

Running Head: IDENTITIES IN MULTICULTURAL LEARNING CONTEXTS

Constructing identities in multicultural learning contexts

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ABSTRACT

In this paper we examine two concepts which aid our understanding of processes of identification in multiethnic schools. The first concept focuses on the complementarity of “three processes of identity” (identifying the other, being identified and self-identification). This is brought together with the concept of sociocultural coupling introduced to examine the co-constructions of changes in practices (across places and times) and changes in identification. The analysis draws on an interview with a pupil, Monifa, a Black African (Nigerian) girl (aged 10 years) and on an interview with a Pakistani teacher, Shazia. Although Shazia and Monifa belonged to different generations (i.e. a pupil/daughter and a teacher/mother) and different cultural groups (British born Black African and Pakistani Kashmiri) the same identity processes could be applied to the data. They both articulated accounts of “identifying the other”, “being identified” and “self-identification,” which emphasized their transitions between cultural practices and multiple communities. Furthermore, we propose that sociocultural coupling has enabled us to understand the means by which aspects of cultural practices borrowed from home and school, allows them to reproduce aspects of their home cultural identity and at other times to transform these identities.

INTRODUCTION

In this paper we discuss the cultural identities of an ethnic minority pupil and teacher in relation to mathematics learning in multicultural communities. Against a backdrop of research which understands learning as situated in socio-political and cultural contexts, we articulate two concepts which aid our understanding of identity in multiethnic schools. The first concept focuses on the complementarity of “three processes of identity;” identifying the other, being identified and self-identification (Abreu & Cline, 2003) whereby identities are reconstructed through belonging to, and engaging with, communities of practice. The second concept focuses on sociocultural coupling, introduced to examine the co-constructions of changes in practices (across places and times) and changes in identification. It is argued that in the transition between different communities of practice (in this case home and school) a process of “coupling” (Beach, 1999) may occur which describes changes and transformations as the individual moves across different activities, times and places. The concept of sociocultural coupling enables us to examine identity processes for the minority pupil or teacher, which take shape in transitions.

In the last decades there has been a growing body of evidence which suggests that home and school mathematics is not only a culturally situated practice, but a mediational influence on the construction of representations, meaning and identities of the learner. The transition process between home and school, as well as the mediational role of significant others (like parents, teachers and friends) in multicultural settings has a potentially powerful impact on the learner identity. Ethnic minority children have to manage diverse cultural and social practices in their transitions between home and

school. The ways in which they experience their learning in these contexts impacts on what they do (their practices) and also in how they develop identities. A particular interest for those studying learner identities in multicultural contexts is the processes by which ethnic minority learners understand their identities, the ways in which different communities of practice impact on those identities and in what ways significant others mediate the identities.

EXPLORING IDENTITY WITH MONIFA AND SHAZIA

To illustrate the three processes of identity and the process of sociocultural coupling, which will be discussed in greater detail in a moment, we have drawn selectively from a wider study exploring parents' and teachers' representations of their children's mathematics learning in multicultural schools. In this study we used an ethnographic approach which combined extensive participant observations, semi-structured interviews and a story completion task with children in year 2 (ages 6/7 years) and year 6 (ages 10/11 years), along with some of their parents and teachers.

This paper will use the semi-structured interview of Monifa (a pupil) and Shazia (a teacher) to exemplify the theoretical concepts presented here. The form of semi-structured interview utilized in this study was the episodic interview. The episodic interview develops links between subjective definitions of topic concepts, and the concrete examples of situations described by the participant. The episodic interview question is therefore set out in two parts, the first part asking for an opinion about the topic (i.e. Does anyone in your family help you with your maths homework?) and the second

part of the question invites the concrete response (i.e. Can you tell me about a typical situation?).

As such, this technique is supported by narrative-episodic assumptions around forms of knowledge which are told through examples that connect experience to concrete situations. Forms of knowledge presented through this interview technique are also representational in that they are about abstract assumptions. In this way the episodic interview is able to tap into those most salient experiences and captures momentary reflections on past situations and the explanations that the participant uses to make sense of them. This technique was originally designed by Flick (2000) to support investigations into social representations but has been used in this instance to support the examination of identities in the individual realm.

The reasons for using the cases of Monifa and Shazia are twofold: firstly, both are from an ethnic minority group and have had experience of making home/school community transitions within the English school system. Secondly, both Monifa and Shazia were able to clearly articulate their own roles and the roles of others within their communities. These revealed how they linked their representations of self-identification and the identification of others, and how others identify them in the everyday relationships with significant people (e.g. parents, teachers, friends). Furthermore, as an ethnic minority pupil and teacher in an English school, salient aspects of identity, which might not otherwise be considered even when they exist, are laid bear.

Monifa was the high achieving daughter of a Black African (Nigerian) family (aged 10 years old). She belonged to a multicultural school in a fairly large industrial town in the South East of England. Her father was a 40 year old I.T. consultant who was

in the process of producing an interactive mathematics website marketed at schools. Her mother was self-employed and in the process of starting a new business as a party organizer. Both parents were educated to degree standard. Monifa's father had lived in Britain until he was seven years old, when his family had returned to Nigeria for the rest of his school education. He later returned to England as an adult. Monifa was born and educated in the UK and was the oldest of three siblings. She told the interviewer that at home with her parents and grandparents she spoke English and Nigerian.

Monifa described three significant communities in her life: (a) her home community, which mostly revolved around her parents, (b) her school community, that revolved around her teacher and (c) her friends, who physically crossed over into both the home and school community. Two dominant representations emerged within the context of her descriptions of these communities. These were Monifa's representation of academic achievement and her representation of her home and school cultural practices. The analysis reveals that the teachers and parents were particularly key contributors to the ways in which Monifa experienced the impact of these representations of achievement and culture in her identity as an ethnic minority pupil.

Shazia was a class teacher of year 6 (ages 10/11 years) pupils in a school which mostly catered for children who were from a South Asian (Pakistani Kashmiri) background. The percentage of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds in this school was 96%. Out of all the children in the school, 88% were from South Asian communities (Pakistani, Indian and Bangladeshi). Shazia's interview has been used to understand issues of identity development in multicultural learning contexts because (a) as a fourth-generation immigrant in the UK her experiences may echo those of the children in a

multiethnic classroom (b) she was the only ethnic minority teacher interviewed and (c) she reflected deeply on cultural aspects relating to identity. Since Shazia teaches such a high proportion of pupils from a South Asian background many of the comments she makes throughout the interview refer specifically to this general ethnic group.

IDENTITY AND SOCIOCULTURAL COUPLING

Exploring the Three Processes of Identity Development

When addressing issues of identity we combine the idea that the development of identities in learning is associated with specific practices, with the idea that understandings of identity involve access to social representations (Duveen, 2001). In this approach, mathematical learner identities are based on forms of knowledge that are historically produced and concurrently transformed. Thus, the representational aspect of knowledge has a double character. It is the representation of something (and therefore a cultural tool) and of someone (and therefore seen as associated to specific social groups). We see these representations as a type of cultural artifact, a representation is something that mediates what we do. In other words they are “modes of action” whereby, in conjunction with objects, actions are undertaken (Wartofsky, 1979). Our identities are informed by these representations.

The three complementary processes of (a) identifying the other, (b) being identified and (c) self-identification provide the tools to understand the ways in which we go from being identified by others to self-identification. In this account of identity

development a fundamental idea is that the developing individual enter social practices that are already structured by social representations of the specific community (Duveen, 2001). Applying this idea to the newborn baby, one can, for example, argue that he or she arrives into a world where meanings for gender are already shared. Even before the developing individual enters a practice the existing members already have expectations, hopes, and aspirations for them. Parents for instance, imagine what they would like their child to be before they are born. These existing representations will structure and regulate the social practices. Continuing with the example of gender, for instance, parents dress, talk and act differently with their children if they are boys or girls. In other words the representations an existing member of a community holds about a practice will result in actions, discourses and relationships that extend identities to new members. In the initial stages of community belonging an individual may thus act through these extended social identities. These identities are part of the inter-psychological plane and as development progresses; internalized identities enable the individual to become a competent actor in a practice.

The three processes of identification may be summarized in the following way:

- a) Identifying the other – how the individual understands the social identities of “others” that are given by society (or that are dominant in the context of specific communities of practice).
- b) Being identified – how the individual understands the identity extended to them by “others.”
- c) Self-identification – how the individual internalizes and takes positionings in relation to identities that had previously existed in the social sphere.

These three complementary processes provide enough flexibility in the emergence of identity construction for the development to be unique and one of change. They are not fixed, but evolve through the interaction between the person and the sociocultural world.

Transitions between Communities and the Potential for “Sociocultural Coupling”

We argue that further interrogation of the process of change in identity, what is maintained or transformed, during transition between communities of practice would be of beneficial use. Notwithstanding challenges by some psychologists and educationalists to lay bear the problems with reductionist approaches of the role of multiple communities, research within mainstream psychology has tended to neglect the process of cultural change and transformation during transitions between contexts. Sociocultural coupling is a concept that can help do that, but first we focus on the transition aspect of that movement. The process of transition has the potential to challenge taken for granted meanings and require reconstructing meanings for the learner who goes between home and school. The dynamics of the two communities of home and school are such that meanings are constructed in these learning contexts, aspects of which remain stable during the transition, whilst other aspects are negotiated through engagement with practices and reviewed representations.

Transitions come in a number of different forms but the type of transition that a child makes between home and school may be referred to as a “collateral transition” where, historically speaking, activities are taking place simultaneously. These transitions

are consequential, because not only can they be a struggle, but also they have the potential to alter “one’s sense of self” (Beach, 1999, p. 114). In other words, they usually have an impact on the individual and the social context that they inhabit. The child is in a continuous process of moving between these two major communities of practice and whilst we do not wish to negate the presence of stability of meaning and identity, there is an element of (re)construction of meaning and identity as ongoing for all the key players of those communities.

We elucidate the negotiation of meaning and identity during transitions between contexts by drawing on the concept of coupling (Beach, 1999). When the concept of coupling was first introduced it was used to describe the means by which mathematical strategies employed at one socio-historical point in time can merge with mathematical strategies used at a different point in time. What emerge are combined strategies which alter the practices of the people using them, thereby enforcing new meaning systems.

Coupling is understood as a unit of analysis for that which

... encompasses aspects of both changing individuals and changing social activity.

The coupling itself is the primary unit of study and concern rather than the individual or the activity per se. The coupling assumes that individuals move across space, time, and changing social activities rather than being hermetically situated within an unchanging context. (Beach, 1999, p.120).

Borrowing the underlying principles of this concept we have adapted the notion of coupling to include a similar process for emergent meanings, representations and identities. While the child is experiencing two different contexts of home and school there develops a meaning system that utilizes aspects of both of these. These aspects may

be the construction of new knowledge, identities and representations. The process is one of change and transformation, so that children going between home and school find themselves in a situation of potential re-development. In light of this, “sociocultural coupling” aptly describes this inclusive phenomenon.

In this study we attempted to understand the ways in which the transition between the home and school community in multicultural contexts mediated the identity construction of an ethnic minority pupil and teacher. In particular, we are using the “three processes of identity construction” and the concept of “sociocultural coupling” to understand their identities in learning contexts. The case studies of Monifa and Shazia are used as exemplars to illustrate the potential ways in which transitional identities in multicultural contexts may be understood by those representing them. Furthermore, they are particularly useful in attempting to explore the use of the three processes of identity in relation to sociocultural coupling. While we have attempted to separate out the three process of identity construction to aid the readers understandings of the concepts, they are not necessarily experienced by the participants in this way. We would expect there are moments of obvious overlap within and between these processes.

It is important to note that the case studies only capture expressions of these processes in a particular occasion, the interview. The authors wish to make a clear exposition on the role of the researcher as a social actor within the research process. The interview process is not viewed as static, but co-constructive between two individuals at that given time. We recognize that the voices presented by the interviewees may have hidden motivations and a purpose outside of those of the research remit. The interview is a contrived situation in which the interviewer is generally not expected to reciprocate

knowledge, leaving the interviewee holding the “expert knowledge.” On the other hand, there are times when the interviewer breaks with convention and presents knowledge which the interviewee (in this case Monifa and Shazia) may not have constructed alone. This will be addressed in an ongoing way throughout the analysis. Understandably the direct focus of their individual narratives will be slightly different because of their different roles (i.e. pupil and teacher) and points in the course of their lifespan. The conceptual processes underpinning the narratives remain the same.

It is worth mentioning a further point at this juncture regarding the mathematical aspect of the study. While the lens of focus within the interviews were on school mathematics, all the participants in the study (including Monifa and Shazia) extended their accounts beyond mathematics to other areas of home and school learning as well. This does not appear to be uncommon and is described in other studies whereby mathematical concepts become hidden and implicit or participants describe themselves and others in a holistic way.

MONIFA: A CASE STUDY OF AN ETHNIC MINORITY PUPIL

Monifa on identifying the other

“Identifying the other” allows the child to construct meaningful representations, which may eventually become reflected in their self-identification system. Identity exists, not just through practice, but through broader social relationships. “Others” identification of “ourselves” often precedes our self-identification. For example, like many children

Monifa used descriptions of her classmates as markers for understanding achievement, and was very much aware of the positioning of herself and her classmates in terms of mathematics performance. Even more significant than the role of classmates, were the roles her parents and teachers played in developing her representations of cultural practices to explain the identities of “others.”

Added to this complex situation is the multicultural classroom, where the children come from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. Each child brings to the classroom various culturally constructed meanings that have made the transition between home and school. This would include the experiencing of both continuities and discontinuities that are in evidence during transition. Within communities of practice new meanings can lead to new identities. The meaning systems developed by the child in the transition process are partly formed by the mediational role performed by key others in the communities of practice.

Monifa gave an account in her interview of the cultural divides between home and school brought about by what she perceived as the power struggles between the teacher and her father. Monifa’s class teacher was White British and Monifa refers to her as Miss Durham. Throughout this case analysis it will become evident that Monifa placed value on the home community as an influential aspect of her success in learning. Monifa showed an awareness that her school performance in mathematics was very positive, and used her grades on tests to understand her achievement in the school community. She represents, through her own account of home and school mathematics learning, home as a more powerful reinforcement of her identity as a good mathematician, as she expressed “nearly all of my family are good at maths.” On the other hand she also has evidence of

success from high test scores on her school mathematics examinations. Children in her year group are expected to reach a level 4 (mark range 45-75) in the examinations.

Monifa achieved a score of 81, one of the highest in her year. The emergence of the dual influence through sociocultural coupling in the transition from home and school in her narrative revealed that she felt some tensions between her teacher and her father regarding her mathematics learning. Although neither the teacher nor her father mentioned the episode described below, it clearly had a significant impact on Monifa. She initially began talking about differences in mathematical practice between home and school, but as the narrative progressed it transpired that she believed conflict existed in the relationship between her father and teacher:

Sarah: Does your dad explain it [mathematics] in the same way your teacher does? Are there any differences?

Monifa: My dad explains it very differently actually. Like the teacher explains it so everybody can understand but because my dad knows me, cos we're father and daughter, he explains it to me so I can understand it properly, so it's better for my dad to do it

Sarah: Are the differences in the way he explains it, in the words he uses, or in the strategies he uses, both?

Monifa: Yeah, because I figured that out one day when Miss Durham and my dad, I don't know why, but I don't think Miss Durham is too keen on my dad any more because once when I took my homework to my dad I told him that Miss Durham said this, and that this is how you do it, and then my dad said "no, that is completely wrong" so when he told me it, then I understood more. But then when

I took it to Miss Durham, Miss Durham said “no, your daddy’s wrong, that isn’t how you do it. You can go and ask my husband in the high school.” And I wasn’t too keen but I understand my dad’s more so I went with my dad. But she’s my schoolteacher in school, so.

Sarah: Which do you think is the proper way, the way your dad does it or the way the teacher does it?

Monifa: I don’t know. Sometimes they just explain it differently but it’s the same because, well I think it’s the different ages. Because my dad would have done it differently and it’s where we come from because my dad was taught in Nigeria, and he taught in Nigeria. And Miss Durham has been here so. They do it in different ways. But my dad teaches it so I can understand even though, sometimes I don’t understand him because he’s been taught in Nigeria.

Monifa uses a number of different identity markers to understand the divide between her home and school communities when it comes to mathematics learning. The interviewer questions who, out of the two significant others have the greater ownership on mathematical knowledge. Initially, Monifa identifies age differences as the reason for the disparity between her father’s and teacher’s numeracy practices, but she also draws upon cultural issues to make sense of the relationship between her father and her teacher. This episode provides some indication of how adaptable the child in transition needs to be in reinterpreting new meanings across the different contexts if they are to succeed. In a school where there may be a wider bridge between the meanings represented between home and school, conflict can occur. If the culturally mediated meaning systems of home

and school are not similar, then the transition for the child between these two communities may not be smooth. More specifically, tensions in the way mathematics is experienced and understood between home and school communities in multicultural contexts can complicate the transition process. There is a sense of new emergent meanings through sociocultural coupling in the transition process whereby Monifa seeks out new explanations for the conflictual positions of her father and teacher. Subsequent to this episode in the interview, Monifa frequently returned to culture when reflecting on her home community.

More importantly, for Monifa there was a “gap” between the home and school communities of mathematics practices, which she attributed to culture. Her father’s upbringing in a different country impacted on the way Monifa learnt mathematics in the home, and supplemented and sometimes contradicted the mathematics learnt in school. But the tension between the home and school becomes more than the difference in mathematical strategies for Monifa, as she extends to her teacher and her father cultural identities which are at odds. Perhaps the tension is so powerful for Monifa because, as previously mentioned, she identifies strongly with the home community and the positive notions of achievement surrounding the home. However, in the context of the educational world of the child, school is the focal point for academic learning and according to societal representations, the teacher is granted heightened status.

Monifa on Being Identified

The notion that self-identity is first preceded by identification extended by others is in

evidence in Monica's account of her mathematics achievements. As described earlier in the paper "being identified" is a process whereby the individual understands the identity extended to themselves by others. It is not uncommon that "others" identification of ourselves is based on dominant representations of identities, which can be seen as part of the social context of practices.

Monifa used her interaction with the researcher in the interview to settle her opinion about the influential role the home community played in forming her representations of her achievement. Monifa used the roles of significant others to understand what achievements she needs to accomplish for satisfaction in her adult life. It is possible to see theoretical overlaps between the three identity processes here but she ultimately uses "identifying the other" to gain an understanding about "being identified." She identifies with certain jobs and excludes others (like being a builder) as requiring a certain standard of achievement. The following excerpt indicates how she has reflected on this identity extended to her by her parents, although revealed in the quote are the contradictory messages received from her mother and father:

Sarah: Do you know what you would like to do when you grow up? Can you tell me about it?

Monifa: I was gonna be either a singer or I would be doing computers and like a business where I would be doing computers and all that. Because my dad has really taught me so I understand a lot, so that's what I would be

Sarah: Do you know what your mum and dad would like to see you do? Can you tell me about it?

Monifa: My dad wants me to do computing and my mum wants me to be a singer.

And like my mum is saying that she wants me to be in a choir and all that, but my dad wants me to stay at home so he can teach me a lot of things. And he takes me to his office and all that so...

It is relevant to note that opposing extended identities do not necessarily reside only in the relationship between home and school. Monifa's narrative reveals that within the home there are some conflicting views between her parents. Sociocultural coupling can take place within communities as well as through transitions between them. This has consequences for her own and her parents' projected notion of her future. The job identities proposed for her by her parents were quite different, one being artistic and the other academic. Given her strong representations of achievement in other parts of her interview, her account suggests that her father played a more influential role in her learning, as is indicated by the fact that he described himself (and was described by Monifa) as the main homework tutor. We are not certain why her parents had these aspirations for her, although in her father's interview he spoke about the kind of future he wanted for his daughter. His real aspirations centered on her gaining a degree because "blue-chip companies" would accept nothing else. With regard to her mother's aspirations for her as a singer, we only know that the family have a connection to Church-going and singing in the Church Choir. Her talk suggests some acceptance or internalization of these projected job roles as part of her "self-identity." It is not possible through this kind of data to see if that was evidenced in action.

One of the ways in which the home community as an environment of learning was augmented, was through Monifa's involvement in her father's work practice. Her

father's work as an Information Technology consultant required specialized skills in programming which would be inaccessible to most computer users. For example, her father told the researcher that he had taught Monifa some basic programming skills. Her father cements her identity for the future by developing her competence in the practice of computing at home. The next extract reveals how this tutelage impacted on her extended identity:

Sarah: What is your favourite subject? Can you tell me why you like it?

Monifa: My favourite subject, erm, I.T. because I'm around, cos my dad is like an I.T. consultant and all that, I'm around him a lot and he's doing some fuses and things and teaching me stuff. And at school I get to do more things in I.T. than at home, cos my dad's on the computer. So if I get to learn about that I'll be able to get my own website, cos my dad wants me to learn about it so I can get my own website.

In the construction of job roles, Monifa alludes to her parents' extended identity, which she has then internalized and made her own. In her interview account with the researcher Monifa has described the way that conflicts in identity can occur within the same household when parents have different representations of the child's current education, and projection for the future. Research using a sociocultural perspective has not accounted for the divisions between parents in their expectations for their children, and the projection for the success of their child in the future. One interesting observation is that her father's extensions of identities also extended to the activities they did together. Monifa's father tutored her, took her to his place of work and gave her

resources that put her in an advantageous position at school. Monifa did not describe within the interview similar practices extended by her mother, although it is possible that more artistic practices took precedence in other contexts (like Church). We are told by Monifa's father that her mother did engage in other mathematical home practices such as playing board games.

Monifa on Self-Identification

As previously discussed, Monifa's identification systems centered on her construction of the meaning of achievement. Similarly, that the community which featured the most in establishing this construct in her own account was the home. If we take her comments in the interview as the window to her representations of self-identity the next quote depicts an internalized identity following her association with her home community, and in particular, her father:

Sarah: What subject do you feel you are best at? Why do you feel that way?

Monifa: Maths, um, because my dad is very good at maths, he was once a maths teacher. And he's taught me a lot, so I know quite a lot about maths. And I get extra lessons on maths, he teaches me at home

Sarah: Your dad teaches you, do you think that helps you in your classroom?

Monifa: Yeah, cos he can explain to me. Because he's my dad it's more personal so he can explain it to me. So that's why I feel comfortable with him. But with a teacher it's different because you don't, like, know them personally, they just tell you what they have been taught and then that's it. They don't really explain it to

you like, like so that you'll be able to remember it.

Monifa introduces her father to the interview discussion as a skilful tutor whose own accomplishments are passed on to his daughter. Added to this, is the personalized way in which she describes her father's input which we have argued earlier in the paper, may have contributed to her positive feelings about her own achievement in the subject. When sociocultural coupling is enacted, mathematical knowledge may be borrowed from both contexts to aid the learner. But how the individual "feels" or represents the learning situation in one context can have a more powerful influence over another context.

The researcher probes this further by linking Monifa's account of her home practice with the school community. It is at this point that Monifa re-counters that this personalized home mathematical learning imparts to her feelings of self-confidence:

Sarah: You said that [mathematics] was one of your best ones, how do you know, what gives you the idea that you're good at maths?

Monifa: Because like, when I do it I understand it more, I don't know why.

Maybe it's because my dad was a maths teacher and that it just runs through the family because all his family is good at maths. So I'm just good at maths as well.

If there is conflict for Monifa it arises because her home practice has a stronger influence on her since she is able to understand her father's methods better than the teachers. But she shows that she is aware that school should be the prevailing community and this leads to Monifa displaying contradictory messages throughout her interview:

Sarah: Do you think your parents understand what you do during your school

day? Can you describe that for me?

Monifa: No, I don't think they do cos it's different from where they've been taught. So sometimes they don't understand because, like if they teach us something and we stick to that, then I stick to it. But then when I get home they ask me "what have you done at school?" and when I explain it to them they don't understand because of what they've been taught in Nigeria. So it's pretty different, and it's hard for them and it's hard for me because I get mixed up sometimes. And when I like say it in class, they tell me "what are you talking about?" I just try and stick to what the teacher has taught me

Sarah: Do you have to quite adaptable, do you try and be like your teachers want you to be at school and then be like your parents want you to be at home?

Monifa: Yeah, yeah. It's pretty confusing and hectic so I'm just all over the place in my mind. It's like I'm two people at the same time and it's just hard.

Sarah: Do you try and take a bit of each thing to make up the person you are in the middle?

Monifa: Yeah

Sarah: Is one influence stronger than the other at the moment?

Monifa: At the moment I think, I'm not quite sure, I think it's the influence from home that is bigger because even though I am, I'm mostly at school, but at home it's different and I know my parents well and so it's pretty complicated.

Monifa's contradictory messages within the passage are partly drawn out from the interaction between the interviewer's prompts and her subsequent answers. However,

even with these prompts sociocultural coupling in the transition between home and school are drawn on in different ways. Monifa is active in reformulating the researcher's question into her own words. At the beginning of the narrative she says she uses mathematical strategies provided by the school. At the end of the passage she maintains home has the strongest influence because of the emotional way she can connect with her parents. On one level her cognitive allegiance, in the form of strategic knowledge, is to the school and is reinforced by the fact that her parents were taught in a different country, and therefore use different methodologies. On the other hand, the quote previous to this revealed that she understood her father's strategies better. Equally, it is left to Monifa to make the mathematical strategies of home and school compatible; when she struggles to do this the solution is to create a separation. It is this situation which may lead her to describe herself as being two people. Sociocultural coupling emerges in multiple ways during the interview. For example, from the description of the transition between home and school communities, through interactions with her parents and teacher, and within the context of the interaction with the interviewer.

The discussions on Monifa's sense of identity have contributed to understanding how powerfully a projected identity, extended by others, influences the construction of self-identity. At times this extended identity becomes a conflictual part of self-identity, but an individual "chooses" what elements of their extended identity to internalize and what elements to resist. Monifa's "choice" about what to internalize and what to resist exist on two levels and are interwoven in a complex way. On a cognitive level Monifa borrows from the home and school community, which has led to her perceiving some tension between her father and the teacher. When addressing academic achievement from

an emotional perspective, the home community is more powerful because of the positive representations of achievement in existence. One must be tentative in the suggestion that an individual has the ability to “choose” what elements of identity to borrow from their communities of practice and what to resist. The choices available may be restricted by the experiences around the individual. The paper will now examine how the three processes of identity and sociocultural coupling can be applied to the case of the ethnic minority teacher, Shazia.

SHAZIA: A CASE STUDY OF AN ETHNIC MINORITY TEACHER

Shazia on Identifying the Other

As a class teacher, Shazia’s focus when “identifying the other” was on the way she represented the parents of the pupils who attended her school and the mediational role that culture played in helping cement her notion of parental identity. As part of the interview Shazia was asked to comment on the role of culture in the home/school relationship:

Shazia: Again, it goes back to that parents...I don’t think it’s a conscious thought, I don’t think it occurs to them to think like that. I think sub-consciously it’s not a top priority to have an influence in the school. Well since; I’ve been working here close to eleven years now, and I do know before I started parents’ evenings were very rarely attended, we now have literally almost a hundred per cent attendance for parents evening. And that mostly has to do with the fact that we now have

dual-language staff. We have community language staff. So parents are far, far more comfortable with coming in... I know some schools translate literally every document, but saying that the same thing happens because they're still, the parents who can't read English, usually can't read Urdu either, so it's a bit pointless. The ones who can read Urdu, are educated enough to be able to read English anyway. And sometimes it's better to send it in English because at least that encourages the parent to ask the child, so there's that communication between them as well.

It is first important to note that at this point of the interview Shazia creates a separate position of her own identification from the community through the objective pronoun "them." On the one hand this reflects her position as the teacher to the parents' children, however, during her later discussions where the "other" is transformed into a self-identification she takes ownership of her identity with the community by aligning her "voice" with a community narrative. It is at this point that she draws on more specific cultural knowledge.

Although Shazia was critical of the parents, she recognized the improvements in parental involvement over the preceding decade, certainly when reflecting directly on the number of parents attending consultation evenings. Interestingly, the other teachers interviewed as part of the larger study (all of whom were White) centered any narrative about culture around language issues. Here, Shazia challenges some of the dominant ideas about language held by schools, such as the beneficial effects of sending home information in the second language that is used in the home community.

To explore Shazia's cultural representations of parental involvement, she was asked about the type of parent she considered would be engaged in the children's learning at home. She recounted that when the school set up a numeracy exhibition for the new intake of school children (estimated figure to be 60) only two parents came. Shazia surmised that these were parents who probably knew the information anyway. Intending to grapple with Shazia's reasoning further the researcher prompted the following question:

Sarah: In your experience are those parents either, possibly well educated in the country that they come from or have gone through this system?

Shazia: Always, almost always. Either that, or you have someone extremely dedicated and doesn't want; and this is probably the fewest ones of these is - didn't have anything themselves, didn't have the education, didn't have the opportunities and want their children to, and they will go out of their way to make an effort. Whereas, all of those, all of the people whether they're themselves educated, or whether they want their children to be educated, or they went through the school system or whatever, makes up less than half. I would probably say in total that makes about a quarter, or a third. The remainder, they just don't.

In this section of the interview Shazia projected a multitude of identities onto the parents of the children in her school which reflects a general identification at the community level. The introduction of the identity component to a theory of learning provides "a way of talking about how learning changes who we are and creates personal histories in the context of our communities" (Wenger, 1998, p. 5). This focus on identity

extends the social practice accounts in two directions. First, “it narrows the focus onto the person, but from a social perspective” and, secondly, “it expands the focus beyond communities of practice, calling attention to broader processes of identification and social structure” (p. 145) in much the same way as Shazia does. However, the parents to whom she gives a positive identity are then said to be in the minority. Stressing her point about the identity of the “other,” namely the Pakistani community, she reaffirms her position by talking about the value placed on educational achievement by the Pakistani community (to which she belonged):

Shazia: Unfortunately, I suppose I shouldn't really say this, in the Pakistan community particularly, there's a very strong attitude that education [takes place] in school, that's it, full stop, you don't have to do anything towards it. So regardless of who they are, how they're brought up, they don't do it.

At this point of the interview she positions herself as a critic of her own community with respect to parental involvement, which reflected the changes she later describes in her own educational values. She was aware that the changes in some of her educational values and practices had come about because she was educated in the English school system, which arguably led to sociocultural coupling of her identity. One of the first elucidations of the concept of coupling came from a study on high school students becoming shopkeepers and shopkeepers going back to adult learning mathematics classes in rural Nepal at a time of major societal change around school and work (Beach, 1995). These findings resonate with a point that Shazia raised about maintained or transformative identities within communities in changing spaces and histories. In the

Nepali study, students who were going to become shopkeepers when asked to calculate a mathematics task predominantly used the knowledge gained from school (written methods), while adapting their traditional calculation techniques (using the arm for measuring and calculating) when required. For the shopkeepers who became students in mathematics classes a shift was seen between the sole use of object calculation, to the eventual use of combined written numerals or fingers, as well as object calculation. We argue that continuities and discontinuities between old and new knowledge described by Beach are also applicable to changes in representations through practice over time. Shazia, for example is now the fourth generation to be brought up in the UK, which could increase the gap between herself and some of the parents in the school further.

Shazia on Being Identified

Shazia did not reflect on how the parents or children might identify her. There was evidence in the interviews with some of the other teachers that they reflected on how the children, in particular, perceived them. These reflections were often strongly influenced by their past experiences and teachers from their own childhood. It is notable that Shazia did not raise these points herself.

When Shazia spoke about “being identified” by others she reflected predominantly on her childhood educational experiences. One of the points about sociocultural coupling is that it doesn’t just account for transitional moments in space from one context to another, but also transitional moments through time. She talked positively, on the whole, about going to school in the UK and represented herself as

being educationally average. She knew this because it was common practice then for children to be moved closer to the front of the class the better they did on tests. Shazia was always placed along the middle row. There was an episode however where she reflects on some incongruence between her self-identity and the way others, mainly teachers, identified her. Prior to going to junior school (age 8-11 years) Shazia spent a year and a half in Pakistan, during which time she forgot her English:

Shazia: And when I came from Pakistan I couldn't speak English. and I was bullied like nobody's business because I was put in a special unit. This absolutely horrendous corner of the room

Sarah: In language units?

Shazia: In language units, I was taken into there. And I was there for two weeks, and I just thought, "there's no way I'm staying here" and I quickly started speaking English again. But I hated it because I was really bullied.

She described how she was unhappy with the way "others" associated her lack of language with her level of achievement. The reference to the bullying suggests some rejection from her peers of her cultural identity as represented through language. This account emphasizes the transition from extended identities to internalized identities, as learners are influenced by the actions of others. It is important to note that internalizing an identity is not a passive re-construction of the social. It is a process where individuals consciously or unconsciously accept, re-create, resist or refuse the identities extended to them.

A little later in the interview she was asked if her mathematics learning was a

positive experience at school. She agreed that it was positive, but that her own achievement identity was different to the way the teachers identified it:

Shazia: I do remember in High School, for some silly reason they put me in the top set for maths, and, basically if you were in the top set they assumed you knew everything and they'd just give you something to get on with. And I couldn't cope with any of it. Then they moved me down into the second set, and the lady I had there was the Deputy Head, she was fantastic. I probably, that was probably the first time I understood anything I was doing. I think I was taught by her for two years in maths, really made a difference to my maths.

The teachers had identified her as a high achiever, which she rejects and then subsequently gets to move to a class whose level she is more comfortable with. "Being identified" may also be reflected in her account of her own father's expectations for her future. She goes on:

Shazia: Our family, my dad particularly, and it was like some of our parents are beginning to be now, he used to say, believe it or not, he'd probably get arrested for saying this, he actually used to say, "you either become a doctor or I break your legs." You know, he was really heavily into this, and you'll find that with a lot of our parents, you've got to be a doctor, a lawyer, and accountant or I don't know

Sarah: One of the major professions

Shazia: One of the major professions And I had absolutely no interest in any; I did not want to be a doctor, there is no way I wanted to be a doctor. Midwife I

could have coped with. If he'd said, "ok I'll let you," but if mentioned anything, if I deviated even that much I'd get it or else. It was literally that aggressive or else thing. So I just flunked it, I dropped out basically. I didn't want to do it, I couldn't do it, I wasn't interested in that. But, I got married quite early, so after that my husband was very supportive, yes you can teach, that's fine.

One may interpret from this quote that Shazia's "flunking out" is a consequence of her father's expectations and the career he "identified" for her future. Only through her marriage was her own personal career choice actualized.

Shazia on Self-Identification

Shazia's own self-identification are told as a complex combination of stable cultural affiliations with the Pakistani community and transformed meaning systems and practices brought about by being raised in a different education system and country. One of the stable aspects of Shazia's self-identification was her maintenance of certain cultural traditions, such as wearing the traditional Pakistani dress, the Shalwah Kameez, and honoring religious festivals. Shazia's biggest change in self-identification was manifested through the change in practice she describes with her own children. Her own experiences as a child had altered some of her own practices:

Sarah: Have your experiences, either as a teacher or at school, helped with your own children's education, can you tell me a bit about it?

Shazia: I have to admit that I have never ever sat them and taught ...and I don't

know whether this is an experience of being a teacher or a student but just the fact that I grew up in this country, and I think I was always envious of all my English friends who did go home and bake cakes at the weekend. I just got told to get home and cook dinner. I was really young when my dad, my dad taught me how to cook, he just taught me for the sake of having an extra person in the house who could cook. I appreciate it now, but I didn't then. So I never experienced, you know, things like going to the seaside and going to the cinema. And he would never allow me to go the cinema, taboo. So doing things like that, I think that's more to do with experience of growing up in this country, rather than teaching. I mean saying that, things like going on school trips, I would never have gone to those places if it hadn't been with the school, and because it was school, school says "fill on the dotted line," and my dad would say "ok, go and do it." My dad was very much into, get your education, not that it will do anything to help you, but you've got to get your education, so.

Shazia reflects that the childhood practices of some of her English friends have informed her practices for her own children. Shazia uses the interview situation to describe a childhood where she felt both deprived and separated from her classmates at school. She was evidently aware of the differences in the home practices of her English friends, from those of her own family. At this juncture Shazia could have chosen to accept or reject the practices of her home and past. It is the ability to reproduce or transform which makes each self-identification unique. Shazia's difficulties with the home-school transition process has resonance with Monifa's narrative. Monifa describes

at one point during her interview that she invited a friend to her church club so that while socializing, her friend could get to know her parents better. To some extent friendships offer the means by which the divide between home and school is reduced if she chooses to share her participation in the home community with her friend. Monifa also assumes that her friend will need to make changes in her cultural representations to cope with access to her home community. In a similar vein, but with a different focus, Shazia describes the gulf between the home practices of her English friends to that of her own home life.

Up until this point Shazia has positioned herself in multiple ways within the interview; as a teacher, a fourth generation Pakistani, a mother, a woman and a pupil in the English school system. At times Shazia uses her descriptions of the Pakistani parents (and occasionally parents in general) in active resistance to elements of this identity. On the other hand, being part of the community means she has a greater understanding about the evolution of her cultural community. Evidence of sociocultural coupling is visible through the combination of Shazia's experiences as a teacher and some negative experiences of her own schooling, and changes to the practices with her own children. It is here that the concepts of "identifying the other" and "self-identification" seem to work simultaneously. The practices, which she had deemed necessary to change, like "practical like" numeracy skills (such as cooking), were aligned with English schooling. The stable cultural affiliations with the Pakistani community do not centre around the act of learning per se, rather around ways of dressing, religion and representations of child development, so therefore have been reproduced. By these means, self-identification is a complex mix of reproduction and change.

It is through Shazia's description of the parents of the children in her school, and the subsequent comparison of her own family life that sociocultural coupling of "identifying the other" and "self-identification" continues to emerge:

Shazia: ...having grown up in the community, having gone through the same problems that my family, because we're now fourth generation. My kids, well my parents are very much like the parents are here now, at the school. And it was, more or less, well you go to school, that's it, you know, their responsibility stops the moment I step on to the school's doorstep, as it were. And things like homework and schoolwork is all to do with the school, it's got nothing to do with them. Whereas, I now, having gone through the education system here, I personally as a parent, if my son brings homework, I have to [help him]. Also I want him to be responsible, but I also need to make sure that I back up that responsibility and remind him, he is a child at the end of the day. "Have you got your homework?" "did you do it?," "have you done it correctly," "Oh, mum I'm stuck," "ok, let me have a look and I'll explain." Like I said, some of them simply can't, some of them simply don't. And then you get perhaps about, twenty-five per cent who always do.

With this quote there is a shift in her identification position which instigates the interaction between her own experiences as a member of the community with notions of "other" brought about by belonging to the teaching community at school. One of her most stable cultural representations that she attributes to the Pakistani community is the value of education. Other authors have also written about identities as they first exist

externally to the individual, as part of sociocultural practices, before becoming self-internalized. Drawing on Vygotsky's socio-historical approach the evolving nature of self-identity taking into account four levels of history can be viewed in the following way: (a) the general history of humanity, (b) the history of individual societies, (c) the life history of the individual in society and (d) the history of a particular psychological system (Dien, 2000). This is a particularly novel way of portraying changing identity in the context of the history of individual societies, where the history of society, and one's place within that changing society has an influence on the construction of one's own self-identity. Significant others in one's life, like parents and teachers, are fundamental in influencing changes in the shared ways of perceiving one's world.

It is Shazia's own transformation in values and practices, which are most telling in the excerpt above. She described that her own changes resulted from her participation in the English school system. These identities have as resources cultural representations of what it is to be a parent of a school child. However, as she illustrated, she drew from a cultural representation that incorporates an English upbringing.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the case studies in this paper has shown how the three levels of "identifying the other," "being identified" and "self-identification" are interactional processes used to negotiate a way of perceiving ourselves within and in between multiple communities of practice. Moreover, it seems that these levels of identification can occur simultaneously and at different times in different contexts. For example, Shazia was able to use her representation of her own Pakistani Kashmiri community to cement a self-

identification that was different. In light of this it is possible to see how individuals do not necessarily use identity as a means of establishing a shared way of perceiving their community, but as a means of asserting change. Another example of simultaneous levels of identity being put to use were seen in Monifa's narrative. Her identity as a mathematics high achiever borrowed elements from the process of "identifying the other" and "being identified." At the same time she was choosing some elements and resisting others for her self-identification.

Significantly, it is important to recognize the unique way that change is as much a part of identity construction as stability. Individuals are not merely receivers of a community's representations. This is where sociocultural coupling becomes a useful theoretical concept. Individuals have the potential to borrow or resist extended identities imposed upon them by the communities they inhabit. This paper provides examples of instances where "coupled" identities have formed which have been borrowed from two communities of practice, indicating the emergent importance of the transition process between the home and school communities for the child learner. Monifa, for example borrowed mathematical strategies from home and school but tended to use home as her main source for self-identification of high achievement. Shazia's account also suggested a sense of "coupling" in her formation of her self-identification, which combined her experiences within the Pakistani Kashmiri community and the English school system. Her experiences growing up in the English school system and as a teacher in England had influenced her engagement in mathematical activity with her own children. For both Monifa and Shazia, issues of culture held saliency as an explanation for behaviour.

We argue that the three processes of identity and sociocultural coupling provide

useful tools for examining the constructions of identities in multicultural schools. For Monifa, the construction of her achievement identity was given a cultural status, however the data from her interview also holds implications for other ethnic minority children and White British children, whose own identity could be closely tied in with notions of achievement, but might not necessarily be associated with an understanding of how it is tied with culture. Shazia drew mainly on representational differences between home and school, drawing on experiential, historical and cultural explanations to evaluate home mathematical learning in multicultural communities.

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Footnote

1 GCSE is the level of attainment reached at sixteen years of age in the UK