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Increasing Social Inclusion for the Children of Migrant Workers in Shanghai, China: A Four-Year Longitudinal Study of a Non-Governmental, Volunteer-Led, After-School Program

Abstract In Shanghai, a mega-city of approximately 24.15 million people (Shanghai Municipal Statistics Bureau, 2015, “Art. 13”), the population of migrant workers continues to increase. According to the Shanghai Municipal Statistics Bureau (2015), as of 2015, 9.81 million residents did not have household registration papers. Of these, 70%, or 6.87 million were migrant workers (“Art. 13”). The researcher relied on qualitative research techniques to explore the outcomes of an after-school program for the children of migrant workers. The study took place over a four-year period with data being collected throughout. Keeping in mind methodology limitations, the analysis affirmed the success of the hoped for outcomes of the program.

Keywords social inclusion, migrant workers in China, NGOs

Introduction

In what may be the largest migration in human history, tens of millions of Chinese people from underdeveloped parts of the country left their farms and villages, and flooded industrialized Eastern cities in search of opportunities. Shanghai, a magnet for migrant workers, has witnessed astronomical population growth as a result of the influx of these rural laborers and their families (“Shanghai officially,” 2011, January). The rapid population explosion has stretched the city’s ability to deliver services to its residents. In particular, the

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education system has been overwhelmed by the demographic change and has been unable to keep pace with the needs of migrant workers' children (Wang, 2011, February). As a result, many migrant children have experienced systemic exclusion from the public school system (Jiang, 2002, July 26).

What promising practices or programs exist to help these children? Are reputable programs actually achieving measurable outcomes? How do these programs work? What is the potential for replicating these promising practices or programs on a broader scale? The research team set out to explore these and other questions.

The *Hukou* System

The household registration (*hukou*) system perpetuates this social exclusion. The registration system began in the mid-1950s to prevent the exodus of rural peasants to China's emerging industrial centers. In essence, the system ties a family to their hometown. Should they migrate to an urban center for work they will be blocked from legally accessing state provided education, welfare, and other government benefits. Currently, approximately 700–800 million rural citizens are barred from receiving public benefits if they leave the countryside (Wei & Hou, 2010).

In Shanghai, a mega-city of approximately 24 million people (Shanghai Municipal Statistics Bureau, 2015, “Art. 13”), the population of migrant workers continues to increase. According to the Shanghai Municipal Statistics Bureau (2015), 9.81 million residents did not have household registration papers. Of these, 70%, or 6.87 million were migrant workers (“Art. 13”). Furthermore, a survey published on the news outlet Sohu News (2016) identified the top three concerns of migrant workers in Shanghai. These were: children's education (43%), wages (33%), and pensions (20%). However, half of the interviewees hoped they would live in the city long-term.

While reformers debate much needed changes, eliminating the household registration system presents a sticky political problem. In Shanghai, some residents express concern that, without the system, their children might be denied opportunities because of intense competition with the children of migrant workers. More to the point, they worry that their children might be denied a slot in one of Shanghai's exclusive universities. For parents whose children are not

bound for higher education, they worry that perhaps their child might not secure an attractive state job restricted to Shanghai's residents (Wu, headmaster of private school, Shanghai, China, personal communication, September 22, 2008, interviewer D. Leitch).

Other Forms of Exclusion for Children from Village Schools

What is a village school? The Chinese public school system is hierarchical in structure. At the top of the structure, the Ministry of Education resides in the country's seat of power in Beijing. Beneath the Ministry of Education sit the provincial departments of education. The subsequent levels of the hierarchy consist of cities, then counties, followed by towns, and finally, occupying the bottom rung of the administrative structures, villages.

Villages, lacking their own seats of government, which are located in the larger towns, tend to be loosely organized. Village schools typically operate only through the elementary grades, after which high school students are bussed to the nearest towns or live in residential schools. Classes may contain 50–60 students typically taught by teachers with a two- or three-year college degree, although in the past couple of years qualifications have risen and more village school teachers may have a four-year degree (Xu, Deputy Director of Compulsory Education, Jilin Department of Education, Jilin, China, personal communication, November 10, 2015, interviewer D. Leitch).

In addition to the household registration system, social exclusion for the children of migrant workers originates from other sources. For one, exclusion arises from the structure of the educational system. The curriculum in Shanghai is more academically rigorous than that found in village schools. Urban schools tend to have more highly qualified teachers. Four-year or masters-level degrees are the norm in Shanghai's schools. Parents from rural areas have typically only completed primary grade schooling. Statistics from Shanghai indicate that in 2014, only 10% of the migrant worker population had a high school diploma or higher. Consequently, parental expectations for educational attainment tend to be lower in village schools. In addition, according to parents and students interviewed for this study, because of the less rigorous curriculum in rural areas, students most often return to their hometowns (i.e., the place in which their household is registered) to take their all-important university entrance

examinations (*gaokao*). The rural exams are perceived to be easier, but also carry less respect, than urban exams. Some students desire to study the curriculum from the region in which they are registered regardless of their current residence to prepare for the rural exams. On the other hand, other students prefer to follow Shanghai's more rigorous curriculum in hopes of gaining entrance into a more prestigious university.

In addition, a social stigma is attached to being a migrant worker in Shanghai. Even when students attend mainstream public schools, they frequently speak different dialects, live in poorer neighborhoods, and get shunned by non-migrant peers. Teachers may view them through the crushing lens of low expectations because they come from the rural provinces' less academically rigorous schools. These low expectations may, in turn, result in decreased educational attainment (de Boer, Bosker, & van der Werf, 2010). Furthermore, they may face the disapproval of Shanghai residents who fear that the migrant children will consume a disproportionate share of educational resources.

Educational options for migrant families have evolved substantially over the past decade or so. When significant numbers of migrant workers first arrived in Shanghai in the mid-1980s, the families formed loosely organized cooperatives. The cooperatives would invite a teacher from the rural provinces to teach their children. Later, numerous private, unregulated schools that catered to migrant families emerged. The schools offered a curriculum taken from the rural provinces. However, during the last 10 years, the government has moved to close these private, unregulated schools because many of them operated in substandard facilities and employed under-qualified teachers. As an alternative, the government offered charters, funding, and supervision to a select group of private schools for the children of migrant workers. More recently, public schools have begun offering self-contained classes within their buildings for the children of migrant workers. These "schools within schools" use the same curriculum as the rural provinces and are intended to be the next step toward full inclusion (Jacka, Kipnis, & Sargeson, 2013).

Systematic Review of Existing Literature on Migrant Children

A systematic review of the literature on migrant children in China reveals two main themes: Left-behind children in rural China and the children of migrant

workers living in urban areas. Of these two broad bodies of literature, the majority of the research looks at rural left-behind children; in particular, their psychological well-being and social development while being raised in the absence of their parents. Although the topic of left-behind children is not examined here, the reader may refer to Murphy (2014)¹ for an excellent treatment of this subject.

Although less substantial, the body of research focused on the children of migrant workers in urban areas is more relevant and therefore warrants further attention. This research contains three primary elements: public policy research, public health research, and miscellaneous topics such as assimilation and second generation migrant students.

To begin, public policy research, the most expansive area of literature on urban migrant children, primarily focuses on the *hukou* household registration system. Holland (2008) explores the system from the perspective of human rights. Hu and Szente (2010) investigate the challenges and prospects for early childhood education. Numerous authors inquire into the systematic barriers to schooling for the children of migrant workers in urban areas including Kwong (2011), Montgomery (2012), Wei and Hou (2010), Xia (2006), and Yang and Wang (2013).

In the public health field, Wang, Smith, Stallones, and Xiang (2010) describe injury related childhood mortality rates among urban migrant worker families. Other public health related research revolved around mental health sub-topics. A sampling of this research includes the sense of belonging (Geng, Zhou, & Hu, 2012), shyness and sensitivity (Chen, Wang, & Wang, 2009), the effects of social connections on mental health (Mao & Zhao, 2012), the functions of social support on mental health (Wong & Leung, 2008), the psychological well-being of children of migrant workers in Shanghai (Wong, Chang, & He, 2009), and the relationship between academic achievement and loneliness (Lu & Zhou, 2013).

Two articles deserve special mention because of their relevance to this investigation. Liu et al. (2009) use a qualitative grounded-theory method to uncover a multi-step framework for understanding the process of assimilation of rural migrant children into urban environments. Finally, Lan (2014) gives much needed clarity to the characteristics of second generation migrant children. These children form a large percentage of the students served by the studied Volunteer Center in Shanghai.

In spite of the large number of quality studies on migrant children in China, the reader might recognize that the literature base lacks an in-depth analysis of promising programs that benefit the children of migrant workers. Bridging this gap may contribute to a better understanding of how these programs work as well as their potential for replication.

The Role of Social Capital

Social capital serves as a useful and relevant conceptual framework to inform the study. As will be mentioned in the upcoming literature review, research suggests strong ties between programs that provide access to social capital and increased academic achievement and social integration. Because this investigation relies primarily on an inductive approach, this article did not intend to prove or substantiate the validity of the theory. Rather, the theory contained concepts and terminology that strengthened the research design as well as increased the sensitivity of the observations and analysis.

Woolcock (1999, April) categorizes social capital according to three basic types: bonding, bridging, and linking. First, bonding social capital describes the relationships between tight knit families, friends, and ethnic groups. Bonding social capital, more often than not, results from shared identities. Second, bridging social capital develops between colleagues, distant friends, and other associates. The communication between members of a bridging social capital network is less intimate than between members of a bonding social network. Nevertheless, both bridging and bonding social capital help preserve communities from social fragmentation. On the other hand, excessively strong bonding social capital may result in weaker extended communities. Finally, linking social capital facilitates the ability of individuals or organizations to connect with resources beyond their immediate radius.

Social capital may help explain how programs serving the children of migrant workers develop and maintain complex relationships within the community. These relationships play a key role in connecting the program's participants to educational opportunities, healthcare, jobs, and other resources. Social capital may also illuminate how young people in the program build support networks with staff, teachers, peers, and others in the community.

The theoretical origins of social capital reside in the works of Alexis de Tocqueville (1979), Emile Durkheim (1973), Max Weber (Kronman, 1983), and James Coleman (1988). Since then, Jacobs (1992) employed the theory in his analysis of city neighbors, Loury (2002) used social capital to study labor markets, and both Putman (2000) and Fukuyama (1995) applied the theory to nations, states, and regions. Furthermore, the World Bank and other international organizations use instruments that measure social capital as an indicator of a community's readiness to use developmental aid effectively (Dhesi, 2000). Research more specific to China has found that family social capital exists in inland boarding schools located in Shanghai through parental educational expectations, the influence of relatives, problem-solving advice, and institutional assistance (Chen, 2010).

Social Capital in Education

Generally speaking, the literature defines education-related social capital as the involvement of parents in the education of their children. A large body of research identifies parental involvement as the single most significant factor in educational attainment (Fan & Chen, 2001). Consequently, educational programs that promote parental involvement through opportunities to volunteer, provide rich and varied communication, as well as maintain openness and reciprocity tend to promote higher educational attainment (Tedin & Weiher, 2011).

On the practical level, Plagens (2011) proposes indicators that educators can use to assess social capital within their organizations. First, educational programs rich in social capital tend to function cooperatively. The parents, teachers, and students commit themselves to working toward a common purpose. Second, individuals within the shared educational environment seek knowledge about how to contribute to their organization and care about the organization's links to the broader community. Hence, the pedagogy of service learning may contribute to the solidification of these links. Finally, schools and other educational programs rich in social capital possess a strong degree of trust between teachers, parents, and schools. Because of this trust, students tend to accept feedback from teachers and likewise are more likely to confide in their teachers when obstacles arise to their learning. In these schools, parents and teachers work together to

create the most favorable learning environments for the students. In summary, where social capital resides in abundance, individuals tend to value their association with the educational organization.

Social Inclusion

What does social inclusion/exclusion mean? The literature on this subject presents no definitive answer. Broadly speaking, theorists tend to associate social exclusion with poverty, unemployment, low levels of education, and a lack of engagement with social institutions. Conversely, the literature suggests that social inclusion manifests itself in the ability of individuals to express themselves freely in public institutions and participate in decision-making (Wilson, 2006).

Oxoby (2009) proposes a model based on three dimensions. First, social exclusion is relative to the context. Therefore, one must consider the societal norms as well as the beliefs and attitudes of the individual. Second, the condition of inclusion or exclusion occurs as a result of agents acting independently. In other words, an agent, such as an institution, may act upon an individual. An example of this might be the exclusion that happens when an individual is denied access to a public school based on his or her place of birth. Lastly, social inclusion or exclusion is dynamic. Individuals may be excluded based on their prospects for the future as well as on their current state of being. Thus, a currently unemployed individual may be included in an institution based upon his or her prospects for the future.

The Relationship between Social Capital and Social Inclusion

In summary, the concepts of social capital and social inclusion, although describing similar phenomena, originate from different schools of thought. In spite of their differences, social capital and social inclusion appear to share points of inter-relatedness. Consider as one example of this inter-relatedness, for instance, the idea of bonding social capital; that is, the strong connection experienced by persons of like-mindedness, familial ties, or shared interests. Strong social bonding of this type, in practice, may inhibit social inclusion if pro-active measures are absent. Likewise, linking and bridging social capital may encourage social inclusion in schools.

Methods

Overview of the Case

The Jiuqian Volunteer Center, also referred to in this article as the Volunteer Center or simply the Center, functioned as an after-school enrichment program serving the children of Shanghai's migrant worker population. The researchers chose this case because of its reputation within Shanghai as one of distinction. The Center's mission was: "To improve the quality of life for underprivileged children by equipping them with confidence, open-mindedness, and charitable giving" (Zhang, 2014). The Volunteer Center served as the hub from which the researchers organized their interviews and observations of the Center, migrant worker neighborhoods, and families.

The Jiuqian Volunteer Center opened in 2006 with one branch in the Pudong district and one branch in the Rixi district. Mr. Zhang opened the two branches of the Center to instill in the children of migrant workers a belief that their lives were rich in opportunities. "The literally meaning of *jiuqian* is 'hand-in-hand for a long time,' which expresses my understanding of philanthropy" said Zhang (Xu, 2009).

The project grew out of a survey conducted by Mr. Zhang and his post-graduate classmates from Fudan University in 2001. The survey focused on Shanghai's migrant population. "I was shocked by the under-funded and poorly equipped private schools for these children," Zhang recalled, "The classrooms didn't have adequate lighting or even a full piece of chalk. After school the kids went home to shabby housing near a deserted airstrip. They played in the rubble while their parents worked from dawn to dusk" (Xu, 2009).

Moved by compassion, Mr. Zhang teamed up with visiting American Fulbright scholar from Cornell University, Jessica Schiffman. Ms. Schiffman introduced the idea of forming a children's choir, originally called the Shanghai Migrant Children's Choir. "I really believe in the healing and therapeutic power of music and singing," Schiffman said (J. William Fulbright, 2006, p. 13). She described her impressions of the conditions surrounding the private schools for migrant children, "The roads, unpaved, are lined with puddles; the air is scarcely breathable; the houses are made of mud; and the children play on the streets. The schools have no playground, computers or library" (Shanghai Daily, 2007).

Research Questions

The specific research questions were intended to contribute to the more general problem statement mentioned previously; that is, do programs generally recognized by the public actually accomplish their program outcomes, how do these programs work, and can they be replicated? Toward that end, researchers have further narrowed the questions. First, how did context, that is, economic, historical, and demographic factors to name a few; influence the philosophy, design, and operations of the program? And second, did the program's design lead to its desired outcomes? Open-ended questions guided the investigation; hence, follow-up probing often arose during the interviews. The conceptual framework of social capital informed the selection of questions. Furthermore, multiple sub-questions nuanced the focus of the primary questions.

1. How does the context influence the program's philosophy, design, and operation?
 - 1.1. What are the major educational issues and concerns of the residents of Shanghai?
 - 1.2. What challenges face children, youth, families, government and non-governmental organizations?
 - 1.3. What assets exist to address these challenges?
 - 1.4. What trends will influence programs addressing these challenges?
2. Does the program's design lead to desired outcomes?
 - 2.1. What are the qualifications and motivations of the program's volunteers and staff?
 - 2.2. What underlying assumptions influence the design of the program?
 - 2.3. What activities support the program's design?
 - 2.4. What are the anticipated outcomes in areas such as knowledge, attitudes, skills, aspirations, motivations, and success in educational or vocational attainment?

Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

The authors of this study conducted the data collection and fieldwork in two phases. Phase one fieldwork took place in October 2008. Phase two fieldwork occurred four years later in July 2012. Between phases the authors stayed in

contact with the key informants through email. The original research design did not include two phases. In fact, the research was designed as a simple case study: a snapshot. However, after analyzing the initial data the researchers decided not to publish the results but instead design a follow-up study in order to paint a more dynamic picture. An annual study would have been desirable, but it was financially prohibitive. Therefore, the four-year benchmark was chosen because at the end of four years the 14-year olds in the cohort would have graduated from high school and it would be possible to gather more meaningful information on program outcomes.

In phase one, the researchers focused on understanding the context, conducting observations of the program, visiting public and private schools that served the children of migrant workers, visiting the homes of families, and interviews with parents, staff, and volunteers. It was decided not to interview youth in the program during phase one.

During phase two, one of the authors interviewed former program participants, the program's director, and the program's founder. The former program participants; more specifically, participants who had aged out of the program within the last year, yielded valuable insights into the program's outcomes because their lives reflected the ability of the program to reach its stated goals. In phase two, the authors focused on the degree to which the program achieved its desired outcomes. In addition, the interviews also yielded additional information on the context of the program.

Methods of Data Collection

The researchers relied on two main types of qualitative research techniques for data collection: interviews and observations. The protocols for both the interviews and observations were described in detail and approved by the Interview Review Board at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville in accordance with the guidelines established by the United States Office for Human Research Protections. These forms are available from the authors and are kept on file at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville. In summary, all participants in the study were provided a written document of their rights as subjects in human research. The document was written in their mother tongue. An oral explanation was provided along with an opportunity to ask questions and receive explanations.

Only participants who agreed in writing were included in this study. No minors were interviewed.

Interviews.

Interviews served as the primary source of obtaining data. The authors used proven questioning techniques such as asking pre-suppositional questions and probing (Patton, 1990). The pre-written questions served as a guide rather than a rigid checklist. The interviews were sometimes conducted in English and sometimes with an English/Chinese translator. Therefore, “have-I-understood-you” questions played an important part in the interviews (Young & Tardif, 1992).

Purposeful sampling strengthened the authors’ ability to select interviewees with meaningful information. The small sample population did not allow for random sampling. Purposeful sampling allowed the investigator to select participants who would yield rich information, credible knowledge, and informed opinions for analysis (Patton, 1987). The names of the interviewees were changed to protect their anonymity. Regarding the method for selecting the program participants interviewed, the researchers relied on participants who were available at the time and willing to volunteer as subjects.

Observations.

The main author used a three-step process for conducting observations. First, he clarified his role in the research process. Second, he developed goals for the observations. Third, he relied on a specified process to use during the observations. The primary observation sites were the Volunteer Center where he observed academic classes, enrichment activities, and children simply enjoying free time; homes of the migrant workers where he observed interactions between the Volunteer Center staff and the families; and the neighborhoods of the program participant in which he observed the day-to-day cycles of life as well as the economic and social conditions.

The role the main author chose was one of “observer as participant” (Glesner, 1999). In other words, he engaged in limited interactions with the program participants while he conducted observations. The goal of the observations focused on understanding the research setting, its participants, and their behavior. In order to do so he purposely assumed a learner’s role and tried to see the phenomena in a fresh way (Erickson, 1984). The process of conducting the observations consisted of observing the setting, participants, events and acts

within the events; observing by means of a broad sweep; and finally, searching for problems or paradoxes facing the group (Popkewitz & Tabachnick, 1981).

Methods of Data Analysis

Data analyses involved synthesizing categories, searching for patterns, and interpreting data. The analytical process began with the main author hand writing memos to self about the observations and interviews. The act of writing freed the researchers for new thoughts and perspectives. The main author then organized the contents of the interview transcripts and observations into broad categories such as people and places. As the analysis continued, the categories became more specific.

After developing categories, the process of coding began. As with the categories, the coding at the onset of the analysis employed simple codes, but then became more focused and nuanced as concepts emerged. As the coding progressed, the researchers organized like-minded pieces of data into “data clumps” to create an organizational framework. The data clumps were further sorted into sub-codes. As a final step, the main author organized the sub-codes into a meaningful sequence that revealed insights into the research questions.

Instruments

The instruments consisted of a question matrix, a table of interviewees, and an interview guide. The question matrix described what the researchers needed to know, why they needed to know it, the type of data that would provide the information, and where the information could be found. The themes of the question matrix mirrored those of the interview questions mentioned previously.

Validity

The researchers anticipated two major threats to validity. First, would their ethnocentric biases distort the results? Second, how would they know that the interviewees were not telling them what they thought they wanted to hear? The researchers addressed these validity issues through four recognized strategies of qualitative research (Creswell & Creswell, 2014).

First, the study made use of triangulation, that is, multiple data collection methods (interviews and observations) as well as multiple sources: parents, volunteers, program staff, and former program participants. During analysis, greater confidence was attached to conclusions from multiple methods and sources. Second, the researchers constantly searched for disconfirming evidence. For instance, since the concept of social capital was presupposed to be significant, there was an effort made to remain mindful of the need to look for negative examples. Third, the researchers strove to reflect upon their subjectivity. For example, the inclination to conduct fieldwork in the role of “observer as participant,” mentioned previously, at times influenced the relationship with the interviewees. Fourth, the research data included rich, thick descriptions, which in turn, allows the reader to vicariously enter the research context.

Phase One Sample Description

The researchers interviewed five informants during phase one. The informants possessed characteristics vital to illuminating the research question. These informants included the staff and volunteers of the Teen Center, parents, and a private school headmaster (see Table 1). The researchers chose the informants based on word-of-mouth connections and the willingness of the informants to participate in the study.

Table 1 Participants in Phase One Interviews

Name	Place of Interview	Role
Ms. Sylvia	Teen Center	Program director
Mr. Li	Teen Center	Parent 1
Mr. Xu	Home	Parent 2
Mr. Yang	Home	Parent 3
Mr. Wu	School office	Headmaster of private school for migrant children
Mr. Hu	Teen Center	Volunteer chemistry teacher

Phase Two Sample Description

Phase two interviews took place approximately four years after phase one interviews. Unlike phase one, which focused on the context, phase two questions

focused on the program outcomes. Consequently, the interview sample included young adults, 18 years of age, who had aged out of the program. These young people had been 14-year-old cohorts during the first phase; they had been observed, but not interviewed. The researchers also interviewed the new director, former program participants, and the program’s founder (see Table 2). Quite simply, the sample was selected because they were available at the time of the study.

Table 2 Participants in Phase Two Interviews

Name	Sex	Age	Hometown Province	Role
Ms. Moon	Female	20	Anhui	Current program director Former program participant
May	Female	18	Anhui	Former program participant
Helena	Female	18	Shaanxi	Former program participant
Bianca	Female	18	Anhui	Former program participant
Salin	Female	18	Jiangsu	Former program participant
Isabella	Female	18	Jiangxi	Former program participant
Mr. Zhang	Male	Unknown	Shanghai	Program founder

Limitations

Four areas limited the validity of the study. First of all, the researchers observed only small pieces of a holistic year-round program. Next, the main author lacked Chinese language skills and significant knowledge of the culture. Consequently, he could not, independently, fully understand the interviews and observations. Third, the phase two sample pool was limited to program participants that the author was able to locate four years after phase one. And finally, the use of an interpreter during the interviews compromised confidentiality. Therefore, the informants may have been guarded in their responses to the interview questions.

As a last note regarding methods, the reader may refer to Leitch¹, for a study of a re-entry program for incarcerated youth in Latvia that used similar methods.

¹ D. Leitch (2006). *The road to dignity: A qualitative investigation of a Latvian re-entry program for incarcerated youth* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Wisconsin-Madison, Madison, WI.

Results

Phase One Results

Volunteer Center Context

Sitting above a row of small service-oriented shops, in a gritty, industrialized section of Shanghai, the Volunteer Center's location reflected the daily life of the migrant worker. During the day, the owner of the shop below the Center rolled up the steel panel doors to reveal his trade: engine repair, tire repair, and small-scale fabrication. In the cool of the evening shadows, the family squatted or sat on simple benches in front of the shop chatting, cooking on a small stove, mending clothes, and doing laundry in a bucket. As darkness crept in, the family retired to an elevated loft in the rear of the shop and rolled out their bamboo sleeping mats under a single, harsh, incandescent light bulb dangling from the ceiling. Behind the Volunteer Center, steel girders lie piled like dry desert islands of rust. Throughout the day, the nerve-shattering boom and clang of the overhead crane moving the girders reverberated against the Center's windows. Steel was one of the heavy industries that drew migrant workers to the east coast of China. Hundreds of thousands more followed in their footsteps to work in supportive service industries. These workers depended on the committed staff and workers of the Volunteer Center to help their children succeed.

The Role of Staff and Volunteers

The eager students stood up as the chemistry teacher entered the room. Friday had begun to slip away as the sun journeyed beneath the soot-lined roof tops. Nevertheless, ten eager teens had gathered at the center for tutoring in chemistry. Mr. Hu, a tall, enthusiastic young man in his late twenties, taught chemistry at the local high school during the week. Yet, in spite of his exhausting schedule, he volunteered on Friday evenings to help the children of the migrant workers get caught up on their studies. Mr. Hu exemplified the spirit of volunteerism that permeated the Center's program. In fact, numerous volunteers, many of them university students from the prestigious Fudan University, tutored the students in mandatory academic courses. Other volunteers taught a variety of enrichment

courses, such as music, art, and even the stage craft of illusions. Volunteerism played a key role in the success of the program. Mr. Hu's chemistry class represented one of many classes led by volunteers that the author of this paper observed.

Ms. Sylvia served as the Center's paid director. In her role as director, she wore many hats. She taught three academic classes: Two English classes for grades six and nine as well as a grade six math class. In addition to teaching, Ms. Sylvia ran the entire operations of the Center. This included coordinating the 10 volunteers, scheduling the classes, and planning the concerts and sporting events held throughout the year. Ms. Sylvia described the biggest annual event, the three-week Hometown Road Show. The historical context of the nearby provinces influenced the design of the Road Show. The Road Show's route followed the journey of Chairman Mao Zedong's fighters through the countryside; a program design feature presumably included to garner the support of local officials.

For the past three years I have traveled with the Hometown Road Show. During these tours, our students travel to the countryside and perform free performances in the villages. The Hometown Road Show provides opportunities for our students to communicate with kids in the villages, see how they study and live, and try to know more about the countryside. (Sylvia, personal communication, September 20, 2010, interviewer D. Leitch)

Before assuming the role of director, Ms. Sylvia volunteered for six months while still a student at Fudan University. After graduating, Mr. Zhang, the program's founder, invited her to assume the director's position. Ms. Sylvia's favorite part of her role was learning something new every day about her own self and about the job. She felt that the biggest challenge was recruiting students. Ms. Sylvia also built relationships with parents. Parental approval was vital in her efforts to recruit students while, at the same time, parental expectations created challenges for recruitment. For instance, according to the data gathered from the interview with Sylvia, parents often pushed for a strictly academic curriculum, but the Volunteer Center was committed to a more holistic approach. Thus, the Center's program design walked a fine line between the conflicting priorities.

In addition to her numerous responsibilities at the Center, Ms. Sylvia made regular home visits to talk with the students' parents. The home visits served to strengthen the relationship with parents, increased the understanding of the students' home lives, and encouraged parental support and participation. Participation in the after-school program required a modest, but mandatory fee. The author accompanied Sylvia on two home visits described in the following paragraphs.

Communication with Families

The first family, the Li's, lived in a traditional Chinese one-story communal house accessed through a labyrinth of narrow alleys. The Li family occupied one room of the communal building. Their room included a partitioned off sleeping area, kitchen, and small dining table. The room opened up into a courtyard crisscrossed with sagging wires heavy with drying clothes. Multiple families shared a single bathroom and toilet. Communal houses like this, akin to small villages inside the megacity of Shanghai, were being constantly razed to make way for new high-rise apartment buildings.

Mrs. Li, the mother, was away working as a clerk in a grocery store, while the father, Mr. Li, welcomed us into their home. He offered us a few dishes of cooked vegetables for lunch. Mr. Li worked as a long-distance truck driver for one of Shanghai's major steel companies. Considered a good job, his regular route kept him away from home most days of the week. His 14-year old daughter, Lulu, attended the Volunteer Center.

During the visit, Mr. Li expressed great concern for his 16-year old son, Bing, who had dropped out of school, roamed the streets with his friends, and demanded money from his parents lest he should resort to criminal behavior to fund his carefree lifestyle. The father felt guilty that he was not home often enough to properly supervise his son. Furthermore, Mr. Li thought that his wife was rather lax in discipline. Ms. Sylvia took advantage of the opportunity and passed along some parenting tips. Although the visit did not provide any immediate solutions for the distraught father, it did help solidify the relationship between the family and Ms. Sylvia.

The second family, the Xu's, lived in a high-rise apartment complex. Mr. Xu, the father, graciously welcomed Ms. Sylvia into his home for a meal. Like the Li's,

they occupied a single room in the communal apartment and shared a small bathroom and kitchen with another family. Mr. Xu's two daughters, Helena and Nancy attended the Volunteer Center.

The Xu family home consisted of two beds, a stool, a small coffee table, a dresser, and a television. They covered the beds with bamboo mats, slid the coffee table between the beds, and served dinner. Mr. Xu, Ms. Sylvia, Helena, and Nancy sat on the beds with their knees practically touching the opposite bed.

The Xu's considered themselves well-off in comparison to other migrant workers. They have owned and operated a butcher shop for the past 17 years. Mr. Xu left for the shop at 3 a.m. every morning to prepare the meat for the daily customers. He returned at noon while the wife attended the shop the rest of the day. Every afternoon after school Mr. Xu accompanied his daughters to the Volunteer Center; a 60-minute round trip bus trip, and then returned to pick them up later in the evening. The family displayed a quiet dignity and expressed pride in what they had accomplished since arriving from the village.

Ms. Sylvia also purposefully connected with the third set of parents, Mr. Yang and his wife, at the Center. Mr. Yang, a sturdily-built man in his mid-thirties, arrived at the Volunteer Center in the evening to pick up his twin son and daughter. His children were new to the Center; beginning only the previous week. Mr. Yang and his family migrated to Shanghai from rural Anhui province 12 years ago. He was drawn to Shanghai because of the opportunities to earn a higher salary for himself and improved educational opportunities for his children. Mr. Yang still owned a house in the village but the house sat empty. Due to the mass migration to urban centers mostly only the children and the elderly remain in the rural villages, and as a result, many houses sit vacant.

Mr. Yang worked as a local truck driver while his wife peddled fruit on the street. They occupied a single-family, one-bedroom apartment with a private living room; a rare luxury for migrant workers in Shanghai.

Although the Yangs' children struggled in the areas of math and English, they recently scored high on their exams and subsequently were promoted from the migrant school to a public middle school; a fact that obviously made Mr. Yang proud. He hoped that the academic tutoring offered by the Center would improve his children's math and English skills.

In summary, during phase one, the researchers collected data from visiting the homes of the migrant children's families, participating and observing in the

day-to-day operations of the Volunteer Center, and interviewing Volunteer Center staff. No children were interviewed during phase one due to the restrictions of the Institutional Review Board protocols of the University of Wisconsin-Platteville. However, four years later, when the children had become of age, the research team interviewed them as young adults. The following section on phase two included that interview data.

Phase Two Results

Changes at the Volunteer Center

Four years later, much had changed at the Volunteer Center. The Center had moved from the gritty, industrialized neighborhood to a second-floor complex of rooms in an upscale shopping and dining district near Fudan University. The new location put the Center within easy walking distance of the university and in an area frequented by university students. As a result, university students could conveniently and safely walk to the Center to volunteer.

Other changes occurred as well. Ms. Sylvia had moved on and her position had been assumed by Ms. Moon, a former participant in the program. In addition, many of the other former program participants from phase one now volunteered their time at the Center. The main author of this article contacted these former participants for interviews through Ms. Moon. All interviews in phase two took place at the Volunteer Center with the exception of Mr. Zhang, who was interviewed at summer camp.

Program Participants Explain Reasons for Migrating to Shanghai

The former program participants reasons for moving to Shanghai varied and the early age of the interviewees at the time clouded their memories of the event; in fact, some of the participants had no recollection of the move whatsoever. However, May and Helena recalled that their families migrated because of economic reasons. May's family came from a region that experienced a severe drought. Subsequently, their crops failed, they lost their wages, and her father left the farm to seek work in the city. He lived alone in Shanghai for seven years while he sent money home to support his family. Eventually, May and her mother

joined him, but her grandparents continued to live in Anhui. Helena's and Bianca's fathers, in contrast, both came to Shanghai as teenagers seeking employment. They later married women from their home provinces and brought their brides back to Shanghai.

Early School Experiences of Program Participants

The interviewees provided vivid descriptions of their early school experiences. May went to an unregistered school for migrant children. Her classmates came from rural provinces such as Anhui, Jiangxi, and Sichuan. The teachers at May's school, for the most part, lacked proper teaching credentials. Some of them had attained only middle or high school levels themselves. May cited rampant cheating and the low expectations of teachers as the primary obstacles to her education; particularly, her pursuit of English language proficiency. In summary, she described her classes as just play.

Helena, on the other hand, loved her kindergarten and primary school. She attended an unregistered private school taught by teachers from her home province of Shaanxi. Although she remembers the tuition and meals being costly, and a burden to her family, the overall experience left a warm impression on her memory. However, when she entered middle school her feelings changed. Helena attended a registered private middle school. In other words, the government subsidized the cost of the tuition and meals. As part and parcel of subsidizing the school, the government exerted more control over the hiring of teachers. As a result, the teachers of the school were Shanghai residents as opposed to teachers from Helena's hometown province. Helena perceived that the local teachers did not care to work with the children of migrant workers. She stated, "They lost their sense of duty" and appeared unconcerned about the children's learning. In retrospect, Helena concluded that she "hated" middle school. She now attends an applied technology school and studies business English.

In contrast to Helena, Bianca studied at a public school in a self-contained classroom for migrant children. She did not share much about her middle school experience during the interview. However, Bianca seemed very pleased about her present studies in economics at the applied technology school. She stated, "I'm happy because everyone is equal; there are local students as well as students from all over China" (personal communication, July 28, 2013, interviewer D.

Leitch). Bianca, barred from going directly from high school to a Shanghai university because of her lack of *hukou*, will first attend an applied technology school. After two years at the applied technology school, Bianca will be eligible to take the entrance examination for the university.

Salin and Isabella took similar pathways. Both went to private, registered charter schools. The teachers at the school were ineffective and the students played more than they studied. Now, both Salin and Isabella study chemistry at the applied technology school. For Salin, the experience of studying with local Shanghai students “changed her life.” The high expectations of the teacher and the competition with the local students forced her to work harder. “We had to prove ourselves,” Isabella added. Isabella went on to explain that, while most of her classmates had internships in nearby factories, she had an internship in the office of the German firm BASF as a project planner. She felt fortunate to have this opportunity.

Ms. Moon, the current director of the program, went to an unregistered migrant school until her last year of primary school. For her last year, she returned to her hometown for school and lived with her grandparents. However, she experienced difficulties living with them and subsequently returned to Shanghai with her parents. She re-enrolled in an unregistered migrant school. After graduating from high school, Ms. Moon completed a nine-month scholarship at Pearson United World College of the Pacific (UWC) in British Columbia, Canada. She then returned to Shanghai to assume her position as director of the Volunteer Center. She hoped to return to Canada to pursue a four-year college degree.

The Influence of the Volunteer Center

Helena first came to the Volunteer Center because she enjoyed dancing and the volunteer dance instructor at the Center recognized her potential. Furthermore, Helena was strongly influenced by the circle of friends she encountered as well as the English classes. Helena and her friends were better able to make sense of the lessons through cooperative learning.

Along with Helena, Saline also mentioned the strength and richness of friendships as a positive influence on her life. Along with her friends, Saline participated in summer English, Chinese, and math courses. These courses

helped to prepare her for examinations. Mr. Zhang, the program's founder, strongly influenced her life by opening up doors of opportunity; for instance, he helped her to get admitted into the public high school. He also showed his care in practical ways such as taking her to weekly doctor's visits after she broke her arm. In summary, Saline thought that the Volunteer Center transformed her life; she learned how to be independent, how to think, and how to communicate with others.

Isabella, like Helena, was drawn to the Center because of her interest in the extra-curricular activities. For Isabella it was the children's choir. She first learned about the choir from a recruiting trip Mr. Zhang made to her school. Isabella cherished the warm friendships and sense of community present in the choir. After primary school, Mr. Zhang tutored her in mathematics so that she could attend a high quality middle school. Isabella summed up the influence of the Volunteer Center in her life as: "friendships, understanding the value of life, and inspiration" (personal communication, July 16, 2013, interviewer D. Leitch).

The children's choir also played a major role in Bianca's life. At first, she could not pass the choir exam because she did not know the various roles of alto, soprano, bass, etc. But after studying, she passed the exam, and joined the group. Thereafter, the choir gave her a warm sense of belonging. She cherished her friends, their shared backgrounds, and hanging out. She described her friendships at the Center as "beautiful." She credited Mr. Zhang for training her to deal with many of life's problems.

May also credited Mr. Zhang for her growth as a person. When she first joined the Volunteer Center, the program was not yet funded. Consequently, the program consisted of one room with some toys, books, and a computer. The choir, dancing, and other activities had not yet been developed. May describes Mr. Zhang as a lifelong friend and teacher, a mentor who led her to "think for myself, understand the world, and dream" (personal communication, July 13, 2013, interviewer D. Leitch).

As would be expected, Ms. Moon, the oldest, had the most to say about the influence of the Volunteer Center on her life. Ms. Moon's uncle was the headmaster of a school for migrant children. When she was in second grade, Mr. Zhang, who was then still a student at Fudan University, came to the school to recruit students for the program. Since then, Mr. Zhang has been Ms. Moon's lifelong mentor. "When I have a question, and can't find an answer, I will talk to

him; not for getting an answer but just for getting advice” (personal communication, July 28, 2013, interviewer D. Leitch). Mr. Zhang taught Ms. Moon to be a “tough person”; strong and independent. Ms. Moon recalled: “He acted like lighting on the street, guiding me in the way I should go, and helping me when I’d lost my way” (personal communication, July 28, 2013, interviewer D. Leitch). But as she grew older, Ms. Moon began to think more independently: “When I became more grown-up, sometimes I felt that he was wrong and I’d try to fight against him” (personal communication, July 28, 2013, interviewer D. Leitch).

Future Plans

Regarding plans for the future, Bianca desired to pursue a career in human resource management, but lacking a degree, acknowledged that more education was required for her to gain recognition. Isabella, on the other hand, shied away from making ambitious future plans: “I think the dream is temporary and not realistic. I’m lucky to work at BASF. I want to stay at this company, work hard, prove myself, and advance my career” (personal communication, July 28, 2013, interviewer D. Leitch).

Helena planned to study diligently in an applied technology school, attend UWC, and in the distant future, become a psychologist. Saline hoped to continue lifelong learning pursuits, open a clothing shop, design her own brand, and eventually get married. May stated that she felt confused about her future. She described her state as “still trying.” Finally, Ms. Moon focused on pursuing higher education in Canada. She planned to read more books, improve different aspects of her life, and eventually get a job.

The Volunteer Center may play an important role in the future plans of these young people. The life-long friendships, long-term mentoring, and access to opportunities through the social capital networks may certainly shape the events of their lives in ways that this research study was not designed to measure.

The Summer Camp

Following the interviews at the Volunteer Center, Mr. Zhang drove Ms. Moon, May, Helena, and the author to a summer camp for migrant workers’ children run

by volunteers from the Center. The camp took place on the second floor of a detention center run by the government for migrant workers and their families. The government provided the facilities free of charge to the Volunteer Center. Not all migrant laborers successfully found employment after arriving in Shanghai. In fact, some migrants and their families found themselves out of work, homeless, and in very dire straits. The government temporarily housed and fed these destitute individuals and families at the detention center before sending them back to their hometowns by train.

The detention center stood on the outskirts of Shanghai where the colossal apartment complexes of the mega-city gave way to more modest one and two-story structures. Chickens scurried out of the way on the unimproved narrow roads. Upstairs in the detention center, the exuberant voices of children echoed along the hallways. The children were enjoying their free time; some played ping-pong, others played board games, a few quietly read books, but most simply played spontaneously as children are prone to do. Later, after lunch, volunteer staff taught classes in art, music, dancing, and music. Backpacks and sleeping rolls of mats and blankets lined the hallways. The children attended the residential camp for two weeks. The campers came both from the families housed at the detention center and from the surrounding neighborhood. The staff consisted of a mix of graduates from the Volunteer Center program and outside volunteers.

Summary of Phase One and Phase Two Results

Although, in the interval between phases one and two, significant changes had taken place in regards to the program's location and the departure of Sylvia left a potential leadership vacuum, the program demonstrated resilience in adhering to its core mission. Ms. Moon, a former program participant stepped in to assume leadership and the move to a location closer to Fudan University promised to increase volunteer involvement. Concurrently, program participants graduating from high school described examples of successful integration into Shanghai's applied technology schools. Furthermore, some of the young people hoped to use applied technology school placements as a stepping stone into the university system.

Discussion

As stated in the methods, the main author intended to use the construct of social capital to guide the research design and aid in the analysis of the results. Therefore, the discussion is loosely organized into two parts. The first part discusses the role of social capital while the second part explores the original research questions from the viewpoint of the data collected.

The Role of the Program's Staff

Mr. Zhang, the founder, provided an example of the three types of social capital: bonding, linking, and bridging. Bonding social capital revealed itself in Mr. Zhang's roles as a friend and mentor to program participants. He maintained a long-term commitment to their well-being and developmental needs. Mr. Zhang demonstrated linking social capital through recruiting volunteers, fund raising, and publicizing the activities of the Volunteer Center. Sylvia characterized Mr. Zhang as "charismatic" while Ms. Moon portrayed him as a "guiding light." Bridging social capital facilitated Mr. Zhang's efforts as he opened up opportunities for students, such as Bianca, to attend public schools. Bridging social capital may also have been part of the Volunteer Center's success in forming successful public/private partnerships. For example, it gained the free use of the second floor of the detention center for migrant workers for the summer school. In addition to forming successful partnerships within China, bridging social capital enabled the Volunteer Center to cooperate with international entities as well; for instance, facilitating the scholarship for Ms. Moon to attend UWC.

Likewise, during phase one, the success of Ms. Sylvia, the program's director, also relied on a rich network of social capital. Her access to bonding social capital enabled her to connect with students and retain them in the program. Whereas her linking social capital network opened doors for her to build trust and reciprocity with school headmasters and parents.

The Role of Friendships

Friendships proved to be the glue that kept the participants for the long term. All

of the interviewees mentioned friendships as a positive aspect of the program. In fact, the author of this article was surprised how easily the director, Ms. Moon, organized the interviews; a process facilitated by the Chinese social media network QQ. A curious feature of the interview sample, however, was the lack of male cohort member participation. This lack of male participation in the interviews evoked curiosity because the author observed boys in the program during the phase one. This may be an example of how excessively strong bonding capital may lead to exclusion of others. Or perhaps fewer males finished the program than females. This phenomenon may indicate the importance of bonding social capital in program participant retention. The study did not illuminate these questions; rather, the main author merely puts them forth as possible avenues for future research.

The Role of Cultural Identity

Albeit that cultural identity was not an outcome of the program, a surprise for the authors was the significant role cultural identity played in the students' perceptive of their early school experiences. Bonding social capital due to cultural identity may have influenced Helena's warm memories at the unregistered school for migrant children. Even though the teachers hired for the unregistered school did not have high credentials, the fact that they spoke the local dialect and shared the culture of Helena's home province may have led to the strong bond of attachment.² In contrast, Helena and the other students expressed indignation that the teachers from the registered charter schools, more highly qualified but residents of Shanghai, "lost their duty" and let the class play rather than pursue academics. The authors did not interview any teachers, but perhaps one may speculate that these teachers were dissatisfied with their low status role as teachers of migrant children.

² This finding supports similar research conducted in Beijing. Researchers interviewed migrant children regarding their perceptions of public schools and migrant schools. This research also suggested that the children of migrant workers recognized the value of the higher academic standards of public schools, but at times still preferred the migrant schools where they felt a stronger sense of belonging. V. L. Fong & R. Murphy (2006). *Chinese citizenship: Views from the margins*. Abingdon, England: Routledge.

Program Outcomes: Question 1

The first question guiding this investigation, “How does context influence the philosophy, design and operations of the program?” may be analyzed by breaking the question into two parts: (1) philosophy; and (2) design and operations. The descriptions below omit sensitive information at the request of the interviewees and based on the judgment of the authors.

Philosophy

The philosophical orientation of the program rested upon the beliefs of Mr. Zhang, the program’s founder. Although Mr. Zhang did not explicitly share his philosophy with the author, he did establish the mission of the Center described at the beginning of the article, so the interviews with the students yielded a few insights. Helena mentioned “understanding the value of life.” Bianca noted that she learned how to deal with life’s problems. May developed the ability to “think for herself, understand the world, and dream.” Meanwhile, Ms. Moon grew in her ability to “be strong and independent.” As an interesting side note, the philosophy of the program, according to Sylvia, at times conflicted with parental desires that the Volunteer Center focus strictly on academics rather than on holistic youth development.

Design and Operations

The program’s setting in Shanghai most strongly influenced the Volunteer Center’s design and operations. Shanghai residents viewed their city as a hub for international business. This international business climate provided important assets for the program. Expatriates in Shanghai for business or study acted as a pool for recruiting volunteers; especially in the area of English language tutoring. The volunteer base at the internationally recognized Fudan University, both foreign and Chinese, prompted the Volunteer Center to move closer the university. International businesses also brought with them a culture of philanthropy. This philanthropic corporate culture assisted the Center’s fundraising efforts. Overall, Shanghai’s resource rich environment of service clubs, expatriate communities, and openness to the outside world provided a fertile incubator for entrepreneurial

non-governmental organizations such as the Volunteer Center.

Program Outcomes: Question 2

The second question guiding this investigation was, “Did the program’s design lead to desired outcomes?” The desired outcomes, as previously stated by the Volunteer Center were, “To improve the quality of life for underprivileged children by equipping them with confidence, open-mindedness, and charitable giving.” The following paragraphs examine the data related to these three hoped for outcomes.

First, regarding confidence, Bianca’s experience studying with the local Shanghai students led her to share, “I’m happy because everyone is equal.” In other words, she no longer felt like a second-class citizen shut out from opportunities afforded Shanghai residents. Isabella described being “inspired” by the volunteer program. May concluded that the program provided her the ability to “dream.” Both inspiration and dreaming allude to having a measure of confidence and optimism about the future.

Concerning the second outcome, many of the program participants also made comments related to open-mindedness. Saline gave credit to the Volunteer Center for teaching her “how to think, and how to communicate with others.” Isabella mentioned “understanding the values of life.” Similarly, May credited the program for helping her to “understand the world.” As Ms. Moon matured, the mentoring she received strengthened her ability to “think more independently.”

Lastly, observations of the actions of the program participants, along with interviews, provided insights into the Center’s stated goal of instilling the value of charitable giving. Although not observed directly by the author, the Hometown Road Show, described previously by Ms. Sylvia, focused on service learning in the rural villages; for instance, free performances at retirement homes for the elderly. Perhaps of more significance, the author observed the internalization of charitable giving by former program participants at the summer camp held in the detention center. While there, the author observed at least a half a dozen current and former program participants working as assistants. These assistants, both teens and young adults, volunteered their time and talents to help operate the camp.

In summary, regarding the question, “Did the Volunteer Center improve the

quality of life of the underprivileged children?" in light of the data the author collected over the four-year life of the research project, and keeping in mind the limitations of the methods used, the analysis affirmed the success of the hoped for outcomes of the program.

Implications

As part of an overall strategy for reform including revising the *hukou* system, promoting the economic development of rural and western China, and restructuring Shanghai's schools, the Volunteer Center plays a crucial role in helping China's especially vulnerable young people. A rich network of social capital strengthens the ability of the Center to galvanize a diverse volunteer base, recruit marginalized students, gain the support of parents, cooperate with government agencies, connect with international supporters, and produce positive results. Granted, the data suggests that the success of the program rests heavily on the shoulders of the visionary founder, Mr. Zhang; yet the model deserves thoughtful consideration by policy-makers, funders, and practitioners for dissemination and possible replication in other parts of China.

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