

## **Hong Kong Teacher Perceptions of U.S. Culture and Education: A Case Study to Prepare for a Collaboration**

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### **Abstract**

Study abroad has become an important component of many teacher education programs. Through the lens of culturally relevant pedagogy, critical thinking, and educational freedom, this qualitative case study focuses on understanding Hong Kong teachers' perceptions about United States culture and education. Data were collected through in-depth, one-on-one interviews with five Hong Kong educators. The findings reveal that the Hong Kong teachers believe that respecting individual differences, inspiring students' critical thinking, and having freedom to choose how to teach and learn are top priorities in the U.S. However, there are also misconceptions in a few areas. This study not only helps prepare for a multicultural collaboration between U.S. teacher candidates and Hong Kong educators in a study abroad course, but it also aims to contribute to the literature the critical need of understanding unintentional biases and stereotypes that might negatively influence U.S. teacher candidates' assumptions of their students with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

### **Introduction**

Over the last decade, the United States has experienced a drastic increase in the number of individuals with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Because of this, it is more important than ever that teacher preparation programs develop teachers' global understanding of culture and education. There are many definitions of culture. In this study, we adopted the definition from Giorgetti et al. (2017) that culture is people's way of life and thinking in a society. Research indicates that many teachers and teacher candidates from around the world have misunderstandings and misconceptions about cultures and the educational systems in other countries (Author, 2018; Author, 2017; Zhao, 2007). For example, Zhu (2016) points out that people in the U.S. are often perceived as independent and outgoing. In contrast, Asian people are stereotyped as being consumed with academic achievement and living up to family expectations (Yee, 1992). Stereotypes such as these negatively affect one's ability to understand the ways in which members of other cultures truly live and think.

Hong Kong is one of the major cities within China. The relationship between Hong Kong and the U.S. has a long history that began when Hong Kong became a British colony in the mid-19th Century (Ford & Slethaug, 1999). With the growth of students' desire to study abroad, the relationship that these two locations possess, as well as the important role culture plays in education, research needs to be conducted to share the knowledge of the variety of perspectives to help teacher candidates understand how the world is connected (Richardson, 2016). Culture plays an important role in culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP), which is a pedagogical framework that "empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically using cultural referents to

impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p.16–17). CRP is an important component in U.S. education (Brown, 2013, 2017; Hollie, 2012, 2019); we argue that it is critical for U.S. teacher candidates to understand what educators from other cultures think of U.S. culture and education because the difference in perspectives can raise their awareness of the existence of stereotypes (Brown, 2013) and in turn, will help them create a culturally responsive curriculum to better meet the needs of the variety of learners in the U.S. (Gay, 2018; Hollie, 2019).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The underlying meaning of CRP is that teachers walk with their students in their learning journey, guide them through scaffolded instruction with a variety of teaching techniques to support individual students’ learning needs, as well as validate and affirm their differences in culture, language, race, socioeconomic status, and gender (Hollie, 2012). In CRP, teachers’ cultural competence is developed through their understanding of culture and its role in education, their own culture, biases, and privilege in hopes of providing equitable education for all students (Ladson-Billings, 1995; 2014). Recognizing and addressing inequitable power structures, CRP emphasizes that teachers are to help students develop a positive self-image and to learn how to embrace differences in others through a supportive and caring learning environment that allows students to feel safe, comfortable, and respected while building and bridging students success in school and society (Hollie, 2012; 2019; Ladson-Billings, 1995). This reflects the focus of social constructivist theory by Dewey (1963) and Vygotsky (1978) on the importance of social interaction on education. Dewey believed that learning takes place as a result of one’s experience and interaction with others, while Vygotsky stated that “every function in the child’s cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 57).

Hollie (2019) identifies Three Rs (Relationship, Rapport, and Respect) within the CRP framework. Although all Three Rs are important, he points out that mutual respect between teachers and students is necessary for rapport and trusting relationships to be built. He defines respect as the confidence in someone’s abilities with sensitivity and understanding. With respect in mind, students need to remember that teachers still make the final decision in the classroom, and “becoming authoritarian is more doable” (Hollie, 2012, p. 63) for teachers when students are respected and feel safe. This type of relationship between teacher and student **is** viewed as the keystone of effective classroom management and successful learning experiences (Marzano et al., 2003).

Developing students’ critical thinking skills plays an important part in the role of culture and education. Referring to Dewey’s philosophy of education (1958) in which he stated that, critical or reflective thinking places a high value in individuals and their culture, and that developing students’ critical thinking leads to the transformation of society “without introducing disorder” (p. 99). Therefore, students ought to be encouraged to think critically, based on their understanding of their own culture and society. It is suggested that culture affects students’ critical thinking. For example, Salili (1996) points out that students from Asia are strongly influenced by its cultural value of collectivism and hard work, whereas American students are influenced by individualism, ability, and effort (Hau & Salili, 1996). In other words, culture or society that students are exposed to has an important influence on their points of views and judgement, as well as how they process information (Salili & Hoosain, 2007). Hence, culture affects teachers’ approach to developing students’ critical thinking.

Dewey’s progressive view of education ties freedom, education, and culture closely together as freedom allows individuals to gain education (Dewey, 1988; Pérez-Ibáñez, 2018). Such

freedom, including political freedom, freedom of speech, freedom of inquiry leads to a society to advance and prosper (Cahn, 1988). In fact, a great deal of education research connects education with freedom, which is “a necessary condition to exercise autonomy” (Abinum, 1979, p. 166). In this classic literature by Abinum, he explained autonomy is a goal of education. Being autonomous means that students need to learn to make decisions for their own learning, and ultimately, be independent of others so they are able to make decisions for themselves and, eventually, fulfill themselves as human beings. A work by hooks (1994) and more recently Specia & Osman (2015) also emphasize education is a practice of freedom and that it is a reflection of its society and culture. “Freedom is the process that draws on the creative energy of the teachers, students and the school administration in developing a unique vision for the institution. It is an aspect that protects the rights of free speech in a meaningful sense of term without coercion or hindrance” (Specia & Osman, 2015, p. 196).

## **Literature Review**

### **Culture & Education in the U.S.**

The United States is an independent, individualistic, low-context society with individual freedom as its fundamental belief (Lam, 2006). Freedom plays a significant role in U.S. culture. Because people have the freedom to choose in all aspects of life, U.S. citizens often consider the words “choice” and freedom as intertwined (Nicholson, 2006). In addition, U.S. culture is characterized by its diversity (Naylor, 1998) due to the massive influx of immigrants from other countries throughout history (Thompson & Hickey, 2005). The acceptance of individual diversity (e.g., racial, socioeconomic, ability, gender) has been increasing amongst people in the country over the last decade (Burtner, 2017; Pew Research Center, 2015; Smith, 2011).

### **Culture and Education in Hong Kong**

Being influenced by the Confucian culture, families play a critical role in education in Hong Kong; Chinese students are expected to obey and value the opinions of parents and family members (Bodycott & Lai, 2012; Salili & Lai, 2003). The differences between the U.S. and Hong Kong were evident in a study conducted by Zhou and Li (2015). The authors reported that the top concern of Chinese teachers who taught preschool to first grade in U.S. classrooms was classroom management. The results indicated that since education in the U.S. emphasizes individualism and equality (while education in China highlights rank and collectivist orientation), the Chinese teachers had difficulty teaching U.S. students to practice complete compliance and acknowledge their authority. In addition, the teaching method in Hong Kong is highly traditional and puts learning verbatim over analyzing and reconstructing information (Law, 2015; Poon & Wong, 2008). The students there almost unconditionally accept the knowledge of the teacher because of the emphasis on Confucian values (Kennedy, 2002). However, Hong Kong is also influenced by the Western influence where students are encouraged to be active learners. Consequently, this creates a power struggle between teacher-student relationships (Wong, 2015). In addition to teaching and finding balance in their relationships with students, research shows that teachers in Hong Kong are also expected to perform non-teaching workload (Choi & Tang, 2011; Lam & Yan, 2011), which has a negative effect on their pedagogical creativity (Cheung & Wong, 2012).

## **Connection Between Culture, Education, & Teacher Training**

Kumar and Hammer (2012) stated that, “many White teachers experience some ambivalence toward minority and immigrant students and doubt their efficacy in teaching students whose cultural backgrounds differ from their own” (p. 162). Therefore, educators need to identify the biases and stereotypes (Brown, 2019; Kumar & Hamer, 2012) that can “perpetuate inequalities and deny a child the equal opportunities to which he or she is entitled” (Jean-Sigur et al., 2016, p. 5). It is important because teacher candidates will work with students, families, and stakeholders with differing opinions about culture and education, and they need to be adequately prepared to effectively communicate, collaborate, teach, and care for a variety of individuals with diverse backgrounds (Brown, 2019).

One important way to increase teacher candidates’ awareness on the impact of biases and stereotypes is through cultural collaborations (Hamilton et al., 2019; Santamaria et al., 2017) by means of developing a study abroad course (Lemmons, 2015). U.S. teacher candidates can gain an understanding of what educators from other cultures think of the U.S., during such a cultural collaboration opportunity, to help raise their awareness of different perspectives that people have about their own culture and education (Brown, 2013). This first hand experience will help them “plan and think about students’ identities and needs as fundamental components to intellectually rigorous and valuable learning, which are consequential to a CRP philosophy” (Brown, 2019, p. 40). In addition, research shows that cooperating teachers contribute a great deal in teacher candidates’ pedagogical development; understanding their perceptions can help teacher candidates communicate with them more effectively to avoid unnecessary conflict due to cultural misunderstanding (Clarke et al., 2014). Any misconceptions in the collaboration process can also become hurdles in the teacher candidates’ learning development (Rajuan et al., 2007), especially when teacher candidates are in an unfamiliar environment. However, there is no empirical research that examines Hong Kong teachers’ perceptions about U.S. culture and education.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Due to the history and relationship between Hong Kong and the U.S., institutes of higher education have a desire to develop study abroad programs between the two locations to enrich students’ understanding of culture. Therefore, the purpose of this study is twofold. In a practical sense, we, as U.S. teacher educators, planned to develop a study abroad curriculum through which our U.S. teacher candidates would be mentored by Hong Kong teachers and work collaboratively with them. It is vital for educators to remember when developing study abroad programs that individuals possess cultural biases of which they are unaware; using the findings of this case study helps teacher candidates hold a deeper understanding of the impacts of biases and stereotypes (Janes, 2011; Preissle, 2006). In addition, with a powerful role of cooperating teachers in teacher candidates’ training, there was a need to explore Hong Kong teachers’ perceptions prior to conducting a short-term study abroad course to avoid potential “awkward dissonance” (Clarke et al., 2014, p. 45).

In a scholarly sense, there is no empirical research to date that identifies Hong Kong teachers’ perceptions about U.S. culture and education. This line of research is important to be able to create conscientious global citizens and educators (Nieto, 2013). As such, through the lens of CRP, critical thinking, and educational freedom, our case study centers on becoming familiar with in-depth perceptions associated with Hong Kong teachers on U.S. culture and education to address the critical need of understanding biases and stereotypes that might negatively influence U.S. teacher candidates’ assumptions of students with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Because educational systems and culture both reflect and have an impact on each other (Gioregetti et al., 2017; Rosenberg et al., 2010), we combined these two areas in one research question: What are Hong Kong teachers' perceptions of U.S. culture and education?

## Methods

### Context of the Study and Participants

This study was designed based on a short-term study abroad program to Hong Kong developed for teacher candidates in our four-year institution in the East Coast of the United States where the demographic of the population is predominantly White. The teacher candidates would teach in one of the two partnered schools (one elementary and one secondary) in Hong Kong and would be paired with a classroom teacher who served as their mentor. The teacher candidates would, first, interview the mentor about the context of the classroom and help support him/her in a gradual progression: observe the class for a few hours, assist with individual students, work with small groups of students, co-teach a lesson with the mentor, and individually teach a lesson. Through the collaboration, the Hong Kong teachers and the teacher candidates would collaborate to determine the rate of the progression. In some cases, the teacher candidates would become a co-teacher with the mentor in the duration of collaboration.

We employed an instrumental case study (Yin, 2009) to gain insight into Hong Kong teachers' perceptions about U.S. culture and education. Our participants from Hong Kong were chosen using the purposeful sampling method; its main goal is to focus on particular characteristics of a population that are of interest (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). We were interested in exploring the perceptions of Hong Kong teachers who had never lived or studied in the U.S. because these teachers would have similar backgrounds to the Hong Kong teachers with whom our U.S. teacher candidates would be paired during their study abroad experience. The first researcher sent an e-mail to a diverse population of Hong Kong teachers based on her professional network and invited them to participate in the case study. Finally, five teachers expressed interest and agreed to participate. While there are debates about how many participants are sufficient for qualitative research that utilizes in-depth interviews, Vasileiou, et al. (2018) argue that researchers should avoid using numerical guidelines. Yin (2009) also notes that due to the nature of a case study approach, sample size is irrelevant. Rather, it is more important for researchers to focus on the relevancy of contexts and gaining different perspectives on the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2013). Charmaz (1990) also emphasizes that the use of in-depth interviews is not about creating generalizations to a larger population of interest. Thus, when considering the sample size for this study, we took all the teachers that were available to participate in the study and focused on their characteristics as well as their perceptions in relation to the research questions. In our analysis of the data, we also saw repeating patterns among the five participants, which is vital in a qualitative case study (Charmaz, 1990).

Of the five participants, there were four females and one male teacher, all of whom were born and raised in Hong Kong. Three teachers were teaching in elementary schools and two were teaching in secondary schools. None of these participants had studied or lived in the U.S. prior to the case study. They reported that their perceptions of the U.S. stemmed from what they had heard and seen from the media (e.g., Google search, YouTube videos, movies), their multiple interactions with people from the U.S. (e.g. visitors in Hong Kong), and their exposure and ideas about Western countries in general (e.g., textbooks, experiences shared by friends or family). The researchers were not able to obtain the participants' ages because of the Personal Data Ordinance in Hong

Kong (Privacy Commissioner for Personal Data, Hong Kong, 2013). Table 1. below describes each participating teacher's background.

**Table 1.** *Participant Characteristics*

Participant	Gender	Teaching Placement	Years of Teaching Experience	Prior Experience in the U.S.	How Perceptions of U.S. Were Formed
P1	Female	Elementary	10 years	None	Media
P2	Female	Elementary	12 years	Traveled to the U.S. once	Media, an interaction with U.S. citizens
P3	Male	Secondary	4 years	Traveled to the U.S. once	Media, general ideas about Western countries
P4	Female	Elementary	2 years	Traveled to the U.S. once	Media, multiple interactions with U.S. citizens
P5	Female	Secondary	25 years	None	Media, general exposure in other Western countries

## Data

Data were collected through a semi-structured, in-depth one-on-one interview with each participant (Hong Kong teachers). On average, the length of each face-to-face interview, which took place in Hong Kong, lasted about an hour and a half. Questions in the interview focused on Hong Kong teachers' views about U.S. culture and education. Examples of questions were: 1) How would you describe U.S. culture? and 2) What are your views about U.S. education? The interviews were conducted in Cantonese (the main language spoken in Hong Kong) and recorded by the first author. Later, the interviews were transcribed and translated to English for data analysis. This way, we were able to obtain thick descriptions from the participants who directly expressed their thoughts on U.S. culture and education (Wolcott, 2008).

## Data Analysis

Content analysis was conducted in this study (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Data from the one-on-one interviews were recorded, transcribed, and translated from Cantonese to English. To enhance trustworthiness, member checking was implemented by sending the transcribed document of their interview back to the participants to ensure what they said was accurate (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995). The researchers also used peer examination during data analysis procedures to ensure credibility of the qualitative analysis results (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In analyzing the data, we focused on the relationship between culture and education mentioned in the theoretical framework (CRP, critical thinking, and educational freedom), while paying attention to the participants' voices as a whole. Both the first and second researchers individually studied and analyzed each interview transcript through ongoing and recursive analysis methods (Merriam, 1998). In this

process, they summarized the main points of the findings in relation to the research question. After that, they each identified and coded the data using the open coding strategy (Glesne, 2016; Rossman & Rallis, 2003) by looking for keywords related to the relationship between culture and education with supporting statements from the transcribed interviews. After the individual analysis, they collaboratively compared the findings. Validity and credibility were determined via cross-checking the results among the researchers (Yin, 2002). If there were any differences, consensus was reached through reviewing the data again and discussing it. Then, the researchers focused on the research question followed by condensing the identified main points into categories (e.g., CRP, educational freedom) illustrated with the participants' quotes. Because CRP is rather broad, we further separated this category into three: respect, various instructional strategies, and social interaction to reflect the underlying meaning of CRP. After reviewing the categories, the researchers used a thematic analysis approach to synthesize the findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To ensure confirmability, both the raw data as well as the analysis of the data were presented to the third author for verification (Patton, 2001).

## Findings

To answer the research question, five themes were generated. They are: level of respect, variety of ways to design instruction, the importance of social interaction in education, inspiring students to think critically, and educational freedom. Below are the details of each theme.

### Level of Respect

The first theme that emerged when discussing Hong Kong teachers' perceptions about the U.S. was the level of respect that people have in society as well as the respect between teachers and students in the school or classroom. Referring to the definition of respect by Hollie (2012), four of the five participants described this during their interviews. The teacher participants agreed that teacher-student relationships should have a level of respect and that a teacher should have his/her own image and authority. However, they also appreciated the friendly relationship that U.S. teachers have with their students. Unlike the teachers in Hong Kong, where teachers are usually strict to represent authority, the participants believe that U.S. teachers tend to respect each child by interacting with them in a friendly manner and designing instruction according to the student's needs. For example, when P4 was reflecting on her observation of a U.S. teacher who had worked at her school in Hong Kong, she stated that the teacher

“was able to maintain a relationship with the students, while, if the students misbehave, she would give students a chance... She would also give “high fives” to students at the beginning of the class and as well as at the end of the class...it was effective and the class was happy.”

Similarly, P2 views U.S. citizens as being respectful of each other, including teachers toward students. Instead of focusing on discipline, U.S. teachers stress being fair and friendly to their students.

Although having no prior experience in and formal knowledge of the U.S., P3 commented on the level of respect that people in the U.S. have for others which, to a large extent, is impacted by the support from the government. He said, “I could experience the U.S. Constitution from the education system reform. Meaning everyone will be respected, everyone has his/her value.”

### **Variety of Ways to Design Instruction**

The second theme was about using various instructional methods to design lessons to meet students' needs, a focus of CRP (Hollie, 2012). All of the participants believed that there is not a one-size-fits-all model in the U.S. and that there are multiple opportunities for teachers to design instruction based on the needs of their students. For instance, the participants believe that U.S. teachers have the freedom to choose how they want to teach based on the learning needs of students. These excerpts illustrate the participants' perceptions regarding this aspect of U.S. education: P2 stated: "they can tailor-make the curriculum according to the need of children in their class," and P3 stated, "they will help them, design and adjust according to the children's needs." Compared to the crowded environment in Hong Kong, P4 felt that there is more space within the classroom in the U.S., so teachers have the freedom to change up their instruction to have different types of formats of instruction. In her words, U.S. teachers "can design their class according to the space that they have."

### **The Importance of Social Interaction in Education**

The third theme that emerged was about the importance of social interaction placed in U.S. education. Social interaction is emphasized in the social constructivist theory by Dewey (1963) and Vygotsky (1978) as well as the CRP framework (Hollie, 2012; 2019). Aligning with this philosophy of education, four out of the five participants believed that U.S. teachers have more interaction with their students by allowing and encouraging them to ask questions. Through a variety of teaching techniques, teachers can then guide students to explore answers and learn through meaningful discussion. For example, when P1 described her perceptions about how teachers teach in the U.S., she said that they tend to incorporate a great deal of "conversation, group work or pair work, role playing, or maybe some drama" in their lessons. Such an idea stemmed from observing the passive learning style of students in Hong Kong. Similarly, when describing her beliefs about how children should learn, P2 stated that children should not just sit in the class without asking questions. Rather, there should be a great deal of interaction, exchange of ideas, as well as discussions which correspond to her perception of U.S. education.

### **Inspiring Students to Think Critically**

The fourth theme that emerged was that U.S. educators inspire their students to think critically, which is aligned with Dewey's philosophy of education and culture (Dewey, 1958). Four of the five participants described this during their interview. They believed that U.S. education puts an emphasis on allowing students to think critically, thereby discovering rationales behind reasons and reaching their potentials. When describing their perceptions about U.S. teachers, P3 stated, "I imagine that they would inspire their students, focus on inspiration...enlightening their thinking and not instill, force-feed knowledge." He went on to further describe that the inspiration was learned from students thinking, not directed from a teacher or specific content that needed to be covered. Similarly, when reflecting upon her perceptions on U.S. teachers, P5 stated that her teaching style is similar to how she believes U.S. educators teach. She described that they are facilitators who guide and inspire students to express their values on morality.

All of the Hong Kong teachers stated that U.S. teachers have more time to actually "teach." The participants shared that U.S. teachers are able to put a great deal of effort on students' learning because, unlike teachers in Hong Kong, the sole responsibility of U.S. teachers is teaching. The Hong Kong participants believed that U.S. teachers are not required to focus on other areas, such



as students' personal and family lives and administrative tasks. P1 portrayed this perception by stating, "they can truly focus on teaching. You don't have to write proposals, be a negotiator...at least they don't have to do administrative work." P5 stated, "I think U.S. teachers would not be required to intervene in a student's personal life. Or they would mostly stress about purely education, on knowledge."

Similarly, unlike the phenomenon of Hong Kong children suffering from the pressure of a daunting amount of homework, the participants believed that U.S. education does not emphasize the importance of homework. Therefore, U.S. teachers and students do not have much pressure, which allows them to be creative. For example, P2 stated, "there are a lot of innovative things and ideas that come from America..I think they probably pay close attention to such education and place emphasis on children's creativity. So I think children do not have a lot of pressure."

### **Educational Freedom**

One common theme that was discussed amongst all five participants regarding U.S. culture and education was freedom. This finding connects to Dewey's progressive view of education in which he stressed that freedom, education, and culture are closely tied together (Dewey, 1988; Pérez-Ibáñez, 2018). The participants provided different examples of their views about freedom in the U.S., including teaching methods, learning opportunities, options for schooling, gun possession, and career development. In terms of education, the participants believed that U.S. teachers and students have the freedom to choose how they want to teach and what they want to learn respectively. As noted under the second and fourth themes, the participants discussed U.S. teachers' abilities to focus on using various approaches to teach as well as inspiring students to think critically due to the freedom they have in teaching. Similarly, all of the participants believed that U.S. education allows students to decide what they want to learn and explore their interests, which maximizes their strengths and potentials. For example, P5 said that in the U.S., the education system "mainly focuses on realizing their potential. The homework pressure is not as heavy. Children have freedom to choose." P1 perceived U.S. education as placing emphasis on self-learning for students. She said, "In the U.S., if I am interested in a certain area, I can learn more about it. Whereas in Hong Kong, there might not be such opportunity."

Besides perceiving teachers as having the freedom to choose how they deliver instruction and students having the freedom to select what they want to learn, three participants also mentioned parents having options for schooling for their children. These participants admired the fact that the U.S. government allows options for parents to homeschool their children, which is different from Hong Kong. This shows that the country values individual differences, stresses on meeting students' learning needs, and freedom to choose. Other aspects of freedom that the participants discussed include gun possession and career options. For example, P4 stated, "I feel that the U.S. gives the citizens a lot of freedom...allowing oneself to own a gun is an extremely great freedom." P1 talked about freedom within the workforce and says that there is "more freedom for career opportunities. Your work, all the choices are more, and free, not as much limitation." The excerpt of P3 below sums up the participants' view on freedom in the U.S. He stated,

from this I can see the Constitution of the U.S. and her liberty. I could experience the composition of the U.S. education system reform. Meaning everyone will be respected, everyone has his/her value. To respect them, to tailor to their needs.

## Discussion

Recall none of the participants had ever lived or studied in the U.S. The findings reveal that Hong Kong teachers' perceptions about U.S. culture and education are connected to the social constructivist theory (Dewey, 1963; Vygotsky, 1978), Dewey's (1988) progressive view of education, as well as the CRP framework. This implies that the participants perceived U.S. culture and education as innovative and influential.

The participants viewed that U.S. teachers respect their students and that the U.S. education system accepts those with individual differences. We believe the emphasis of CRP in U.S. education and the support of the government have assisted in the acceptance of those with individual differences. Since none of the participants had experience in the U.S., one possible explanation of this view could be that it is one of the issues that the participants hope to change about the education system in Hong Kong because the Chinese culture places an emphasis on authority (Kennedy, 2002). On the contrary, in a previous study conducted by Zhou & Li (2015), there was no mention of respect in particular, but there was mention of behaviors and attitudes, both of which are related to respect. Zhou & Li (2015) found that Chinese language teachers who taught preschool to first grade had difficulty with the behaviors and attitudes of students from the U.S. These results differ from the participants' view in our case study. We believe it is important to further discuss and research the relationships and level of respect between U.S. teachers and students.

As noted by the participants, critical thinking and creativity are encouraged in the U.S. One way that U.S. educators inspire their students to reach higher is through building rapport and establishing trust (Hollie, 2012). In the U.S., this is the keystone to effective learning experiences within the classroom environment (Marzano, et al., 2003). Research has shown that U.S. teachers perceive a strong relationship with students as an important way of encouraging students to accept the rules and procedures, in addition to developing the rapport to ask critical learning questions (Marzano et al., 2003; Zhou & Li, 2015). This was supported by the participant's responses in which they discussed and described inspiration as enlightening students' thinking and developing their higher order thinking skills. The participants described a deeper level of thinking and connection between teacher and student in the U.S., which does not seem to happen often in Hong Kong, as described by the participants. In connection with the literature (e.g., Hau & Salili, 1996; Salili, 1996), students from Asia tend to be influenced by hard work (e.g., memorization), whereas American students are influenced by effort (e.g., thinking). Factors that may hinder the teachers from doing so in Hong Kong include having many other responsibilities and lacking adequate time (Choi & Tang, 2011; Lam & Yan, 2011). Teachers are required to not only teach, but to develop and implement school programs and performances, budget for utensils, and oversee the renovations in the building, as evident in this study. This additional workload has impacted the teachers' morale and job satisfaction, sometimes at the cost of trying different teaching methods to improve their instruction.

Teachers in the U.S. most often have the freedom to use a variety of instructional methods based on the needs of their students. This theme was discussed by almost all of the participants and has been supported in the research when Crowther (2005) discussed how U.S. institutes of higher education emphasize multiple instructional methods when training teacher educators. There is a belief in U.S. education that there isn't a "one-size-fits-all model" and that one should design instruction that utilizes different approaches for the students to learn the material. This design has been shown to improve the instruction of the diverse learners in the classroom. The size of the classroom and the number of students may impact the type of instruction that is chosen, no matter

what area of the world one teaches. It is also important to note that there are a variety of content and courses within U.S. schools as well. With a strong focus on CRP and a goal of helping students to become autonomous in learning, teachers are encouraged to use different formats such as lectures, small group discussions, and flipped classrooms to facilitate student learning. This may have been noted by the participants because the teaching method in Hong Kong follows a specific course sequence, is traditional or lecture-based, and does not focus on analyzing information or creating new information (Poon & Wong, 2008).

Along with offering a variety of differing teaching formats, the participants also noted that education in the U.S. focuses on teaching and learning through social interaction. Many participants discussed the exchange of ideas and dialogue with other learners as well as the exploration and discovery of the material. This type of teaching has been called “student-centered learning” where the teacher is the facilitator. Studies reveal cultural differences in regard to how U.S. students are encouraged to question teachers and have conversations to deepen their thinking and encourage critical engagement (Gao & Liu, 2013; Slater, 2008). This was supported by the participant’s responses about the opportunities for more of an interactive education in the U.S., which connects to the philosophy of Dewey (1963) and Vygotsky (1978), as well as Hollie’s idea of developing CRP through social interaction (2012, 2019). Even though none of the Hong Kong participants had prior teaching experience or schooling in the U.S., their perceptions about how teachers instruct there may have come from their dissatisfaction with the current teaching methods used in Hong Kong.

The final discussion theme that emerged about U.S. culture and education was about freedom, which is a requirement for students to develop autonomy (Abinum, 1979) and an important part in the U.S. culture (Nicholson, 2006; Heuvel, 2015). The discussion on freedom was mainly due to the cultural differences between education in the U.S. and Hong Kong. Hong Kong students are often “tracked” into particular fields of study which their families want them to complete. Going against a family’s beliefs is not an encouraged practice because some people from Hong Kong believe that it may impact the family’s image (Bodycott & Lai, 2012; Salili & Lai, 2003). When describing the U.S., the participants had a range of responses about the types of methods that are used in the U.S, including the various learning opportunities and the different options for school. One of the ways that the participants described “freedom” was that students are able to choose what they want to learn. There was a common discussion amongst the participants about how students in the U.S. are given opportunities to explore careers earlier, and through this exploration, they are able to choose what they want to learn. The participants believed that students should be given freedom to choose what they want to learn and teachers should have freedom to provide appropriate support as well as implement various teaching methods to facilitate students’ diverse learning needs. This finding is aligned with the literature on freedom in education through which it allows students to think for themselves, communicate, and be creative, which are important for a society to advance (Cahn, 1988; Dewey, 1988; hooks, 1994; Specia & Osman, 2015).

The significance of this study is twofold. As part of the study abroad course components within our University program, our U.S. teacher candidates are placed with Hong Kong teachers who served as their mentors and to assist them in their classrooms. We found that Hong Kong teachers had some misperceptions about U.S. education (e.g., teachers only teach, students do not have homework), though they were not critical issues, they should be addressed through an open discussion with our teacher candidates using the authentic data collected in this study prior to the trip. This is important because U.S. teacher candidates’ interaction with their mentors would constitute a large part of the collaboration; it was necessary for teacher candidates to understand

Hong Kong teachers' views on U.S. culture and education to avoid any tensions (Clarke et al., 2014) due to cultural misunderstanding. In conceptual assumptions, the findings of this case study aim to contribute to the literature to assist U.S. teacher candidates in understanding the perspectives of educators from another culture. Such knowledge not only highlights cross-cultural understanding as an important component of multicultural collaborations within teacher training programs, but it also allows U.S. teacher candidates to recognize any unintentional biases and stereotypes that might negatively influence their own assumptions of students with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

There are some limitations to the case study that need to be addressed. One limitation is that this case study was collected using one form of data. Future studies should duplicate our research and collect more evidence to support the rationales for participant's responses. Another limitation that may have impacted the case study is the participants' feelings towards the researcher whom they know that she had experience teaching in the U.S. Thus, the participants' may have focused their attention on other variables (e.g., opinions of their response from others) besides the questions being asked of them during the study. A duplication of this case study and using a variety of interviewers to validate the results would be beneficial for future research on the topic. This study also focused on one cultural group only. Thus, we suggest further exploring how teachers from other countries perceive U.S. culture and education. To understand the impact of multicultural collaborations on U.S. teacher candidates, future studies can examine how U.S. teacher candidates perceive Hong Kong culture and education before and after the study abroad course. These studies, we believe, will help break educators' stereotypes on students from different cultural backgrounds and apply the knowledge to better support students of diverse populations.

### **Conclusion**

This case study sought to discover Hong Kong teachers' perceptions about U.S. culture and education to assist U.S. teacher educators to develop and implement a study abroad course for U.S. teacher candidates to Hong Kong. It was our hope that U.S. teacher candidates could understand potential stereotypes that may impact the collaboration. We also hoped that the findings of the study could add to the literature the importance of understanding the impact of biases and stereotypes through cultural collaborations. As the number of culturally and linguistically diverse students in the U.S. increases every year, it is critical for U.S. teacher candidates to recognize any unintentional biases and stereotypes that might negatively influence their own assumptions of their students. We believe that young adults must develop an appreciation for diverse cultures, possess an openness to multiple perspectives, and cultivate a sense of global interdependence to ultimately become the future leaders of this ever-changing, culturally rich world (Richardson, 2016).

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