Children’s perceptions of the value of ethnic religious community in their adjustment and socialisation to the UK: examining pedagogical aspects of an immigrant Sunday school - a case study of two recent Korean immigrant children in the UK

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Abstract
This paper examines new immigrant children’s socialisation and adjustment to the UK in relation to their ethnic belonging. Thus, the paper draws attention to children’s perceptions of their ethnic Sunday school setting; finding out how they view the value of their Sunday school pedagogy to their adjustment and socialisation to the UK. Two children (10 and 11) from Korean immigrant Sunday school participated in the pilot study. Through document analysis, semi-structured interviews and observations, the study explores characteristics of ethnic Sunday school that supports and hinders children’s socialisation and adjustment to the UK living experience – based on their views.

1, Background
The questions of adaptation and socialisation among immigrants are often significant. In recent years, a major concern of Britain has been the adaptation and adjustment of new immigrants. A large number of the new generation immigrant children from Asian, African and European countries often raises the concern of how education and social policy is geared to support them to adapt to British society. Because of widely different languages, cultures, religion, race, and their collectivism, social norm immigrants are likely to face difficulties in adjusting to the new environment (Rumbaut 1994).

Recent statistics suggest that approximately one in seven children in UK primary schools is non-English speaking (BBC 2008, Doward 2007). Despite attempts from Government to prepare and resource the education system, schools often admit that the issue of a rise in the number of immigrant children may slip ‘out of control’. When children come to school without any glimpse of knowledge of the new culture especially the language aspects, teachers and schools are faced with the challenge of having adequate provision for every child taking into account their individual needs (BBC 2008, Doward 2007).

Since there are few studies on immigrant children’s experiences in school or community (Rumbaut 1994, Zhou 1997), it is difficult to be definitive about their adaptation and socialisation process. However, what we know is that immigrant children are more pressured to learn new culture, language and social aspects in school than their adult counterparts (Lee and Chen 2000). Furthermore, similarity or dissimilarity to the dominant group affects their experiences with the dominant group (Rumbaut 1994).

Some scholars (Lee and Chen 2000) view new immigrants’ socialisation and adjustment from a different perspective- that is as a ‘cross cultural adaptation processes’. The scholars raise the issue of ethnic community in connection to immigrants and the host country (pp765).
Immigrant churches viewed as immigrant communities are ‘culture reproduction’ institutions for immigrants (Gjerde 1986:681, Zhou 1997). Gjerde (1986) claims that immigrant churches often provide ‘emotional and material resources which enables ultimate adjustment’ (pp681). Williams (1988 cited in Warner 2007:16) comments:

“immigrants are religious- by all counts more religious than they were before they left home- because religion is one of the important identity markers that helps them preserve individual self-awareness and cohesion in a group…”


The quotation shows that ethnic institutions are ‘a contributor to the maintenance of cultural distinctiveness’ (Gjerde 1986: 681). The role of immigrant church becomes significant to meet emotional and social aspects of immigrants as they prepare to fit into mainstream society.

Considering the role of immigrant Sunday school, there are hardly any studies on immigrant Sunday schools, however, studies on immigrants and ethnic churches may suggest theoretical starting points for the value of Sunday school on young immigrants. Empirical studies reveal that the relevance of immigrant churches is not only known in spiritual terms, but also as a social and economic benefit through provision of community services, opportunities for self-expression and validation, and psychological well-being (Brown and Gary 1999:412, Hurh and Kim 1990, Kenney et al 1977).

Brown and Gary (1991) illustrate that ethnic church teaching can particularly play a role in the social processes of adjustment and adaptation for young people. Teachings in Sunday school often deal with prevalent aspects of daily life so that young people have opportunities to assess their own behaviour and attitudes on the social spectrum of right and wrong. By observing how young black Americans are socialised when attending African American church youth programmes, Brown and Gary (1991:412) states that an individual can learn and ‘internalise attitudes, values and behaviours within church practices and beliefs’. Young people build up their socialisation skills from awareness of own behaviour, values and attitudes in relation to others from a similar religious background (Brown and Gary 1991: 413). Involvement in Christian practices is an instrument of socialisation.

In their teachings Bible scriptures influence attitudes, behaviours and values. Children acknowledge the Bible stories of Abraham or Joseph – they are challenged to apply biblical principles to their everyday lives (Mcmillon and Edwards 2000). Bible teachings often deal
with diverse aspects of daily life. Elbourn (2007) argues that Bible teaching develops children’s values, attitudes and behaviours. They focus on inspiring positive social values and habits.

Brown and Gary (1991) state the significance of aid and comfort that ethnic and immigrant churches provide for young people. Being part of a church as a young person means access to trained and skilled personnel. Programmes such as peer discussion and recreation groups reinforce a sense of identity and belonging. Because immigrant Sunday school is often associated with religious socialisation for young people in an immigrant setting, it can be seen as an extended communal family.

This paper examines the perceptions of two Korean girls (10 and 11-year-old) who have recently migrated to the UK; how they view the value of Sunday school pedagogy on their adjustment and socialisation in the UK. The purpose of this study is to examine the value of pedagogical aspects of Korean immigrant Sunday school in West Yorkshire on the adjustment and socialisation process of the two recent immigrants. In this way, the study will trace the perceived value of an immigrant Sunday school on a young persons’ sense of belonging and identity.

2, Methods

Documents, semi-structured interviews and observations were primary methods of data collection in this study. The documents are based on information drawn from curriculum books and guidance. Semi-structured interviews were used on both children and teachers. Observations and participant observations were undertaken during lessons.

The primary goal of the study is to examine the perceptions of recent immigrant Korean children on the value of Sunday school in their socialisation and adjustment to the UK as foreigners. Thus, interview questions for children were divided into four sections: (a) moral and behavioural aspects, (b) adjustment and adaptation to new culture, (c) personal identity and position, (d) psychological comfort. Each section explains how the participant views the value of Sunday school in the issues of right and wrong and behavioural aspects, adjustment to a new culture, personal identity and position in Sunday school and psychological comfort.

Interview questions for teachers explore the teachers’ perspectives of their own experience as Sunday school teachers and their preferred teaching approach. Questions consist of teachers’
pedagogical knowledge, their preferred teaching styles, and their awareness of new immigrant children’s welfare, how they deal with new immigrant children in their class, and their perceptions of the value of Sunday school for new immigrant children.

Targeted and semi-structured observations were also utilised to explore pedagogical strategies for the selected children. The observations examined individual pedagogical aspects prevalent in the Sunday school setting.

3, context of study

3.1 Korean immigrant Sunday school

This pilot study was conducted in a Korean Sunday school, an educational department of a Korean immigrant church in West Yorkshire. The church, located in an urban setting, is Presbyterian. With approximately 70 members of different social backgrounds, most are predominantly middle class and have attained higher education. A majority of the members are Korean especially international students and their families attending universities in the region. As most members are Korean, the church aims to accommodate immigrant Koreans with a quality assurance in Korean style church service familiar to most Koreans and to provide social fellowship within the ethnic group.

The church has special interest in children’s learning within the context of Sunday school. There are 17 children, aged between four and eleven and six Sunday school teachers. Most children attend Sunday school every week. Korea is the common denominator for all children one way or another, yet there are notable diversities within- some are recent immigrants with their student parents or refugees from North Korea, others are British born migrants, other children are of mixed race and they cannot speak Korean. Recent immigrants prefer speaking in Korean and often ask other children to speak in Korean too. Since children of mixed parentage are not competent in Korean language skills, the coordinator planned to conduct Sunday school in English every third Sunday. Therefore, one of the pairs teaches exclusively in English. In fact, one of the Sunday school teachers is non-Korean. The non-Korean Sunday school teacher was keen to offer support in this regard.

All six Sunday school teachers are females–two of them gained Masters’ degrees in education and all of them are presently or have previously worked in child settings as teachers or
nursery nurses. The teachers teach weekly in pairs in rotation – three pairs in total. Three of them individually have many years of Sunday school teaching experience in Korea.

In my observations I was a participant observer. As a member of the Korean church and Sunday school teacher I had full access to the Korean Sunday school children. Values and beliefs as Korean Sunday school teacher can arguably be influential in the understanding and interpretation of data and also the response by participants. However, prevalence is also crucial in this issue. To adequately examine recent immigrant Korean children in the ethnic Sunday school, I have the most basic credential - understanding their language and culture. More importantly, the struggle for recent immigrants to assimilate into new society is rather a private issue, not easily disclosed. In this way, I as ‘insider’ am likely to gain trust in participants to access and explore their values and interests against wider background, and emerge with a fuller and more exhaustive picture of the Korean Sunday school context.

I chose Min-hee and Hei-young for my pilot study. Min-hee and Hei-young were chosen in consideration of their age, their status as recent immigrants and their regular attendance to Sunday school. The two participants were also carefully chosen in consideration of their similarities and distinguishing characteristics and their combined potential to authentically and plausibly contribute to research in education. To offset the moderating influence of variables as far as possible, both participants are girls, identified as middle class, from nucleus families with married biological parents. Regardless of careful selection of participants, Min-hee and Hei-young’s experiences in Sunday school might not be representative of all children who attend Sunday school. I put forward an explanation of individual learning cases rather than a broad picture of Korean immigrant children’s learning in Sunday school.

3.2 Min-hee’s story

Min-hee (10) tries to adjust to her environment as a new immigrant. Her major concern is being able to communicate with her classmates. “I pray to God to speak good English, you know… when kids approach me, I cannot understand anything.” According to her mother, Min-hee is often crying after school. Her mother says, “It is not easy… she bursts into tears because of anxiety of not being able to communicate in English…”
Regardless of her anxiety in school, Min-hee is regarded as an articulated child in Sunday school. Precision and clarity in her communications, and an advanced command of Korean vocabulary make Min-hee a valuable ‘teacher’ to many of her Korean peers.

Not only Min-hee’s ability of articulation, her thorough knowledge of Bible stories and her enthusiastic beliefs in God make Min-hee a prominent figure in her Sunday school. During lessons Min-hee is quick to put her hand up and is eager to answer all questions – preferring to work individually and independently. Min-hee is earnest in her response to the teachers’ comments. Sunday school teachers often shower her with praises- her efforts and enthusiasm in Bible learning are not unrecognisable.

Min-hee migrated to the UK six months ago. Her father is pursuing a year long Masters Degree at the University in the region, and has temporarily migrated to the UK with his family. Min-hee is an only child and both her parents being journalists.

Min-hee explains her feelings about Sunday school. ‘I communicate well here, it’s comfortable….There is no other place I feel so relaxed when speaking… so, I need to come here to talk to other Koreans’. At the same time, Min-hee bursts with anxiety about her school experience. Her confidence level is best measured by phrases like ‘can’t understand, it’s hard, can’t speak well, can’t communicate well’ which she so often uses to describe her position in English skills.

Min-hee’s concerns about effective communication in English are evident when she is having Sunday school lessons in English. Every third Sunday school class is in English because children of mixed heritage have limited skills in Korean language. In these classes, Min-hee was initially reserved and often gazed at the floor. Her response to the teacher was limited too. This could have mirrored her experiences in the mainstream school at that time. Her low participation in discussions was obviously hampered by a then limited competence in English. To observe Min-hee enthusiastically engaging with her Korean lessons, it is disheartening to see a sudden change in mood and energy when she has to speak in English.

In her opinion about Sunday school lessons in English, Min-hee states;

‘I have not learnt many English words. So when people speak fast, I hardly understand them. But here (Sunday school)… I have learnt Bible stories since I was very young. So.. it’s comfortable… Here, people are similar to me…I don’t get special attention. I am in the middle. So, I can relax and feel comfortable.’
Children still make jokes and often respond to the teacher in Korean during the English lesson. When interacting within themselves, children prefer speaking in Korean despite some mixed race peers not being able to access the language. A non-Korean teacher aptly comments; ‘The environment itself has a strong Korean focus’.

3.3 Hei-young’s story

Hei-young (11) seems to be adjusting well to the UK. ‘I went to my friend’s birthday party, it was good fun’. Hei-young smiles and talks about what happened in her school friend’s party. Very sociable and outgoing in her personality, she has many school and Sunday school friends. On arrival to church, her priority is always to find all her friends.

Hei-young migrated temporarily to the UK one and half years ago with her family for her father’s further education at the University in the region. With regards to adjusting to the UK, Hei-young comments, ‘Since I came here I work hard in my studies. So… I adjusted well in school and do well in my work.’

Hei-young has been to Sunday school since migration, and she gets along with her peers in Sunday school. As well as her enthusiasm with her friends, she seems wholehearted in class and often tries to answer teachers’ questions. When the teacher talked about the blood of Jesus and how Jesus died in one lesson, she was almost in tears. Some of Hei-young’ teachers take notice of her beliefs and love for Jesus. Hei-young is often praised by her Sunday school teachers in her behaviour and is often chosen as the ‘best seater’ during the class.

During lesson time, Hei-young sits in the front row and listens to the teacher attentively. She often raises her hand to answer teachers’ questions. Hei-young is very enthusiastic in class and often tries to answer teachers’ questions. However, her knowledge of Bible stories, compared to Min-hee, can be classed as average. Her responses are often a reflection of her consistent attendance to Sunday school. Hei-young is formal and audial in her learning style, preferring to quietly listen to the teacher rather than participating in active interactions.

Hei-young’s attendance to Sunday school has a certain impact on her awareness of aspects of adjustment. In her comments, she often makes reference to adjustment. ‘I did not cope well…But I make lots of friends here… there are not many people here…so I get along with
everyone.’ With strong friendship links in Sunday school, Hei-young believes that she has a chance to learn how to speak English during peer interactions. ‘I speak English with them… they teach me sometimes, I teach them Korean. So my English is better now.’

In her Sunday school environment, Hei-young responds to the teacher with recognisable ease and confidence. ‘… I put my hand up to the teacher… I get more and more confident by doing that.’ In fact Hei-young is now so competent that she corrected Min-hee’s grammar recently. ‘ …I corrected Min-hee’s English the other day, she said ‘you cow’ instead of saying ‘you are a cow’… and she thanked me.’

She seems satisfied with her Sunday school and shows excitement to come to Sunday school. Hei-young comments

Happy!! Because I believe in Jesus… that’s why you come to Sunday school, isn’t it? You come to Sunday school because of Jesus of course. But I can also meet friends in Sunday school …

(Hei-young)

3.4 Min-hee and Hei-young’s experience with Korean immigrant Sunday school

The following is an observation of a typical day for Min-hee and Hei-young.

It is half past two on a Sunday school afternoon. Seventeen zealous children coming from the main church service enter a classroom with eardrum-bursting noise. Their Sunday school classroom is relatively big and rather long in its design. Because it is narrow and rectangular rather than wide and square children are limited in the type of physical activities they can engage. In the classroom, there is a piano- a vintage of its kind still producing reasonable quality notes with every stroke. There are bulletin boards on the wall where children can read scriptures and sing some Sunday school lyrics. Upon entry into the classroom, a Bible scripture captioned in neon is striking: ‘Love your God with all your heart, with all your strength and with all your soul’ - a vivid summation of the purpose and target of this tots assembly.

One teacher (the other teacher was absent) asks children to be quiet. When children eventually do, the Sunday school begins with a prayer. Min-hee volunteers to do the opening prayer. After reading a Bible verse aloud, children are asked to stand up to worship. It is a
Sunday school song in English. All children stand up to dance and sing energetically with their teacher for 10-15 minutes until they get tired and sweaty.

After worship is what can be compared to mainstream school carpet time. Four weeks before Easter, the lesson is appropriately entitled - The meaning of Passover. The teacher shows the film about Moses (and Passover) on DVD. After a short while of watching, the teacher asks questions about the film to tease out understanding of Passover.

Teacher: Do you remember what Israelites ate?
Hei-young: Unleavened bread
Teacher: Can you describe how it looked like?
Min-hee: It is without yeast.
Teacher: Mmmh yes…you’re right. The angel of death passed by some houses. Which houses did He Passover? (stressing ‘Passover’ and using hands to gesture passing over)
Min-hee: He passed over doors with blood but he entered the doors without blood.
...
Teacher: (shows a picture of four people - two of them have Jesus drawn in their hearts, and the other two do not.)
Hei-young: (looks at the pictures intently)
Min-hee: (Speaks before any question is asked) Without Jesus in their heart those two will die.
Teacher: Can you explain to everybody why he or she will die Min-hee?
Min-hee: We will die if we do not have Jesus in our heart.
Teacher: You are right, Min-hee.

The story about Passover is immediately followed up by a learning activity related to the object lesson. Children are still learning about the meaning of Passover. The teacher tries to connect Passover to Jesus in relation to Easter. Children are then asked to sit in a circle for Holy Communion as a class. The teacher shares bread and grape juice (rather than wine) with children. Children are challenged to share how they apply Passover to their personal lives.

Teacher: What about us? Jesus said he would come and judge us one day just like He did to Israel. Think about our heart. Do we have Jesus in our hearts?
If he comes tonight to judge us, would we survive like those Israelites who put blood of the lamb on their door? … What do we need to remember about Jesus?
Min-hee: His blood and flesh.
Teacher: (shares bread and grape juice)
Hei-young: I remember I have seen this. Adults eat bread and drink wine in church!
Teacher: It is called Holy Communion. What does it remind us of?
Min-hee: Jesus’ blood and flesh!
Hei-young: Wow! (As she partakes the bread and juice)

Children become quiet as they take Holy Communion.

…
Min-hee: Teacher, Jesus appeared in my dream a long time ago. But…it’s strange.
Teacher: Really? Why is it strange?
Min-hee: (looking serious) Monsters also appeared in the same dream.

…
Hei-young: Miss, one of my friends is a really good Christian. But in her dream her dead grandfather appeared. But she said the Lord’s Prayer in the dream. So, her dead grandfather disappeared. (Just after talking she sips the grape juice)
Teacher: (calling a child who is disrupting) Jin-Woo!
Hei-young: Miss, this grape juice is ugly. Is it Korean?
Teacher: No, it isn’t. (Turning to the whole class) OK I will ask one more time, do you think Jesus is in your heart? If Jesus, comes today, would you survive?
Min-hee: Yes!
Child1: I am sure I will not die. Instead my brother will die because he is the first child.
Min-hee: Don’t say that. I am the only child.
Children including Hei-young: (laughing)

With six different teachers on rota, Min-hee and Hei-young are exposed to a variety of teaching methods. However, I will not analyse all methods and styles but will highlight the most common.

4. Findings - Characteristics of the ethnic Sunday school

The experiences Min-hee and Hei-young have in their Sunday school are laden with implications for the value of the ethnic Sunday school in their socialisation and adjustment to the UK. Out of observations and interviews with Min-hee and Hei-young, I was able to find some characteristic patterns based on Min-hee and Hei-young’s perceptions and their learning in the Sunday school.

4. 1. Curriculum
Teachers’ main concern for children is to promote appropriate behaviour during the service. The Sunday school Curriculum is designed to develop children’s spiritual attitudes and rectify fundamental questions when making choices between right and wrong. Thus, children are encouraged to participate in Christian practices of praying, singing and reading the Bible in church and beyond.

The Sunday school curriculum is structured in relation to some Korean cultural aspects. Different curriculum books (mainly Korean denominational curriculum books and a few international Sunday school curriculum books such as ‘Child Evangelism Fellowship’) are used in the curriculum syllabus. Most curriculum resources are Korean but readjusted for cultural relevance to suit Korean children as foreigners. The curriculum reflects cultural adaptation to fit with the Sunday school overall aim of ‘worshiping God in an appropriate manner’.

As the syllabus is mainly based on biblical contexts, specific cultural aspects seem less relevant, except the language. However, by observing how most teachers apply the curriculum, Min-hee and Hei-young’s learning is based on ‘a communal learning as a community activity, a sharing of the culture’ (Edwards and Mercer 1987:163). Teachers somehow focus on interacting with Min-hee and Hei-young- basing all teaching and learning upon children’s prior experiences.

During observations, teachings in the lesson are underpinned by Korean cultural aspects. Most pictures and power point images are Korean based. A teacher, in one lesson, compares Bible stories of Passover with Korean harvest festival. The teacher comments in her class, ‘Jesus died on the Passover. It is same as the harvest festival in Korea. You know, you get together with people, get new clothes and eat nice food. It is same. Passover is just like Korean harvest festival…’ The teacher applies children’s familiar previous experiences of Korean culture into a new knowledge.

Min-hee and Hei-young experience the text in familiar ways. The ideological and dialogical pedagogy engages Min-hee and Hei-young in familiar culture (Ruddin 1998:101). Ruddin (1998) states that children in ethnic churches experience ‘cultural and linguistic familiarity’ to
Bible texts. Ethnic Sunday school setting represents an ethnic meso level; an opportunity for children to express their own identity, language and specific culture.

4.2. Sunday school teachers

All teachers are enthusiastic, confident and structured in their approach. Despite the six teachers’ different preferred teaching styles, the common repertoire of teaching is direct instruction by explanation, demonstration and modelling of Bible stories. When Min-hee and Hei-young learned about Easter, teachers mainly gave a direct explanation of Jesus’ crucifixion. Often, teachers start the lesson by recap questions to determine what Min-hee and Hei-young remember from preceding lessons and tune them in to what they are about to learn.

Visual aids including videos, and active activities like games art crafts and role play are common educational resources and activities in many lessons. These are used to complement the teachers’ different teaching styles. Often they relate to the theme of the lesson.

Comparing the three main teachers, one from each pair, each teacher is unique. Children’s Bible knowledge and motivation for the lesson are decisive factors that teachers use when choosing or adjusting their teaching approach. Visual aids, child-centred pedagogy, active play and art craft are often utilised.

Despite different teaching methods, the teachers’ common objective seems to be the application of Bible stories to daily life. Teaching about Passover, one teacher talks about the Blood of Jesus. She then tells the class how Jesus’ blood was shed because of their own sins. The teacher challenges children to reflect on their moral and behavioural issues by focusing on social themes in the Bible study.

Min-hee and Hei-young do not particularly acknowledge the Sunday school teachers’ support in their adjustment to the UK. Rather, teachers’ comments in the lesson challenge them to reflect on their choices and responsibilities. Min-hee and Hei-young comment;

‘When I heard of, ‘Rejoice only in the Lord’, I realised my joy should be in the Lord … I am not supposed to be arrogant… but I think I sometimes show off.’

(Min-hee)

‘When I realised Jesus saved me, I felt sorry for myself and pity for him. He did not deserve to die for us…not necessarily support from teachers. But it encourages me in a way.’

(Hei-young)
From Min-hee and Hei-young’s comments, they do not personally talk much with Sunday school teachers except during lessons. This might explain some teachers’ beliefs on children’s adjustment in their Sunday school. Some teachers say:

‘When they come to Sunday school, they do not really struggle.’

‘Coming here to settle, it might be really difficult. But when they listen to the Word of God, they get encouragement.’

In the teachers’ views, teachers do not spend time with children to discuss children’s personal issues. However, they are aware of difficulties they may be facing as new arrivals in the UK and try to encourage them through Bible lessons.

4.3. Bible

Min-hee and Hei-young gave specific examples of Bible teaching from Sunday school class that influence their choices of what is biblically considered right and wrong and behavioural change. How Min-hee and Hei-young apply the Bible teaching of ‘Love your enemies’ ‘Jesus death’ to their interaction with friends and a sister show Bible teaching has an indirect effect to their social skills (Pike 2003, Powell 2003).

Bible teaching is influential to me…I remember learning about ‘Love your enemies’. I realised that I am not supposed to get upset with them. Even when they are so bad… I don’t know why, but since then, I feel guilty whenever I do wrong… I never thought many things were wrong before, but this time they make me feel guilty.

(Min-hee)

I used to fight with my younger sister. But I hardly do that these days. Sunday school teachers talked about many things…I learnt from many Bible stories. Most of all, it is because of what Jesus had to suffer to make me a better person…

(Hei-young)

Although they both may seem to reflect on matters of right and wrong and responsible behaviour in a similar way, during interviews Min-hee gave more specific examples of Bible teaching that link with her choices of what is biblically considered morally upright and acceptable behaviour. This may be because Min-hee is more responsive in class work to show off her Bible knowledge. According to Min-hee, she appreciates the teachers’ agenda to teach Bible stories. She finds the stories interesting and easy to learn from. (Johnson 2001).
Hei-young, on the other hand, is less specific in her examples of Bible lessons influencing her personal adjustment. However, learning activities convincingly reinforce her understanding of right and wrong according to Bible teaching. It is of interest that she has the unusual sensitivity of grasping moral substance within the cluster of song lyrics. On observation, I noticed that Hei-young is a much faster learner in dancing and singing than in her Bible study. She even clearly states how much she appreciates singing and dancing rehearsals in her Sunday school.

Nevertheless, Bible teaching plays a significant role in influencing the formation of beliefs and attitudes for Min-hee and Hei-young. They do not believe that their Bible learning necessarily enables them to understand British culture. However, Bible teaching supports their development of moral consciousness, behaviour and character.

These findings adhere to a number of previous studies, which indicate that Bible teaching has a sturdy influence on personal attitudes and behaviour at different levels (Brown and Gary 1991, Johnson 2001). Bible stories are adapted to suit the level of the child for access and personal application. When Bible stories are implied to a child’s life, the stories become meaningful to him or her. In this way, a child is challenged to be reflective in their learning and understanding (Mcmillon and Edwards 2000, Pike 2003, Powell 2001).

Since Min-hee and Hei-young’s Sunday school upholds specific values, commitment and Korean culture, their Bible learning is more specific to Korean way of life. This means that when Bible stories are taught, it is often related to cultural aspects of the congregation (Ruddin 1998:175). However, the fact that Bible teachings prepare people to participate in the wider society in support for their integration can never be undervalued.

4.4 Peer associations

Min-hee seemed at ease to talk about interactions with her Sunday school peers. Min-hee particularly stated that she is more comfortable with her Sunday school friends than her school peers because of language barriers. In her comments, Min-hee used terms like ‘comfortable’, ‘similar’, ‘time for me’, ‘confident’ to describe her peer interactions in Sunday school. Such phrases signify how peer-groups in Sunday school provide Min-hee psychological comfort and a sense of belonging (Shin and Park 1998).
In comparison to Min-hee, Hei-young does not differentiate between school peers and Sunday school peers. However, about her Sunday school peer associations, Hei-young uses terms like ‘coping’, ‘speaking in English with them’, ‘they’re helpful’, ‘get supports from them’. These terms indicate that more than association, Sunday school has a stronger provision of positive social support to strengthen values and habits (Brown and Gary 1991).

The fellowship offered in Sunday school has adjustment and socialisation functions with a natural inclination to develop her social skills and awareness of culture (Brown and Gary 1991: 413). In their views:

Kids here... have been here longer than me and speak good English and good Korean... so they know lots of things...High school Musical is not in the school text books. So I did not know about it. When children at school talked about High School Musical, I had nothing to say. But in Sunday school... they also talked about High School Musical... that’s how I got to know more about High School Musical.

(Min-hee)

I did not speak English well at first. But because of them, I speak much better English now.

(Hei-young)

Min-hee and Hei-young’s view of fellowship with other Korean immigrants shows how her immigrant Sunday school serves practical functions for communality (Min 1992). Children in the Sunday school share similar status and experiences as immigrants and benefit from interacting with each other. Min-hee’s view of the role of Sunday school indicates that her Sunday school provides not only meaning and belonging but communal bonds for immigrants, necessary to facilitate and support the process of the adaptation of a new lifestyle (Hurh and Kim 1991).

4.5. Sunday school environment

Min-hee is very noticeable in her Sunday school – her confidence in expression and phenomenal knowledge of the Bible at her age makes her outstanding. Min-hee explains how Sunday school provides psychologically support,

Compared to school, I am more relaxed. When I go to school, I get really tense. Because I need to speak in English... what shall I do today? What could be happening today? But here, you understand everything... with no effort I can speak correctly. I understand everything people say here.
Hei-young sees herself as ‘special’ in Sunday school. Although, she believes that she has adjusted well into the UK, she does not seem to have much confidence in relation to her school peers. She comments ‘I don’t think I am special in school. There is no one taller than me, I am in year 6, but kids speak better English than me and they are very kind…’

Min-hee and Hei-young view their Sunday school environment as making them feel more secure and comfortable. Their perceptions are in line with a number of scholars that the role of immigrant churches is often reflected as a response to immigrants’ position of insecure outsiders (Shin and Park 1988, Hurh and Kim 1990). This notion is that the immigrant Sunday school is appreciated for its significant influence on securing identity and position. This may explain how the Korean Sunday school affects Min-hee and Hei-young’s sense of belonging.

This may well describe a major characteristic of their immigrant Sunday school—psychologically support. An emergent piece of evidence about Min-hee is that, in regards to immigration, the value of Sunday school is more significant to new arrivals. Min-hee is likely to get much of her emotional affirmation from Sunday school than from mainstream school—a fundamental role of immigrant Sunday schools. The major service of Sunday school as a social fibre for child immigrants—new and old—remains distinguished.

Interestingly, both also learn Bible stories and Christian values in school. Why Min-hee and Hei-young are particularly comfortable and happier in Sunday school could, thus, not only be driven by Christian education, but possibly by the opportunity to associate with children of similar background within the confines of a familiar and more relaxed Sunday school environment.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study demonstrates the value of the ethnic Sunday school from Min-hee and Hei-young’s point of view. Two cases show that their immigrant Sunday school is significant in providing Min-hee with a sense of secure Korean identity and in being crucial to her adjustment in terms of her sense of self and belonging. However, there are some characteristics of the immigrant Sunday school that may hinder Min-hee and Hei-young’s cohesion and integration to wider society. Their experiences of Korean cultural aspects and
their own linguistic familiarity can cause unfamiliarity to UK mainstream language and culture- which may slow down their integration to society.

Furthermore, Learning about the Bible cannot be ignored as the main role of the immigrant Sunday school. As Min-hee and Hei-young describe themselves as Christian the main reason for attending the Sunday school is, thus, for religious reasons. Since the process of cultural adjustment is dynamic and unique to each individual, it is difficult to conclude what characteristics of immigrant Sunday schools have a strongest impact on recent immigrant children in general: further research is needed to determine this.
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