

Wang, T. (2002). *Cultural dissonance and adaptation: A study of Chinese immigrant teachers coping with cultural differences in Toronto schools (Ontario)*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Toronto, Canada. Retrieved May 19, 2005 from Proquest Digital Dissertations. (UMI No. AAT NQ74796)

### **Resource Focus**

#### Research

- Native English speaking teachers (NESTs) and Non-native English speaking teachers (NNESTs)
- Internationally educated teachers (IETs)/ Immigrant teachers
- Immigration
- Employment and labour market
- Credentialing and licensure

Country Context: Toronto, Ontario, Canada

### **Resource Type**

- Other: doctoral dissertation

### **Intended Audience**

- Policy makers
- Researchers
- Teacher educators
- Internationally educated professionals
- Teachers (K-12 and adult)
- General public

### **Summary of content / Abstract**

The purpose of the study was to investigate Chinese immigrant teachers' experiences of cultural dissonance and adaptation in Toronto schools. Individuals' understanding of education and how it should take place are shaped by the historical, philosophical and cultural contexts to which they belong. As entrants in the Canadian school culture, many Chinese immigrant teachers are vulnerable and foreign to the local school conditions, while facing cultural, ideological and practical challenges at the same time. The conceptual framework of this investigation focused on culture and education, minority teachers, cultural dissonance, the role of values, adaptation, meme and its role in cultural adaptation, micro-politics in the school, and the strategies for cultural adaptation.

A qualitative research methodology was employed, aiming to describe and interpret the cultural adaptation experiences of the Chinese immigrant teachers who teach in Toronto schools. Data for this study are based on multiple case studies of eight Chinese immigrant teachers, who, by the time of the study, had taught for one to three years in a local elementary or a secondary school in Toronto. The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with the participants following a pre-designed interview schedule. Specific procedures were taken to ensure confidentiality and protect the identities of the participants. The interviews were supplemented by the researcher's observations of classes conducted by some participants, her visits to the schools and attendance at some of the schools' public events. Drawings from the participants were also collected by the researcher to analyze the feelings and mental stage participants went through. Participants' interpretations of drawings were compared to the data collected from the interviews. The NUD\*IST software was used to aid the qualitative data analysis.

The findings of this study are presented in both narrative and graphic forms. The eight cases were cross-analyzed based on themes emerged from the data to identify meaningful consistencies as well as variations in the adaptation processes and strategies among the participants. The findings have revealed the complexity in the nature and the causes of the experiences of cultural dissonance. Participants demonstrated various coping strategies in responding to the cultural dissonance they experienced in Toronto schools, based on a combination of interests and motives they saw as desirable within the respective circumstances.

The results also suggest that all participating Chinese teachers made conscious effort to maintain their culture in the Toronto school context.

In large part, the findings have indicated that cultural adaptation for the participants can be fruitfully viewed as a process of value adjustment, meme selection and interaction. In addition the results suggest that micro-politics in the school and individuals' personality are among the key factors having potential impact on the adaptation choices of participants. The overall findings suggest a strong case for the interdependence of the systematic and cultural factors affecting the adaptation process of minority immigrant teachers. The findings of this study have offered some specific suggestions and advice on how to better prepare future immigrant teachers in the Toronto school system as well how to better accommodate their needs.

#### **Table of contents (if available)**

#### **Reviews available (if available)**

The writer offered a very detailed categorization of the kind of cultural dissonance immigrant teachers faced in their work. Apart from the expected ones like language difficulty, racial and linguistic discrimination, difference in dealing with discipline issues, he also found other dissonances that relate to teaching methodologies and the social aspects like difficulty in establishing meaningful relationships with students because of the different perceptions on teacher respect and authority, the preference of student-centered approach to teaching over the teacher-centered approach, and varying understanding of education that learning is seen as fun rather than an obligation. There were altogether 17 categories which he thought were caused by contrasting educational philosophies, cultural values, perceptions about teaching, etc.

What is most interesting is when he came to examine the different ways of coping with the dissonances these teachers adopted, which driven by different reasoning---1. instrumental reasoning (adopted some Canadian colleagues class management skills because they proved to be effective), 2. normative reasoning (conformed to existing norm just to get acceptance and approval), 3. identity reasoning (desired to be identified as one of them), 4. practical reasoning (adopted some Canadian teaching methods to gain practical rewards), and 5. value reasoning (came to realize the relevance of certain values and integrated them into their own systems). For those who were able to maintain their own heritage while actively integrate Canadian educational practice and values into their own tended to have a better transition. The suggestions for preparing future immigrant teachers were also very useful, which includes the need to help immigrant teachers to know the educational reality and cultures of Canadian schools, training in aspects like classroom management, and cooperative teaching, and provide them with the channel where they can reflect and verbalize the cultural conflicts and difficulties they face. The role of the administration is also deemed to play a significant role in their job transition, and a comprehensive support system is seen as much needed where immigrant teachers could communicate with each other and exchange ideas.