

Re-negotiating Identities and Reconciling Cultural Ambiguities: Socio-cultural Experiences of Indian Immigrant Students in South African Schools

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ABSTRACT South Africa has become the host country of destination not only to immigrants from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region, but also from countries such as India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Much research has focussed on Black Immigrant students¹ experiences in South African schools. Little if any research has addressed experiences of Indian immigrant students². Utilising social constructivism, case study approach and narrative inquiry, this study sets out to explore the socio-cultural experiences of Indian immigrant students in South African schools. It was found that contests of space and place in South African 'schoolscapes'³ were not so much about 'race' as it was about nationalism and territoriality. For South African Indian students, international competition was not an abstract policy; it entered the school through immigrant students. For Indian immigrant students international acceptance implied a re-negotiation of identities and a reconciliation of cultural ambiguities.

INTRODUCTION

Previous work on immigrant student experiences confirms that identity-making does not happen in a vacuum but in relation to other groups (Suarez-Orozco 2004, 2008). The researchers found that immigrant students compared themselves not with other immigrants, but with South African students (Vandeyar and Vandeyar 2011). Depending on where they came from, the comparison would be to the racially or ethnically closest group. SADC students will take as a reference point Black African students. Sri Lankan and other Asian students will mirror themselves against what are called South Africa Indian students. Many Indian immigrant students have found their way into former white Model C schools¹ and former Indian schools². How do they experience the disparate cultural streams each with its own unique cultural and moral codes of conduct, and dress? Do they experience a sense of cultural conflict or consensus? How do they identify? What implications does this identification hold in terms of their role as custodians of their culture? How do they balance the tightrope of maintaining their culture of origin while at the same time seeking a

sense of belonging and acceptance in the host country? How do they re-negotiate their identities and reconcile cultural ambiguities in South African schools?

The argument is presented as follows. The researchers briefly sketched the background context to situate the identified intellectual puzzle. They then explore the literature in an attempt to determine findings from the major debates in this field of study. This was followed by a brief exposition of the theoretical framework, data collection and data analysis methods that were utilised in this study. The findings are presented and subsequently analysed and discussed in an attempt to unpack the sociocultural experiences of Indian immigrant students in South African schools.

1. Background Context

Socio-cultural experiences of Indian immigrant students have to be investigated in terms of broader societal influences. In the case of South Africa, this phenomenon has to be understood against the backdrop of the broader context of migration and xenophobia in South Africa.

Migration to South Africa is an inevitable consequence of long-standing patterns of labour migration in mining and agriculture (Landau et al. 2005; Crush 2008). Prior to 1994, the South African immigration policy was utilised as a tool of racial domination (Khan 2007). Until 1991 the official definition of an immigrant was that he or she had to assimilate into the white population (Crush 2008). Africans from the SADC region were not given the status of immigrants. They arrived in South Africa as contract migrants which gave rise to the South African migrant labour system (Crush 2008). Indian immigrants were brought to South Africa in 1860 to work as indentured labourers on the sugar cane farms (Meer 1969).

The advent of democracy in South Africa coupled with its insertion into the global economy (Crush 2008; Pendleton 2008) has witnessed a notable change in pattern regarding the politics of migration. Over the past two decades in South Africa there has been a substantial increase in the migration of Black and Indian immigrants from different parts of the world. Alongside this, South Africa has witnessed a rise in intolerance and animosity towards Black immigrants (Harris 2002; Landau et al. 2005; Reitzes 2009) as evident from the 2008 xenophobic attacks in South Africa (Hassim et al. 2008).

A review of the literature reveals that the phenomenon of xenophobia in South Africa can be explained and understood in terms of five theses namely, the scapegoat thesis (Morris 1998; Tshitereke 1999), the relative deprivation thesis (Tshitereke 1999; Pillay 2008), the isolation theory (Morris 1998), the bio-cultural theory (Harris 2002) and the South African nationalism theory (Neocosmos 2008). It is against this backdrop that this research study set out to explore the socio-cultural experiences of Indian immigrant students in South African schools.

The majority of Indian immigrant students in the Gauteng province³ of South Africa are from India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. (Department of Education, Ten Day Statistics 2009). Former Indian suburbs in Gauteng have some of the largest numbers of Indian immigrants, who are diverse not only in terms of national origin, but by ethnic and religious affiliation, cultural tradition, and generational status. Yet, Indian immigrant students are often grouped with South African Indian students on the basis of "race". Such monolithic grouping tends to neglect the increas-

ing racial and intra-racial strife that affects immigrant student development and academic achievement, as well as school climate.

The 2008 xenophobic attacks took an overt form that openly displayed to the world the hostile attitudes and actions of local Africans against Black immigrants from SADC countries and from other parts of Africa as well. Indian immigrants were not openly targeted in these attacks. However, a more covert and insidious form of xenophobia seems to have reared its head between South African Indians and Indian immigrants. Contests of space and place in South African 'schoolscapes' are no longer about 'race' as much as it is about issues of nationalism, belonging and territory.

2. Exploring the Terrain: Socio-cultural Experiences of Immigrant Students⁴

Socio-cultural experiences encompass issues such as schooling experiences [academic and social experiences within and outside the classroom], language use, acculturation and identity formation (Chow 2006; Grobler et al. 2006). Larson and Marsh (2005:339) define the term 'socio-cultural' as an awareness of students' backgrounds, personal histories, and that each student is "a product of the social, cultural, political, and historical forces that are present at any given time and place.

Much of the literature concurs that immigrant students experience adjustment adaptation problems when they enrol at schools in the host society (Ighodaro 1997; Traoré 2004; Goyol and Dobson 2006). The transition of immigrant students into the host country is influenced by a number of factors such as discrimination, harassment, attrition, isolation, language barriers, social standing, cultural changes, social change, teaching styles, school environment, academic standing, sense of belonging, and identity (Kunz 2000; Qin et al. 2008). Strong work ethics, academic excellence and academic commitment often predispose immigrant students to prejudice from indigenous students (Qin et al. 2008) which, in turn, influence social relations between immigrant and host students. Bullying and harassment from the hegemonic cultural group at the host school concerning issues centred on territorial spaces have also been a cause for concern. Gibson and Carrasco (2009:254) argue, although official school discourses appear to em-

brace cultural and linguistic diversity, foreign-born and native-born children of immigrants often end up feeling silenced and alienated.

A significant factor is language that serves as a gatekeeper for acceptance in the host society. It also serves the purpose of forming the foundation for interaction and acculturation among immigrants and indigenous students in the host society (Yeh et al. 2008). Osborn and Osborn (2005:4) argue that language is a basic human right and the opportunity to learn from other 'cultures' is fundamental to an education in a democratic society.

When immigrants are deprived and destitute of the basic tenets of language in a community, there is the possibility of exclusion. In the host society, the issue of language is not always comprehensible by minority groups because "language is not just a cultural issue but a political one" (Wang and Phillion 2007:95). In essence, the inability of minority groups to communicate well in mainstream culture may lead to their exclusion at school and in the host society (Sayed 2002; Sayed et al. 2003; Osborn and Osborn 2005). Even where literacy levels are good, and years of schooling are commensurate with chronological age, many immigrant and refugee students find the "mainstream curriculum and its language demands very difficult" (Brown 2006:150).

The languages spoken by students, which are eventually spoken at school, are resources because didactic cultures are based on the previous understanding and training learners have had over the years in their home language (Nieto 2002). Nieto (2002:83) argues that "educators by and large accept as one of their primary responsibilities the language assimilation of their students" because, without proper language proficiency in academic matters, academic achievement becomes far-fetched (Rumberger and Larson 1998; Chow 2000, 2001; Goddard and Foster 2002). Chow (2006:2) argues, proficiency in English is a major consideration in the necessity, rapidity, and ease with which immigrants adapt to a milieu dominated by English. It is required for communication and for the acquisition of information about the new society.

Issues pertaining to language are very sensitive to the acculturation process and the "belongingness" of immigrants at school (Soto 1997; Wang and Phillion 2007). Taylor and Doherty (2005) argue that immigrants who are new to

their host country, especially those who cannot interact with dominant students because of a language barrier, are also prone to experiencing difficulties in participating in sporting and recreational activities. When Black immigrant students enter South African schools they are not seen as any different to Black African students, but are heard differently because of their accent. Their accent may be viewed as a major identifier that separates them from the black Africans who are native (Fischer, 2004; Aikhionbare 2007).

Another point of consideration when evaluating immigrant students' academic performance borders on the congruence existing between teaching styles used by their teachers back home and in their host society. It has been found that the use of good teaching skills and a good rapport between the teacher and students enabled immigrant students who were English language learners to have a vivid understanding and keen interest in learning at school (Salinas et al. 2008).

The degree of belonging to the school centres on how and who immigrants associate and identify with in a bid to shape their identities, which represents the road to acculturating to their new environment. Dika and Singh (2002) imply that, in order to gain an understanding of the schooling experience of immigrant students, pertinent issues like their level of affiliation, commitment and identity should be considered. A common occurrence among immigrants is the persistent feeling of not being recognised, a notion of not being important, and caginess (Gibson et al. 2004; Noguera and Wing 2006). When immigrants identify with the school environment they are able to "quickly discover that schooling is essential to success" in their host country so as to be able to ascend the steps of social class mobility (Delgado-Gaitan 1994: 137).

Acculturation is one of the dimensions that can be used to determine the extent of belonging among immigrant groups of children to their mainstream culture (LaFromboise et al. 1993; Berry 1995; Mouw and Xie 1999; Yeh 2003; Yeh and Inose 2003). Acculturation denotes the way people bargain in the midst of cultural diversities with the assumption that there are hierarchies in terms of the affiliation to one or more cultures than others. This is usually recognised when such individuals describe their identities to show their degree of affiliation to cultural

preferences (LaFromboise et al. 1993; Berry 1995). The process of acculturation borders on knowing and taking on the way of life and customs of the “adopted society”. The level of acculturation of a student is often an indicator of a student’s integration into a school environment. Students with low levels of acculturation to the dominant culture often experience the stress of integrating the environment of school with their own cultural background of home (Gonzalez and Padilla 1997). Furthermore, some studies have suggested that the ethnicity of a student’s teacher can negatively affect a student’s academic performance. Teachers who may lack a sense of multiculturalism in the classroom may hinder some students’ level of adjustment in school (Banks and Banks 2001).

Identity formation is linked to the acculturation of immigrants to their host society. In the formation of identity, hybrids emerge depending on the experiences of immigrants in their host society (Asanova 2005; Vandeyar 2008). It has also been demonstrated that identity formation depends on the degree of affiliation of immigrants to the home and host culture and the transnational space existing between the two cultures. Two pertinent concepts in the formation of identity are that of the “social mirror” (Winicott 1971) and “psychosocial passing” (Berry 1997; Nesdale Rooney and Smith 1997; Murrell 1999; Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco 2001; Wu 2002; Suarez-Orozco 2004). Winicott (1971) suggests that a child’s sense of self is profoundly shaped by the reflections mirrored back to him by significant others. “Psychosocial passing” refers to people who seek to render invisible the visible differences between themselves and a desired or chosen reference group.

The above mentioned factors of schooling experiences, language use, acculturation, sense of belongingness and identity formation directly influence the socio-cultural experiences of immigrant students and serve to either affirm or negate the very essence of their beings.

3. Theoretical Mooring: Sociocultural Theory

Socio-cultural theorists argue that learning occurs within a social world (Vygotsky 1978) and hence the individual learner must be studied within a particular social, historical and cultural context (John-Steiner and Mahn 1996:191;

Blanton 1998; Patsula 1999; Flem et al. 2000; MacGillivray and Rueda 2001) as the manner in which an individual makes meaning of the world is mediated through society and culture (Cole 1996; Bruner 1997; Kozulin 2003; Rogoff 2003). Furthermore, meaning emerges from the interplay between actors within social contexts and mediators such as tools, language, activity structures, signs, and symbol systems that exist in that context (Blanton 1998; Riddle and Dabbagh 1999). Individuals both shape and are shaped by these mediators. Thus, culture, environment and history are crucial in this interplay of learning.

Socio-cultural theory rests on three prongs. First, thought and language are inherently connected and central to learning and development. According to Vygotsky (1978), speaking is a cognitive tool for internalising our social interactions and a mediating tool for communicating with others. Second, the social, cultural and political environment of learners influences the social interactions that take place with others. And third, the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky 1978; Wink and Putney 2002) which refers to the level of development attained when learners engage in social behaviour (Blanton 1998; Riddle and Dabbagh 1999; Scherba de Valenzuela 2002; Kearsley 2005).

‘Borderlands’, a term coined by Anzadua (1987:i) to describe the places where ‘two or more cultures edge each other’ and ‘hybrid spaces’-spaces within schools that mix multiple cultural communities” norms and practices (Gutierrez et al. 1995; Barton et al. 2008) are utilised in this study to understand the experiences of Indian immigrant students in South African schools.

4. Research Strategy

The meta-theoretical paradigm utilised in this study was that of social constructivism. The methodological paradigm employed a qualitative case study approach and narrative inquiry. Data collection was a mix of semi-structured interviews, observations, document analysis, field notes and researcher journal. Content analysis and ground theory approaches were utilised to analyse the data.

Three secondary schools located in the Gauteng province of South Africa provided the research sites for the broader study; a former white Model C school, a former Indian school

and an inner city school⁵. Criteria used in the selection of students were based on racial background and gender. Approximately six Indian immigrant students (India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka) across Grades 8 to 10 were selected at each school. The selection of immigrant students depended on the mixture that was found at each of the identified schools. A total of seventeen students were interviewed. These interviews were conducted in 2009 over a period of six months. Questions comprised of five to six broad categories and were open-ended. The duration of these semi-structured interviews ranged between 90 and 120 minutes. All interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Observations were conducted to coincide with the interview period. Researchers observed immigrant students over a period of six weeks at each school with a focus on their experiences of school life and how it plays out on the classroom floor and school grounds. Observations of classroom practice, activities and associations during the break sessions, assemblies and other activities of the school including after school activities were captured.

6. Findings

6.1 Re-negotiating Identities

The most common identifications found in these narratives were ethnic characterizations linked strongly to culture, traditions and language. Almost all immigrant Indian students identified either as “Indian”, ‘Sri Lankan’ or ‘Pakistani’ related to ancestral and geographical origin and home country. A very strong sense of patriotism and nationalism seemed to mark their responses. Unlike much of the literature that talks about hyphenated identities (Phinney 2007; Suarez-Orozco 2004; Vandeyar 2011; Vandeyar and Vandeyar 2011) none of the respondents identified as Indian-South African; Pakistan-South African or Sri-Lankan-South African or vice-versa. For example,

I am a Hindi-speaking Indian from India (Rithik).

I am an Indian Tamil speaking Hindu from Sri Lanka (Preyanka).

I am a Muslim from India. I am an Indian Muslim (Moosa).

I am Mohamed and I come from Pakistan. I am a Pakistani.

I am a Sri-Lankan (Sharma).

An exception to the norm was a response from one Indian immigrant student who identified in terms of geographical origin and progeny “I come from India; I am the son of...” (Jeet). When analysed further, this response could relate to the identification structures and caste system in India (Balagopalan 2009). In contrast immigrant Indian students were plugged into a category by South African Indian students who called them “Pakis”. In terms of “Othering” they were ascribed the group categorisation of ‘Amandiya’⁶.

Some people call me Paki...this makes me angry. I tell them I am not from Pakistan; I am from India (Yash).

There is one South African Indian kid who keeps going on and on about me being Sri Lankan and sometimes the South African Indians say to go back to your country (Jayasuriya).

The South African Indian children call me Paki and tell me to go back to my country...they don't like me because I am from Pakistan (Zain).

They (South African Indians) call me ‘Amandiya’ and chase me away (Amjad).

Black African students on the other hand could not easily distinguish between South African Indians and immigrant Indians. Hence, immigrant Indian students were cast into the category of South African Indians because they shared the same phenotypical features and characteristics. Black African students labelled immigrant Indian students and South African Indian students as Indians and treated them in like manner.

They say I am from Sri Lanka...mostly the South African Indian children say this...to the blacks (Africans) I am just another Indian student in the school (Thilak).

Consequently, the identities of Indian immigrant students were re-negotiated in terms of the social currents of the host society. Irrespective of their country of origin immigrant students were all categorised as Indians. Little if any cognisance was taken of their ethnic or cultural identities. The category “Indian” stems from the apartheid history of South Africa.

6.2 Psychosocial Passing

The concept of ‘passing’ within the Black community in the western world traditionally referred to Blacks who pass for Whites because

of their light skin colour. However, in the South African context this concept refers to Black immigrant students who 'pass' for local Black students because of similar phenotypic racial features.

In school I am actually like a normal South African and everyone treats me the same I'm just like the other Indians (Fatima).

I've been in this country now for seven years and most people don't know that I am from Sri Lanka, so they don't really treat me differently (Saravan).

I fit in well in this school because most of the children see me as an Indian from South Africa...I look like them (Hamsa).

I fit in well, like the other SA Indians in this school. I speak English well, I don't really have an 'Indian' accent so I am like one of them (Jeet).

Teachers treat me like a South African Indian. They do not see any difference (Pushil).

6.3 Cultural Ambiguity

Many immigrant Indian students began to question their cultural values, traditions, practices and customs. As much as they passed for South African Indians in terms of appearance they experienced many differences in terms of dietary needs, use of ethnic language, codes of conduct, morals and work ethic. Many Indian immigrant students found it difficult to come to terms with the devaluation of culture, ethnicity and language of South African Indian students.

During break I sit with my friends who are all Indian Tamils, no other race. They are all Indians but they are different from me...I am a pure vegetarian and they are not. In terms of culture, they are South African Indian, I am not; they speak English and no Tamil (Samishka).

My culture is Hindu and I speak Gujarati. Very important we do not eat meat and each morning we pray before taking water (cultural practices). Many of the South African Indians are not religious (Rishi).

Classmates who are Muslim understand me, in terms of religion but they cannot speak Arabic, they speak English (Yash).

It's different in South Africa. In Sri Lanka all the children are the same. I learnt through the medium of Tamil. Here, although they say they are Tamils they don't speak my language... I had to give it up (Preyanka).

Furthermore, immigrant Indian students felt that South African Indian students had become too westernised and had forsaken their culture as expressed in their code of conduct and moral behaviour.

The South African Indians lack culture. They are too westernised (Madesh).

Some people in this school like to fight. There are others that steal people's things. This does not happen in India...we respect other people's belongings and we do not like to fight (Rahul).

South African children are lazy and they do not come to school to study. They are more interested in boyfriends and nightclubs etc. They sit with their cell phones most of the time (Sarada).

They (South African Indians) threaten to chase me away. They bully and hit me. They use vulgar language and swear at me. It's not nice, we must respect each other. I feel that I don't belong here, because of the people (Moosa).

One thing I was shocked by when I came to this school is the disrespect for teachers and the lack of discipline. South African Indian students talk back to the teachers. They do not do their homework, they lazy (Shanthi).

6.4 Academic and Social Exclusion

Indian immigrant students experienced both academic and social exclusion in the schooling context. Academic exclusion played out in the form of a lack of proficiency in the medium of instruction but also in terms of group formations in cooperative learning activities. Social exclusion happened during both in an out of class activities. In class immigrant Indian children were mocked at in terms of their surnames and accents. Out of class they associated with non-South African Indian students.

During break I hang out with my sister in front of the art room or I go to the library all the time (Thilak).

I don't have lots of friends like I had in India, we played together. Here they are chasing me away. If I could speak English like them they will not call me Paki. I hate that word. I am not a Paki from Pakistan. They say our government should take you back to Pakistan (Moosa).

My friend is from India, and one Coloured and one Black. I do not have any South Afri-

can Indian friends. They don't know me and I don't know them, so I sit with my other friends (Akshay).

The teacher puts me anywhere but when the learners choose groups sometimes I do not have a group ...sometimes I have to pay to be in a group (Mohamed).

Almost all Indian immigrant students expressed that they did not feel a sense of belonging.

Here there are Blacks and I am Indian. Some are Indian but they speak English and I can't understand. No I don't feel like I belong to this school because they are Black and I am Muslim. The other Indian children are here but they don't belong to my culture... I want to belong to a true Muslim culture (Ahmed).

I feel that I don't belong here, because of the people. We are all human, but they do not accept us. I have a big problem speaking English (Yash).

6.5 Agency

Almost all Indian immigrant students demonstrated a strong sense of self-determination and agency. They were hard-working, dedicated and committed to their studies and it was extremely important for them to succeed and to do well.

I have Black African friends who like me a lot. I get along with most African children. I think it's because I work really hard and I often get the top marks in the class...some of the South African Indians say I am just showing off. Some of them are not really here to study. They do not take their education seriously (Shanthi).

This finding is similar to much of the literature on immigrant studies (Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco 2001; Wu 2002; Suarez-Orozco 2004). However, where this differs is in terms of studies on immigrant students in the South African context. Black (African) immigrant students' sense of agency was two-fold in nature namely, a sense of individual aspiration but also helping to pull up their South African brother (Vandeyar and Vandeyar 2011). Indian immigrant students' sense of agency was related to an individualistic need and desire for self-development and success. They lacked an ethos of caring about their South African Indian brother. Their sense of agency was based on competition rather than on compassion.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

What do we learn about the experiences of Indian immigrant students within the sociocultural context of the South African 'schoolscape'?

Some of the findings from this research study resonate with findings in the literature. First, this study also found that Indian immigrant students experienced adjustment adaptation problems in schools. Almost all Indian immigrant students within the South African 'schoolscape' experienced discrimination, harassment, attrition, isolation, language barriers, cultural and social changes, conflicting values, tension regarding territorial spaces and a sense of non-belongingness. The ethos of reception of Indian immigrant students in South African schools has largely been one of hostility and exclusion, which seemed to be eroding away at their self-esteem.

Second, similar to the findings in the literature, this study also found that the teaching styles of the teacher negatively affected immigrant student's academic spaces of learning. The teacher did not take cognisance of the language proficiency of immigrant students. Third, the formation of Indian immigrant students' identities depended on the degree of affiliation of immigrants to the home and host culture and the transnational space existing between the two cultures. Almost all Indian immigrant students identified in terms of dominating ethnic identities related to ancestral and geographical origin and home country, none identified in terms of hyphenated identities. Fourth, identities born of the prevailing South African mind-set were imposed onto immigrant students namely, the categories of 'Indian' and 'Amandiya'. Sociocultural theorists claim that identities are dialogically negotiated within cultural contexts through interactions between individuals as they carry out actions and position one another in relation to cultural norms (Holland et al. 1998; Hermans 2001; Nasir and Saxe 2003; Carlone and Johnson 2007; Rahm 2007; Varelas et al. 2007; Yoon 2008). Furthermore, categories of social identification "thicken" (Wortham 2006) or accrete (Poleman 2006) on individuals as they repeatedly position themselves, or are positioned by others, as belonging to a social category. Fifth, language served as a gatekeeper for acceptance in the host country. Issues pertaining to language were

very sensitive to the acculturation process and the “belongingness” of immigrants at school (Soto 1997; Wang and Phillion 2007). The picture reflected in the social mirror is one of a foreigner invading territorial spaces in the South African schoolscape and broader South African society.

Where the findings of this study differ is that discrimination against Indian immigrant students was mainly from South African Indian students. Many Indian immigrant students found a sense of solidarity with Black African students, and Coloureds who were far more accepting and welcoming. Why is this? The answer seems to be twofold. First, contests are about nationalism (rightful citizenship), territory and entitlement. Because of similar phenotypic features Indian immigrants pass for South African Indians; they tend to settle in former Indian suburbs and are constantly ‘in the face’ and public spaces of South African Indians. They take on jobs that were once reserved for South African Indians and are prepared to accept lesser wages etc. Resultantly they pose a threat to the livelihood of many South African Indians who lived through the atrocities of apartheid and who had hoped for better opportunities in democratic South Africa. This is possibly why Black and other South Africans cannot seem to distinguish between Indian immigrants and South African Indians and have categorized both groups as “Indian”. Second, South African Indian students some of whom are fifth generation Indian immigrant students and who see themselves more as South African than Indian are left alone on how to deal with the history of apartheid which is still very much on the shoulders of their parents and their frame of learning. The reaction of South African Indian students to Indian immigrant students can be partly ascribed to the sharing of resources, but more importantly it is the fact that neither South African Indian students nor their parents had the opportunity to find balance or the time to heal. And rather than healing in a protected space they are being thrown into an international competitive education system. Some students will be equipped to do that because they are on solid ground but if you are historically disadvantaged you are not on solid ground to meet this.

What implications does the South African socio-cultural ‘schoolscape’ hold for the education of Indian immigrant students? Educa-

tion viewed from a sociocultural perspective seeks to understand the social and cultural worlds within which individuals have grown and developed, how individuals interpret who they are in relation to others, and how they have learned to process, interpret, and encode their world (Perez 1998). In this study, it became evident that both the concepts of ‘borderlands’ (Anzadua 1987:i) and ‘hybrid spaces’ (Gutierrez et al. 1995; Barton et al. 2008) played out within the South African ‘schoolscape’. Schools had a mix of multiple cultural communities’ norms and practices where two or more cultures edged each other. However, in this study the ‘edging of cultures’ happened between South African Indian students and Indian immigrant students. Indian immigrant students felt more at home with Black African, Coloured and White students than they did with South African Indian students and despite language barriers found solidarity around other things such as sport (Runhare and Mulaudzi 2012)

Mostly cross cultural groupings with Black African, Coloured students and other Indian immigrant children. We play soccer together during break. Whoever has an interest, we don’t say you can’t play (Sharma).

It would seem that the ‘edging of cultures’ was more between new Indian immigrants and fourth or fifth generation South African Indians and was strongly related to social and geographical affinities and the influences of those contexts on the adaptation of a particular culture or ethnicity. So, although both Indian immigrants and South African Indians may originally have come from the same culture, for example Tamil, the social, cultural, political and historical contexts of each country (South Africa and India) influenced how that culture was being practiced and became a significant marker of belonging or non-belongingness.

The first prong on which socio-cultural theory rests namely, thought and language are inherently connected and central to learning and development was clearly evident in this study. Speaking was utilised as a cognitive tool by Indian immigrant students for internalising their social interactions and as a mediating tool for communicating with others. Attempts were also made to learn English, not only to find a sense of belonging but more importantly to enhance understanding and learning, since both teachers and students only spoke English during lessons.

The second prong of socio-cultural theory looks at how the social, cultural and political environment of learners influences the social interactions that take place with others. This study found that learning and knowledge were inextricably intertwined with the context within which they occur. The context also moved beyond physical location and was inclusive of individual, cultural, social, institutional and historical locations (Lave and Wenger 1991). Social interactions were inhibited due to a lack of proficiency in English. Many Indian immigrant students did not want to associate with the cultural environment that was representative of South African Indian students. They found this environment characterised by cultural ambiguity and a lack of cultural norms. A few Indian immigrant students questioned this and tried to remain true to their culture at the risk of being rejected and excluded. Others were prepared to forsake their cultural practices in a bid to fit in,

Here, although they say they are Tamils they don't speak my language...

I had to give it up (Preyanka).

I'm supposed to fast and I am not allowed to eat meat, but I eat meat and I am cool. I go with the flow. Culture does not play a big role in my life (Jeet).

While South African Indian students seemed to have held on to some cultural traditions, practices and customs they had largely forsaken the use of their mother tongue and daily cultural observances. Western standards and norms seemed to have left an indelible mark on South African Indians. The political environment strongly excluded Indian immigrant students and labelled them either as 'Indian' (categorized as the South African Indian, mainly by non-South African Indian students) or as 'Amandiya' (Indian immigrant).

The third prong of sociocultural theory is Vygotsky's notion of the zone of proximal development (ZPD). This refers to the level of development attained when learners engage in social behaviour (Blanton 1998; Riddle and Dabagh 1999; Kearsley 2005; Scherba de Valenzula 2002) and is defined as the distance between the actual development level and the level of potential development (Vygotsky 1978). ZPD links the known with the unknown. In this study it was found that Indian immigrant students were disadvantaged as the socio-cultural context of the 'schoolscape' did not affirm or draw on their

cultural or social capital, or attempt to use it as an asset. Hence, scaffolding did not take place between immigrant students' existing schemata of knowledge and new knowledge. Instead an assimilatory approach was the favoured option.

CONCLUSION

The dawn of democracy in South Africa brought with it the promise of a better future and a new sense of hope to many Indian school-going children. It was hoped that the inequities characteristic of the apartheid schooling system would finally be addressed and that all South African students, especially black students would have better opportunities. However, the nature of the South African schooling system eighteen years after the advent of democracy has evolved into a more complex system of race and class. The South African public schooling system has become multi-tiered and multi-layered in nature. Access into the more affluent and well-embellished former white schools is now determined by economic status, attracting mainly the newly formed South African black bourgeoisie. Many poor South African Indians who do not have the means to flee to these well-embellished schools are forced to remain in former Indian schools whose learner population has turned over from 100% Indian to 90% Black African students. Arguably, South African Indian students now find themselves to a certain extent worse off than they were during apartheid as they now need to share their already limited resources and impoverished educational environments with Black African, Coloured and immigrant students. It is these schools that have mainly attracted Indian immigrant students where, understandably so, vicious contests of space and place occur. For South African Indian students, international competition is not an abstract policy; it enters the school through immigrant students. For Indian immigrant students on the other hand international acceptance implies a re-negotiation of identities and a reconciliation of cultural ambiguities. Is the quest for "South Africanness" and South African citizenship worth the social, cultural and moral risk?

NOTES

1. Black Immigrant students: 'African students' who come from African countries and who are natives

- of any of the countries of Africa, or descendants of any of the people of Africa.
2. Indian immigrant students: immigrant students who share the same phenotypical features as South African Indian students and who come from India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.
 3. Schoolscape: The concept "schoolscape" has evolved from the concept of a 'scape' that was first proposed by Appadurai (1996) in his attempt to describe forces of globalisation and global cultural flows that are 'liquid' and irregular in nature. He introduced terms such as 'ethnoscape', 'technoscape', 'financescape', 'mediascape' and 'ideoscape', each of which emphasis a particular aspect of the world with the latter 'ideoscape' embodying the 'imagined worlds' produced through and intersection of all of the former scapes.
 4. Model C school: A government attempt to cut state costs by shifting some of the financing and control of White schools to parents.
 5. Former Indian school: A school that formerly exclusively catered only for Indian students.
 6. Gauteng province: the name of one of the nine provinces of South Africa.
 7. This literature review was first published in Vandeyar, S. (2010). Educational and Socio-cultural experiences of immigrant students in South African schools. *Education Inquiry, Vol. 1 (4):347-365*. Copyright of this literature review rests with this journal.
 8. Inner city school: a school that mushroomed out of the need to cater to students who live in the inner city. The usually older, central part of a city, especially when characterized by crowded neighbourhoods in which low - income often minority groups predominate.
 9. Amandiya: a term borrowed from Bongo Ngema song "Amandiya" that refers to Indian immigrants.
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