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## **Political, Economic, Socio-Cultural, and Educational Challenges of Administering a Sino-US Joint Venture Campus in China**

**Osman Özturgut**

**Hua Li Vocational and Technical College, China**

### **Abstract**

This qualitative study explored the political, economic, socio-cultural, and educational challenges of administering a Sino-U.S. joint-venture campus in the People's Republic of China. China American University (CAU) is an educational joint venture between China Investment Company (CIC) and American University (AU) in the U.S. that resulted in naming CAU a branch campus of AU. Data were acquired through semi-structured interviews, surveys, and participant observations. The researcher interviewed, surveyed and observed U.S. administrators and executives, American teachers, Chinese students, and Chinese staff. This study concluded that there are many challenges of administering such a Sino-U.S. joint venture campus in China. Administering a Sino-U.S. joint venture campus in China requires a broad understanding of the host country and a significant amount of flexibility. More research is needed to understand how American the so-called American education is in China, including what the standards are and who is, as Knight (2004) says, "monitoring" and "assuring the relevance and quality" of such programs (p. 84).

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## **Introduction**

While the United States continues to host the most foreign students in the world, the annual growth rate of the enrollment of foreign students on American campuses decreased from 6.4 per cent in 2002 to 0.6 per cent in 2003 (Open Doors, 2004). With the recent globalization movement and decline in foreign student enrollment in universities in developed countries like the U.S., universities are looking for ways to bring education to the student rather than waiting for students to come for education. Decline in the foreign student enrollment in the U.S. is mostly because of the recent changes in visa regulations, especially after September 11, 2001 attacks, growing competition from other nations, and rising costs. Therefore, opening a branch campus abroad and bringing education to the student became an alternative for U.S. universities to bringing students to their campuses. Branch campuses in this study is defined as “campuses set up by an institution in another country to provide its educational or training programs to foreign students” (Huang, 2003, p. 214) while granting the same degrees as they would in the foreign university’s home campus.

As a source for student potential, The People’s Republic of China (P.R.C.) presents an almost limitless opportunity. China is home to 25 per cent of the world’s population. This makes it potentially the biggest market for goods and services in the world. It is not surprising, therefore, that following the economic reforms, which started in 1979, China has been seen as a major growth area for those seeking global market opportunities.

### **Chinese Higher Education and Branch Campuses**

The demand for higher education in China has increased dramatically during the last decade. In 1998, universities and colleges admitted about 1.08 million new students; by 2002, this figure rose to about 3.49 million. By 2005, it was estimated that the enrollment rate would exceed 15 percent of the college age cohort (Chen, 2002). With the growing student market in China, many universities in the U.S. and in many other developed countries are exploring opportunities for getting their share of this potential student population.

Through opening branch campuses in China, U.S. universities are not only intending to encourage a global education for their native students, but also are creating considerable revenue by means of high tuition. They are creating a potential market for the U.S. universities, as students graduating from these branch campuses are applying for visas to go to the U.S. for their advanced studies.

However, opening a branch campus and running it has its own unique challenges, especially in China. The challenges of doing business in China are immense, both for indigenous companies and for foreign companies attempting to penetrate these immense potential markets (Newell, 1999). Many hurdles exist as Eckel, Green and Caine (2004) argue in opening a branch campus in cooperation with a Chinese university. Firstly, starting a branch campus requires a significant investment of time and money and presents challenges in convincing board members, as the return on investment is not certain and may not be immediate (Eckel et al., 2004). The second challenge is recruiting students who might not be attracted by an American brand name university. The third challenge is setting market-appropriate

tuition and fees, given the economic hardships in China. The fourth challenge lies in gaining approval from the Chinese Government to offer American degrees. Last but not the least is the challenge of how a branch campus should be run.

There is extensive literature on the operational challenges of ‘Sino-Foreign joint ventures’ but the research on administering a ‘Sino-U.S. educational joint venture’ is minimal, if any. Many studies discuss a wide range of issues pertaining to joint ventures but none looks at the education sector in specific terms (Boisot & Child, 1988; Willis, 2000a; Little, 2000; Child, 2000; Hofstede, 1980). However, even such studies have shortcomings and need for extensive research to add knowledge to the current literature is imperative.

This study explores the political, economic, socio-cultural, and educational challenges of administering a Sino-U.S. joint venture campus in the People’s Republic of China. The research for this study was conducted at a Sino-U.S. educational joint venture campus in China. China American University (CAU) is an educational joint venture between China Investment Company (CIC) and American University (AU) in the U.S. CAU is a branch campus of AU. Through this campus, Chinese students can receive American education and American Associate’s and Bachelors degrees without having to leave China. The only major offered at the time of the study was International Business.

### **Pseudonyms and Abbreviations Used in this Study**

In order to maintain the anonymity of the institutions and the people, real names were not used in this study. Rather, pseudonyms were used for people, institutions and places. These Pseudonyms are: 1) China American University, (campus where this study was conducted) 2) American University (U.S. home campus of China American University), 3) China Investment Company (Chinese joint venture partner), and 4) Southern Province (where China American University and China Investment Company campus are located).

For the space and practical considerations, the following abbreviations are used throughout this study:

- CAU: China American University
- AU: American University
- ABM: American Business Man
- AUP: President of American University
- DAP: Director of Academic Programs
- VP: Vice President of American University
- CIC: China Investment Company
- CCP: Chinese Communist Party
- P.R.C.: People’s Republic of China



## **Review of Related Literature**

Since the reopening of China for business in 1978, joint ventures have been the most frequent entry mode for small and medium-sized international firms, and various leading multinational companies (Child, 2000). China has embarked on a further major phase of enterprise reform in which the promotion of giant enterprises, new forms of corporate governance, entrepreneurship and internationalization are to be the key elements.

Approximately 16 million of China's 1.3 billion population are enrolled in post-secondary programs (China International Education Association, 2004). China has one of the largest state higher education systems in the world with more than 3,000 universities and colleges—of these, 1,225 are full-time colleges and universities; 686 adult higher education institutions; and 1,202 new private universities and colleges (Min, 2004). Many of these universities and institutes have developed alliances and undertaken a broad range of activities with foreign counterparts. With the literature indicating that the number of educational joint ventures is increasing (Willis, 2000a; Willis, 2000b; Si & Bruton, 1999; Little, 2000; Hofstede, 1980; Knight & de Wit, 1999; Hayhoe, 1989), there are many challenges faced by both the American and the Chinese sides, especially in China.

### **Challenges of Administering a Sino-U.S. Joint Venture Campus**

Xuan and Graf (1996) argue that when investing in China it is important to know about the economic, legal [political], and the socio-cultural environment in the country. In an educational joint venture, educational challenges must be included in any research undertaken to determine the specifics and underlying assumptions of these challenges.

#### ***Political Challenges***

In Communist countries, the education system has been central to the teachings of Communism. It is understandable that allowing an American educational institution with democratic traditions to operate in China would weaken the communist convictions of the younger generation. Especially, Western management theories are considered as “capitalism being preached in China” (Southworth, 1999, p. 327). Involvement of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in any business including the educational joint ventures does have significant effect on the operation of such businesses.

Tse, Au, and Vertinsky (1996) argue that the choice of levels of government interference may bear greater significance in China than in other market economies because they represent different risks to the investing forms. Generally speaking, the higher the level of government involved, the more secure the ventures. “This is because higher level governments have more authority in approving projects, interpreting government policies, and exercising controls” (p. 144).

### ***Economic Challenges***

One economic challenge is the tuition fee that students pay for their education. Xiaoping (2002) reports that “Qinghua University, Beijing University (with the exceptions of a few specializations), People’s University, and Beijing Normal university will be charging 4,800 yuan per person annually; Beijing Technology University, Beijing Science and Technology University, Beijing Post and Telecommunications University, Beijing Aeronautics University, and Beijing Chemical Engineering University will be charging around 5,000 yuan for most specializations; and the University of Foreign Economics and Trade will be charging 6,000 yuan” (p. 22).

Another economic challenge is that the U.S. partners face in a Joint Venture is the wages of the teachers and the staff. Holton (1990) found that most American managers of joint ventures in China are especially unhappy with the policy requiring Chinese counterparts of U.S. managers to be paid salaries comparable to the Americans. The Chinese argued that there should be equal pay for equal work.

### ***Socio-cultural Challenges***

Chinese culture has a long history, showing great persistence and coherence. The roots are primarily in the religio-philosophical traditions of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism (Shi & Westwood, 2000). Harmony is a core element, central to the main religio-philosophical traditions and critical in orientations to the self, environment and social relationships. “A ‘harmony-with’ the environment is prescribed rather than the ‘mastery-over’ prescribed in the western tradition” (p. 191). This entails a non-interventionist, outer-directed and situation-accepting orientation (Leung, 1992) in contrast to a Western problem-solving orientation (Adler, 1991).

In his 2004 article Xiaohua argues that dealing with cultural differences is a major concern to international business scholars and practitioners. Tsang (1999) explains this challenge as: “Managers from industrialized countries are ready to teach native Chinese staff, but seldom do they realize that they can learn something from the locals” (p. 94). Westerners are anxious to “teach the rest of the world” (Xiaohua, 2004, p. 39).

### ***Role of Guanxi***

Cultural roots of Guanxi reside in the Confucian legacy. According to Confucianism, an individual is fundamentally a social or relational being. Social order and stability depend on a properly differentiated role relationship between particular individuals. Confucius defined five cardinal role relations (called wu lun): emperor-subject, father-son, husband-wife, elder-younger brothers and friend-friend. Tsui and Farh (2000) explain that the term ‘wu lun’ in the Confucian ideology is analogous to the contemporary concept of guanxi. Yang (1993) describes ‘wu lun’ as follows:

As a highly formalistic cultural system...[requiring] each actor to perform his or her role in such a way that he or she should precisely say what he or she was supposed to say, and not to say what he or she was not supposed to say. In order to be a good role performer, the actor usually had to hide his or her

free will...This is why Chinese have been said to be situation-centered or situationally determined. (p. 29-30)

Guanxi refers to a special kind of relationship characterized by implicit rules of obligation and reciprocity (Chen, 1994). Such relationships can grow into complex networks that constitute a “highly differentiated intricate system of overt or covert as well as formal and informal social subsets governed by the unwritten law of reciprocity” (Wilpert & Scharpf, 1990, p. 647). Alston (1989), however, argues that guanxi is a viable mechanism for coping with China’s highly personalistic social order.

Guanxi provides the lubricant for the Chinese to get through life. It is a form of social investment. No company in the Chinese business world can succeed unless it benefits from an extensive Guanxi. Although Guanxi brings obligations and costs to its beneficiary, these are mainly social obligations rather than economic ones (Luo, 1995). Chinese nationals tend to rely heavily on personal relationships (Guanxi) in business dealings (Chen, 1994).

Guanxi can also be defined as a special type of relationship which contains “trust, favor, dependence and adaptation, and often leads to insider-based decision making in the business world” (Chan, Cheng, & Szeto, 2002, p. 327). Under conditions of poor legal infrastructures (e.g., and underdeveloped education law system), guanxi might result in unethical business practices rendering privileged treatments to members within the same guanxi network and under-table dealing. “A guanxi network may represent the only efficient means to conduct business in countries where distribution and legal systems are far from fully developed” (Chan et al., 2002, p. 328). This unique Chinese way of resolving business conflicts also reminds foreign enterprises of the importance to cultivate guanxi with Chinese officials to protect their corporate interests in the country. While “Westerners perceive certain business practices (e.g. gift giving) as bribery, their Chinese counterparts may regard them as totally acceptable and necessary for cultivating mutual trust and long-term relationship” (p. 328). Therefore, coping with complexity in China is thus closely tied in with foreign investor policy on local partnerships, that is, forming guanxi.

Osland (1990) also suggests that “Chinese cultural values are largely formed and created from interpersonal relationships and social orientations” (p. 7). To a certain degree, the human relationship network acts as the most important lever or strategy in operating management and administration in China (Sun, Vandenberghe, & Creemers, 2003).

Warren, Dunfee, and Li (2004) conducted two studies on Guanxi. The first one was on the effects of guanxi on different social groups. Two hundred and three Chinese business people participated in this study. The second study tested, with the participation of hundred and ninety five Chinese business people, whether guanxi was helpful or harmful to social groups. Their findings varied. They suggested that guanxi may result in positive and/or negative outcomes. They utilized five scenarios for this research:

Scenario 1: Mr. Wang, a manager of a middle-size and state-owned company, relies on his friendship with local government officials to avoid paying fines for violating pollution regulations.

Scenario 2: Mr. Zhang, a sales manager for a machine-tool factory, gives gifts to the procurement department of his large customers.

Scenario 3: Mr. Liu, a manager who is in charge of a procurement department in a large detergent company, agreed to buy a large amount of material from his boss's brother's company.

Scenario 4: Mr. Wu, a general manager of a branch of Bank of China in He Nan Province, only hires his old classmates who attended college with him.

Scenario 5: Mr. Chen, a business manager in a large restaurant in Jinan city, is visited by officials who say Chen violated an unwritten accounting regulation. The officials send Chen to jail for a week. One of Chen's employees, Ms. Wu, is friends with the officials and asks the officials to let Chen pay money to avoid pending time in jail. The officials agree and Chen pays the money.

Scenario 6: Wu Chang, a business manager, develops a loyal, long-lasting relationship with his set of customers. (p. 360)

The researchers found that "All scenarios were considered authentic examples of guanxi."(p. 361).

### ***Face***

"Face" is another important consideration for joint ventures in China. Hwang (1987), Alston (1989), Chen (1995) suggest that even though Face might exist in any society, it has special importance in Chinese societies because of its centrality in social life and business transactions. Shi & Westwood (2000) explain that for the Chinese, face concerns one's dignity, respect, status and prestige; thus social and business interactions should occur without anyone losing face. Sun et al. (2003) confirm that face for a Chinese is very important. It is even more important than dignity for a Westerner because dignity is only associated with an individual person but face is associated with the dignity of the individual's family, relatives, and a group of people. When a manager criticizes an employee, whether in private or in presence of others, s/he causes that employee to lose face. Holton (1990) says that then the manager also loses face because s/he or caused the subordinate to lose face. This means that criticism of performance on the job must be handled in a very delicate way, with criticisms disguised as suggestions for improvement. The foreigner manager who is accustomed to dealing with workers in a straightforward way, open and blunt, must be aware of the Chinese employees' concern for "face" if he is to be effective.

### ***Educational Challenges***

It is commonly assumed that some Asian cultures are heavily influenced by Buddhism, which holds that knowledge, truth, and wisdom come to those whose

silence allows the spirit to enter (Andersen & Powell, 1991). For instance, harmony or conformity is a key Chinese cultural value that often causes Chinese students to refrain from voicing opposing views in the classroom (Liu, 2001).

Bodycott and Walker (2000) argue that in Confucian societies many local staff are wary of foreigners, and are concerned with what they see as an invasion of Western cultural and educational ideologies and values. These foreign academics often face difficulties adjusting to life in their new institutions and countries. Some experience stress related to alienation from families. It is also worth noting that some foreign academics bring with them preconceived beliefs about their role. "Many see themselves as savior, that is, bringing the best of the West to a developing country" (p. 81).

Cheating and Plagiarism is another issue that American professors face in their Chinese classrooms. Sapp (2002) explains that "Chinese students often consider cheating as a skill that everyone should develop just like Math and computer skills; this skill is something they feel that they need in order to compete in the real world" (p. 5).

### **Methodology**

The research for this study was conducted in the People's Republic of China. CAU was used as the basis for this case study. The researcher lived and worked in China for the duration of the research. The research question was: "What are the Political, Economic Socio-cultural, and Educational Challenges of Administering a Sino-U.S. Joint Venture Campus in China?"

### **Data Gathering**

Data were acquired through semi-structured interviews, surveys and participant observations. The researcher interviewed, surveyed and observed U.S. administrators and executives, American teachers, Chinese students, and Chinese staff. The presence of the researcher as a direct participant on campus was an important part of the research. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) explain that the qualitative research "has the natural setting as the direct source of data and the researcher is the key instrument. Researchers enter and spend considerable time in schools, families, neighborhoods, and other locales learning about educational concerns" (p. 27) and that qualitative research uses the natural setting as the source of data while the researcher attempts to observe, describe and interpret settings as they are, maintaining an "empathic neutrality" (Patton, 1990, p. 55).

### **Choice of participants**

The choice of participants was limited since the investigator could only interview, survey and observe the people involved with CAU. As a relatively new university (started in 2000) and small in size, the number of people involved was limited. However, this was not a significant issue for this study because "there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry. Sample size depends on what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what's at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with available time and resources" (Patton, 1990, p. 184).

## Data Analysis

Interviews were tape recorded, when suitable; surveys were sent out and responses collected, and field notes were taken during observation. Tape-recorded interviews were transcribed and then combined with field notes. Next a content analysis was performed. Raw data were organized, classified and edited into a manageable and accessible package (Patton, 1990). The data were analyzed within the framework of Internationalization concept developed by Knight and de Wit (1999).

As Patton (1990) explains, the first task in qualitative analysis is description. The descriptive analysis answers basic question. The initial categories for analyzing the data were political, economic, socio-cultural, and academic challenges. These categories were identified through the work of Knight and de Wit (1999). After going through and sorting the data, these were revised to final categories as political, economic, socio-cultural, and educational challenges of administering a Sino-U.S. joint venture campus in China

The data collected were then sorted and a content analysis was performed. Patton (1990) defines content analysis as the process of identifying, coding, and categorizing the primary patterns in the data. Once the raw data were gathered, the researcher underlined the words and the phrases that he thought to be significant. After underlining the words and phrases, the researcher searched for patterns in the data while constantly comparing the data in the surveys. He color coded for emerging themes, breaking down the data into its relevant parts. This is also called “open coding” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Condensing data into “analyzable units by creating categories” helps us in organizing, managing, and retrieving “the most meaningful bits of our data” (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 26). They further explain:

The argument here is that coding is much more than simply giving categories to data; it is also about conceptualizing the data, raising questions, providing provisional answers about the relationships among and within the data, and discovering the data. Strauss argues that coding should be used to open up the inquiry and move toward interpretation. Coding is thus about breaking the data apart in analytically relevant ways in order to lead toward further questions about the data. (p. 31)

Multi-colored pens were used to assign different colors to words and phrases. As the researcher collected and gathered the specifics, the data suggested more general patterns of order and the constant comparison of the color coded data in the surveys strengthened the researcher’s choice of categories. Aronson (1994) explains that the patterns within the codes develop into themes and it organizes the data and tells the story. The researcher was also aware of the fact that a refinement or change of emergent themes was a possibility as he dug further into the data. In sum, the analysis process was as follows:

Raw Data → Underline the important words and phrases → Break down and color code for themes → look for emerging themes and categories → Compare and contrast the data → Determine final categories.

### Limitations of the Research Design

- Data were collected through a relatively small sample of participants.
- Lack of sufficient language skills of the researcher was a limitation. Even though the researcher has lived and worked in China for two years and took formal Chinese language and culture classes, lack of Chinese language skills limited this qualitative research.
- Getting approval from the Chinese participants to conduct interviews was a challenge. Conducting qualitative study in a Communist country slowed down the data collection process.
- Sensitivity of the business environment in China was a major limitation for this research design. Information gathered through this study had to be reviewed by the U.S. partner.

### Findings

4 main themes and 7 sub-themes emerged during data generation and analysis. These themes can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1 - *Main Themes and Sub-themes*

<b>Main Themes</b>	<b>Sub-themes</b>
The Idea of a U.S. Campus in China	<i>*Preliminary Research</i> <i>*Issues During the Establishment Process</i> <i>*Later Issues</i> <i>*Relationship with the Chinese Partner</i>
Chinese Staff	<i>*Issues with the Chinese Staff</i>
Foreign Professors	<i>*Issues with the Foreign Professors</i>
Chinese Students	<i>*Issues with the Chinese students</i>

Questions are directed to the participants to find out the political, economic, socio-cultural and educational challenges of administering a Sino-U.S. joint venture campus in China.

### The Idea of a U.S. Campus in China

In 1997-1998, the President of AU, “one of the pioneers of expanding overseas,” went to China to look for opportunities to set up sister school relationships. With the help of an American friend, who is a businessman and a well-known entrepreneur in China, and his Chinese wife, they met with some executives and started talking about having a branch campus in China. The dialogue with a Chinese university in Southern Province “led to the eventual development of the school.” They [administrators at the AU] wanted to introduce something “bigger” and “found the right partners and put it together.”

Around the time of their China visit, they felt that “there was definitely a need for it.” The amount of emphasis that Chinese government was putting into education in China and “with their future outlook that their education being very poor,” that “they thought that this [opening a branch campus] would be a good thing to do.” There were some MBA programs at that time, but those MBA programs “required

students to take certain courses here but to get a degree they had to go overseas, back to the main campus to pick it up.” However, this was a problem because “lot of times, students would not get their visa after completing their coursework here and they would end up with no degree.”

### ***Preliminary Research***

AUP explained that the preliminary research they did was in 1996 and basically on the whole Asian market. By the time they arrived in China, they had already determined that for the future of the university [AU] they wanted to have a strong presence in Asia. They thought that Asia was very important for the future and commerce in the U.S. and therefore was important for the future of their students on the main campus [AU].

### ***Issues During the Establishment Process***

Once they “got the initial project off the ground” and established the branch campus, they were challenged by “just trying to get to understand how things operate in China which is very different than the U.S.” and “the whole way of approaching education is very different and trying to get our people here to understand of the Chinese.” Using translation to communicate with the Chinese disrupted the communication as “you really are at the mercy of those that are doing the translating.” It was “a constantly moving target.” Also, as private education was a new thing for the Chinese, “the rules of how things were done was constantly changing and so you would be thinking of doing the right thing and the next thing you find out that you aren’t doing the right thing.”

ABM explained that the most difficult part was trying to get the curriculum established. It was never done before and they were trying to get the permission to offer a U.S. accredited program which required certain courses that were mandatory for the program to qualify for accreditation in the U.S.

Getting approval from the Chinese government has not been as a big challenge as one might have expected as both interviewees explained. The Chinese wanted to experiment as “Chinese at any level are extremely progressive people.” “They change,” they add, “When they see something that’s needed, they change.”

When they started thinking about establishing a branch campus in 1997-1998, none of the “massive changes” of the present time had taken place in China and “thinking was more conservative because they had not seen a lot of this, so, they were not resisting the idea, they were just cautious, to try to understand, to try to get their hands around it, try to feel what is it you are trying to do.” The Chinese had some concerns with a private Catholic university coming to China to set up a full program and “they needed to look at it very carefully and they did.” ABM further added that it was “with an open mind” and “they [Chinese] never questioned the books. They never said ‘you can’t teach this,’ ‘you can’t teach that,’ and there has been no censorship. There has been no control on any of the programs content, and teaching, so they left school alone to do what it does.”



People that they are dealing with in China are mainly educators and they realize that an “American degree is a value.” Therefore, they want the degree and they “sometimes understand” that there are strict regulations in the U.S. as they [AU/CAU] are “trying to deliver a high quality degree.”

ABM described that they approached the issues they faced during the establishment process by “listening and talking, and explaining. Listening and talking, and explaining.” He further added that “if you are coming with an attitude, well, I am going to teach you how to do this right or I’m going to give you better things to do, better way to do things, certainly they are going to resist it more.” The solution is to “sit and say, look, let me explain to you why we do it this way and how that benefits our students and how this can benefit your students.” He feels that Chinese have been “very open minded.”

ABM further explained that the interest of the owner of the CIC is probably not “purely educational” and “the interest is driven primarily by profit.” In order to make that profit and attract more students, “he [owner of the CIC] has to do better. He has to give better quality education, better degree, better faculty, better places to live, better, better, and better.” He added that “if our philosophy conflicts with the owner’s philosophy, with the school’s philosophy, with their big plan,” as they are building new buildings and expanding continuously and hiring the best faculty, “they don’t have time to stop and wait for us.” He explained that “We need to understand them a lot more than they need to understand us” because the question really is “how important are we in the whole picture of their plan and how much of their time do they want to devote to this?” He added that “if you have got hundreds of programs, thousands of faculty, and if you spend one third of your time worrying about this, sometimes it is better to get rid of it, and succeed in another way.” When they started the CAU program, they were “the only game in town” but now “there are big universities coming here to set up programs so the field of cooperation is much more competitive than it was the day we started.”

He continued to explain that he made mistakes but he has “always listened before I did something, or at least asked advice before I did something.” Even though China is a modern place and very open to western ideas, in many ways “it remains a very traditional place.” “You cannot take 5000 years of culture out of people” he added. He concluded by saying that “we have to agree a lot more than we disagree and we have to build relationships.” “15 years living in China, what I have learned is that I don’t know enough about China.”

### ***Later Issues***

The VP explained that some of the issues she has been faced with since starting the CAU are: “with any kind of partnership is who pays for what. Therefore, they “had to get that spelled out very clearly.” “Who pays for what, what happens to the profits, how is that divided” had to be decided beforehand. She further added that “almost anything you do can fall apart in any partnership even if it is just borrowing something from your neighbor, if you don’t have the rules straight.” Another issue was that they “also had to deal with the curriculum.” They had to make sure that the curriculum would be accepted because then, they would not have been able to open the school and be there if their curriculum could not have been honored. They had to

make sure that “the things we were doing would not affect our accreditation” as they are “Southern Association accredited.” Thus, they needed their Chinese partner to honor that, while they honor their issues with the Ministry of Education.

DAP explained that the first of the political issues was “visa issues”, that is, acquiring foreign expert certificates and temporary resident permits for the CAU faculty. “As rules have changed, teachers now must have two years experience prior to getting their work permit approved by the Education Bureau.”

The second political issue she pointed out was related to hiring teachers from another Chinese university located on the same campus as CAU. Even though most of the CAU classes are taught by “American” teachers, CAU at times needed Chinese teachers to teach Grammar [ESL], Fine Arts, Physical Education, Biology, Physics, and Chinese Accounting classes.

The third political issue was “establishing partnership.” At present, they are in transition from moving between their old partner and new partner. The Chinese government required that they prove that they no longer have ties to their old partner before they can apply for collaboration with their new partner.

The fourth political issue was the credibility of their degree. CAU is an American university that awards American degrees. Students want verification that their American degree is recognized by the Chinese government. As CAU is not officially on Beijing’s official list of approved foreign degrees, it makes it difficult to convince students and parents.

Last political issue was, as he puts it, “lost in translation.” CAU has its own bilingual staff that works to translate between CAU/AU and CIC. Though staff members try their best to convey messages appropriately and to “properly gauge cultural responses,” miscommunications do occur.

Next category of issues was “instructional.” AU recruits their “American” instructors on behalf of CAU from the U.S. and these instructors must meet the academic requirements of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools in the U.S. They also have to meet Chinese requirements of having at least 2 years teaching experience: “So even if we find a Ph.D. with fifteen years of professional experience, we can not hire her/him because she or he does not meet the definition of a teaching expert.”

In the past two years, CAU has had to have some of their core classes taught online, “AU Blackboard”. Because their student body has declined due to the inability to recruit and the graduation of multiple students, they taught some of their core classes online. The main reason for those classes being taught online was that it was not “financially viable to bring an instructor to China to teach just one or two courses.” These classes also have technical difficulties because of “limited access to the internet, problems with Blackboard password issues, instructors [in the U.S.] having different editions of the textbooks from what we have here.”

Another instructional issue was the textbooks. They were at times “unable to get the correct textbooks [same textbooks as used at AU], “not able to get the right

number of textbooks on time,” “students not wanting to pay for books that have American prices,” “students breaking copyright laws by copying the textbook.”

DAP further explained that technology and classroom limitations were other issues with which she had to deal. Some examples of these issues included: “not having an up-to-date computer lab,” “not having media equipment in each classroom,” “not having American style classrooms with moveable desks,” “not having a complete English library or access to the same database resources as our American counterparts,” and “not having science labs for Biology or Physics like in America.”

The next category of the issues was “administrative issues,” which included the “communication between CAU and main campus [AU].” Presently, the record keeping systems at AU and CAU are not connected. This has caused some problems with students’ files not being complete or having errors. The database that CAU uses was specially created for this campus and “it has limitations.”

Student recruitment was an issue that caused significant challenges for both sides. CAU depended on the recruiting of their Chinese partner to increase their student body. Because their new partnership has not been officially accepted by Chinese Education Officials, “our partner has not been able to actively recruit for us, so our numbers have decreased over these past two years. This decrease has led to present students worrying about the health of our school and its future.”

### ***Relationship with the Chinese Partner***

When asked about their relation with Chinese partner, VP explained that they [CAU/AU] are “extremely lucky.” She further added that “this partner is the most straightforward person I have met in a long time.” He is “very direct, very honest. He is an academican, a businessman,” but “academics really come first” and he is “very ethical.”

DAP acts as a liaison between the AU administrators and CIC administrators and tries to meet with her assigned counterparts as needed “to make sure that communication channels remain open and are flowing.” CIC administrators have done their best to make CAU feel welcome on campus by including them in meetings, “offer services” to them “as they would to their own departments, and invite the CAU faculty and staff to special events on campus.” To help build guanxi, she and other CAU faculty members have made it a point to participate in student and faculty activities such as teaching English at CIC, “singing at campus events,” “attending dinners,” and “participating in games (tug-of-war),” or “providing campus-wide activities such as English Corner and the Halloween Party” that not only serves CAU students but all students on campus.

### **Chinese Staff**

There are currently two Chinese staff members working at the CAU office as administrative assistants. They are studying “Secretarial English at CIC” and “Financial Management at Beijing University through distance education” as part-time students in addition to their full time jobs as administrative assistants. The two

were interviewed at the same time as one administrative secretary had limited English and the other one helped her with translation of certain English words. Also, interview responses were edited for grammar and anonymity concerns. As long as the meaning was clear, the grammar was not edited in order to keep the cultural elements in the responses.

One of the respondents had worked with “Americans” through helping her cousin in his company. Her cousin had an advertisement company and they dealt with “some of the foreign clients.” In addition, she worked at the trade fairs, helping foreigners communicate with the Chinese companies. Other administrative assistant did not have any experience working with Americans prior to coming to CAU.

They found Chinese administrators to be more serious and “usually leader is leader and worker is worker” in Chinese organizations compared to the “American” administrators that “seem like a family and like friends, very warm, and active,” “When I need to work, I want to work.” Working with American administrators was “very easy, very well.”

Language (spoken language) was explained to be the major challenge for both respondents. In regard to cultural differences between the Chinese and Americans, one respondent explained:

American people is very direct people, ‘I like this one,’ and ‘I don’t like this one.’ Maybe Chinese people, for example when Mr. X invites us dinner, but you think that the food is not very good. You tell them, “I don’t like this one.” But Chinese people say, “Oh Thank you Mr. X, I like it very much, very much.”

They both expressed their concern for China being a developing country and added that U.S. and China cannot be compared. Most of the Americans affiliated with CAU are “from very good environment” and “sometimes when they meet something bad, they will think Chinese are behind and feel uncomfortable.” Even though they are trying to help the Americans at CAU, there would still be complications and it would be hard for the Americans to understand: “If electricity suddenly stops, that is what I cannot help them and they [Americans] will be very uncomfortable. If I am Chinese, I say, oh, that is fine.” Respondents explained that “if you want to communicate effectively with the Americans you have to learn the culture first” “You have to know what they want.”

### ***Issues with the Chinese Staff***

When asked about the issues with the Chinese staff, VP said that they have had difficulties from time to time. She added that “when you have any two cultures, getting together to do something, that has not been done before, you are going to have some problems.” She explained that the biggest challenge she had was in “recognizing finally, and it took a long time for me to recognize it, when the Chinese say, “yes,” they really mean, maybe, and when they say no, they mean, not right now.” She further explained that when they would have a meeting and discuss something, she would “go away with a yes or no” and she would think that “the issue was closed.” “Yes, we are going to do X,Y,Z, and I get ready to do that and , no, that

wasn't it at all, and if you just say, 'but you just said yes,' it was like, 'well, I meant yes we would continue to think about it.' It was a cross cultural issue where my American thinking caused me to incorrectly interpret what was meant."

Another issue with the Chinese staff is that sometimes DAP is "concerned that the staff does not keep some student issues in confidence." She has had to remind both office assistants to keep files closed and not discuss one student's issues with another.

"Overwork" was another issue concerning the Chinese staff. CAU office assistants' duties also included acting as dormitory monitors, counselor, and faculty resources. Sometimes they returned to the office at night or on weekends to finish tasks that could wait until the next workday. Also, "they are called up by our counterparts to deal with issues that arise late at night in the dormitory."

Five of the eight professors explained that they had little or no contact with Chinese staff and professors. One professor explained that he did not have any problems communicating with the Chinese staff and professors because he does not "communicate with them, except for body language, such as facial expressions, such as smiling and nodding my head indicating my approval and satisfaction with the environment." Also, for some, communicating with the staff was minimal as "sometimes you say something and they interpret it, they think something else." They also expressed their regret that it would have helped if they would have had better Chinese language skills in dealing with the staff.

In terms of communicating with other professors, two professors explained that there should be "more inclusive," and team work should be emphasized as "Team makes everything, you got a good team, you got a good job" and "American teachers need to get to know each other better."

### **Foreign Professors**

Five professors who previously taught at CAU and three professors currently teaching at CAU responded to the questions. The five who previously taught at CAU were surveyed, and three professors who were presently teaching at CAU were interviewed. Responses were edited for privacy concerns as well as for grammar. Present employer names and affiliated school names are removed to maintain the anonymity of the respondents. In addition, order of the responses was given randomly in order to prevent possible identification of the respondents.

CAU recruits professors mainly through AU. There are mainly four ways for recruiting teachers. These are: 1) through newspaper advertisement, 2) through AU's Ph.D. program providing them an International Education internship as part of their degree requirements, 3) through family and friends of AU, and 4) through their employment at AU. Two faculty members found out about CAU through the newspaper, three faculty members through AU's Ph.D. program, one member through his wife's employment at AU, and two members through their employment at AU as faculty members, spending their sabbatical year at CAU.

Seven out of eight professors that were recruited to teach at CAU did not have any teaching experience outside the U.S. Only one professor had teaching experience for extended period of time in two different countries.

Except for one of the professors, the other seven professors received a minimum of two weeks of cultural training before leaving the U.S. to work at CAU. One professor received training individually which included the questions about climate, living standard, and benefits. Other professors explained that the training consisted of “ESL and the TOEFL test procedures, cultural history of China, symposium taught by a native Chinese professor at the AU who had taught in China at the college level,” “which specifically addressed the differences of teaching practices and the typical educational process for the Chinese student, Chinese expectations of an American teacher and the American expectations of the Chinese student and the reality that would be encountered, lesson planning and class preparation and an actual class presentation to members of the faculty, and do's and don'ts on and off Campus.”

For three faculty members, the tour at CAU was part of their Ph.D. requirement to have an “international internship.” Two of the professors were invited to teach at CAU by the administration of AU where they are tenured professors. One professor explained that she needed the teaching experience to put on her C.V. so she would be competitive when she looked for domestic work. Second, she has “always had an adventurous spirit” and has “an active curiosity about other cultures” and “this gave her the opportunity to explore outside of the U.S.” One professor expressed his interest in the challenge and felt he could “contribute a positive influence in the relations between American and Chinese people.”

### ***Issues with Foreign Professors***

In terms of the issues they have had with foreign professors that they sent to CAU, VP commented:

It takes a unique person to agree to go to China. We try to screen them out. I often told the story about how the students, how the people come out of the woodwork to apply for the job, but, no matter how much you screen them, you still have people who get there, and really discover that it is not what they expected it to be, and so, they get homesick, or they cannot make the leap from how to teach the American learner to how to teach the Chinese learner.

She further added that some professors “become impatient, or they become frustrated, so, they are not happy any longer.” They have had people who got there and decided that “it was one big vacation” but “it is obviously not a vacation.” Another challenge was when the person goes to China who “has never set foot in China,” and decides after a week that “she or he knows how a school should be run.”

Other responses regarding issues with American professors included that some were “not fully prepared for living in a foreign country,” health problems,” “not having a good work ethic,” “not prepared for the limitations of the ESL or Chinese classroom,” and not being willing to “serve as extra-curricular advisors and planners,

admissions counselors, recruiters, mentors.” CAU needs its teachers and staff to “go the extra mile” as they are limited with staff and teachers at the moment.

Most of the student responses centered around the positive aspects of teaching methods of American professors. Having “less students” in the classroom, teachers “talking to students,” “teachers and students being just like friends” and “enjoying outdoor activities” were main examples given by the respondents.

Some students said that “the environment is not only in classroom” and “in China, there is no any teaching method to improve the courage and speaking skill like at CAU,” so “students love different methods that they didn’t meet before.”

Some students expressed their dissatisfaction as “the professor who has more real business experience will be better and the teaching should not be only teach the thing in book, but also the real business.” Some said that “some teacher waste the time to teach nothing to us, I like the teachers who use some substantive examples to let us solve the main problem. Not just know the answer from the book at the same time. I do not like cancel the courses without important reason. We pay for the fee.”

Chinese staff explained that “Chinese teacher pays more attention to talk by himself or by herself,” and “he is the only people in the class.” They further added that students listened to the instructors “in most of the cases” and “teacher guided the class.” As for American teachers, “the American class may give more chance for the student to learn also give more chance to communicate for both.” Also, in Chinese classes “students just listen to the teacher, but American teachers give many chances and ask students speak.”

When asked about the strengths and weaknesses of American teachers, one response was that American teachers were not only acting as teachers but, because of their diverse professional backgrounds (i.e. businessman), brought experience to the classroom. As for Chinese teachers, “they are doing teaching for their whole life.” “American teachers will bring the student more experience in society but Chinese teacher will bring more students more in the book. Because maybe they do lots of research in the book and as they had already read the book and they don’t need anything to teach.”

For the weaknesses, one response included that American teachers have different backgrounds. Some of them have no teaching experience and “if you want act as a teacher, teaching experience is very important.” They need to learn “how to communicate with the student.” Another response to the weaknesses of American teachers was that the American teachers were “friends” with the students and sometimes students would not follow teachers’ instructions: “you are the teacher, they are the students.”

“Chinese teacher usually pays lots of attention to students’ exam papers,” explained one respondent. Even though “the knowledge from books can help the Chinese students” to become successful members of the society, “students just memorize the information in the books if they want to get a good mark in the paper.” Also, Chinese teachers “will give more space for the students.” That is, the students have a lot of free time and not guided by the teachers outside the class, “they don’t

care the students sleeping too much” and they try “a little to communicate with the students.” Another response included that “The students who are taught by the Chinese students are boring. There is no activity.”

### **Chinese Students**

A total of fifteen CAU students were interviewed and surveyed. Nine students who graduated from CAU were surveyed and six students presently studying at CAU were interviewed. Their responses were edited for grammar and anonymity concerns. However, because of the cultural elements that can be found in the responses, editing for grammar was minimal. As long as the meaning was clear, responses were reported as transcribed.

CAU recruits students mainly through newspaper advertisements. Even though the Chinese partner is responsible for student recruitment, advertising through newspapers is considered to be “an effective way to recruit students” by the U.S. partners.

Six of the students found out about CAU through a friend or relative. Three students found out about CAU through Internet and five students said that they found out about CAU through newspaper advertisement. One student found out about CAU when he was studying at the Chinese partner university’s high school.

The reasons for studying at CAU can be explained in four different categories. First, the Chinese students have/had no choice/alternative. Second, the Chinese students want to study using a “truly American learning style” with a “very good English teaching program.” Third, the Chinese students want to get “American diplomas.” Lastly, the Chinese students felt that studying at CAU would help them get an “American visa easily.”

Except the “living environment,” most of the students expressed that they had found what they had expected. They improved their “oral English,” met with “high education” foreign professors, and “made good friends.” They “communicated with English teacher directly and daily, so it gave a very language learning environment.” Three students explained that they have not found half of what they had expected. They had expected “more real business stuff,” and “some teachers seem came to China not for work, just for fun. They do not work hard, then the student not to need work hard.”

When asked about the cost of studying at CAU, few students said that it was expensive but “it is worthy to take those courses.” Majority of the students accepted the cost as reasonable and “worth because all the teachers are national Americans” but “the book material cost a little high.” One of the students explained that he was not as much concerned about the cost of studying at CAU as much as he was concerned about the quality of the program: “The cost is ok. But CAU needs to hire very good professor” and one other student confirmed this concern: “But the precondition is the education level. I mean the passing level should be increased. It is so easy go get this diploma. That makes me suspect the quality of the diploma.”



### *Issues with the Chinese Students*

Before she answered the question, VP reminded me that she is answering this question from an administrator's perspective rather than a faculty member's perspective. She explained the biggest issue to be the "language problem." She said that "it wasn't a bad thing, but it was just an awkward thing." If you get past the language, the biggest problem, she explained, "was probably getting accustomed to their relationship to an authority figure."

DAP explained the challenges as "poor attendance/poor academic achievement," "fear that CAU degree is not recognized in China," and "smoking" mostly among boys. For some students especially the younger students, this is their first time away from parents, and they do not come to class. Some find playing computer games more worthwhile than their classes. DAP has called these students into her office but "this would work for a few weeks and then the students would not maintain their tutoring schedule" as assigned by the DAP for breaking the rules on campus.

One professor explained that the Chinese students were not very different from American students as they all have goals, needs, wants, and expectations for their future. There are dedicated students and not so dedicated students.

Other responses included that the Chinese students worked harder and were more committed. They [Chinese students] valued education and the process of education rather than just the degree. They respect the position of teacher and give an honest effort.

American students "are more independent" and "study individually." Chinese students "depend on each other for success" whereas, one respondent added, "we depend on ourselves to succeed in the classroom."

Except for one professor who had no issues while teaching Chinese students, lack of English language skills, attendance, and copying each other on tests were major issues for other CAU professors. One professor explained that language barrier was the "main hindrance to teaching." Although the ESL teachers did the best they could, the time from "going monolingual to bilingual to college appropriate English" was too short. They found it hard to understand their accent at times.

Chinese students at CAU participated in classroom discussions and were prepared when they were given assignments. One teacher responded that the issues he had were "the same issues as any other teacher would have all around the world." These issues were, "not turning in homework," "staying awake during class," "paying attention," and "talking out of turn." However, he emphasized that these issues were not causing any sort of disciplinary action, but were the kind of issues "that could be resolved immediately." Another professor commented that the only challenge she had was "keeping them [Chinese students] quiet during an examination and laughter."

Regarding the benefit of study at CAU, most of the answers focused on benefiting from gaining confidence in their English language skills. They explained

that they have benefited from CAU in terms of “gaining confidence,” “learning useful knowledge,” “learning a second language,” and “help me open my mind.” Some of the students explained that the CAU diploma did/will not help them to find a better job. One student even expressed his concern about the diploma he would be getting from CAU as it is not recognized by the Beijing Government and said that “I plan to go on studying at a Chinese school and get a Chinese diploma which major is relate to international business”.

## **Discussions**

For the analysis of the findings, “Internationalization” concept of Knight and de Wit (1999) was utilized. The “Internationalization” concept is categorized under four sub-headings. These are: political, economic, socio-cultural and educational.

### **Internationalization of Higher Education**

Knight and de Wit (1999), two well-known scholars in the field of international and comparative higher education, have developed a structure in an attempt to understand and rationalize internationalization of higher education. Knight (1999) defines internationalization of higher education as “one of the ways a country responds to the impact of globalization yet, at the same time respects the individuality of the nation” (p. 14) while globalization is defined as “the flow of technology, economy, knowledge, people, values, ideas...across borders” (p. 14).

#### ***Political Challenges***

The data support the obvious existence of the government influence in the overall approval process of such joint ventures. Chinese laws are changing and conditions of presence of an American university in China are getting harsher, with new visa regulations being an example. However, it is also supported by the data that the Chinese government’s interference in the overall operations of such a joint venture is minimal and has only been a challenge to CAU/AU, CIC and the Education Bureau because of the pressure from CAU/AU on “getting things done” and “not understanding” how things work within the overall Chinese system. That is, the political challenge is typically during the approval process of such a joint venture while visa procedures for foreigners have been stricter in the recent years throughout China.

#### ***Economic Challenges***

In terms of recruiting local staff for CAU, the Chinese staff at CAU was recommended by the CIC administration to work at the CAU office. Eventually, Holton’s further argument that the workers in such joint ventures continue to be employees of the Chinese partner and are essentially seconded to the joint venture itself is supported by the interview and observation data.

The Chinese staff are not as willing to cooperate with the U.S. administrators as they are with their actual employer, the Chinese partner. Chinese staff consider the Chinese partners as primary employers and are loyal to them and rather unwilling to

take orders from American partners. At times, they think the American partners are insensitive to the Chinese culture and do not know how things are done in China.

In terms of the tuition fees paid by CAU students, students expressed their acceptance of the CAU tuition. However, one issue that emerged during the interviews with the students was that the students were more concerned with the price of textbooks and the quality of education than the actual tuition fee.

### ***Socio-Cultural Challenges***

The data collected through this study confirm that social and cultural issues have been significant challenging for both parties of the joint venture as well as the people (students, parents, etc.) affiliated with the venture. This is mainly due to cultural (mis)communication. In the case of CAU, this researcher found this to be the case not only for managers but also for American teachers. It is the (mis)understanding from the American side that the Chinese should listen more to what they have to say rather than listening to what the Chinese have to say.

Guanxi and the concept of Face were also explained to be a significant, if not the ultimate, communication tool for the Chinese and crucial for the continuation of this joint venture. The research data support that the 'guanxi' and 'face' were very well-understood and, in most cases, properly utilized. It was not because they did not know the meaning or the importance of 'guanxi' and 'face' in China, but it was because of poor application within the daily operations of the joint venture.

### ***Educational Challenges***

The research data indicate that challenges faced by CAU students, other than the lack of English language skills, centered around "CAU not being recognized by the Chinese government," "expensive textbooks," and "teachers not being professional" and at times "not having an idea" of what they (teachers from the U.S.) are teaching. These findings were not expected and there was no indication in the literature review conducted prior to this study. It was only after the interviews with the students that the cost of textbooks and quality of instructors were found to cause significant issues with the students.

Overall, the educational challenges at CAU were due to: CAU's not being approved by the Chinese government (thus not being accredited in China), the faculty members' lack of teaching experience and professionalism, expensive textbooks for students, and cheating and discipline problems for CAU teachers. Even though faculty members had received some form of cultural training in the U.S. before they arrived in China, they have not received any instructional training regarding classroom management and interpersonal communication skills.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

In the case of CAU-CIC joint venture, there are challenges. However, these challenges are not simply because of these two cultures' systems and structures being different, but rather due to lack of interpersonal and cross-cultural communication skills of both sides of the partnership. One of the conclusions of this study is that

both sides need to understand each other better for such a joint venture to operate effectively. The question about the CAU-CIC partnership is that how significant this partnership is for both sides. Concerning the U.S. partner, the question is how committed they are in making this partnership work. That is, how are they benefiting from such an endeavor and how far they are willing to go to maintain this partnership? Regarding the Chinese, how significant this relationship with CAU is for them in the bigger picture?

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The researcher recommends qualitative studies be conducted using single case studies where possible, to give a deeper understanding of partnering with the Chinese educational system. One weakness of this study was that the researcher was not able to involve more Chinese respondents as he had limited Chinese language skills. In addition to the lack of Chinese language skills, even though he had lived and worked in China for three years, he was still an ‘outsider,’ representing America and working for America in the eyes of the Chinese. It is the researcher’s recommendation that future research be conducted, where possible, by two researchers, one of which is a Chinese, and basically an ‘insider.’ This way, it is possible to get a clearer perspective on what the Chinese are thinking about such joint ventures. It should be noted that China belongs to the Chinese and, as one of the respondents commented, “We need them more than they need us and we need to learn to listen more.”

Another research area that is now needed is the quality of such programs in China. The researcher foresees that the number of such programs will increase despite the number of unemployed university graduates from Chinese universities: “The number of graduates seeking employment increased from 1.15 million in 2001 to 2.80 million in 2004” (OECD, 2005, p. 539). Observations and participant responses indicated that the Chinese are tending towards a more quality education rather than accepting any “American education.” Therefore, more research is needed to understand how American the so-called American education is in China, including what the standards are and who is, as Knight (2004) says, “monitoring” and “assuring the relevance and quality” of such programs (p. 84).

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## **Developing Prosocial Behaviors in Early Adolescence with Reactive Aggression**

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### **Abstract**

Despite the alarming rise of early adolescence aggression in Hong Kong, it is the pioneer evidence-based outcome study on Anger Coping Training (ACT) program for early adolescence with reactive aggression to develop their prosocial behaviors. This research program involved experimental and control groups with pre- and post-comparison using a mixed model research method. Quantitative data collection consisted of the Peer Observation Checklist (POC), while qualitative data collections of the early adolescents' behaviors were assessed through structured interviews (early adolescents, parents and teachers). In post-intervention and follow-up studies the treated early adolescents showed a consistent increase in their physical and verbal prosocial behaviors.

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### **Developing Prosocial Behaviors in Early Adolescence with Reactive Aggression**

Numerous previous studies have shown that aggression persists both over time and across generations and situations (Prasad-Gaur, Hughes, & Cavell, 2001; Eron, Gentry, & Schlegel, 1996). Persistence of aggression reported from childhood through adolescence often predicts maladaptive outcomes such as delinquency and hostility in the adolescent and adult years. More longitudinal studies have linked aggression during early adolescence with long-term maladjustments and problems. Aggressive early adolescents were identified to have delinquency, drug use habits (Kupersmidt & Patterson, 1991; Roff, 1992; Brook, Whiteman, & Finch, 1992; Brook, Whiteman, Finch, & Cohen, 1995, 1996), externalizing behavior and difficulties (Hymel, Rubin, Rowden, & Le Mare, 1990; Rubin, Chen, McDougall, Bowker, & McKinnon, 1995; Coie, Terry, Lenox, Lochman, & Hyman, 1995). In high-risk situations, aggression may relate to and develop into psychopathology such as conduct disorder and oppositional defiant disorder (Loeber, Green, Keenan, & Lahey, 1995; Vitaro, Gendreau, Tremblay, & Oligny, 1998). Aggression deeply impacts and influences family, school and community life.

There are also studies linking early aggressive behavior to violence and antisocial behavior later in life (Achenbach, 1991). Aggressive reaction patterns observable at ages 10 can be substantially correlated with similar patterns observed eleven to fourteen years later (Farrington, 1978; Buckley, 2000). It should also be noted that such patterns could be used with some success to predict certain forms of antisocial behavior that will occur eleven to twelve years later. In addition, some studies have shown that marked aggressiveness towards peers and authorities, manifested as early as in the 10- to 12- year age range, is predictive of antisocial behavior in the following years (Robins, 1966, 1978). However, Walker and his colleagues (Bullis & Walker, 1995; Walker, Colvin, & Ramsey, 1995) provided evidence that if antisocial behavior patterns are not identified and treated before children reaching the age often, these patterns are considered to be chronic and are much more difficult to ameliorate than when they are identified and treated before that time. Besides, previous studies have presented and encouraged more attention to early adolescents' social behavior and to their antecedents and correlates (Fabes, Carlo, Kupanoff, & Laible, 1999; Carlo, Fabes, Laible, & Kupanoff, 1999). Furthermore, Carlo, Hausmann, Christiansen, and Randall (2003) highlighted that higher levels of altruism are linked to higher levels of ascription of responsibility and to lower levels of aggression for both early adolescents and middle adolescents. The objective of this research is to construct an Anger Coping Training (ACT) program for early adolescence with physically aggressive behavior, which is designed to assist them to use socially acceptable skills, assertive skills and problem-solving skills, and thereby to reduce their aggressive behavior.

Reviewing similar programs in past literature, evaluations of psychodynamic (Tate, Reppucci, & Mulvery, 1995; Tolan & Guerra, 1994), behavioral (Kazdin, 1995; Sanders & McFarland; 2000), or cognitive (Richardson, Fowers, & Guignon, 1999) approach as a foundation of intervention for children with aggressive behaviors have found minimal effects within the institution and negative effects at postrelease follow-up. Cognitive-behavioral therapy intervention is the best intervening approach for aggressive children (Lochman, 1999; Lochman, 1990; Kazdin, 1987, 1995; Lochman & Wells, 1996; Southam-Gerow & Kendall, 2000).

The ACT program is originally developed by the researcher in Hong Kong, and is characterized by parent-child parallel-group with Chinese culture incorporated. For the children's group, the theoretical framework is largely based on a Cognitive-behavioral Model of Anger and Aggression (Michael Nelson III and Finch, 2000), that is relied on the rationale that children's emotions and subsequent actions are regulated by the way they perceive, process, and mediate external stimulus. The experience of the emotion of anger is an integration of cognitive processing in physiological events. The Model handles anger firstly by examination of interrelated cognitive processes such as outcome expectations and reinforcement values; secondly, exploration of cognitive processes that are situational; thirdly, emphasis on developmental changes in cognition in cognitive-behavioral therapy; fourthly, integration of understanding basic cognitive processes such as attention, retrieval, and organization of information in memory into social information-processing models and into cognitive-behavioral therapy, and lastly, consideration of the importance of early caregivers on the evolution of children's cognitive controls, schemas, and self-regulation (Lochman, Whidby & FitzGerald, 2000). The reactively aggressive child possesses cognitive distortions and deficiencies, which directly stimulate the children's physiological and emotional arousal (anger) and behavioral response (aggression) to environmental cues eventually. The program is aimed to change individuals' contents of cognitive scripts regarding aggression and enhance their practical interpersonal skills and techniques. Then, their level of aggressiveness and prosocial behavior will be expectedly reduced and increased respectively.

For the parent's group, Patterson (2002) further verified that disruptive parenting practices are the proximal mechanism for generation of antisocial behavior. Patterson (1982, 2002) describes a multistep family process called "coercion training" that occurs frequently in families of aggressive boys which consists of escape-conditioning contingencies. Consistent with recent study, the more adolescents tell their parents and the lower the level of negativity in the parent-adolescent relationship, the less aggressive behavior they show (Wissink, Dekovic, & Meijer, 2006). Therefore, restructuring parent-child relationship and interactive pattern are core foundations to treat children with aggressive behavior. The theoretical framework of the parent's group is built on a conceptual Parenting Pyramid for rebuilding the relationship between parents and their aggressive children, restructuring the parental style and parental behaviors through establishing a secure and supportive environment for parents and their children, to relearn and reconstruct their interactive patterns (Webster-Stratton & Hancock, 1999). Parents are given specific instructions in ways to improve family management practices (Kazdin, 1996).

The uniqueness of the ACT program, ten 2-hour sessions in total, in parallel groups for early adolescence with reactive aggression and their parents, were devised originally by the researcher and localized thereafter. There are four phases of the ACT program which are relationship building, cognitive preparation, skill acquisition and application training. The ACT program is based on the premise that aggressive early adolescents have cognitive-processing deficits that dictate their aggressive behavior. This is supported by findings that aggressive early adolescents demonstrate distorted cognitive appraisals of social situations and utilize aggressive schemata for acting on these appraisals (Lochman & Dodge, 1998). For the parents, interventions have been developed under the assumption that changes in the parent-child relationship, and parenting style, and parental behavior will lead to noticeable changes in the children's

behaviour. Parent training has long been used as a highly successful means of treating highly aggressive children (Dumas, 1989; Cavell, 2000). Parent training in the ACT program is focused on teaching parents to apply attention, appreciation and reinforcement when children are behaving appropriately, and to use behavioral discipline strategies when children behave inappropriately.

The parents have a chance to learn how to handle their children's anger and the conflict with others through modelling the worker. Parents are invited to work out their children's conflict after observing the worker's demonstrations. In addition, workers introduce the token economy system in which children can gain stickers if they commit to the group and carry out the assigned task. After collecting a number of stickers, they can achieve desirable rewards. Contingent reinforcement allows the therapist to shape the child's behavior to be more adaptive (Miranda & Presentacion, 2000). Rewards may also be useful in encouraging the child to complete homework assignments designed to give the child practice using newly acquired coping techniques outside the sessions (Southam-Gerow & Kendall, 2000).

Parents report the daily records of their children's prosocial behaviors and give compliments and reinforcement to the children in the group. Parents learn how to shift their perceptions of their children from negative to positive through doing the appointed assignments. After each group session, they are encouraged to find out and reward the child's prosocial behaviors, and then report them in the following session. Furthermore, the children are encouraged to record their own prosocial behaviors everyday. If parents and children find that their relationship is emotionally satisfying, it can be a vehicle for promoting prosocial behavior (Wahler, 1997).

In this research, the levels of behavioral presentations of early adolescence physical and verbal prosocial behavior are defined as the dependent variables and the ACT program is defined as the independent variable. It is hypothesized that the early adolescents' physical and verbal prosocial behavior will increase after completing the ACT program. The ACT program is the original parent-child parallel group which is designed as intervention for early adolescence with reactive aggression in Hong Kong. The content incorporates localized and indigenous characteristics catering for Chinese parents and their children with physical aggressive behavior. Based on the ecological approach, the program content has consisted of individual system, family system, school system, and social system (Fung, 2004), which are integrated into 10-session of parent-child separated and joint groups (Fung, Wong & Wong, 2004).

### **Method**

An experimental and control group pre and post comparison design is used for the present study. The Pre-test Post-test Control-group design with parallel experimental groups is the most appropriate for this study because it does an excellent job of controlling rival hypotheses that would threaten the internal validity of the experiment (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). The result of the experimental design would provide greater confidence that changes in the levels of behavioral presentations of aggressive early adolescence's physical and verbal prosocial behavior (the dependent variables) are associated with changes in the ACT program (the independent variable). It is hypothesized that the early adolescence's physical and verbal prosocial behavior will be increased after completing the ACT program.

## **Participants and Procedures**

Pamphlets, posters and application forms were printed and distributed to schools and social welfare institutes. Additionally, personal contacts and follow-up calls with caseworkers, social workers, student guidance officers and schoolteachers were made. Pilot Study I was carried out between August and December 2002; and the phase of Pilot Study II was from January to May 2003. After the completion of the Pilot Studies I and II, the Main Study started in June 2003. The recruitment and promotion was from June to September 2003. By the deadline, there were 34 application forms submitted. One of them was self-referral, the rest of them were referred by caseworkers, school guidance officers and schoolteachers. The researcher and group facilitators contacted the potential clients to collect more preliminary particulars and explain the details of the research and to seek verbal parental consent. Kendal and Sheldrick (2000) recommend that the closer the demographic characteristics between the treatment group and control group, the more representative the normative group becomes. Hence, the working team had a preliminary assessment of the clients' demographic backgrounds, such as the level of early adolescence aggression, age, marital status, educational level and socio-economical status, and then selected 28 potential families with homogenous characteristics to go through the screening procedure. The screening and assessment process of the pre-test procedure made up numerous scores in the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL), the Child Behavior Checklist- Teacher Report Form (CBCL-TRF), and the data from observation and structured interviews. In order that the selected people had reasonable representativeness of the study, the criteria of selection were based on the consistency with high scores of all parts of data and early adolescence aggression across different contexts. After systematic screening and assessment procedures, a group of 18 families with early adolescence classified in the subcategory of aggression based on the result of CBCL rated by parents and CBCL-TRF rated by teachers was identified.

In this study, the age of target early adolescence was 10. Seventeen of them were boys, only one was girl. The result was consistent with recent finding shown that males are more physically aggressive than females, and females are more prosocial and preferred by peers (Zimmer-Gembeck, Geiger & Crick, 2005). They were randomly distributed into three groups with six children and their parents, each namely (1) Experimental Group 1: A parallel treatment group for aggressive children and their parents; (2) Experimental Group 2: A parallel treatment group for aggressive children and their parents and (3) Control Group 3: A non-treatment group for children and their parents. The children and their parents in Experimental Group 1 and 2 received the ACT program, and the participants in control group obtained purely reading and study skills. Children and their parents in the control group showed enthusiasm and acceptance with the arrangement, which had a chance to improve their children's study skills. Pre-test and post-test procedures were conducted before and after the intervention process, the duration of which was approximately about three months. The impacts of intervention on the early adolescent, parents and teachers were assessed with observational measures at a three-month follow up after the intervention process. The findings of pre, post-test and follow-up across the groups were compared by using statistical analysis and multiple qualitative data sources.

## **Techniques**

### ***Quantitative Methods***

Quantitative data is collected through self-administrated questionnaires, CBCL for parents and CBCL-TRF for teachers to screen out the targeted early adolescents who are above the clinical score in the subcategory of aggression, and behavioral observations to address stated hypotheses in the Peer Observation Checklist (POC). The early adolescents are randomly allocated into small groups for observation of their interaction at play. They are under the clinical observation of a professional team using a social behavior checklist for evaluation while the entire process in the playroom is video-taped. Data is collected through the early adolescent's interaction with the peer group in a spontaneous environment with clinical judgment being made by two independent raters. The POC consists of five items of verbal prosocial behavior: (1) Shows politeness; (2) Chats/ Communicates with others; (3) Invites others to have fun; (4) Breaks ice/ Greets, and (5) Tries to settle conflicts. It also consists of five items of physical prosocial behavior: (1) Smiles; (2) Tries to assist; (3) Shares toys; (4) Plays with others in harmony/ cooperates, and (5) Makes proper and friendly eye/ body contacts. Observational procedures included rating response frequency of 10 items of verbal and physical prosocial behavior. Event recording counts how many times a target behavior occurs within a half-hour period per session in both forms of behavioral observation. Two independent raters are required for the event recording. In interval recording, an observation period is divided into equal intervals and the rater records whether the target behavior occurs in the interval. Each subject is observed for three 30-minute sessions at the pre-test, post-test and follow-up studies. For the analysis of the quantitative data, the non-parametric statistical procedure, Mann-Whitney *U* Test, is used to assess the differences between those two experimental groups and a control group (Experimental group 1 between Control group; and Experimental group 2 between Control group).

### ***Qualitative Methods***

Qualitative methods include structured interviews for assessing parents, children and their teachers both before and after an experimental treatment. Multiple observers from multiple perspectives of different contexts are involved, including aggressive children's parents, discipline teachers, counselling teachers, class mistresses, and teachers teaching major subjects. Multiple qualitative data sources are compared, reconciled and merged in analyzing qualitative data. Thus, quantitative and qualitative data provide in-depth understanding towards early adolescence's prosocial and aggressive behavior under different contexts, which include the individual, peer, school and family system.

## **Results**

Interrater reliability was used to test the extent to which observation scores were consistent among independent raters. 30 minutes of peer interactions were videotaped for subsequent rating by two independent raters. Both were professional social workers with master degrees in social work and over 5 years of in-service experience. The raters were well-trained before the ratings. In total, they received

three 2-hour training sessions in Pilot Studies I and II and the Main Study. Every training session consisted of a briefing of the POC, rating guidelines, and three trail-marking ratings of the children's peer interactions. The raters were totally blind as to the status of the participants which ensured that the rating process was free from any bias. As Table 1 and 2 indicate, the Mann-Whitney  $U$  test was applied to the ranked data. For an alpha level of .05, the mean ranks of the pre-test, post-test and follow-up scores between Rater A and Rater B were not significantly different,  $z$  value ranged from -.11 to -.19 (pre-test assessment) and from -.19 to -.89 (post-test and follow-up assessment). The results demonstrated that the scores obtained for the two independent raters of the POC were significantly and positively correlated with each other. This was an indication of high interrater reliability for this measurement.

The results showed no significant differences on the pre-treatment scores between experimental group 1 and 2, so as the pre-treatment scores between two experimental groups and the control group. In conclusion, all results already showed that the technique of randomization in this study was very effective. Correspondingly, the post-test procedure comprised of the same assessment components as the pre-test process. For the analysis of the quantitative data from the pre-test and post-test self-report questionnaires, quantitative analyses including non-parametric statistical procedures were involved.

### **Observational Measurement**

#### *The Children's Physical Prosocial Behaviour*

As Table 3 shows, in post-test assessment, the mean rank of physical prosocial behaviour rated in the experimental groups was higher (12.17) than the mean rank in the control group (4.17). There was a significant difference between the experimental and control groups,  $z = -3.00$ ,  $p < .01$ .

The 3-month follow-up results indicated that the mean rank of physical prosocial behavior rated in the experimental groups was higher (11.88) than the mean rank in the control group (4.75). There was a significant difference between the experimental and control groups,  $z = -2.69$ ,  $p < .01$ .

As Table 4 shows, the mean rank of physical prosocial behaviour rated in the experimental group 1 (6.42) was lower than the experimental group 2 (6.58) in post-test assessment. There was no significant difference between both experimental groups,  $z = -.08$ , *ns*. In addition, the mean rank of physical prosocial behaviour rated in the experimental group 1 (8.67) was higher than the experimental group 2 (4.33) in follow-up studies. There was no significant difference between both experimental groups,  $z = -2.11$ ,  $p < .05$ .

Hence, there were significant differences between pre- and post-intervention scores on physical prosocial behaviour. Treated early adolescents demonstrated strong improvement in behaving prosocially. Both experimental groups showed positive effects after completing the ACT program.

#### *The Children's Verbal Prosocial Behaviour*

As Table 3 indicates, the mean rank of verbal prosocial behaviour rated in the experimental groups was higher (12.00) than the mean rank in the control group



(4.50) in post-test assessment. There was a significant difference between the experimental and control groups,  $z = -2.81$ ,  $p < .01$ .

The 3-month follow-up results indicate that the mean rank of verbal prosocial behaviour rated in the experimental groups was higher (9.88) than the mean rank in the control group (8.75). Yet, differences were not significant between the experimental and control groups,  $z = -.43$ , *ns*.

As Table 4 shows, the mean rank of verbal prosocial behaviour rated in the experimental group 1 (7.83) was higher than the experimental group 2 (5.17) in post-test assessment. There was no significant difference between both experimental groups,  $z = -1.28$ , *ns*. In addition, the mean rank of verbal prosocial behaviour rated in the experimental group 1 (7.83) was higher than experimental group 2 (5.17) in follow-up studies. There was no significant difference between both experimental groups,  $z = -1.29$ , *ns*.

Observers rated the treated early adolescents as having more verbal prosocial behaviour than the non-treated early adolescents after completing the ACT program, but fewer verbal prosocial behaviors was observed 3 months after the intervention.

### **Structured Interview**

Structured interviews with aggressive early adolescents, their parents and teachers can be extremely helpful in identifying situational variables related to the occurrence of prosocial behaviour. Three kinds of structured interviews (child, parents, and teachers) were conducted by the same interviewer in the Pilot Study I, II and Main Study. Qualitative data were collected through 373 individual interviews (with adolescence, parents and teachers) in the main study, focusing on the adolescences' cognitive characteristic and aggressive behaviors across contexts (at home, school and in classroom). The focus of structured interview was based on the Cognitive-behavioral Model of Ander and Aggression, children with reactive aggression show particular characteristics of their social-cognitive style that differ in a meaningful way from nonaggressive children. The premise behind the ACT program was that cognitions or thoughts influence the behaviour that an individual shows in various situations, and thus, alter both the individual's behavioral response patterns and the cognitions that accompany or precede the behaviors. The program was designed to impact their social behaviour and related cognitive and emotional processes. Thus, through participating in the ACT program, treated children might have changes in cognitive characteristics, behavioral presentations, and affective reactions. They might develop a self-control mechanism, an anger coping method and problem solving skills.

The basic procedures in qualitative data analysis were transcribing data; reading and rereading transcripts; segmenting and coding the data, coding categories and enumeration; and searching for relationships and themes in the data. The coding and developing category systems were appraised by two independent reviewers. Pre- and post-intervention perceptions from multiple informants and information from different sources on the early adolescence's change are presented.

### ***Prosocial Behavior With Appropriate Problem-solving Solutions***

Early adolescence with aggressive behavior demonstrate deficiencies in prosocial behavior with appropriate problem-solving solutions. In response to hypothetical interpersonal conflicts, aggressive early adolescents offer fewer verbal assertion solutions, fewer compromise solutions, more direct action solutions, and more physically aggressive responses.

*There were no other ways to relieve my tension. He hurt me by hitting me, even though he touched me accidentally, I would beat him up until he bled. (LING)*

*Nobody is allowed to touch him. If he finds someone touching him, he will hit him or her immediately. (CHAN'S PARENTS)*

*I could not think of any other useful ways that were better than fighting. (CHOW)  
He believes that nobody can help him, fighting is the only way to protect himself. (LEUNG'S TEACHER)*

*Fighting is a way to solve problems. (LEE)*

*I scold others until they are speechless. (NG)*

*He always uses foul language to fight back. (CHOY'S MOTHER)*

*Screaming, shouting and yelling frequently occur under a conflictual situation at school. (MAN'S TEACHER)*

*Teachers cannot help me solve interpersonal problems, fighting is the only way to cope with them. (FONG)*

*I have many enemies, I have to protect myself. I find fighting as the greatest way. (LAI)*

*I hate people laughing at me, I must fight back. (CHU)*

Aggressive early adolescents have a deficiency in the number of solutions they generate to resolve social problems.

*To me, fighting is a medium to make friends. I would fight or scare others before making friends with them. (TAM)*

His lack of social skills led an aggressive child, Tam, to use aggression as a means of making friends. He thought that "Fighting is a medium to make new friends". Aggressive early adolescents evaluate aggressive behavior as less negative than early adolescents without aggressive behavior problems.

After the completion of the program, early adolescents were able to generate more problem solving methods which they demonstrated in their daily and school life. They were found to use prosocial problem-solving methods to deal with interpersonal conflicts at post-intervention. Their views were as follows:

*I tell the teacher I will not fight back. He triggers me but I do not care about him... (SIN)*

*Now, he takes a deep breath and leaves the spot. He does not fight with others. (AU'S MOTHER)*

*He will leave the spot and drink cold water to calm himself down. No fighting anymore. (CHAN'S TEACHER)*

*He tells us about his feelings and thoughts when he found himself nearly losing his temper. (CHOY'S PARENTS)*

*I tell myself that I do not care about others, or instead think that they are idiots. (NG)*

*He thinks that he is a talented and brilliant student, fighting is a foolish action. He has many ways to deal with the conflicts. (LUI'S TEACHER)*

*If I beat others, I will be punished. I will consider the consequences. (CHENG)*

The intervention was found to have lasting effects at the follow-up assessment. These findings were vital because skill development was difficult and there was a risk of relapse. Treated early adolescents shared their experiences in applying prosocial problem-solving methods in the social world.

*Somebody triggered him during recess once. He stopped for a few minutes, then told the teacher. The teacher praised him for doing things correctly. (CHU'S TEACHER)*

*I tried to seek help from a monitor who told the on-duty teacher. He punished the fellow classmate that used foul language. (CHAN)*

*If I encounter a conflicting situation, I will bully people in the worst scenario, but will not beat up others. In my heart I will count from 1 to 10. (TAM)*

*Most of the time I will use the deep breath method. The second best way is to write my feelings on paper and then tear it off. (LAI)*

*Now, he will tell others of his own feelings. Then he leaves the spot and looks at other things. (YIP'S MOTHER)*

*Now I will express my thoughts and feelings to others, then start positive conversations instead of fighting. (TONG)*

The effectiveness of the ACT program has been consistently verified by the quantitative and qualitative methods, and the result outcomes are consistent. In post-intervention and follow-up studies the treated early adolescence showed an unvarying increase in their physical and verbal pro-social behavior. In conclusion, the ACT program was efficacious in enhancing early adolescence's social skills.

## Discussion

In Chinese culture, parents easily tend to exercise physical punishment, coercive and punitive discipline, which is directly affected by Chinese traditions. Some traditional proverbs are related to parental cognition and coercive physical punishment, which are positively associated with a child's achievement and filial obedience. Some mothers perceived childhood aggression was characterized as a kind of boys' temperament. Males exercise their power through aggression, and females usually play submissive roles. Therefore, some parents normalized their son's physically aggressive behaviors. They thought that it was appropriate for boys acting out explicitly and made friends through fighting. On the other hand, some parents rejected their sons with physically aggressive behaviors. Although boys in traditional Chinese society are at a higher and superior position in family, some mothers reported that they preferred girls' gentle and caring personality to boys' insensitive and hostile character. In spite of their intimacy with their daughters, they maintained a discordant relationship with their aggressive sons.

After completing the program, treated children and their parents were found to gain cognitive restructuring. Children had less self-reported anger, fewer time-out restrictions, and improvements in coping self-statements and generation of problem solutions. Parents had more positive perceptions and attitudes towards the child, improvements in parent-child relationship and effectual parental behaviors. These positive treatment effects provide evidence supporting the recommendations by Lochman and Larson (2002) that cognitive-behavioral therapy for children with reactive aggression and their parents is the best approach for an anger coping program.

Hence, parental involvement in the group is vital. There are well-documented and effective treatments for childhood aggression in Behavioral Parent Therapy (Kazdin, 1987, 1995; Lochman, 1990; Long, Forehand, Wierson, & Morgan, 1994; McMahon & Wells, 1989). These treatments focus on altering the deficient parenting skills and parental aggressiveness that are so often evident in families of aggressive children. In a parent-child parallel group design in the ACT program, the parent's treatment promotes changes in parents' appraisal distortions and social problem-solving deficiencies. As parents change their parental cognition, their children can begin responding to the parents' modelling of more adaptive and competent cognitive processes.

Parents are found to have increasing play-facilitating behaviors such as praising (verbally reinforcing the child during the activity), describing (commenting on what the child is doing and how the child might be feeling), and touching (appropriately touching the child during the activity). In addition, parents also reduce detracting behaviors such as confronting (challenging the child with unnecessary questions during the activity), commands (telling the child what to do during the activity), and criticism (negatively evaluating the child's behaviour during the activity). Parents and children learn and practise prosocial interaction behaviors in joint group sessions such as starting a conversation, participating in activities, sharing, cooperating, asking questions, and listening. Besides, parents learn new parental and management skills through demonstration and role-playing. After acquiring effective skills and parental

practice, parents actually can play a trainer role in providing positive guidance for their children.

It is the first systematic research of studying how to enhance social skills of aggressive early adolescence in Hong Kong based on qualitative and quantitative results. This study demonstrates that the ACT program developed through this research holds good potential for helping aggressive early adolescence and their families to improve such children's management of aggression (Fung, 2004; Fung & Tsang, 2006). There are plenty of contributions in the research, theoretical, and practical aspects: (1) it is the first systematic research of improving prosocial skills for aggressive early adolescence in Hong Kong; (2) it strives to link up separate literature and to design an indigenous intervention program; (3) it offers a multi-method assessment of an early adolescent's aggressive and prosocial behaviour, which provides a platform for further studies in late adolescence aggression and prosocial behaviour; (4) it focuses on the cognitive, affective and behavioral characteristics of the early adolescence; (5) it helps to enhance the understanding of the development of early adolescence with aggressive and prosocial behaviour from multi-perspectives and different points of view; (6) it involves parents in a parent-child parallel-group model; and (7) it is the first study in which the specific targets mainly focused on reactively aggressive children, which provides insight to teachers, professionals, and parents on assessing and dealing with this specific type of early adolescence aggression.

Furthermore, it is the hope of the researcher that the ACT Program will be expanded: (1) to focus on different types of early adolescence with aggressive and prosocial behaviour; (2) to focus on some specialized target groups such as new immigrants from the Mainland; (3) to address with tailor-made anger control treatment programs the different characteristics of each particular school; (4) to provide intensive training for teachers to improve their positive attitudes towards student aggression and enhance their prosocial skills in problem management; (5) to offer professional training for social workers and counsellors in order to strengthen their group facilitating skills; (6) to include elder aggressive youth and adolescents with peers recruited as counsellors and positive role models; and (7) to promote the significance of the parental role in early adolescence aggression, to be more conscious of their parenting style and to help to prevent early adolescence aggression.

### **Conclusion**

The effectiveness of the ACT program is well supported by evidence in this outcome study. This multi-component intervention, child- and parent-focused parallel group, has shown the best gains in reducing early adolescence aggression and enhancing the adolescents' prosocial skills. The level of peer acceptance and positive interpersonal relationships is enhanced and established. This, in turn, diminishes the number of victimized adolescence in school. Most of the aggressors are found to have been bullied by others in the past; therefore, it stops the spread of school violence and hostility.

Although the current research has not included the school system in the intervention program, teachers were involved in the pre- and post-intervention. Teachers reported that the parents tended to have a positive attitude towards

correcting their child's behavioral problems. The parents showed the initiative to contact them for further understanding of their children's performances at school. Teachers found that home-school collaboration and effective teacher-parent communication patterns were established and enhanced.

**Tables**

**Table 1**

*Mann-Whitney U Test – POC (Rater A vs. Rater B) Pre-test Table*

		N	Mean Ranks	U	Z	Sig. Level
Physical Prosocial Behaviors	Rater A	18	18.83	156.0	-.19	#
	Rater B	18	18.17			
Verbal Prosocial Behaviors	Rater A	18	18.31	158.5	-.11	#
	Rater B	18	18.69			

Note: \*\* p < .01, \* p < .05, # ns

**Table 2**

*Mann-Whitney U Test – POC (Rater A vs. Rater B) Post-test & Follow-up Summary Table*

		N	Mean Ranks	U	Z	Sig. Level
Physical Prosocial Behaviors Post-test	Rater A	18	17.58	145.5	-.52	#
	Rater B	18	19.42			
Physical Prosocial Behaviors Follow-up	Rater A	18	18.17	156.0	-.19	#
	Rater B	18	18.83			
Verbal Prosocial Behaviors Post-test	Rater A	18	16.94	134.0	-.89	#
	Rater B	18	20.06			
Verbal Prosocial Behaviors Follow-up	Rater A	18	17.86	150.5	-.37	#
	Rater B	18	19.14			

Note: \*\* p < .01, \* p < .05, # ns

**Table 3**  
*Mann-Whitney U Test – 2 Experimental Groups vs. Control Group Post-test & Follow-up Summary Table*

		n	Mean Ranks	U	Z	Sig. Level
POC – Physical Prosocial Behaviors Post-test	2 Experimental Groups	12	12.17	4.0	-3.00	**
	Control Group	6	4.17			
POC – Physical Prosocial Behaviors Follow-up	2 Experimental Groups	12	11.88	7.5	-2.69	**
	Control Group	6	4.75			
POC – Verbal Prosocial Behaviors Post-test	2 Experimental Groups	12	12.00	6.0	-2.81	**
	Control Group	6	4.50			
POC – Verbal Prosocial Behaviors Follow-up	2 Experimental Groups	12	9.88	31.5	-.43	#
	Control Group	6	8.75			

Note: \*\* p < .01, \* p < .05, # ns

**Table 4**  
*Mann-Whitney U Test – Group 1 vs. Group 2 Post-test & Follow-up Summary Table*

		n	Mean Ranks	U	Z	Sig. Level
POC – Physical Prosocial Behaviors Post-test	Experimental Group 1	6	6.42	17.5	-.08	#
	Experimental Group 2	6	6.58			
POC – Physical Prosocial Behaviors Follow-up	Experimental Group 1	6	8.67	5.0	-2.11	*
	Experimental Group 2	6	4.33			
POC – Verbal Prosocial Behaviors Post-test	Experimental Group 1	6	7.83	10.0	-1.28	#
	Experimental Group 2	6	5.17			
POC – Verbal Prosocial Behaviors Follow-up	Experimental Group 1	6	7.83	10.0	-1.29	#
	Experimental Group 2	6	5.17			

Note: \*\* p < .01, \* p < .05, # ns

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## **Building a Learning Community through Curriculum**

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### **Abstract**

This paper uses mixed methods to document how a new charter school's curriculum facilitates in the development of a learning community. The study highlights diverse curricular practices that often do not take place in traditional public schools. The school's philosophy and curriculum, which is based in social justice, provides a unique environment where students have the opportunity to better understand the world around them while simultaneously building relationships with their classmates and teachers. Utilizing a methodological combination of observations, informal and formal interviews, document analysis, and a short survey, the paper provides a rich description of the implementation of a charter school's curriculum steeped in critical pedagogy.

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## **Introduction**

Establishing relationships that develop into a close-knit learning community can prove to be advantageous for students' learning. It is through students' relationships with administrators, teachers and classmates that they are able to learn most effectively. This study looks at these relationships and more specifically at how a new charter school's curriculum has led to the building of an in-school learning community.

As a result of the United States Federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), public schools are under constant pressure to improve students' test scores, often at the expense of social and affective aspects of education (Goodman, Shannon, Goodman & Rapoport, 2006). Some parents have tried to move away from their local public school's emphasis on testing by sending their children to charter schools. In the U.S., charter schools are hybrid forms of public and private schools that started to open in the early 1990s, allowing the private sector to more actively engage in public school education. While charter school funding and laws differ by state, in general charter schools are public in that they are open to any child of school age, but are private in that the school is responsible for covering costs above state expenditures. As a result, charter schools are often linked to businesses that financially allow for their survival. One of the benefits of the charter school movement has been that schools can take alternative approaches to covering the material required by state standards (Abowitz, 2001). While all charter schools are still accountable to state standardized tests, the way in which charter schools decide to prepare their students for these tests can vary greatly.

Because the crux of this study deals with the building of community it is necessary to define what I mean by a learning community. Within this paper I use two different aspects of community that are not mutually exclusive. The first aspect is the in-school community, comprised of interactions, events and relationships between those associated with the school. The second type differs in that it is concerned with the broader surrounding community. This paper concentrates on different aspects of how the curriculum facilitates the creation of an in-school community that will ideally develop into a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

This case study incorporates one full academic year's worth of observations (approximately 80 hours), informal and formal interviews with students, document analysis as well as interviews with teachers and a student survey in order to examine how the school's curriculum strategically played a role in the development of an in-school community. The principle research question is: How does this new charter school use a curriculum based in critical pedagogy to foster a learning community?

## **Theoretical Framework**

This research was conducted within a theoretical framework based in critical pedagogy. Freire (1993) has played a key role in my ideas of community building and the importance of a critical approach to education. In addition, this research is grounded in a sociocultural perspective that has emerged from the "funds of

knowledge” work of Moll and Gonzalez (2004). I view this school as a social space in which all aspects of the school community play an active role in its own success. My view of creating a learning community is not based on students’ ability to regurgitate facts or perform well on standardized tests. Instead, this framework requires students to be active participants in their own learning, as well as both problem-posers and problem-solvers (Freire, 1993). Moreover, I realize the importance of community, dialogue and the incorporation of social justice into a school’s curriculum, which ideally creates conditions for long-term constructive learning. Similarly, Freire and Macedo (1995) stress the importance of providing a place for students to actively take part in their own learning while simultaneously implementing aspects of social justice to prompt critical thinking.

The majority of the documentation of curricula based in critical pedagogy comes from adult classes where teachers and students have more curricular freedom. As Shor and Freire (1987) document, the implementation of critical pedagogy can be a difficult task even when working at the postsecondary level, which is obviously compounded when attempting to work at the middle school level where there are more curricular constraints, as is the case in this study. Gutiérrez (2007) discusses pedagogies of empowerment where teachers provide adolescents with experiences that encourage them to find their own voice and question dominant power relations. This perspective necessitates that teachers avoid the practice of “banking education” (Freire, 1993). Provided teachers buy into their role as facilitator, it is necessary for the administration to support a curriculum that allows for the creation and maintenance of relationships between teachers and students as well as activities that promote critical thinking. Unfortunately, NCLB’s emphasis on high stakes tests has severely limited this possibility in the U.S. (Goodman et al., 2006).

In addition to critical pedagogy, this paper uses a sociocultural perspective premised by the “funds of knowledge” work of Moll and Gonzalez (2004). By viewing students’ diverse cultural backgrounds as additive and beneficial, teachers are able to use the funds of knowledge that students bring into the classroom to help in their own learning. This theory for teaching and learning highlights the importance of making activities and lessons socially and culturally relevant to the diverse socio-cultural experience students bring to the classroom (Moll & Gonzalez, 2004; Eryaman, 2007). Similarly, as Gutiérrez (2002) suggests, culture cannot be studied in isolation, thus I have chosen to analyze the school’s culture and community through a variety of activities that have been built into the curriculum, both in and out of school.

While observing classes, fieldtrips, meetings, and other non-traditional aspects of the school’s curriculum at Paul Francona Middle School (PFMS), I used a lens rooted in critical pedagogy and socio-cultural theory. The use of these theories guides both this work and the work of the school itself. I thought it was important that I view the school within the same, or similar, theoretical framework in attempt to understand the base on which the founders had structured the school. While I could have approached the study using counter lenses, I felt that using the same theoretical framework that the school was founded in would allow me to better understand the daily intricacies of the school.

### **Review of Literature**

There is an extensive body of literature on the development and implementation of Charter Schools in the United States (Bierlein & Mulholland, 1995; DeSchryver, 1999; Gifford, Phillips & Ogle, 2000; Gresham, Hess, Maranto and Milliman, 2000; Hadderman, 2002). Since the early 1990s charter schools have increased in their popularity and even more so in the No Child Left Behind era (Holland, 2006). The justification for charter schools has been to give students an opportunity to attend a public school that will better prepare them for their future and as a means for motivating traditional public schools to improve their services. McCullough (2006) compared the charter school movement to that of the privatized mail movement in that for many years the U.S. Postal Service could do whatever it wanted because there was no competition. However, companies like Federal Express (Fed Ex) and United Postal Service (UPS) now have forced the U.S. Postal Service to become more effective. This increase in competition that charter schools can offer public schools is why McCullough believes charter schools can be effective in overall school reform.

Despite the quantity of literature on charter schools, there is little attention given to charter schools whose focus is in critical pedagogy and social justice or more broadly concerning the range of different curricula used in these schools. Alowitz (2001) reports that nationwide there has been an increased popularity for specialized charter schools and these schools vary in emphasis from conventional foci like mathematics and science to more progressive themes like Afrocentrism and, in this case, social justice. However, because of the relatively short amount of time that these schools have been in operation, few, if any, studies have considered their effectiveness.

Similar to the gap in social justice themed charter schools, there is a void in literature concerning community building within entire schools. The community that I am referring to throughout this paper is an in-school community, which differs subtly from other definitions of community. For instance, Cummins, Chow and Schecter (2006) argue for the incorporation of a school's surrounding community in curricular development. While I agree that a curriculum should bring in the local community, the aspect of community addressed in this research is specific to the development of in-school community through the curriculum and not necessarily the surrounding community.

There are few empirical studies documenting school community building and how a school goes about developing such a community. Empirical studies of the use of participant action research such as Cammarota and Scott (2006) document students' empowerment and highlight the link between students and the community, but this too is not necessarily the crux of my focus. There is a great need for empirical research and the documentation of particular methods of critical pedagogy in classrooms (Bigelow, 1990). Hence, this study hopes to add to the small corpus of literature highlighting how school curricula can play a role in the development of in-school community.

At a more specialized level, there is a plethora of literature on the use of how a particular class' curricula promotes community building through inquiry. Short and



Burke (2001) document the positive effects of an inquiry-based curriculum in which "... readers explore different perspectives and actually think together, not just cooperatively work together. Everyone, including the teacher, participates by listening carefully to other and working together towards understanding" (p. 24). While an inquiry based classroom curriculum as outlined in Short and Burke (2001) undoubtedly promotes community building, this paper focuses not on the curriculum of a specific classroom, but on the school wide PFMS curriculum.

The way in which learning communities are developed have been elaborated and described in different places. Edelsky, Draper and Smith (1983) describe how one particular teacher used a whole language, holistic ideology to frame her class and successfully 'hook' her students in and develop a powerful classroom community. Christensen (2000) explains how time consuming and difficult the building of community can be and defines it to mean "[students] taking into account the needs of the members of that community" (p. 5). Short (1990) is more specific than most in that she outlined six ways in which a community of learners is created:

- (1) come to know each other;
- (2) value what each has to offer;
- (3) focus on problem solving and inquiry;
- (4) share responsibility and control;
- (5) learn through action, reflection and demonstration; and
- (6) establish a learning atmosphere that is predictable and yet full of real choices. p. 35

For the purposes of this paper, I have decided to keep these six criteria in mind as well as use Lave and Wenger's (1991) idea of a community of practice. A community of practice is built on the idea that people with shared experiences, languages and histories come together and form a community where the actions represent their common history. While communities of practice take time to develop and evolve, and this is only the first year of the school, the 'practice' aspect of the community is still in its developmental stages. Nevertheless, it is the goal of the directors to allow the school community to live through similar in-school experiences culminating in what would be an example of a community of practice.

### **Research Context**

The PFMS opened in August of 2005, with capacity for sixty students for grades six and seven<sup>1</sup>. Common to most new charter schools, initial enrollment was significantly lower than the directors had expected. The school is located in the basement of a historic building, within walking distance of a large research university in the southwestern part of the United States. The school is run by co-directors, Santini and Jennifer (all names are pseudonyms), who have spent the better part of their working lives as teachers and teacher trainers in urban education reform throughout the United States. The school was funded on 501C3 money as a non-profit organization, in addition the school received a federal grant for computers, providing every student with access to modern technology. The school was also linked to the Turning Points Organization, which is an organization committed to

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<sup>1</sup> The original charter was set for 90 students for three grades, an eighth grade which was added in the second year was planned to have 30 more students putting the school at 90 total pupils. In the second year of the school the charter was changed to have only 75 total students or 25 students per grade.

middle school reform that focuses on creating students who are active in their surrounding community and who are “engaged in planning and managing their own learning” (Turning Points, 2005).

My first visit to the school came two weeks after its opening for the fall trimester of 2005-2006, when there were only twenty-three students enrolled. Before opening, the directors were expecting around sixty students. The lack of students meant a major economic burden as well as added pressure to recruit more students in addition to the daily tasks of running a new school. As the school year progressed, more and more students joined the school. By the end of the year there were fifty-two students, of which the majority planned to return the subsequent year.

Upon arrival, I was pleasantly surprised at the diversity of the school. Even with such a small student enrollment, the directors were able to attract students from varied socioeconomic backgrounds as well as a number of minority groups. For example, of the thirty-two students, eleven were minorities (Field notes 11/16/05). Furthermore, as was evidenced on a carpooling map of the city, students literally came from all parts of the city, ranging from the wealthy to the poor neighborhoods, and from down the street to a thirty-minute commute. The school’s staff was comprised of a bilingual secretary/Spanish teacher, math teacher, science teacher, a humanities teacher and his student teacher, and the co-directors. With the exception of the Hispanic secretary, the school’s staff was Anglo. The school also contracted an independent art teacher and made an agreement with the dance studio located above the school to offer a variety of physical education and dance electives throughout the year.

The school has a friendly aura about it, which stems from its mission of accepting others’ cultures, appearance, languages and differences. This was articulated by Pickles<sup>2</sup>, a seventh grade male who, when asked about the community building in the school, responded:

“[S]ince the school is about being a community, it sort of changes people’s thought about being a community... saying that it is about community makes people want it to be more about community... [S]o when people come, we talk about incorporating them in, [so] you just make friends faster.”

Visitors are routinely welcomed with handshakes, hi-fives, and smiles from many of the students. Throughout the first year students would come up to me, jump on my shoulders, put out their hands for hi fives and nod their head to say hello. Equally as important was when parents or university students would come by for tutoring or observations, and many students would introduce themselves or just say hi (Field notes 10/18/05). Similar to the students’ inviting attitudes towards outsiders, new students joining the school mid-year were able to make friends and adapt to the other students in a rather quick and effortless manner (interviews with Octavio, Willow, and Pickles). Similarly, parents have mentioned to me on numerous occasions how they were happy that their child was accepted so quickly.

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<sup>2</sup> Students were allowed to pick their own pseudonyms

## Methodology

This study used mixed methods that employed five different forms of data collection. Observations and informal and formal audio-taped interviews were the key components of the data collection and document analysis. I also distributed a student questionnaire to compliment and triangulate findings from the observations and interviews (Merriam, 2001). The first, and most time-consuming, aspect of the data collection was the on-site observations. Through my onsite visits to the school I was able to observe and participate in all aspects of the school including, classes, meetings, activities and fieldtrips. I observed classes for both sixth and seventh graders, as well as attended additional parts of the school day like morning reflections with the entire school community, staff meetings, yoga, dance, and fieldtrips. I observed all aspects at least once and attended the majority of curricular activities on multiple occasions.

The second form of data collection was informal interviews with students, teachers, and administrators. These informal interviews provided insight that the observations alone would not have been able to speak to, such as the struggle between the teachers and directors to find ways to develop rules while simultaneously supporting student empowerment. These short interviews came in informal settings such as walks to a protest on immigration, or in talking to students or teachers during lunchtime, Kiva, or at recess. The majority of these informal interviews were at times when it would have been awkward to tape record; hence I elected to take careful notes as soon after the event as possible.

Formal taped interviews were the third form of data collection. Interviews were conducted with the directors as well as all of the teachers within the first academic year and interviews with the students took place in the second academic year. Interviews with the directors and teachers were approximately an hour in length and interviews with students were twenty minutes long. The interview format was based on Spradley's (1979) criteria for conducting an ethnographic interview in which the interviewer elicits thick descriptions related to themes and concepts that emerged from previous data. Thus, all of the interviews were conducted in and around the use of social justice and the curriculum and how the directors and teachers promote the building of community within the school. While serving to triangulate my observations, the interviews also provided excellent examples of events and relationships that I was not able to witness as the researcher.

The fourth form of data collection came from the document analysis of the school's web page and weekly updates to the school community called the *Friday Footnote*. I used the school's web page to learn more about its intended philosophy and the *Friday Footnote*, a newsletter that goes home on Friday afternoons, to stay up to date on weekly events missed in the observations. It is authored by one of the directors and informs parents what students have been doing that week as well as advising them of upcoming events. The *Friday Footnotes* were used to gain an idea of the highlights of each week as well as plan observations for the following week.

The final form of data collection is an analysis of a 21-item questionnaire that was answered by thirty-three of the school's forty-three students enrolled at the time it was distributed. This questionnaire, which was designed to be rapid and anonymous,

and provided quantitative data focused primarily on the development of community as well as students' comfort level in this learning context. The questionnaire, which was piloted with five students prior to its distribution to the whole school, provided data that was then compared to the other data sources in order to confirm and disconfirm initial findings. This mixed methods research uses triangulation in order to add validity and ensure that what is being documented is akin to the beliefs and viewpoints of the directors, teachers, and students (Merriam, 2001).

In order to make this research as participatory as possible, I did not isolate myself from the students, teachers or directors. Instead I participated whenever possible and took an active role in my research. My participation in the school often allowed me the opportunity to substitute teach, chaperone school functions, and regularly help as a driver on fieldtrips. To ensure that I was welcomed and not seen as an outsider, I made frequent visits to the site even if it was for a short amount of time. This allowed the students to recognize my face and identify me, to some extent, as part of the school.

### ***Participants***

The participants in this study encompassed all of the main players in the school. The co-directors, Math, Science, and Humanities teachers, and almost all of the students participated in the research. The overall student population was diverse in that students came from all geographic parts of the city as well as all different socio-economic statuses. Furthermore, the student body was racially diverse with two-thirds being Caucasian and the other third comprised of Hispanics, Native Americans and African Americans. All of the teachers and directors were middle class whites with varying degrees of experience teaching. The co-directors and science teacher all had over twenty years of experience in teaching and/or school administration, the Humanities teacher had taught at the middle school level for eight years and the Math teacher had taught English in Japan for a year, but had never taught Math before. While the teachers varied in experience, they all had a common goal, which was using critical pedagogy and working together to create a learning community where students would be able to build on their talents and interests. The faculty worked as a team at the school and their communication and togetherness was infectious as the students mimicked the togetherness of the teachers.

### **Data Analysis**

Using the school's goal of building community through their curriculum was the main theme throughout the data analysis. From the beginning I was curious to see what the directors and teacher were going to do in order to build the school's community. Thus my data analysis focused on identifying events throughout my field notes and interviews that would highlight specific aspects of the curriculum that the directors, teachers, and students believed to be the most effective in creating this new learning community. Detailed field notes from the observations, which also incorporated informal interviews, comprised the bulk of the data. A survey of the students using a Likert scale was also used to assess what particular aspects of the curriculum the students thought were the most effective in community building process. The results from the survey was evidence that there were three general aspects of the curriculum that most facilitated in the community building process.

The data was then coded based on specific events that the students, teachers and directors or myself identified as a potential meaningful event for the schools' growth. For instance, an event in the humanities class using a provocative reading or assignment was coded in my field notes and any mention of a similar task was coded the same. The main divisions of the coding were split into the three aspects of the curriculum, which each ended with a variety of sub-groups.

After the questionnaire, and as the data analysis progressed, it was obvious that the primary community building process happened in different ways based on the three general aspects of the school's curriculum. The three areas were: *Activities inside the school* (not core classes), *Core classes*, and *Activities outside the school*. Unlike many traditional schools PFMS has a variety of non-academic aspects of the day that have been instituted to build a strong school community. Kiva (a fifteen-minute daily reflection/community building activity), weekly school assemblies, advisory and electives are all examples of aspects of the students' daily/weekly schedule that have been coded as *Activities inside the school*. According to the school directors, *Core classes* were comprised of Humanities, Science, Mathematics and Spanish. However, Spanish was not given the same amount of weight as the other three core courses and it was the only class taught without a certified teacher. *Activities outside the school* pertain to fieldtrips, intersession trips and other activities that happened off campus. These three areas comprise the manner in which the data was broken down and analyzed. Each area will be elaborated on in the subsequent sections of the paper.

## Findings

### *Activities inside the school*

The daily curriculum at the PFMS is set up in a rather non-traditional manner. From Monday through Thursday the day starts with a fifteen minute Kiva session and on Friday there is a fifty-five minute school assembly. The purpose of Kiva and weekly assemblies is to provide a space where students, teachers and even parents can come together as a community before academic classes start. In addition, this is the time where students were able to voice proposals for aspects/projects of the school that they would like to add or improve. For instance, within the first month of class, three sixth graders brought forth a proposal to move lunch from after to before their third class because many of the students were so hungry in their third class that they could not concentrate (Field notes 09/7/06). Other proposals took the form of organizing a school dance as well as voting on a student of the week. Unlike schools that I attended growing up, and many I have observed, student-initiated proposals at PFMS were constantly encouraged by teachers and directors and were put to a vote by the student body (Field notes 9/16/2006). In fact, the three student-initiated proposals mentioned above were voted on, passed, and enacted by the students. These experiences, which are built into the curriculum, worked to build a cohesive unit among students to think together, simultaneously strengthening their bond. Furthermore allowing student to propose change is teaching them to be agents of change and is itself an empowering aspect of the curriculum.

Starting each day with Kiva was a relaxing, fun way for students to engage in dialogue as well as become active in their own learning. Kiva was also frequently

attended by many of the students' parents who play a vital role in the school by organizing fieldtrips and/or using their expertise to teach extracurriculars. Kiva gatherings created a place where students are respected and listened to by all in attendance. The school's emphasis on the democratic process required all votes be passed unanimously. Initially, getting all students to decide unanimously was a difficult venture. However, as the students gained experience they were able to pick their battles, and concessions were generally made between students in order to pass various proposals, as was the case in the moving of the lunch hour. In addition to Kiva, other aspects outside of the core classes were advisory and electives.

Advisory took place on Tuesdays and Thursdays for fifty-five minutes each day. The school was broken up into four different advisories with fewer than fourteen students in each group by the end of the year. Advisories were mixed by grade level and served multiple functions. Many of the activities in advisory were related to community building where students spoke about their problems, their personal histories, as well as things that they are enjoying or disliking about the school and/or society. The Math teacher explained her feelings about advisory when she said, "I like to teach things besides Math. I look at myself as a whole person with many different facets and one of them being Math, but letting them show all of their different sides and embrace all of their different qualities, physically, mentally, spiritually... [allowed her to] be more like a role model or mentor." Advisories often went to the park to play or to read books collectively and then discuss them. By the end of the year each advisory had invested a lot of time together and were close-knit groups where students felt comfortable in sharing the most personal experiences such as a parent's drug addiction and another parent's drug overdose and death. Advisory provides a unique venue in which students are able to get to know one of their teachers and other students in an intimate venue where everyone feels comfortable sharing in diverse activities.

Throughout the first year the students had a variety of electives that they participated in as a school. In the first trimester the school was initially so small (only 23 students) that all students participated in African Drumming, where a local drum teacher would come with a drum for each student. Students sat in a large circle and practiced in unison. Twenty-five plus drums beating to the same beat is incredible to both hear and feel. Moreover, each student realized his or her individual importance in keeping with the beat in order to continue the unique sound. The day that I participated in the African drumming was an awe-inspiring experience where I felt the strengthening of community with every beat of the drum.

Other electives that first year included modern dance/hip-hop as well as a folk music unit. The co-directors put major emphasis on not allowing electives and the arts fall prey to high stakes testing as many public schools have throughout the U.S. in the No Child Left Behind era. Furthermore it was through many of the electives that the students were able to socialize, show off their other talents and develop relationships with other classmates. While the electives were aspects of the curriculum that served to strengthen the community, the core classes offered a different side of the school's curriculum.

### *Core classes*

The four classes that the PFMS has identified as its core classes are: Humanities, Mathematics, Science, and Spanish. Spanish, however, was only taught three times a week while the others were taught daily and it is the only class whose teacher is not certified. The school's staff spent many long summer days, before the school opened, developing a curriculum and finding ways to implement critical pedagogy, social justice, and environmental sustainability into all aspects of the school (Field notes 9/21/05). The classroom instruction provides students with a sound foundation in social justice that is reinforced in other school related activities.

I observed that the humanities classes for both the sixth and seventh graders heavily integrated social justice issues into daily activities. The science classes were based on experiential learning about the world around them. This class frequently went on fieldtrips or did science related activities inside the school. While various aspects of critical pedagogy were used, the classes concentrated more on environmental sustainability. The math class was the only class of the core courses that used a textbook-based curriculum. As a result, the math teacher felt in some ways obligated to cover much of the material in the series of books purchased by the school. While students had Math projects and activities that tied into social justice, i.e. word problems, bake sales etc. very little of their everyday learning was social justice oriented. Nevertheless, the math teacher did an excellent job diversifying seating arrangements, as well as using an eclectic variety of teaching techniques to help the students and get them to work together. However, through my observations of the Spanish class I found little evidence of social justice or critical pedagogy in use. With the exception of Spanish, all classes incorporated, in different ways, class discussions, meaningful field experiences, and group work, which all worked to supplement the creation and maintenance of community and thinking critically about the world around them.

The humanities class, generally team-taught by a student teacher and a certified teacher, offered the best example of implementing social justice in the school. The teachers consistently used socially provocative texts and allowed students time for reflection and discussion of the various readings. For instance in the sixth grade class, the student teacher showed a short film excerpt about the creation of the U.S. Constitution. The teacher used guiding questions like: Who were the people who wrote the constitution? Were there any people left out? Students quickly picked up on the fact that women, blacks, Hispanics and other groups were not represented among those who were responsible for the writing of the U.S. constitution. This realization was followed by a discussion among the students where one student commented, "the document was written by the rich and for their own benefit." Another student chimed in saying that "today the rich don't send their children to war. It is only the poor that do." These comments about war led way to a larger discussion about how discrimination has unfortunately played a major part in U.S. history and how it is still prevalent today (Field notes, 9/16/05). Like majority of the lessons in the humanities class, students are expected to think critically about the world around them and towards the end of the first trimester the teachers confirmed my observations that the students were starting to expand their ways of using their mind as they started thinking outside of the box.

The absences of an assigned textbook in the humanities class allowed the teacher and his student teacher to handpick readings that they believed to be provocative, would meet the state standards, and that were interesting for the students. One such example came from a seventh grade class where the activity focused on the injustice and sexism with respect to women among the Taliban in Afghanistan. The students were read an excerpt from a provocative text titled: *My Forbidden Face* by Latifa (2002). The main purpose of the text was to show detail and the power of imagery in using the words of a middle school aged child in Afghanistan as she detailed the horrors of the Taliban and their impact on her as a young woman. Following the reading the teacher had the students reflect in writing about the brutalities discussed in the excerpt from the book. After the personal writing time, the teacher opened the class up to discussion where students made comments like “that is horrible,” “why did they do that,” “that isn’t fair,” “I wouldn’t want to live there.” The text served as a prompt for students to think about injustice around the world and the way others live. The students discussed their thoughts and opinions about the situation in Afghanistan and the way that women are treated in the story (Field notes, 10/6/05). Dealing with these emotional topics and allowing students to discuss, debate and dialogue about their emotions and feelings provided a space for the students to grow and grapple with sensitive topics together.

In my observations of the math and science classes I did not find as many examples of the incorporation of social justice, however the theme of social justice was present. The activities involving social justice often took place outside of the classroom on class-sponsored field trips and thus were not as evident in the classroom. For instance, the math class organized a bake sale to raise money for the victims of Hurricane Katrina. They used the activity to learn basic accounting skills and engaged in many mathematical activities in the implementation of the fundraiser.

Another example of social justice and community building came in a math class where students used their knowledge of percentages in an activity highlighting the distribution of wealth in the United States. Ten students were assigned to go to the front of the room and sit down in one of the ten chairs. She then explained to the students that if the money in the U.S. were distributed evenly each person would have \$250,000 and each student would be entitled to one chair. However, the teacher then asked the students who wanted to be rich? All of the students raised their hand and finally the teacher chose one of the students and told her that she could lay over seven of the chairs. The other nine students were then assigned to share the remaining three chairs. The teacher then said that this was a more accurate view of the distribution of wealth in the U.S. where ten percent of the population has seventy percent of the wealth. The seven students who had to share the three chairs were visibly frustrated that they were not entitled to a chair and this frustration then moved the class into a discussion. The discussion elicited a number of comments from students such as “rich people are on the north side” referring to the way that the city is noticeably divided between the rich and the poor. Another student said, “that is why people steal” referring to the injustice and major discrepancies in the distribution of wealth in the United States. As the discussion progressed the teacher started to probe students’ ideas of what it takes to make money and be rich. Questions such as: what does one have to do to make a lot of money? If you work hard your whole life does that mean that you will be wealthy? At this point one student named Octavio, spoke about his uncle and how he was a truck driver who drove all over the country for long hours



and worked extremely hard, but was not rich. Other students spoke about their parents or people that they know who have similar stories. The discussion and unpacking of the lesson on the distribution of wealth in the U.S. dispelled many commonly held ideas that one only has to work hard and stay in school to be rich in American society. Many of the students were just starting to understand that there is an element of privilege that is part of the American dream, which was often omitted from their instruction in previous schools (Field notes 10/13/05).

In line with Dewey (1938) the science teacher believed strongly in the importance of meaningful experiences in and outside of the science classroom. The teacher regularly took the students out into the community to identify different living organisms in their every day environments both at home and on their commute to school. Although the in-class work was not always directly related to social justice, both the math and science teachers actively engaged their students with experiences in the community that built on their funds of knowledge and thus facilitated their learning (Moll & González, 2004).

Sixth and seventh graders at the PFMS were in many respects provided a space for their own empowerment by their teachers and more generally in the organization of the curriculum. This was achieved by encouraging, students to guide activities, speak-out, honoring their opinions when they did speak and praising them for doing so. Likewise, the teachers encouraged students to think about their own society and took them on field trips, multiple times a month, exposing them to the community around them.

### *Activities outside the school*

PFMS takes great pride in its involvement in the community and teachers have used the surrounding area as a venue to aid in their community building. Building on much of Dewey (1938), the focus was on the importance of learning through experiences, and so the Humanities, Math and Science classes regularly left the school grounds to engage in authentic meaningful learning throughout the surrounding city. Located within walking distance of a major university, the school takes advantage of the many resources and events that the university has to offer. The math class sponsored a fundraiser that took place on the university grounds where students sold baked goods to raise money for Hurricane Katrina victims (Field notes, 10/6/05). The humanities class often attended different events on campus such as listening to the governor's speech and attending a poetry reading. Science classes offered students the opportunity to go out into the community and identify different plants and organisms that are found in the students' immediate surroundings. Fieldtrips are an integral part of the curriculum and students and teachers are often within walking distance of the school on different assignments that create a link between what is learned in the classroom and the realities of every day life.

The 2005 – 2006 academic year was one where a great number of policies and trials concerning immigration were discussed in the media and played out in the courts. Students participated in marches that were pro-immigration and some students even attended a trial of two people arrested for providing humanitarian aid to undocumented aliens trying to cross the US border. A particular excerpt taken from my field notes from a field trip to a pro immigration rally with some of the students,

describes the effect that the school has had on the students. While we were all at the rally a reporter came up to a few of the students and started asking difficult questions about the immigration protests such as why are you here? Do you know what they are marching for?

The questions were answered by a number of the students and their answers were not only articulate, they were educated and well informed... When the reporter asked would vote if they were old enough, all of the students looked at the interviewer as if it was a stupid question and responded, 'why wouldn't I vote? It is our responsibility.' One of the students in particular talked about the importance of human rights and how she was protesting because 'our government does many things to take those rights away from immigrants and no human is illegal.' Another on looking protestor looked at me as I was listening in on the verbal exchange between the interviewer and the student and said 'that girl has got it!' (Field notes 3/31/06)

The school's ability to allow and provide these experiences to the students was extremely important, but equally as important was the debriefing and the discussions that occurred after each activity. Throughout their core courses, as well as in Kiva and assembly, students would deconstruct and analyze their powerful experiences. Controversial topics such as immigration, racism, and issues of inequity necessitate a close community in order for everyone's voice to be heard. Moreover, the dialogue around difficult topics facilitates in the building and strengthening of community. These discussions were often the first step in the creation of inquiry projects where the students did research on or a project about their interests such as children soldiers, homelessness, genocide in Darfur among others.

Between each trimester students engaged in a weeklong intersession where they selected an activity that they were interested in and worked with their classmates and a teacher on that specific activity. The first intersession divided the students into three different groups. The first group sent fourteen students to Mexico where they undertook scientific experiments and attempted to use their Spanish. The second group, called "Show Time" was comprised of eleven students who attended a number of plays throughout the week and then performed personal monologues. The third group consisted of five students who studied homelessness. The homelessness project gave students the opportunity to talk to and help the homeless in various shelters, parks, and feeding sites (Field notes 11/18/05). Moreover, the majority of those interviewed, as well as the questionnaire data, pointed to the intersession experiences as being some of the most beneficial aspects of the curriculum in terms of community building.

An excerpt from the final reflection papers of one of the students from the group the studied homelessness provides excellent insight as to how powerful the intersession experience was for many of the students.

"...Everyone was sitting there taking notes on the stories this man would tell us. I couldn't. I was completely unable to even look away from his face. His stories were so unbelievable and sometimes hard to hear. He told us all that if we spent just one day out on the street with him looking as if we were

homeless, we would be so grateful of what we have and that we weren't homeless" (Willow, Homelessness Observations and Conversations).

The second intersession had a wider range of groups. One group went on a camping trip, another on a three-day trip where the theme was 'pushing your limits.' Others stayed behind at the school and learned about how to repair and build bicycles as well as bicycle safety. From the questionnaire as well as the interviews with the directors, teachers and students, intersession was consistently the aspect of the curriculum where the majority identified community building at work. Long car rides and over-night trips along with a generally fun experience provided ample time for students to be themselves and bond with their peers. Engaging in the non-traditional curriculum provided new experiences, allowing the students to grow together, which with time could potentially develop into a community of practice. Apart from having fun activities, the directors and teachers consciously created intersession groups based on students' behavior and interests, but also worked to break up existing cliques and force particular students to open themselves up to others. At the end of intersession each particular group had gotten to know one another in a unique fun manner.

All of the activities that were carried out throughout the intersession had components that took the students out of school and into the real world. Students in this school are exposed to life outside of school, where learning does not occur in a vacuum but is authentic and personal. By allowing the students to choose which specific activity they wanted to participate in, the school followed its goal of allowing students to develop their own interests and take an active role in their own learning.

### **Discussion**

Throughout approximately eighty hours of onsite observations, coupled with interviews and questionnaire data, it became obvious to me that the PFMS has succeeded in its goal of creating a learning community through a curriculum based in social justice. Directors, teachers, and students alike learned and worked together to improve themselves and their understandings of the world and immediate community. Whether the activities took place in Kiva, advisory, assembly, inside the classroom, on a fieldtrip or during intersession, students and teachers were constantly engaged in activities that make them feel as though they play an integral role in their school and surrounding community. The students have learned the importance of community through a variety of experiences. The teachers and parents lead by example through actively participating in daily school activities and promoting their children's education by enrolling them in this non-traditional school.

Within the normal week there are a total of nine hours and forty-five minutes dedicated to non-core courses. In this time students partake in an eclectic variety of community building activities. Kiva, assembly, electives, learning lab, which all are components of in-school activities, offer students a wide range of venues to show their talents, share with their peers and discuss larger overarching issues that face them as teenagers in a complex society. A traditional curriculum generally does not afford for all of this 'experimental' time. It is through this curriculum that teachers have the opportunity to promote social justice and use critical pedagogy in their

classrooms. The curriculum based in community building has facilitated in the creation of what Anyon (1980) would call an executive elite school.

Anyon (1980) documented how different socio-economic levels elicited vastly different ways of teaching in five different schools where the instruction methods reinforced the type of learning and work associated with the students' socio-economic status. Anyon demarcated the difference in educational methods used in working-class schools versus those used in executive-elite schools, where the working class schools concentrated on rote memory and regurgitation of facts and the executive-elite schools highlighted the importance of work individually as well as collectively with authentic learning experiences. While the PFMS has a mixture of students and would have probably fit into one of the middle class schools, the majority of the core curriculum of the school exemplifies what Anyon described as executive-elite or a curriculum that caters to the skills needed in high paying positions, such as working with others, critical thinking skills and the ability to work independently. It is through this kind of progressive attitude towards learning that students can work towards the reconstruction instead of merely reproduction which is generally perpetuated in schools (Hyslop-Margison & Richardson, 2005).

The inquiry-based curriculum allows students to choose specific things that they want to learn in-depth and teachers serve as facilitators in allowing the students to build on their inquiry (Short & Burke, 2001). The core curriculum, Kiva, electives and learning laboratory provide a space in which such inquiry promoted and incorporated, resulting in dialogue as well as experiences allowing students to grow together and see themselves in others shoes (Christensen, 2000). These experiences serve a multitude of purposes of which two of the most important are making students feel comfortable in their learning environment and the development of the beginning stages of a community of practice. The curriculum and the actions of the teachers both implicitly and directly aid in the community building process as Octavio suggested in his interview when he said "Here it is not like there are people's own cliques... Teachers are a lot more personal with their students [then his experience in other schools]... there aren't very many cliques, cause there are just a lot of people and we are all friends."

One of the more salient differences between the PFMS and traditional schools is the amount of time provided for learning outside the school walls. Throughout my data collection, if I did not plan ahead, I would often arrive at the school and find that majority of the students were off on a fieldtrip. The location of the school was ideal for multiple fieldtrips a week and teachers as well as students preferred to be out in their larger community, interviewing, observing and inquiring about things that they were learning in class. For the directors, students' ability to make connections from experience at school to the outside world has stood as testament to the success of the school's curriculum. The directors and teachers believe these connections will serve their students well for years to come (Ellis, 2000).

Lave and Wenger (1991) note that members participate at multiple levels in order to create a community of practice. Throughout the school year students were encouraged to take part in the creation of school rules, the planning of fieldtrips and the brainstorming of different intersessions. While data from the questionnaire as well as the interviews suggested that intersessions were overwhelmingly the most

beneficial aspect of the school in terms of community building it also provided a space where students engaged in multiple activities, showing their commitment to the school community through supporting their classmates, lending a helping hand, and planning and maintaining order. The activities and experiences that the school promoted provided the groundwork for a shared history that facilitates in the development of a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

I started this paper stressing the importance of relationships in education. The PFMS has hired teachers who have bought into the importance of fostering and developing long lasting relationships between themselves and the children as well as among the students in general. Students right from the start called teachers by their first names, which automatically defuses part of the power structure that is generally at play in traditional classrooms. Teachers know their students' lives and their students know teachers' lives (Interview with Science Teacher). This has created a bond as well as an opportunity for the teachers and directors to craft groups that will work well together but simultaneously avoid already established cliques (Interview with Piggy). The interviews with students highlighted how intersession, classes and even advisories have facilitated a space and promoted the interaction and development of relationships throughout the school community.

The use of critical pedagogy in schools is not only informative but provides authentic learning where students are able to use their world knowledge and personal experiences to enhance their understanding of the world. Students in this school "are at the center of educating in a collective social expertise" (Suoranta & Moisio, 2006: 52). Instead of teaching math, humanities or science as if they only existed within the walls of the school, the teachers made it a point to make lessons authentic and full of meaning. By taking students on field trips and relating activities to familiar real life situations, teachers at PFMS have been able to successfully reach the students. It is important for all schools, regardless of their size and location, to make lessons authentic and meaningful (Freire, 1987). Often in this era of education, where high stakes testing reigns, teachers teach concepts without relating them to students' daily lives (Goodman et. al 2005). Divorcing concepts from their real world defeats the purpose of a meaningful education. By using the environment around the school and inviting students to play an active role in their own education, students are more likely to learn because they are motivated to do so.

Unfortunately in our current world of education, teachers and administrators feel threatened by high stakes testing and often do not allot time for experiences where students are able to engage in meaningful learning (Goodman et al. 2005). The PFMS has consciously decided not to teach to standardized tests, but instead engage its students in meaningful learning that corresponds to areas that will be tested. While long-range test results are obviously not available, their test scores within the first year gained the school the label of adequately performing from the state's Department of Education.

### **Conclusion**

Through reading about this unique charter school, one might question the practicality of the curriculum used at PFMS. While I agree that not everything that is done at the school can be adapted in all schools, there are some basic aspects of the

curriculum that I think could at least be attempted regardless of where the school is located. They are:

1. Teachers getting to know their students through outdoors / non-traditional activities – This might mean creating assignments that allow the class to walk together around the community or planning fieldtrips.
2. Setting aside a regular, set time, for students, teachers, directors and even parents to come together and share. At PFMS they call it Kiva and its takes place at the beginning of every day for 15 minutes.
3. Take a more critical approach towards teaching and learning. Teachers should discuss and reflect with their students the injustices in society and when possible allow their students to have some kind of meaningful experience surrounding the area of study. Making students be both problem posers and problem solvers.
4. Getting involved in the community, allowing the students to attend protests and the courthouse are activities that can generally be done and offer an excellent venue for students to do their own research and interview people.
5. To the extent that it is possible, plan overnight or extended time periods in which groups of students are together for a long period of time and are studying one particular unit or skill. This type of intense study and expanded time fosters relationships and memorable shared experiences necessary in building community.

In summation, through this mixed methods case study, I have shown that the PFMS has, at least in its first year, successfully implemented a curriculum grounded in Freiren ideals and social justice, which has resulted in the successful creation of a learning community. It was through a multitude of activities provided throughout the school's curriculum that facilitated in the school's successful implementation of all six of Short's (1990) aspects that build community. The directors' and teachers' ability to work together, as well as allowing students to aid in planning has provided a curriculum that not only meets state requirements for content, but also does so in a way that is purposeful, authentic and relates to social justice. On the last day of first intersession, the students presented what they had learned over the past week's intersession and then there was time for general questions about the school from the audience. One of the people in the audience, a visiting college student, asked what the students liked about the school. Two of the many positive replies were: "I feel like I have a place here" and "here you are allowed to be yourself" (Field notes 11/18/05). These quotes highlight the school's success in making students feel comfortable in their learning environment, which is often an aspect of education that is neglected in the NCLB era. The building of community through school-structured events; class lessons and fieldtrips has created a habitus among the students in the school that could potentially allow for the realization of purposeful learning long into the future.

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## *Miscellany*

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