

The Condition and Reconstruction of the Children of Migrant Workers' Cultural Identity in Urban Public Schools--A Case Study Based on the Primary school Y in Qingdao

Yang Qiaoling
Qingdao University
Qingdao 266071
P .R. China

Abstract

In recent years, more and more children of migrant workers come to the city and study in the public schools. In which urban and rural culture, cultural identity of different social classes and cultural identity of different social groups coexist, blend and collide with each other. The characteristics of cultural identity of the children of migrant workers are more reflected in their daily behavior, learning habits, expression of language and self-identity, etc. Therefore, with the study on the case of primary school Y in Qingdao this research analyzes the characteristics and causes of their cultural identity, then discuss the guidance of schooling in reshaping these students' cultural identity with the help of developing their habits and characteristic culture. Thus to makes the the children of migrant workers adapt to the school life better.

Key words: Urban public schools, Children of migrant workers,Cultural identity

Introduction

With the acceleration of Chinese urbanization, the cities continue to expand the scale of employment, migrant workers flow into the city with their families and their children (referred to children of migrant workers) come to the city to live and study following them. Although state and local governments at all levels has issued relevant policies and regulations to safeguard the migrant children have the right to enjoy the equal right to education, to solve the issues that migrant children may have for studying in the urban public schools. Here, the differences of migrant children and urban students' cultural identity¹ is significant or even conflict with each other. There are coexistence, blend and a collision among the different social groups of cultural identity. The differences of cultural identity and conflicts of culture, not only directly affect not only directly affect the behavior and learning habits of children of migrant workers in urban public schools, but also have an negative effect on their self-identity.

1. Conditions of Primary School Y and Its Source of Students

Primary school Y is located in Shinan district. She has more than 20 years' history which from a community with primary developed the standard school in south district of Qingdao. The following is the brief introduction about the schools running conditions.

1.1 School-running conditions

Primary School Y is a public school in Qingdao south district. It was a primary school for community. Along with the transformation of the eastern city of Qingdao City, it gradually developed a standard school.

In 2007, the Shinan District government invested to refurbish school's buildings, equipped with advanced modern equipment. The school has a computer lab, the art room, dancing room, lab, multimedia classroom, table tennis room, the electronic reading room, library, reading room and other special classrooms. From the point of teaching hardware, Primary school Y is a standardization of the modern school. In recent years, Shinan district implement the teachers' rotation, so that the teacher resources and teaching level has improved. Primary school Y's principal and leadership try their best to explore a suitable way for the school. Finally it forms a distinctive school characteristic cultural name " dragon " . However, due to the source of students, their quality is not high. Primary Y achievements are not very prominent and not ranked high in the district schools.

In 2005, according to the "new citizen children enjoy equal right to education" policy, primary school Y began to receive the first batch of migrant workers' children and became one of the public school which receives concentrated migrant children in Shinan district. Now, in this school, half of the students' sources are migrant children. The school sets up six grades, 15 classes and it has 51 teachers and more than 600 people. Among them the number of migrant children has more than 360 people, about more than 60% of the total number of students. Migrant children and urban students were mixed placement. However, I learned that even though there is no clear sense of the migrant children independently organized classes, some classes have 40 people and only two have local household registration. For students in terms, the difference of migrant children and urban students' cultural identity in primary school Y is very obvious.

1.2 The Differences of Cultural Identity Caused by the Source of Students

There are two main sources for the Primary school Y in Qingdao: one is from the school districts around the children of local residents in Qingdao. Primary school district Y residents are mostly the village residents. These households based on school-age children to the nearest school policy, select this primary school. But in recent years, some households who is in good economic conditions or some political officials choose other good quality of teaching in schools.

Others are migrant children (some relatively backward rural areas like Heze, Laiwu, and there are a few from other provinces, such as Henan, Sichuan etc). They account for over 60% of school student. In addition, there are individuals trailing with their parents because of their redeployed work. The parents in primary school Y are of lower economic status; their political status and cultural status are even lower. And the official children usually choose to study in the high school. Furthermore, primary school Y hasn't had the abundant education resources. Moreover, the real cultural upper families have good cultural literacy themselves; they would not send their children to this school. The migrant children and urban students in Primary school Y come from different social classes, different social groups, with different cultural qualities, representing different cultural identities. As a result, there are noticeable differences of them in their daily behavior, learning habits, language expression and so on.

2. The Characteristics and Causes of Cultural Identity of the Children of Migrant Workers

The characteristics of cultural identity of the children of migrant workers in city public schools more reflects in their daily behaviors and learning habits, language expression and self-identity, etc.. The following text will analyzes the characteristics and causes of cultural identity of the children of migrant workers in primary school Y of Qingdao.

2.1 Daily Behaviors and Learning Habits

(1) the "stinking smell"

In dealings with the children of migrant workers, as to the daily behaviors, they left the deepest impression on me can be in one word "dirty." A pungent smell blows on the face directly when you step into the classroom, as many teachers saying, "the smell on them is invincible, especially in summer, as long as we come into the classroom the stinking smell even makes us do not want to have anything. Because most of the children' parents sell seafood for a living, they do not often change clothes so it is inevitably leave a fishy smell of seafood. Although the students on duty will clean the ground brightly and place the tables and chairs neatly, so make the classrooms very clean and tidy after school every day. However, after the students came to the classroom the next day, they litter paper and debris on the ground and it becomes messy and unsightly in a few minutes of. Some of the children of migrant workers will have lunch in the classroom. After having fruit, such as oranges, they just throw the peel of the oranges directly toward the trash in the back of the classroom just stand on their seats. The hit rate is low and so make the floor around the trash are all orange peel.

Investigate its reason, the living environment of the children of migrant workers is too poor. On one hand, the family income of such families is very low and their living conditions are poor, thus there is no conditions for cleanness and washiness. On the other hand, their parents are busy for working all day then they have no time to take care of their children's health. At the same time, as the family and cultural quality of the children is low, therefore they have no acquisition of good health consciousness and health habits at home.

(2) "natural habit" of homework plagiarism

After not long time when I came to primary school Y I soon find that, it is a common phenomenon for some children of migrant workers of coping homework. Every morning there are always some students, more or less, will write up the homework which was assigned yesterday in the classroom. Then from the chat with the school teachers I learned that the living conditions of these children are too poor. Some of them lives in a simple room which is converted from the abandoned container, some lives in the rented garage in the basement. Such a family is overcrowded and there is no place for them to read and learn. To avoid the discover of the teachers they can only come to school early to do the homework they have not been done timely. But in order to save time and complete the task as soon as possible, they copied the homework of their classmates directly in their books. Obviously, the homework they handed in have not been done through their careful and independent thinking. When they were puzzled about some problem, they would not to ask teachers or classmates initiatively. In this case, the purposes (to help the students to review the new knowledge they learned) and significances of teachers to assign homeworks disappear.

The cause of the children of migrant workers copying homework is variety, but the family cultural quality of them is not high may be the root cause. Bourdieu believes that the children had been received different cultural capital in their family before they come into schools. This capital is not only with the traces of their family, but also with the brand of the class they belong. Meanwhile for the accumulation of cultural capital follows its own logic so lead to the reproduction of existing class's relations. The school education itself represents the culture upper class, which participate in the process of the reproduction through the identification and development of students' cultural capital. In fact, the attitude that school education for the low culture is denial and rejection(Wu Kangning.1986).

Although the children of migrant workers and urban students accept the same education in the primary school Y of Qingdao, the children of migrant workers cannot get a good cultural awareness and do not develop good habits in family. Because the economic and cultural capital of their family is relatively poor and they lack of the influence of family culture and education. Especially under the background that the campus culture oriented by the urban students' life culture, the cultural identity of the children of migrant workers in school education is in a position of being ruled, thus resulting the academic achievements of the children of migrant workers is relatively low.

(3) The "lively and vigorous flourishes in calligraphy" writing

The basic requirement for students of primary schools is writing regularly, but the writing of some children of migrant workers is quite irregular. We can find this issue from reading over their homeworks and examination papers and it is too appropriate to describe their typeface by "lively and vigorous flourishes in calligraphy". In contrast, the students in the city often finish the job carefully and writing regularly. They have strong self-discipline and self-awareness of learning and unique perspective of knowledge, so they often become the model that teacher awards.

The above survey shows that the differences of cultural identity between children of migrant workers and urban students is evident, and the differences of cultural identity are determined by their corresponding humanity accomplishment, the structure of knowledge , behavior, values and so on.

Comparatively speaking, parents whose level of education higher will pay more attention to their children's cultural awareness, educational quality, behavior and so on. Students whose family conditions better have high consciousness of independent learning and learning attitude, writing is relatively standard. The educational quality of rural migrant workers are generally not high, they do the works belong to the bottom of the city with poor working conditions, low wages. They are busy working all day so they have no time to take care of their children, no extra time and effort to guide their children to learn.

Due to the differences of cultural identity there are class differences in students' mind. It shows from the superiority of urban students and the inferiority of the children of migrant workers which is inadvertently exposed. This is determined by their cultural background. In a word, students who have good family conditions better than the poor one, the native students are superior to others, students in city feel better than students in rural areas. This is a psychological advantage, a cultural advantage.

2.2 The Self-identity of the Children of Migrant Workers

In urban schools, the urban students' learning habits, daily behavior and other aspects are slightly better. Thus they have a kind of cultural superiority and exclude the cultural identity of children of migrant workers. But the children of migrant workers determine and identify their own identity in their exchanges with urban students and interactions with the society.

Most of the children of migrant workers in primary school Y of Qingdao came to the city follow their parents at the age of two or three, even some of them were born in Qingdao. They spent their critical period of growth in the city so they have more profound feelings of living in Qingdao, learn more about cultural customs of Qingdao unwittingly. Meanwhile, in the process of growing, due to geographical limitations and less contact with friends and relatives, or even have a little chance to return to their hometown, the only memory about the culture and customs of their hometown become blurred or even forgotten. For those students who were born in Qingdao, the concept of their hometown is even more vague. Although some of the older students' identity to Qingdao is not so strong and believe that they will certainly to return to their hometown. Most of the students think that Qingdao is a very good city. They are already familiar with the city and adapt to living and studying here, hoping to stay in Qingdao. Anyway, they can clearly know that they came to Qingdao because their parents are working here, and they will leave when their parents migrate to another city for work.

The early migrant life makes the children of migrant workers do not have deep attachment to cultural life of countryside like their parents any more, although with the root of countryside, they are lack of labor experience, being unable to return to country. Because of the differences of urban and rural culture, the children of migrant workers not only cut off their original cultural reserves, but also excluded by the urban culture. Such differences may be explained by borrowing the "Tunneling Theory" of sociologist Holzman. In his view, if I were driving on a closed tunnel which have two lanes in the same direction, the line between the lanes is prohibited to cross. Suppose I was driving on the left lane, both the two lanes are blocked and all the vehicles could not go forward. I feel very frustrated, however I had nothing to do but to wait. Then I see the vehicles start moving and I think there is hope. But if the expectation is blocked, the vehicles on the right lane continue to move forward while the left one is blocked, I would feel very angry and injustice, even I will take violations and attempt to cross the prohibited line onto the right lane (Albert O.Hirschman.1981).

Because the two different roads, making the children of migrant workers in the city cannot well integrated into the urban culture, then formed the "Island" state of life, they are at the edge of the city. As a result, in addition to their parents and brothers and sisters, their social circle is mostly the students around. Although their interpersonal circle is very small, their friends are mostly the fellows of hometown or other children of migrant workers, their friends of Qingdao are few, they find their own identity in the groups of fellows. In their own groups, the children of migrant workers share the same cultural background. In such a case, they are able to gain the approval of others and self-identity emotionally and spiritually, thus resulting in a sense of belonging to the group, and so they gradually turn to recognize their own groups or recognized by the groups.

2.3 The Class Demarcation of Teachers to the Children of Migrant Workers' Cultural Identity

As children of migrant workers and urban students belong to different groups with different cultural identities, the level that the the children of migrant workers integrate into the urban culture is low. In the school education dominated by the urban culture, the children of migrant workers behaviors unsatisfying, teachers class them as "bad" and "disorder".

In the very next day I arrived at the primary school Y, a teacher told me, " They mostly come from migrant families and is a class of bad." Initially, I thought it was because most of them come from the rural areas, they do not adapt o the teaching here for the differences of city and countryside. However, by further conversations with some teachers, my daily observations and interactions with some of the students, I find that the language factor may be one of the reasons why these students were labeled "bad" and "disorder". About their composition, the Chinese teacher said, "The language skills of some children are poor, their thinking and expression are not clearly." (The class taught by the teacher is considered to be the worst in the school.) In fact, teachers of other subjects also talked about these problems. Bernstein, an American educational sociologist, did a research on linguistic differences of students in different classes.

In his view, it is the linguistic differences of students lead to the success and failure in their learning. In the theory of social language code he mentions that the language people use in daily life is actually a cultural code, which expresses the cultural characteristics of language users with two basic cultural code. one is refined code, its main features are universality and relevance, normally exist in the language of upper and middle class. Another is restricted code, its main features are a particularity and isolation, usually exist mainly in the language of lower class. Bernstein believes that the school's curriculum and language teaching are a refined code, therefore it is more suitable for the children of middle and upper class (Basil Bernstein.1977). Therefore, a child of lower class who uses the restricted code is often considered as "bad" and "disorder".

3. The Reconstruction That the Schooling to the Cultural Identity of Children of Migrant Workers

Primary school Y cultivates the school characteristic culture, trains the habit and holds some art activities to reshape the migrant children' cultural identity.

3.1 Characteristic Culture of "Little Dragons"

The migrant children in Primary school Y are mostly from remote rural areas; their parents' culture quality is low. So the children are lack of family culture. In order to cultivate the students' cultural quality, the principals in Primary school Y exploit the " dragons " moral education system with the " equal education, harmonious development " school concept. First theme is the " Chinese Dragon--virtue " to cultivate the civilized, honest, disciplined and indebted children with the national spirit by holding class meetings, having speeches under the flag and calligraphy competition. Second theme is the " Chinese Dragon--classic " . It devotes to carrying forward the traditional culture and creates display platform for every child through celebrating the Spring Dragon Festival, the dragon-boat festival, the double ninth festival in May, the school sports, science and art festival.

3.2 Passbook of "Good Habits of Dragons"

In order to develop the migrant children' good behavior habit, Primary school Y designs a unique " dragons good habits " passbook. It divided into three parts: study habits, living habits and life habits. And each divided into eight small details. Grade 1-3and Grade 4-6 have a slightly distinction. It is also clear that a " good habit banks " access approach: each student has 10 dragon coins as a basis for deposit. They observe each grades' content in " Yan'er Island Road primary school good habit code " . Evaluation approach sets up student assessment column, parents and teacher evaluation column. School monthly launches key appraisal project, issued a " dragons star card " . This card can be accumulated to participate in each semester' s " good habits dragons " title. Each class can set up the corresponding evaluation rules according to their own class rules. The implementation of the passbook " dragons good habits " inspires the students' interest to develop various habit. Many migrant children have changed a lot and win the title of " good habit dragons " .

3.3 Characteristic Class of Art

Primary school Yin Qingdao using the lunch break for students to create all kinds of extra art specialty classes, such as painting classes, drumming classes, chorus classes, writing classes etc. These classes are picked by the students themselves according to their interests. And all these classes are free for them. When talking about the art specialty class with these students, they are very excited. The art specialty classes give students a vast world; they can enjoy exploring their artistic talent to weave their colorful dreams. Primary school Y often hold some performance art activities, then the migrant children can have some chances to show their artistic style with the urban students on the same stage. Some of them are extremely talented. And also some are good at paper-cutting; they even get the first price in the city of paper-cutting. These classes offer the opportunities for children to develop themselves and let them be the real man. Here the migrant children and the urban students compete with each other and grow together. It is in this environment that make the migrant children become self-confident, generous, let them have a energetic and positive mental outlook.

But for the reshape of students' cultural identity also need the cooperation of family. When I was in this school, I assisted the principal doing the parent questionnaire statistics of the school' s new three-year plan. In this process, I found that many migrant parents are reluctant to cooperate with school. Meanwhile, some migrant children bring the bad habits to the school and may affect the other students. In short, there are many difficulties for the school reshaping the students' cultural identity.

The migrant children' cultural identity has been ruled and transformed by the unique cultural value orientation of school education. The education value of the concept which presented through the dominant cultural identity in school plays a leading role. And some evaluation standard adopted by the schools is actually the internal mechanism of the integration and remodeling of the school' s cultural identity(Wang Yousheng,2005).

As students' some aspects difference like intrinsic structure of knowledge, cultural awareness, it decides the cultural identity difference between the migrant children and urban students. The culture that the school education presented is a social dominant culture, and it can lead to the city' s public school students integrates cultural differences. In the current urban public schools in our country, the caused by different class cultural identity is widespread. And in primary school Y the cultural identity difference between the migrant children and urban students is just the microcosm.

Conclusion

In summary, as to the characteristics of the children of migrant workers' cultural identity, the primary school Y takes some measures to guide to reshaping the cultural identity of the children actively, for instance, the characteristic culture of "little dragons", the unique passbook of "good habits of little dragons" and the characteristic class of art. The purpose of these measures is to make them adapt to the life of urban school better and to make them show a confident and optimistic outlook.

References

- Wu Kangning.(1986).Three schools of Sociology of Education in modern Europe and America.*Educational Research*,(9).
- Albert O.Hirschman.(1981).*Essays in Trespassing:Economics to Politics and Beyond*(pp. 40-44).Cambridge University Press.
- Basil Bernstein(1977).*Class, Codes and Control:Towards a Theory of Educational Transmissions* (Volume 3).London,England:Routledge & Keganpaul.
- Wang Yousheng.(2005).The difference and remodeling of cultural identity in Non-state-run school—a case study. *Exploring Education Development*,4(2B),85-90.

Note:

Note1."Cultural identity" is first put forward by Weber, and later Collins inherits and develops its meaning, he makes the content of cultural identity more specific and points out the elements of cultural identity, which including speech manners, etiquette education and behavior manners. He believes that the main role of school is to teach the cultural identity of social dominant group. The development of school education is driven by conflict of different groups' cultural identity.

In this paper, the author draw on the explanation of Collins on cultural identity, that is to say, the cultural identity refers to the identity and culture of special groups-the children of migrant workers in their own class scope, such as values, language expressions, behavior manners, knowledge structures, etiquette education and so on.