught as supplementary subjects, Indigenous peoples ethnic education resource classroom stated in EAIP Section 14 should be established as independent units; organization of integrated classrooms with neighboring schools may be effected if necessary.

**Section 12** The Indigenous peoples ethnic education resource center stated in EAIP Section 15 has the following missions:

- A. research, development, and promotion of Indigenous peoples ethnic education curriculums and teaching.
- B. collection, compilation, exhibition, and promotion of Indigenous peoples ethnic education related articles and information.
- C. Indigenous peoples ethnic education consultation and guidance.
- D. Indigenous peoples ethnic education teaching assistance.
- E. other Indigenous peoples ethnic education related assistance.

**Section 13** As provided in EAIP Section 19, the government, in providing Indigenous students taking preschool and public school education the opportunity to learn their ethnic language, history, and culture, should plan, assist, and

supervise the class schedule arrangement and teaching procedure of preschools, public elementary and high schools.

**Section 14** Schools, as provided in EAIP Section 20, should respect the opinion of Indigenous peoples during Indigenous peoples ethnic education curriculum development and textbook selection, therefore the government should hold public hearings, seminars, questionnaire surveys, and interviews for said purpose.

**Section 15** A minimum of one school equipped with an Indigenous ethnic education resource center should be located in every municipality and local county (city) to support the Indigenous peoples ethnic education conducted in the regular schools located within the city/county area or neighboring areas.

- A. Municipality and county (city) governments should prepare the local annual Indigenous peoples ethnic education potential teacher quota based on actual requirements and submit proposal to the central Aborigine affairs authority for inclusion into the potential teacher cultivation program planning.
- B. The central Indigenous peoples affairs authority should meet with the central executive education authority to evaluate the foregoing requirements and negotiate with teacher colleges or universities and Indigenous peoples colleges to determine the quota of government-subsidized and self-paying Aborigine student quotas.

- C. Upon the acquisition of their professional eligibility licenses, government-subsidized Aborigine ethnic education students should be assigned to various schools as provided in the quota allocation of municipalities and counties (cities) for the fulfillment of their service obligations.

**Section 16** Senior high school, public junior high school, public elementary school, and kindergarten teachers working as Indigenous peoples ethnic education teachers should study Indigenous peoples ethnic culture or multicultural education courses, as provided in EAIP Section 22.

The foregoing courses, units, and learning hours should be jointly determined by the central Indigenous peoples affairs authority and the central executive education authority.

**Section 17** EAIP Section 23 paragraph 1 provides the order of priority for full-time teacher employment. As per Aborigine student population ratio, first priority for employment is the Indigenous teacher belonging to the same tribe, followed by the Indigenous teacher belonging to other tribes; third priority is the non-Indigenous teacher.

Directors and principals employed according to the EAIP Section 23 paragraph 2 shall be approved for employment.

**Section 18** The Indigenous peoples ethnic popular education establishments established according to EAIP Section 25 should optimize the organization and

manpower of social education institutions, schools, and government offices, as well as consolidate social resources.

**Section 19** Indigenous peoples affairs authorities concerned should meet with broadcasting and TV industry authorities to negotiate the promotion and TV engagements stated in Section 26, as well as to establish teaching time slots and channels for the dissemination of Indigenous peoples ethnic and cultural education programs.

Indigenous peoples affairs authorities should set up their own websites, and meet with other concerned or cultural & educational institutions to negotiate the setup of website to broadcast the Indigenous peoples ethnic culture and education.

The Indigenous peoples affairs authorities should meet with other concerned departments to negotiate the budget allocation of the funds needed for the time slots, channels, and broadcast programs stated in paragraph 1.

**Section 20** Said implementation procedure shall take effect on enactment date.

### Appendix D

Really Want To Go Home <sup>11</sup>

by DagaNow (*Paiwan/Rukai*)

Indigenous Peoples straying in the city  
 Do not have much luxury to dream  
 Blood with special mark flowing in the body  
 Do not know if tomorrow will still be the same  
 Indigenous Peoples living under uncertainty  
 Wounded souls want to go back to their homeland  
 Have been reluctantly in disguise for so long  
 Do not know if tomorrow will still be the same  
 Really want to go home  
 Really want to go home  
 At the end, Indigenous Peoples are all the same  
 Young men earn their livings in city factories  
 Young girls are forced into prostitution  
 Realized that life is no easy task  
 Do not know if tomorrow will still be the same  
 What will be the future for Indigenous Peoples  
 To speak of it made my heart feel sore  
 Ask for the answer made my heart go panic

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.Indigenouspeople.net/taiwan.htm>

Do not know if tomorrow will still be the same

Really want to go home

Really want to go home

At the end, Indigenous Peoples are all the same.

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