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STUDENT LEARNING, CHILDHOOD & VOICES | RESEARCH ARTICLE

"My friends are there": Constructions of schooling of children of Filipino immigrants in South Australia

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Abstract: This article provides insights into children's perspectives on schooling experiences following immigration. Albeit focusing on a small cohort of children, the theory and methodology in the article could well be applied to children of immigrants from other cultures. In exploring the primary school experiences of children of Filipino immigrants in South Australia, symbolic interactionism as frame of analysis and in-depth interviews as research method have been utilised. This study shows that children constructed perspectives on the school environment, academic work and interaction with peers and teachers. Symbolic interactionism asserts that children defined their situations, took perspectives and adjusted their behaviour in line with that of others. This paper argues that children's perspectives were informed by socialisation to prior schooling in the Philippines and interaction with family, peers and teachers. This prior schooling experience, likewise, informed the children's construction of primary schooling in South Australia.

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Children from migrant backgrounds come to school in the destination country not as blank slates but as informed and socialised individuals. Even migrating at a young age, when these children go to school, they bring with them a wealth of knowledge and skills they learnt via primary socialisation from significant others such as parents, siblings, relatives and friends. This article on the construction of South Australian schooling of a cohort of children of Filipino immigrants provides insights into the above-mentioned phenomenon that their perspective of schooling is informed by prior experiences of schooling in their country of origin. From these experiences, children were able to form perspectives on their current schools, subjects and school activities, as well as their teachers and their school peers. Understanding these perspectives can be useful to educators of newcomers to a country, education policy-makers and researchers pursuing comparative studies on migrant children.

1. Introduction

This article examines the construction of primary school experiences by children of Filipino immigrants in South Australia. Thirty children aged 8–12, and who attended South Australian primary schools, took part in semi-structured and in-depth interviews. Primary education covers Reception (aged 5–6) to Year 7 (aged 12–13). The children were accessed through social networks. An interpretive/constructivist paradigm used here focuses on the individual and subjective world. Through the frame of symbolic interactionism, how the children of Filipino immigrants formed concepts of selves and identities through daily and social interaction (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Bush & Peterson, 2013; Mead, 1934), and how these children developed adaptive skills and coping strategies through socialisation (Pollard, 1982; Potts, 1997; Woods, 2012a) have been analysed. Symbolic interactionism is relevant in this present article because children have perspectives and assume perspectives. Their perspectives were discovered through how they defined a situation (primary schooling) and how they take others' perspectives (teachers, parents and peers) unto themselves, thus providing valuable insights into how they construct schooling and respond to challenges they experience in school.

The Filipino children learnt about themselves, their identities and a range of new values and attitudes. In this context, teachers, classmates and other school officials were generalised others (Mead, 1934) and agents of secondary socialisation. The perspectives of these children arose from their interaction with families, peers, school, media and other socialising agents. These agents embodied assumptions, values, symbols and ideas that socialised children, enabling them to define their situations, understand their reality, appreciate their attributes and capacities and act in line with others.
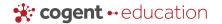
Thus, the use of symbolic interactionism as a framework for this research allows for the understanding of how children of Filipino immigrant made sense of their primary schooling in Australia and hence construct what is school for them.

2. Studies on immigrant children's construction of schooling

Immigrant children in the early years of primary school generally have positive attitudes towards schooling and have a strong desire to learn (Cullingford, 2006; Margetts, 2008; Woods, 2012a). Large-scale and longitudinal studies on immigrant children's schooling have aimed to generalise on immigrant children's experiences of schooling. Such research focus on topics of adaptation, group difference among immigrants and academic trajectories (Abada, Ram, & Hou, 2008; Portes & Rumbaut, 2005; Portes & Zhou, 1992; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010), well-being and discrimination (Adair, 2015), academic achievement (Glick & Hohmann-Marriott, 2007) and educational policies on schooling of immigrant children (Crosnoe, 2013). However, a gap in research has been recognised particularly on "how immigrant children view their own educational experiences" (Adair, 2015, p. 17). Of the few studies on children's construction of schooling, peer relationship and academic achievement have been identified as main themes (Griebel & Niesel, 2000; Margetts, 2008). These studies, however, do not distinguish immigrant from non-immigrant children and children's immigrant origins that may or may not have an impact on children's construction of schooling. This research develops understanding on a cohort of children of Filipino immigrants in South Australian primary school. In addition, the theory and methodology can be applied in analysing the experiences of children of immigrants from other cultures.

3. Australian values in schools and the South Australian Curriculum

The culture of Australian schools and their curriculum has been based on mainstream Anglo-Australian values. Australia's multicultural character and core values are promoted by the school through the *National Framework for Values in Australian Schools* (Department of Education, Science & Training [DEST], 2005). These include care and compassion; doing one's best; fair go; freedom; honesty and trustworthiness; integrity; respect; responsibility; understanding, tolerance and inclusion. These values strengthen the Filipino children's own core values and provide a context for socialisation experienced in Australian schools.

In 2013, the Australian Curriculum for English, Mathematics, Science and History was implemented in South Australia, from Reception till Year 10. Primary school children in the state spend approximately six hours each weekday in school for four school terms spread over a period of 200 days. English is the official language and immigrant children are expected to acquire the language. English comprises three strands—language, literature and literacy. Cross-cultural priorities in the Australian curriculum include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia and sustainability (Australian Curriculum, Assessment & Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2013). Along with English, other learning areas include Mathematics, Science, History, Geography, The Arts, Languages, Health and Physical Education, Technologies, Economics and Business and Civics and Citizenship.

4. Methodology

Children's construction of their primary schooling in South Australia is organised in two main sections—schooling experiences in the Philippines and South Australia. In both contexts, themes and key issues pertaining to children's perspectives on the nature of the school and academic/schoolwork, and relationship with teachers and peers are examined. The symbolic interactionist concepts of selves and identities, taking the role and attitude of others, socialisation and coping responses served to highlight what children learnt from these school experiences.

4.1. Qualitative methodology through symbolic interaction

Symbolic interactionism and qualitative methodology do not see subjectivity as a hindrance to systematic inquiry. Qualitative methodology and symbolic interactionism suggests interviewing as a method to disclose children's subjective perspectives on their experiences. Qualitative data analysis followed three stages, namely organising codes and themes, interpreting themes and categories and theorising through the lens of symbolic interactionism. The experiences, realities and interpretations of children of Filipino immigrants may have been different from or incompatible with how adults understand these experiences, realities and interpretations, even when the children engaged in taking the others' perspectives. They were capable of, if not experts at, defining their situations and their perspective on things. While their experiences were unique, some similarities were noted to provide connections to the interactionist theory, without going into overarching generalisations.

4.2. The interview participants

Appropriate ethical protocols were followed throughout the study including informed consent from the parents of the children and assent from the children. The parents of the children were present during the interview.

Sixteen participants were female while 14 are male. Ten participants out of 30 were Year 7 students while the rest were distributed throughout Years 3 to 6. Twenty-one participants attended government schools. Six participants were enrolled in Roman Catholic schools while three were from an independent school. Of the 30 participants only two did not experience prior schooling in the Philippines. These two children contributed insights into their South Australian schooling. The rest were able to use their schooling experiences in the Philippines as a comparative reference for their South Australian schooling experiences.

Open-ended questions about the child's experience in his/her Philippine and South Australian schools were asked in an interview that lasted from 30 min to one hour. For example, a main question: "Tell me about your former school in the Philippines" was asked to allow the student to narrate his/her story. In the process, the researcher interacted with the student through follow up and clarifying questions based on the student's responses. This interview situation provided opportunities for children to navigate the conversation, clarify their perspectives and allow for new perspectives to emerge. This way, the researcher and participants became co-creators of knowledge in the study. The participants' names have been changed for ethical considerations. Their original names and pseudonyms reflect the language and culture of most Filipinos in using Anglicised or Spanish names.

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5. Schooling in the Philippines: A comparative reference

Within children's extended family networks, many children saw other family members (i.e. siblings and cousins) go to school. Parents, siblings, cousins, grandparents, aunts and uncles, even household helpers communicated the value of education and the importance of schooling. These significant others helped children by taking them to school and assisting them with homework and school projects. For this reason, school culture blended with the participants' home contexts. Children, whose parents were teachers, anticipated school culture and this, influenced their attitudes towards schooling and behaviour in school.

> Yes, I was in kindergarten where Mum was a teacher. After school, I go to her class and I meet her students, then I became friends with her students because I always go to her class. (James)

Significant others influenced children's perspectives on schooling, school-related values and attitudes towards school. They helped in children's daily routine such as preparing for school, going to school and doing related tasks after school. Children constructed their schooling experiences in the Philippines around opinions on the physical characteristics of the school, the nature of schoolwork, school-related activities, interaction with teachers and peer relationships.

Children described their schools in the Philippines based on location and size. Their views of the physical area of schools in the Philippines were also informed by their exposure to South Australian schools. Their experiences of South Australian schooling allowed them to reflect on their experiences of Philippine schooling. For this reason, children compared the size, location and facilities of their old school with their new school, for example, Zach notes, "In Philippines, it's like 600 people in one school there, here, it's 200".

Although primary school zoning is not practiced in the Philippines as it is in South Australia, some children in the Philippines attended nearby schools. Some left the school premises during breaks and returned soon after, as Carlo indicated, 'During recess and lunch break we go to our house to eat and I also share what I did in school with my family, sometimes with my Grandpa'. Those who lived far from schools brought home-cooked meals or purchased them from the school canteen or nearby shops.

Children referred to some school resources lacking in Philippine schools like libraries, computers and SmartBoards. A number of children mentioned play areas in their old schools or the lack thereof. Sally studied in a city central school that had no playgrounds. Eric who studied in a private school described his school in the Philippines as small in terms of play area after comparing it with his current school in South Australia. Ben said his school was better compared with the Philippines because of the four playgrounds.

Children saw the significance of play areas in school. This was unsurprising since children's stable routines (Mead, 1934) included play. The school's physical environment comprised playgrounds for children. Children learnt to interact with school mates through play and games. A later section discusses children's playground activities in South Australian schools.

Experiences of South Australian schooling informed children's views on schoolwork in the Philippines and other school-related activities. Academic subjects and other school activities in the Philippines were compared with what they experienced in their current South Australian schools. Part of the children's routine in Philippine schools was participation in the Flag Ceremony followed by class activities.

> Every morning we would go out of the classroom then head to the school entrance and then we would sing the Philippine National Anthem. In class with my team, I point to a letter which my classmates need to recite. (Amy)

The Flag Ceremony socialised Filipino children to Filipino citizenship. Children sung the *National Anthem* while the Philippine National Flag was being raised. Children also recited the *Pledge of Allegiance* to the country. Elementary school students memorised the pledge and the anthem.

Some students enjoyed doing schoolwork and other related activities, for example, James remarked, "because that's where I all started, I started school there, and I learnt lots there, spelling, English and sometimes we had sports, soccer". In contrast, many children encountered difficult lessons which were impossible to accomplish on their own. This required adult assistance. Many children found homework difficult and unexciting. Some were assigned large amounts of homework as early as Kindergarten. Memorisation of the multiplication tables and other information was difficult. Some found mathematics in Year 4 hard because they had to multiply numbers up to the thousandth place.

Children encountered teachers with different personalities, some were kind while others, strict. Most children preferred friendly teachers since strict teachers added to their anxiety. Students judged their teachers by how they conducted themselves when dealing with students. Amiable teachers had happy demeanours, which made them approachable. For example, Annie cried when she was not assigned a friendly teacher. Amiel and Carla felt that their teachers in the Philippines were very similar to the ones they had in South Australian primary schools. Using South Australian teachers as a comparative reference to those in the Philippines, children learnt to define a good teacher.

Filipino teachers were seen as strict if they gave difficult lessons, assignments and projects, and if they asked students to memorise, or verbally or physically abused students. For example, Jane was hit by a teacher for poor reading skills. Teachers, as children's generalised others articulated values in their behaviour towards their students (Pollard, 2005). They represented the world of school to children.

Children's perspectives on their peers in the Philippines were informed through comparative reference group experiences with schoolmates in schools in South Australia vis-à-vis the Philippines. Peter found that making friends with classmates in the Philippines was easy. It was simplified by gender, where boys played with boys and the girls gathered.

> In the Philippines, this is the how the group will be divided up. All the boys are friends and all the girls are friends. But here you choose your friends. In the Philippines boys will be friends and girls will be friends. But here it is different. (Peter)

Children's views about their school peers in the Philippines varied. Some stated they had good relationships with their classmates who were also playmates outside of school. Ben, of small stature and Eric, with round body figure, encountered schoolmates who bullied. In response, Ben informed the schoolmate's grandfather, while Eric walked away.

> Most of them are bullies. One of them says, "Go away or I'll punch you". I told his grandpa. Next day he said, "Go away you're not my friend anymore" and then later he came up to me and said, "Come on dude, let's play." But I said, "No, I thought you said we're not friends anymore." (Ben)

> There was one who was mean, who bossed me around. I just went home. I was just in Grade 5 and he was in Grade 6. (Eric)

In summary, children's views about schooling in the Philippines encompassed the school's small physical space yet large enrolment, the complexity of lessons including homework and projects, experience of having regular examinations and having different teachers. Their experiences prepared them for school in South Australia, particularly managing schoolwork and their relationships with teachers and peers.

6. Experiences in South Australian schools

Children's perspectives on South Australian schooling centred on daily preparation for school, the school's physical area and facilities, the nature of schoolwork and school-related activities. Their construction of schooling also included interactions and relationships with teachers and class/schoolmates.

6.1. Before school rituals

Children's engagement with school did not begin in the physical confines of the school. Children brought aspects of "home" to school (and vice versa) through their daily preparation rituals. As functional entities, home and school mingle in the children's sense of selves. Children have "home selves" as much as they have "school selves". These selves are situational and emerged as children interact with others.

   All participants had similar routines in preparation for school such as having breakfast, taking showers and brushing teeth. Some participants had rice and viands for breakfast, bread or cereals. Having breakfast was a taken-for-granted family practice. Some of the older participants prepared their own food for recess while their parents prepared their lunch, which often consisted of rice and a Filipino dish. Food from home was one example where children brought their culture to school.
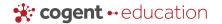
6.2. In school routines

Children were not permitted to leave the school premises during breaks. Thus, a large portion of the children's school hours was spent with schoolmates and teachers. Routines such as preparation for school were learnt "observations and replication" (Goffman, 1971) which structured children's cultural repertoires (Rogoff et al., 2007). Children's cultural repertoires of daily preparations for school, travel, school routines, to post-school activities were also structured by parents, older siblings, teachers, peers and the children themselves.

   The school system expected children to conform to school. Teachers facilitated routines and enforced school policies. Through routines, children learnt their expected roles in the classroom as Nina explained:

> We just stay under the shelter or we play. Teacher said there was a job, to put all the name tags out. We get our folder and lunch box, put our diaries in the diary box, our reader in the reader box and then we set up our table. When the bell rings, we pull our hats off and put it in our bag and then we line up and then we say good morning to the teacher. We go inside, do the roll and then we go to Assembly. (Nina)

Most of the children shared the same routine in the classroom. There were places for gears in the room, and children had their own tables and chairs. Children confirmed their presence by roll call or by face recognition using a SmartBoard. Teachers initiated classroom routines, which served as classroom management strategies to help students organise their time and materials. These routines encouraged student responsibility and orderliness. Students were expected to carry out these routines at the start of class each school day and then follow further instructions from the teacher. These routines socialised the children into appropriate work habits which formed part of the school's hidden curriculum (Martin, 1983).

   Teachers predetermined routines and students had to conform. Failure to comply with routines resulted in verbal or written warnings from teachers, deferment of recess or detention (a later section discusses disciplinary practices of teachers). Children conformed to teacher-initiated routines to be spared from consequences, as in the case of James:

> I forgot to bring my diary, she [teacher] warned us to bring our diary, then I had to miss out recess, and think about what I've done. I don't want to get into trouble again. (James)

6.3. The school surroundings

Children noted the physical space of the school, describing playgrounds, ball courts and other school structures. Some found the physical space of the school bigger than the ones they had known in the Philippines. Sally's school in the Philippines did not have a playground while Ben's school had no library. This contrasted with their experience in South Australian schools. Children used their Philippine schooling experience as a comparative reference. Ben noted, "new school is better, four playgrounds, huge big red building, the last library was inside the big red building".

Children appreciated designated areas for play and learning, and other school activities. Classrooms and laboratories were sites for learning, individually or in groups. Children enjoyed playing on playgrounds and ball courts. Children spent their breaks in dining halls, school benches, school grounds and the library.

When children arrived early at school, many headed straight to the playground. Most children played games with schoolmates where roles and rules were constructed. Peers assembled as playmates and friends on the playground.

> We were playing this fox game, she [a classmate] said that she can go over the playground because she was the mummy fox. Then when we went out [of the classroom] that's when we can chase each other in the playground. (Nina)

School structures not only provided learning and play opportunities but also had symbolic significance. Children ascribed a system of meanings to the physical structures which pertained to their varied interests. For example, children who enjoyed reading and computer games headed straight to the school library, while others found the playground more exciting. "In the morning, I play in the playground, although I'm too big for it, I still play on it, I don't want to be bored, it's really fun". (Liz)

Physical structures for learning and play in schools gave the children interactive learning activities that were important for their cognitive and meta-cognitive development (Piaget, 1951; Vygotsky, 1967). For example, playgrounds were sites for pretend play as illustrated by Nina. Thinking occurred in pretend play, through which children assumed the attitudes of generalised others (Mead, 1934).

Through these structures in the school, children also learnt to develop affective skills through a disciplined system of control by teachers and school administrators. Children overcame boredom by playing in the school grounds. Play interaction and kinaesthetic activities in these school structures not only taught children psychomotor dexterity but also sports etiquette.

6.4. Perspective on schoolwork and subjects

Children's perspectives on schoolwork included their knowledge of the English language, academic subject preferences and their views on pedagogical methods. They developed attitudes towards homework and other co/extra-curricular activities. Children's selves, their meaning construction and the influence of others emerge through these experiences.

Children understood English as the main language of instruction. Familial socialisation and prior schooling experiences in the Philippines helped. Most children knew about American English when they came to Australia. Most participants learnt Australian English in their current schools. Some were required to attend English as Second Language (ESL) classes.

> We speak English in Philippine schools. When I came here I was already good in English, I am good in reading but I was not as good in writing, but I can read; writing was my only weakness, but now I know how to write. (Amiel)

Most participants' parents, before coming to Australia, took an English test and met the minimum required English competency band score. This gives an insight into the ability of many Filipinos as English language users. Children were socialised to the English language and many were bilingual. This can explain the ability of some immigrant children to adapt well to the Australian school system.

The *Philippine Basic Education Curriculum* was content-heavy and loaded with "minimum" competencies that students need to achieve. Most children who experienced at least three years of schooling in the Philippines had been exposed to this curriculum with its accompanying pedagogical strategies. When these children commenced primary school in South Australia, most adjusted well. Children's views about liking or disliking subjects and certain teaching strategies provided insights into certain curricular and pedagogical realities they encountered in their new schools and how they responded to these. These preferences reflected their reactions to school.

Regarding subject-related schoolwork, children's favourite subjects included Mathematics (15 out of 30 children) and English (9), Arts (6) and Physical Education, Sports and Fitness (5). Only a few participants specified Science and Technology (4), Studies of Societies and Environment (SOSE) and History (2) and Religion (2). Only one child cited Music as her favourite subject. Some children gave multiple responses.

Many children preferred Mathematics because they learnt it previously in the Philippines. They felt confident with easy and familiar topics. Sometimes they received verbal rewards when they accurately completed mathematical problems. Tina indicated, "It's easy, I do well in Math according to teacher". Others preferred English because they were good at writing, achieved good grades and received awards for these. Angel linked her love of English to teacher-initiated activity, which she enjoyed.

> There's one that I think my teacher made up, it's called *Contract* [for] English, where she gives us a sheet. You just have tasks and topics, like draw this and write about that, and it's really fun and you say, "By the end of the year, I'm going to have this much done". (Angel)

Some favoured Science because learning activities were linked to doing experiments. Ron stated, "Science, because you do experiments sometimes; and you test out what will happen, if air or water is heavier; and I can see that the water is heavier".

Children formed preferences for subjects because of academic competence, rewards and pedagogical features. Firstly, academic competence related to students' abilities, interests and personal motivations for learning certain subjects. Children's familiarity with the topics—due to prior learning in the Philippines—contributed to their academic competence. This gave children a sense of efficacy and self-confidence in those subjects. Secondly, children developed a liking for a particular subject because of rewards such as verbal approvals, good grades and certificates. Positive reinforcements from teachers played a role in children's subject preferences. Lastly, certain pedagogical aspects also influenced children's subject preferences. Such pedagogical techniques include learning-by-doing activities, experiments, homework and contracts, along with games and simulation activities and group work that enhanced children's teamwork skills. Play through educational computer games and group activities were part of children's classroom interaction. Children's academic interests were promoted through subject-related activities. They learnt to cooperate and collaborate with classmates as illustrated by Kaye.

> Teacher splits us in groups of three or four people, and we make posters like to stop kids from bullying little kids. We had to get another poster paper because one boy ruined one; he was colouring it the wrong way. Another boy tried to stop him from helping again because he might ruin the poster again. (Kaye)

Children viewed homework differently. Many enjoyed doing homework and found it easy because it involved their favourite subject. Some struggled with homework and had to seek help from parents and older siblings. For children who studied in the Philippines, homework was not unexpected. In Australia, children were relieved at not having too much homework or pleased that homework was non-demanding. Some children did not like homework but conformed anyway. Failing to complete homework meant missing out on activities such as television viewing. Homework could involve re-searching a topic to be discussed the following day, doing a project, solving mathematical problems and exercises, memorising words and vocabulary, reading or finishing an incomplete task that should have been done in school.

Children experienced difficulties with subjects, even with favourite ones. The following examples demonstrated how children coped with difficulties in academic work. While some children enjoyed English, Math and Science, there were some who struggled with these subjects.

> I felt classmates are fluent in English and I am still learning. I felt sad but I tried to forget about it. I respond even when I don't understand some English words. I sometimes look for meanings in the dictionary. I read about them. I ask teacher or search in the computer. (Ernest)

> I really struggle with Math. I usually have this Math homework that I have to finish, and I usually ask my brother for help. (Angel)

> Science … sometimes easy, at times hard, I cannot complete the task. I ask support from friends, sometimes they work with me. (Tina)

In coping with difficult subjects and homework, children sought help from siblings and parents. In school, they sought help from teachers and classmates. Asking help from others was a popular strategy, as well as using the internet.
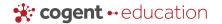
Preferences for particular academic subjects related to student competence and interests, prior understandings and skills, rewards for doing well and engaging teaching. Mike situated this issue of subject preference in perspective when he mentioned Math as his favourite because he wanted to study engineering. If sustained, preferences for academic subjects served anticipatory socialisation purposes when it came to future academic work and pursuits, work preferences and even related non-academic activities. The children sought help from significant others when it came to difficult academic tasks.

6.5. Co- and extra-curricular activities

Children's schooling involved activities that were accomplished outside the contexts and confines of subject-specific classes. These experiences formed part of the children's school realities. School-related activities included co/extra-curricular activities like sports, religious assemblies, school community events, field trips and camping. Sports Day and Harmony Day promoted physical activity and opportunities to appreciate different cultures.

> This Wednesday we are having Harmony Day. We made posters and drew anything we wanted about our country. I drew the Philippine flag because I'm the only Filipino in class. The others made drawings of food like noodles, the Vietnamese wore national costumes. (Mardi)

Children helped to prepare for such events, for example they participated in the school's co-curricular activities either individually or in groups. These promoted classroom and school solidarity. As with school routines these also contributed to the social order of the school community.

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Most children were aware that their ability to speak and understand English helped them adjust to school. They formed preferences for subjects because of prior learning experiences in the Philippines, positive reinforcement from South Australian teachers and engaging pedagogies. Furthermore, co/extra-curricular activities for children provided opportunities for socialisation to school values and acceptable behaviour.

6.6. Perspective on teachers

Teachers initiated classroom interaction and implemented rules involving teacher-student and student-class/mates relationships. Children's perspectives on teachers suggested certain features in the classroom and school that involved care and responsibility for students. Children identified teacher dispositions, teaching styles and disciplinary practices of teachers that they found helpful in learning. As much as a presentation of the teachers' selves, these qualities of teachers facilitated effective classroom interaction, encouraged social behaviour and student responsibility. These teacher qualities promoted positive outcomes and achievement. Children's views about teachers were organised into three categories: dispositional, pedagogical and disciplinary.

6.6.1. Teacher disposition

Children were aware of how their teachers presented themselves. This outward manifestation of teachers' inner selves is what Woods (1979) referred to as "disposition". Dispositions varied from day to day and were influenced by a number of factors that also involved situations outside the school context. Some children found certain teacher dispositions encouraging and helpful as Annie illustrated, "Teacher's nice, her face and how she talks. I have good teachers because they're nice. They talk nice and act nice and then they help me out".

For children, teachers created a positive environment for learning and encouraged student participation if they were approachable and available to listen to students' issues, and had a sense of humour. Children were sensitive to less encouraging teacher demeanours. Many referred to their teachers' disposition as grumpy, mean or strict. Students learnt to adjust to situations involving these dispositions and complied with tasks at hand.

Children understood the reasons behind some not-so-encouraging demeanours from teachers like shouting or acting irritably. They attributed such dispositions to teacher illness or to misbehaving students. They accepted what their teachers demanded and adjusted their responses. They complied with expectations and did not draw attention to themselves.

6.6.2. Pedagogical approaches

Children identified teacher qualities helpful to their learning. They appreciated teachers who gave clear instructions and questions, and repeated those when necessary. Children valued teachers' encouragement and clear explanations.

> The teachers are good. If I don't know how to do my work, I ask him a question and then he would help me, tell me how to do the work in Math and how to make a summary. (Ernest)

A number of children appreciated teachers who allowed them respite from classroom routines or who were not strict about schoolwork. Ron demonstrated how his teacher made him rest his head on the table while in the middle of a writing task. These teachers were flexible in implementing student work.

> When I had to do 17 lines of writing, I still have to do it but I just do this [demonstrates resting his head on the table]. I asked her if I can have a lie down. She said yes. (Ron)

For children, certain pedagogical approaches of teachers were valued. These included giving clear instructions, encouragement, clarification and respite from classroom tasks.

6.6.3. Discipline and classroom management

Children accepted the way teachers managed classroom routines and instilled discipline. Rules that teachers implemented in the classroom often organised, mediated and regulated classroom interaction. These classroom rules reflected the teacher's values, the school's values, even some values in the wider society. Rules in the classroom (and in school) were firmly implemented and accompanied by teachers' sanctions when violations or misdemeanours occurred. Teachers took action when they discovered cheating, lying and other inappropriate behaviours. The following illustrates children's perspectives on their teachers' responses to student misconduct.

> Classmate T is talkative. He got into trouble [with teacher], he was talking to Classmate E, and then he got a yellow dot, yellow dot means warning and red dot means consequence; he had a consequence. (Nina)

> Well, I had to sit next to this one girl and I think she was cheating in the Math test, because she has the answers. I told the teacher and she gave her another test. (Angel)

> The teacher will tell the kid not to do it again, and if she hears that s/he did it again to somebody, s/he'll go in a bench and miss recess and not play. (Andrew)

Most teachers regarded theft, student altercations, harassment and bullying as serious disciplinary concerns. Schools had clear sanctions for dealing with students who engaged in these. Children understood that these situations were dealt with by the class teacher. Children were aware of the consequences of physical violence. Depending on the gravity of an offence, students involved in physical violence could face either a school-wide or system-wide disciplinary action. School-wide measures for issues related to physical violence include timeout from classroom or detention; while system-wide measures include suspension, exclusion and expulsion (Department of Education and Child Development [DECD], 2007).

In response to disciplinary actions imposed by teachers, children conformed to expectations as a coping strategy (Pollard, 1982; Woods, 2012b). Many obeyed the rules and did not draw attention to them. Others learnt from the experience of classmates who were reprimanded. Troy explained, "When the teacher is talking you can't talk to classmates because that's not listening".

Children took the attitudes and perspectives of teachers and classmates when formulating their responses to teachers' disciplinary practices. To avoid trouble, they considered the Filipino value of fear of losing face (shame). Most children acquired this from parental socialisation and copied their parents' assumptions or outlook.

Teachers' disciplinary practices on behaviour and academic tasks contained other elements. Teachers who rewarded good behaviour and academic performance motivated the children as the following illustrated.

> Principal M gives all these certificates. I got one about doing neat handwriting. She also gave me a certificate for sitting well on Grade 2 class. I was happy and we had to shake her hand. (Nina)

> Ms. W is a good teacher, and she teaches us well and every Friday, we got drama, she gave lollies. (Troy)

Children sought praise and rewards from teachers, the content of which were as important as the context in which they were given. Rewards took the form of social gestures such as "shaking hands" or "thumbs-up" for a job well done, words of encouragement and positive feedback. Tokens like lollies, star cut-outs or smiley stickers, and certificates from teachers were symbolic rewards for positive social behaviour and academic achievement. These motivated students to perform better, encouraged desirable behaviour in class and promoted self-discipline.

In summary, children's perspectives on teachers involved three aspects: dispositional, pedagogical and disciplinary. Children liked teachers who had positive dispositions such as warmth and a sense of humour. They identified these positive attitudes and took those attitudes unto themselves. In response to not-so-encouraging teachers' dispositions, children coped by adjusting to the situations such as keeping quiet when a teacher became annoyed. Children preferred teachers who gave clear instructions, encouraged questioning, assisted in student work and gave respite from tasks. Children recognised teachers' responses to misbehaviour and appreciated teachers' positive reinforcements. Children assumed the attitude of teachers and classmates as they assessed their own behaviours. They conformed to rules to avoid teacher-imposed sanctions.

6.7. Perspective on schoolmates and friendship

Children's perspectives on peers, peer relationships and peer activities provided insights into their social world and their coping responses to school. Peer socialisation is a process through which children produce their own peer culture and identity. The school was a source of peers for children and a site for building friendships and experiencing rivalries. It was also a site for developing shared perspectives that allowed them to manage daily activities in and out of school.

All children liked going to school and this was due to having encouraging teachers, good school facilities, playgrounds and computers. However, most children liked going to school because of their classmates.

Why do you like going to school? (Researcher)

To see my friends, that's it. (Zach)

My friends are there. (Sally)

For many children, peer companionship took place even before the school commenced each day. Those who came early to school often played in the playground. Daily interaction and socialisation in school for children began in the playground with peers rather than the classroom and with the teacher. Kaye specified, "Before the bell, we play chase at the playground with some of my friends from last year".

Most went to school to spend time with peers although this did not mean that they did not interact with friends outside of school. However, being with friends at school was spending "real time" with them through talk and play.

Because those are the only real time I see my friends. (Peter)

I do at lunch and recess. There are not a lot of Year 7 girls this year in my school. So, we just sit on the playground. We'll sit on the cement and talk. (Ellen)

For children, going to school not only meant academic work but also spending time with peers. The school was a context for children socialising with other children, not only to do schoolwork but also to share values.

6.7.1. Awareness of and socialisation to a multicultural school

Children were aware of the ethnicities of schoolmates and friends. This enabled them to define themselves as Filipinos and Asians by comparing themselves to others. It was common among children that their Australian classmates were Anglo-Australians, but there were Greeks and Italians as well. Zach described his school friends as "mostly they are Australians and they're all white".

Children were aware of ethnicities and categorised these. For instance, they classified Australian-born classmates with Chinese parentage as Chinese or Asians. Children who spent longer time with

schoolmates or who formed closer relationships with classmates were able to distinctly identify classmates' ethnicities.

> My schoolmates were English and Aboriginal. (Troy)

> There are Filipinos, Somalians; there are Guineans and Australians. (Ernest)

> All of my classmates are not Aussies. There are Italians, Korean, there are Vietnamese, and there are even Muslims. (Eric)

Ethnic awareness was learnt in the home and reinforced at school. Children differentiated classmates from other cultures. This related to children's ability to distinguish between members of different ethnicities. Rogers et al. (2012) indicate that children develop this ability at age 3–5 years by observing phenotypical characteristics like skin colour and shape of the eyes. By age 6–10 years, this ability focuses on social categorisation and social comparison using behavioural and abstract ethnic features like language and ancestry.

Furthermore, identifying ethnic categorisations, or in a broader context, cultural socialisation, proceeded from what Hughes, Wu, Kwok, Villarreal, and Johnson (2012, p. 749) referred to as "parental practices that teach children about their racial or ethnic heritage and history; that promote cultural customs and traditions; and that promote children's cultural, racial, and ethnic pride, either deliberately or implicitly". Socialisation of ethnic differences also happened in schools through interaction with classmates and teachers, and learning about the ethnicities of people. This explained why a number of participants characterised their school as "multicultural".

> We are a multicultural school so I had friends from Africa and my other friend was Sri Lankan. They were both really good friends because we stick together. My best, out of all them is J, he's from India. (Peter)

Despite children's awareness of their peers' ethnicities, they did not make friends based on ethnicity. However, a few suffered bad treatment by classmates because of their ethnicity as illustrated by Jane. Children coped with rejection and exclusion by walking away and by searching for friendlier peers with whom to associate.

> They are loud because I pretty much hang out with guys because some of the girls in my school are mean to me because I was the only Asian in my class. They look at me and then they talk about me. I just walk away. (Jane)

Getting along with friends and having things in common with them made school life enjoyable. Good friends also helped with schoolwork and homework. Friends were described as supportive: "Those friends I really know are really nice, we support one another, and they help sometimes with homework". (Carlo)

Children interacted with peers from various ethnicities. They enjoyed doing common activities together, forming close friendships and characterised their peers as friendly, helpful and supportive. Peers provided care, friendship and company that, in a way, allowed children to enjoy school life.

6.7.2. Perspective on activities with school friends

Children's views about their activities with friends provided insights into the mutual influence friends had. Peer socialisation experiences allowed children to cope with school and with peer relationships. For Mead (1934) the self develops in play and games. Playing with friends was the most enjoyable activity children looked forward to at school. "Play with friends" was one of the reasons they liked going to school. Play included making up rules that friends accepted and upheld. It also involved other symbols which included written communication and "secret handshakes".

> My friends are really nice to me. All of them are Aussies. We play this game called Zombie Rules, like chasing, except someone has to be a zombie, try to get people so the zombie can get brains. (Sally)

> I started making friends with O and then there's this Korean girl, she's HT, and then the new girl M, we started playing together. We write notes to each other, we give each other notes of how we are doing in school and then we made up a secret handshake. We give each other notes of how we are doing in school. We made up a secret handshake. (Nina)

A secret handshake was like speaking a language that only close friends understood. While play among peers created a trust relationship, the handshake symbolised and authenticated group membership.

There were situations when language served to authenticate a friend's entry into a group. Language also authenticated a friend's affiliation among peers, especially when they appeared to come from the same ethnic group. A few children shared their experiences in breaking the ice with Filipino classmates by speaking in Tagalog.

> There was a Filipino who came to school and my teacher told me, "Go talk to this boy," he said. I saw that he is also a Filipino, we spoke to each other. I said, "How are you?" He said, "Oi, are you Filipino?" and I said, "I am Filipino" and he's happy. (Amiel)

Eric spoke to a fellow Filipino in Tagalog which caused a classmate to inform the teacher. The classmate who did not understand Tagalog felt annoyed. Eric said that the teacher ignored the complaint but his classmate felt bad.

> We were just talking to another Filipino. There is one classmate who did not understand what we were talking about; then this classmate said, "Hey, look on," calling the teacher's attention because we were speaking in Tagalog. He said, "Ms. H," "Look at the two; they are speaking in their language." (Eric)

Albeit speaking one's native language was not prohibited in school, this excluded non-speakers of the language. Informing the teacher of such was a response by the peer who felt excluded, however, it was ignored. On the other hand, there were cases when a number of children sometimes could not understand their classmates who spoke in English. Responses to this situation included not playing with these classmates or ignoring the instance, as in the case of Ernest:

> Yes, most of them are whites. Sometimes I don't understand them. I just shrug it off. Sometimes I understand it but I don't know the meaning. I just say I don't know the answer to that. (Ernest)

Some children revealed that friends helped with their communication skills when they first joined their school, as what Carla shared:

> I felt different because they need to speak English not Tagalog, it's a bit hard. I just practiced with my friends, and they taught me how to speak more English words. (Carla)

In play situations, children taught other children communication skills, both verbal and nonverbal. The ability to communicate in the English language was important for children to hold conversations with their friends. Although instances emerged when a language seemed privy only to a group of friends, the excluded children coped by ignoring the situation. Some, however, responded by allowing friends to help them with speaking English.

Most children played with peers once they got home from school each day. Children saw their friends through video chat or FaceTime. Through the internet, children played with friends and communicated with them.

Play mediated the bonds of children's friendships. Playing with peers in school and outside of school were socialising opportunities. When children played, they took on selves and identities that allowed them to discover similarities and differences with others. They cooperated in activities and helped others with difficult tasks. Although there were situations where children created a 'secret handshake' or spoke in a language known only to close friends, any attempt to exclude others, intentionally or unintentionally, was reported to the teacher. Children who experienced communication problems with peers responded by ignoring them or walking away.

Peer interaction in school was an important motivation for school attendance. Friends were a source of enjoyment, help, care and support in academic work and social interaction. Peers helped children make sense of going to school and cope with school life.

7. Conclusion

This article described how children of Filipino immigrants in South Australia constructed their primary schooling experiences. Their perspectives on school and school activities, academic work, relationships with teachers and peers revealed learning experiences that enabled them to make sense of schooling, adapt to school and respond to challenges they faced. This study is limited in terms of the small cohort of children from one culture. However, the methodology can be applied to children from various age cohorts or cultural groups. While the children's experiences of schooling in Australia appeared to be generally positive, it cannot be denied that some strategies had been applied by the children to cope with difficult situations in school. Moreover, most children of Filipino immigrants are "westernised" as a result of neo-colonial ties with the United States (US). For this reason, learning English and adjusting to the school system did not seem to be too difficult for these children.

Children learnt about academic work and routines through their schooling experiences in the Philippines which they brought to South Australia. It must be noted that Philippine basic education has been patterned against the US system, often, English was the medium of instruction. Children formed preferences for subjects that were familiar to them. Their perspectives on schoolwork and related activities revealed curricular and non-curricular activities that they enjoyed despite encountering difficulties and as such, learnt to manage or coped with.

Children conformed to school rules, social norms and values that fostered cooperation and participation through routines. Even when some children found themselves in troublesome situations, through these interactional experiences, children learnt acceptable behaviour and following school rules was preferable. Filipino children were socialised to the Filipino norm of losing face. This explained in part the degree of children's conformity to Australian values, school regulations and teachers' responses to misbehaviour.

Children's exposure to multiculturalism in school clarified their belief in harmony. Children made friends with other children from different cultural backgrounds. Play and other peer activities mediated their interactions. Playing with their friends in school was an important factor in school attendance. Friends were a source of enjoyment, help and support both for academic work and social interaction. Children also encountered problematic situations with friends but some learnt to cope by adjusting their responses. Peers helped the children to make sense of going to school and to cope with school life.

Schooling led to self-understanding as well as the acquisition of basic skills. In the Philippines, children acquired knowledge and skills in mathematics and English that helped them manage the same subjects in South Australia. Children were not entirely "blank slates" in terms of school culture in general and the Australian school culture in particular. Their ideas of Australian schooling were informed not only by direct exposure to it but also by what parents, siblings and significant others communicated to them. Reinforced by prior experiences of schooling in their home country, children adapted to their new schools and coped with any academic difficulties.

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Children's relationships and interactions with teachers revealed responses to teachers' dispositions, pedagogical approaches and disciplinary practices. They were encouraged by teachers having positive dispositions and these helped create a constructive learning environment. Children honoured pedagogical approaches that included clear instructions, encouragement, clarification and respite from classroom tasks. Finally, in terms of disciplinary practices, children recognised teachers' responses to inappropriate student behaviour and appreciated teachers' positive reinforcement. Children took the attitude and responses of teachers and also learnt from the behaviour of other students, friends or otherwise.

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