

## **Where equity is a dirty word: Contradictions in Hong Kong's policy of support measure for ethnic and linguistic minority students**

Author: Jan Connelly  
*Hong Kong Baptist University*

### **Abstract**

Equity for ethnic minority students (EM) is a marginalized discourse in Hong Kong. This is not to say that Government policy over the last five years has not tried to respond to the educational needs of EM or non-Chinese speaking student (NCS) as they are officially referred to by Hong Kong's Department of Education (EDB). EM students come from heritage backgrounds of Indian, Pakistani, Nepalese, Filipino, and Indonesian. NCS include students who have multi-ethnic parentage. Over the last six years the government's broad-ranging support measures, inclusive of a specially designed Chinese-Second-Language (CSL) course, have been slow to improve the fact that few ethnic minority students complete their final years of schooling and fewer still go on to higher education.

This paper reports on findings from research that explored the difficulties that Hong Kong's NCS/EM students and their families encounter inside the education system. It shares the challenges that principals, and teachers face in meeting the complex educational needs of a multicultural, multi-lingual student body. It closely examines the government's support measure that established 'designated' schools policy and questions whether the policy in fact contradicts the official rhetoric of 'smooth integration' for EM students, by spawning further segregation and inequality.

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... over the last century Hong Kong has evolved from a fishing village into a migrant city, a world factory and in latter years an international financial centre ... post-war migrants to Hong Kong looked for food and shelter to improve their living standard ... generations that followed sought to build a comfortable home and a good career. The new generation pursues social justice, civil rights and environmental conservation (Tsang, 2010, p. 2).

Research reported here focuses on issues relevant to the jurisdiction of Hong Kong. It raises issues of social justice in education through the evaluation of policy decisions having a bearing on educational support measure for the group of students officially labelled as Non-Chinese Speaking (NCS). This official term - NCS - renders invisible the linguistic and culture diversity of ethnic minority students (Kennedy, 2011), whereas ethnic minority although imbued with notions of 'minor'/'less than', accurately captures the notion of ethnicity diversity of the population. The term 'ethnic minorities' is however somewhat inaccurate, for outside the jurisdiction of Hong Kong the term refers to ethnic minorities of a particular country who are traditionally rural and remote groups of that country, that is their heritage is indigenous to that country, but whose cultural practices and language diverge from the country's present dominant ethnic group. However, in Hong Kong the term broadly refers to immigrants groups from South Asian countries. In the absence of an appropriate term, throughout this paper both acronyms NCS and EM are combined.

### **Ethnic Minority Population**

#### ***Population Statistics***

Of Hong Kong's 7 million people, 93.6% are Chinese, 3.3% are South Asian peoples, 0.8% are Whites/Caucasians - 'White' being the term used to refer to Caucasians in Hong Kong's Population Census (Census and Statistics Department, 2012); other nationalities make up the remaining 2% of the

population. The largest ethnic groups within the South Asian community (Table 1) are Indonesian (133,377), and Filipino (133,018). The majority of these immigrants are domestic helpers - predominantly females who are a temporary workforce that consists mostly of live-in 'helpers'. Indonesians are not represented in schools, but the ethnic minorities highly represented include Indian, Pakistani, Nepalese and Filipinos, a large proportion of whom are second and third generation Hong Kong residents.

The Hong Kong Government tightened immigration law in 1969 and made it more difficult for Indians or Pakistanis without relatives in Hong Kong to enter the territory legally (Bosco 2004). Indians and Pakistanis coming to Hong Kong since that time enter via irregular channels such as overstaying, people smuggling and using false documents. Another large group of South Asian minorities is Nepalese. Nepalese residency in Hong Kong is linked with the British colonial government that governed until the 1997 hand-over of the territory to the People's Republic of China (PRC). Under the British rule the Nepalese - specially the Gurkha army unit – were incorporated into the army after World War II. In 1967 violent riots broken out and more Gurkhas were called to Hong Kong. The rioters (pro PRC leftists inspired by the Cultural Revolution in China) had conflated a labour dispute into large-scale protests against British Colonial rule. Gurkhas also patrolled Hong Kong's border to block illegal immigrants from Mainland China (Bosco, 2004). By 1990s they were being recruited into the Emergency Unit of the police force, which was formerly run by Pakistani policemen (Weiss 1991). In 1980s, the colonial government granted citizenships to about 7,000 children of the Gurkhas and granted residency to their dependents. Thus the Nepalese in Hong Kong nowadays are mainly descendants of the now retired Gurkha army and their relatives.

A recent development of South Asians in Hong Kong is the increasing number of protection seekers, i.e. both asylum seekers and torture claimants. According to the Hong Kong Government, there are respectively 2902 illegal immigrants and 3804 over stayers who lodged torture claims to the Immigration Department between 2006 and 2009 (Security Bureau 2009). A majority of them are from South Asian countries such as Pakistan. Among the South Asian ethnic minority groups, the Pakistani and

Nepalese are the most underprivileged groups mainly due to racial discrimination and social exclusion (Ku, Chan, Chan and Lee 2003).

**TABLE 1. Population by Ethnicity 2001, 2006 and 2011 (Census and Statistics Department, 2011)**

Ethnicity	2001		2006		2011	
	Number	% of total	Number	% of total	Number	% of total
Chinese	6 364 439	94.9	6 522 148	95.0	6 620 393	93.6
Filipino	142 556	2.1	112 453	1.6	133 018	1.9
Indonesian	50 494	0.8	87 840	1.3	133 377	1.9
White	46 584	0.7	36 384	0.5	55 236	0.8
Indian	18 543	0.3	20 444	0.3	28 616	0.4
Nepalese	12 564	0.2	15 950	0.2	16 518	0.2
Japanese	14 180	0.2	13 189	0.2	12 580	0.2
Thai	14 342	0.2	11 900	0.2	11 213	0.2
Pakistani	11 017	0.2	11 111	0.2	18 042	0.2
Other Asian	12 835	0.2	12 663	0.2	12 247	0.2
Others	20 835	0.3	20 264	0.3	30 336	0.4
Total	6 708 389	100.0	6 864 346	100.0	7 071 576	100.0

### *Ethnic Minorities and the Workforce in Hong Kong*

In 2006 the Hong Kong's International Trade Union organization IHLO estimated that more than 30 percent of South Asian workers in Hong Kong work in the construction industry and up to 40 per cent of these are Nepalese and Pakistani workers who are long-term Hong Kong permanent residents. Written and spoken Chinese is not a requirement for construction work and this is one reason why so many Hong

Kong South Asians work in the industry, but a registration scheme is only available in Cantonese, (the Chinese dialect spoken in Hong Kong). To gain skilled worker status they must undertake training courses and examinations but these too are only available in Cantonese means that even in this industry, ethnic minority workers face increasing discrimination in terms of career advancement, wage increases and official registration (IHLO, 2006).

A recent study conducted at Hong Kong University and its Policy 21 Limited commissioned by the Equal Opportunities Commission (Centre for Civil Society and Governance, 2012) reported that all South Asia respondents in its research acknowledged difficulties in finding employment, especially for those who did not speak and read Chinese. They had given up learning Chinese in school without realizing what the consequences would be up ahead of not having learned Chinese. Before the handover (the return of governance to China by Britain in 1997), South Asians who did not read Chinese were still able to enter the civil service. But the government policy had changed since the handover, knowledge of spoken and written Chinese was now required closing the door to civil service. Hunting for job through the Labour Department was almost futile. Job descriptions were in Chinese and there was no additional help assigned to South Asians. The government gave no extra incentives to employers to hire South Asians. (Centre for Civil Society and Governance, 2012:16).

### *Ethnic Minority students in Hong Kong schools*

There is no census data that systematically reports on the population of NCS/EM students in Hong Kong schools, although in contrast there are records of the number of students of Mainland Chinese (who have immigrated for purposes of increased economic opportunities in Hong Kong, or are Mainland Chinese periodically conducting business and trade or undertaking further study). Without data on NCS/EM student numbers, it is difficult to formulate education policies and provide focused support (Kapai, 2011, p.13). From anecdotal evidence (because interestingly there are no known available statistics published by government bodies) it is long-term residents' children from Pakistan, India and

Nepal who constitute the majority of the NCS/EM students who attend local schools.

## Discourses surrounding Ethnic Minorities students in Hong Kong

Recently introduced broad ranging restructuring of the length of time and content of the school curriculum (3 years in junior secondary school, 3 years in senior secondary and 4 years at university to attain a Bachelor degree) known as the 3,3,4 Curriculum Reform's rationale is to nurture new educated persons for the technology driven knowledge-based economy. It has been suggested that a more durable and broad ranging solution lies "... in the participation of all Hong Kong's citizenry in the rapid evolving information society requiring innovation and creativity in its production, accumulation, renewal and management of knowledge" (Hong Kong Policy Research Institute, 1998, p. 1). Reflecting a functionalist discourse, Lo (1998, p. 2) claimed Hong Kong had not "dug deep into its pool of potential talents comprised of all children and youths who are studying in Hong Kong's schools", signalling the idea that increasing investment in educational support measures could enhance EM students' achievement which in turn would be a leverage for increased competency and depth of the future workforce.

Another discourse increasingly being heard, is that of social reconstruction. It reflects an ideology of social justice and equity, and calls on government support for NCS/EM students' equitable access to educational opportunities and resources (with particular attention to transparency in higher education admission policies). Such calls are reported in the media with increasing frequency (Equal Opportunities Commission, 2011; Hong Kong Unison, 2012; Kapai, 2011).

### *Social justice advocacy in Hong Kong*

A decade prior to 2008 saw a small number of community groups advocating for social justice for Hong Kong's needs, but the response from government was slow. The government argued that given Hong Kong's multicultural mix, it was understandable that there might be circumstances where "unfamiliarity with other people's customs, culture and language may give rise to prejudices and stereotypes against people of other racial groups. Such prejudices have at times led to discrimination,

harassment and vilification” (Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC), 2011). Many South Asians have been domicile in Hong Kong for several generations, yet research findings show that they are a relatively less accepted ethnic group by local Chinese in the community (acceptance level of 82% vs. overall averaged racial acceptance level of 88%), probably because most of them belong to the lower socioeconomic strata and are more susceptible to racial discrimination (Centre for Civil Society and Governance, 2012). This same research found that among various groups, not only were Indians/Pakistanis least trusted, local Chinese were least willing to work with them. A number of studies revealed that South Asians were discriminated against not only in employment (Ku, Chan, Sandhu, 2005) but also in education.

Finally, after much pressure from lobby groups in 2008 the government finally acknowledged its obligation under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and enacted the Racial Discrimination Ordinance (RDO) in 2009, to protect people against discrimination, harassment and vilification on grounds of race. It was a positive step towards social justice, but, “attitudes are difficult to change and legislation is not a panacea” (Loh & Loper, 2011, para. 10), there is still much ground to cover towards equity, especially in education where discriminative attitudes and practices are manifest across the educational arena, as recent reports reveal (Loper, 2004, Carmichael, 2009; Hue & Kennedy, 2012; Kapai, 2011).

### *Social justice in education*

Paralleling social justice advocacy, the experience of ethnic minorities in Hong Kong’s education system has been monitored over the last decade by a small group of education researchers who have voiced concerns (Lo, 1998; Ku, Chan, & Sandhu, 2005; Kennedy 2008; Lisenby, 2011; Hue & Kennedy, 2012;). They called for greater attention to educational inequalities, the issue of access and equity has not been an enduring concern of Hong Kong’s government (Kennedy, 2008).

Loh & Loper (2011), on their weblog ‘Human Rights in China’, report that immigrants from South Asia have experienced all kinds of barriers and few programs to support their children’s educational

advancement. They have been reluctant to speak publicly because they have no channels to voice their complaints nor any hope for redress. In recent times this situation is changing (Ngo, 2012) through the advocacy of non-government bodies such as Hong Kong Unison, the Equal Opportunities Commission, the Centre for Comparative Law at Hong Kong University, and the Nepalese Community newspaper. The Nepalese Community newspaper recently reported on the lack of adequate Kindergarten education for ethnic minority students (Bhowmik, 2012; Thapa, 2012).

Just a decade ago there were only seven schools for these NCS/EM students and more than a third of all NCS/EM parents experienced difficulties enrolling their children as enrolment was frequently refused on the grounds that the children could not speak Cantonese (the medium of instruction), nor the official spoken language of Mainland China, Putonghua/Mandarin. Such a long-term oversight in the provision of language support has resulted in NCS/EM students' premature entry into the unskilled labour force and very few post-school employment options or opportunities for admittance to higher institutions, where proficiency in both Chinese and English is a prerequisite. These practices reflect a lack of acknowledgement of the existence of structural discrimination and its repercussions for ethnic minority communities.

### Educational provision for Ethnic Minorities in Hong Kong

We will *step up* the support services for ethnic minorities and new arrivals from the Mainland China to facilitate their integration into the community, and to foster mutual understanding and respect within the community Hong Kong Chief Executive's Policy Address 2011-2012 (Tsang, 2011, para. 10).

The rhetoric of 'stepping up' evidenced in this address and also in the mounting Legislative Council (LegCo) transcripts related to Ethnic Minority educational issues, has not brought about any tangible differences for immigrant students. A constant battle continues between advocacy groups on the one hand calling for more and more support – such as transparent access to all schools, better and more instruction in written Chinese and spoken Mandarin, and the removal of restrictive admission regulations for

University entrance - and on the other hand from the Education Bureau (EDB) that displays a marked reluctance to accede to the advocacy groups' requests (Kennedy, 2008). Kennedy believes the government not only struggles to find the right policies and practices but it also faces the Hong Kong Chinese community's onslaught of a long held cultural belief about equality – that providing more for one group is not fair to others (2008).

In EDB documentation on the Support Measures for Non-Chinese Speaking Students, the use of expressions such as 'smooth integration' (Education Bureau, 2008, para. 11) and 'harmony' (Education Bureau, 2012, March 23) disguise an ideology of assimilation. The prime support strategy manifests as multiple provisions for Chinese language acquisition. While commendable, the strategy is criticised, because its singularity ignores a reality that schools with NCS/EM students are multicultural and multilingual contexts (Hong Kong Unison, 2011; Kapai, 2011). A second related criticism is that teachers have little knowledge and few skills to teach Chinese-as-a-second language; some EDB commissioned tertiary professional development courses are offered but not all teachers can access the courses. A third criticism is that teachers have a marked lack of understanding of their students' cultures nor any professional development that would raise awareness of their social and cultural identity struggles encountered in the interface between home culture and the dominant Chinese culture of Hong Kong schools. In summary, the emphasis placed on Chinese language proficiency renders a silence around diversity being a source of strength and pride in the cosmopolitan society of Hong Kong.

### *Gap between rhetoric and reality*

Whilst other jurisdiction would not claim they have 'got it right', many such as Australia, New Zealand, Finland, and Canada, operate in the above average quadrant of equity in education according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operative Development, (OECD, 2012). These countries recognize students' needs as multifaceted and endeavour to ensure that teachers have pre-service and in-service training to teach ethnic and linguistic minority students (who are also often from low socio-economic backgrounds).

In the list of EDB's education objectives there is no mention of Non-Chinese speaking students (although the needs of Mainland Chinese immigrants students are recognised). Acknowledgement comes in a section entitled 'Support for NCS Students' (Education Bureau, 2010), where it states:

... it is important that all teachers and students in the school are willing to accept non-Chinese speaking students and assist them in integrating into school life (Education Bureau, 2010).

Hong Kong Unison's 2011 submission to the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) called on the Hong Kong government to provide:

... adequate and professional training for teachers including: raising their sensitivity towards racial and cultural backgrounds of Ethnic Minority students and their awareness of the challenges facing Ethnic Minority students (2011, p. 4).

### *Designated schools for Ethnic Minority students*

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development - OECD (2012) singles out school choice as the prime contributor to inequality, claiming the lack of choice results in segregation by ability, income, and ethnic background. In Hong Kong, school choice exists only for those who can afford a private school education. Most NCS/EM parents register as low-income earners and can only afford to send their children to designated schools or the few non-designated schools who accept immigrant students.

Designated schools are in general low performing. Funds allocated to designated schools are two-tiered; schools with larger numbers of NCS/EM students from between 300 and 600 receive funding additional to normal infrastructural costs, that is equal to the yearly salary of two mid career teachers. Schools with fewer students < 300 receive a lower level of funding. Some that enrol NCS/EM students receive no funding and prefer to remain non-designated (they fear the 'designated school' label will result in Chinese parents being discouraged from enrolling their children in the school). There are other non-designated schools with sizable populations of NCS/EM students who would welcome the additional funding, but find that the criteria for gaining designated school status is not transparent. An example of the

non-transparency of the administration of designate funding was reported in the minutes of Legislative Assessment proceeding in January, 2009:

... a designated primary school with 31 NCS students and a designated secondary school with 77 NCS students were provided with a special grant of \$400,000 and \$500,000 respectively, while some 22 non-designated schools with more than 30 NCS students were not provided with any special grant. As the Administration had not set a ceiling for the number of designated schools, [the member] asked whether the Administration would proactively approach or encourage non-designated schools meeting the prescribed criteria to become designated schools and be eligible for the special grant. (LegCo 2009)

The findings in this research found that the majority of schools that had received designated funding were originally schools facing declining student enrolments (of Chinese students). As a means to 'save' the school from the threat of closure the government's advice was to enrol Ethnic Minority /Immigrant students, when student enrolments were raised the school was invited to join the designated school program.

The introduction of the Designated Schools Policy into the stratified system of schools in Hong Kong has generated a great deal of criticism on the grounds that it creates racial segregation and exacerbates educational inequities (Hong Kong Unison, 2011). Of concern are the observations gathered through this research inquiry, that within a few years of a school enrolling Ethnic Minority immigrant students, the number of Chinese students at the school begin to decline. This flight by Chinese students results in schools quickly becoming an NCS/EM school entirely.

In defence of designated schools and the support programs they receive, an EDB spokesperson claimed:

... the policy has achieved some progress. We provide focused support to the [designated school] teachers. Our support teams are professionals in teaching and learning, who go to the schools regularly and collaborate in the preparation of [Chinese language] lessons ... they observe how teachers conduct the lessons and give feedback to the teachers. They continuously support the school; sometimes schools have been receiving this for 5 to 6 years.

When asked if any evaluation was in place to determine the impact of the Designated School Policy and the support measures, the question was evaded. The EDB response focused instead on the administration of the measures and not on student outcomes:

We don't have that [evidence of any outcomes] ... we do different projects ... we [put all our efforts into] being aligned. ... we don't want to overlap and we have to look at each other's work [in different schools], how we can synergize our efforts, and what's the way forward.

While support can be more concentrated for immigrant students in a designated school, the advantages need to be considered against the negatives of educational segregation. Although the support measure policy has been in place for nearly seven years, continued inequities are evident. The support measures are seen to be producing uneven and sometimes contradictory outcomes with little evidence that they leverage increased participation and enhanced educational opportunities for NCS/EM students.

## **The Research**

### **Evaluation of Support Measures**

Concerns were raised in the Legislative Council (LegCo) about the academic performance of NCS/EM students in local public examination (LegCo, 2009). Less than 50% had met the minimum requirements to be admitted into Senior Secondary in 2008/2009 with only 24 NCS/EM students taking Senior Secondary final-year examinations. LegCo members suggested the government consider conducting research on immigrant students' academic performance; to date no survey or research has been carried out to determine the circumstances related to NCS/EM students' lack of retention in senior years.

A package of support measures was introduced to achieve the objectives of minimizing the obstacles of language and cultural diversity and facilitating a smooth integration for immigrant children into Hong Kong society (Education Bureau, 2011). Although the government expressed the view that many variables affect student performance (Hong Kong Legislative Council, 2009), the single focus of the support measures were initiatives that aimed to enhance Ethnic Minority students' proficiency in Chinese.

Incorporated into these support measures was the use of a Supplementary Guide to the Chinese Language Curriculum (The Curriculum Development Council, 2008).

The inquiry set out to evaluate the government support measures and to gain a better understanding of their impact on the teacher and student recipients of the support. Using responsive evaluation, the inquiry asked the following questions.

- (i) Are the support measures alleviating obstacles of language and cultural barriers?
- (ii) Are they facilitating smooth integration of NCS/EM students into Hong Kong society?
- (iii) Are they positively impacting the educational opportunities of NCS/EM students?

Participants in the inquiry included Education Bureau (EDB) personnel, school representatives (principals/NCS coordinators), teachers from six schools drawn from Hong Kong's New Territories and Kowloon districts who enrol NCS/EM students, and NCS/EM students from the six schools. EDB personnel, principals and teachers were closely involved in the administration and implementation of government support measures. Student participants were the targets of the support.

Table 2: Demographics of participating schools.

<u>A. Peninsula Primary</u> <i>Designated School</i>	<u>B. Bayside Primary</u> <i>Designated School</i>	<u>C. Esplanade Primary</u> <i>Non-designated School</i>
(i) Of 396 students <b>95%</b> NCS/EM students	(i) Of 218 students <b>31%</b> NCS/EM students	(i) Of 620 students <b>80%</b> NCS/EM students
(ii) NCS student body: all students are South Asian English <u>not</u> first language	(ii) NCS student body: majority are mixed heritage students; UK/Chinese, US/Filipino, Chinese/Swiss, Canadian/Chinese, Thai/Chinese English is the students' language of communication at school	(ii) NCS student body: Indian, Thai, Nepalese and European ethnicities; English is first language for most students

(iii) English medium of instruction; Chinese/Mandarin used in the teaching of Chinese/Mandarin for all students.	(iii) English medium of Instruction For strand Class B in each Year level except in the teaching of Chinese/Mandarin. Most Chinese speaking students streamed into Class A- have Chinese/Cantonese medium of instruction.	(iii) English medium of instruction across whole school except in the teaching of Chinese/Mandarin, Chinese/Cantonese & French classes. 4 spoken and 3 written languages are taught.
(iv) Staff all Chinese with 1 Native English Teacher (NET), & 4 Ethnic Minority Teaching Assistants – (Indian, Pakistani, Filipino & Nepalese).	(iv) Staff all Chinese with 1 Native English Teacher (NET), and 2 additional Chinese teaching assistants & 1 European (English Speaking) Teaching Assistant.	(iv) Staff all Chinese plus 3 Ethnic Minority trained teaching staff – Filipino, Indian and European, & 1 Native English Teacher (NET).

<u>D. Kowloon Secondary</u> <i>Designated School</i>	<u>E. Northern Secondary</u> <i>Designated School</i>
(i) 836 students <b>95%</b> NCS/EM students,	(i) 1000 student <b>5%</b> NCS/EM students
(ii) large proportion of South Asian students; English <u>not</u> students' first language, although it is the language of communication at school.	(ii) NCS/EM student body comprised of Indian, Pakistani, Nepalese and Thai students; English is <u>not</u> the students' first language, although it is the language of communication at school.
(iii) English medium of instruction in all subjects even in the teaching of Chinese/Mandarin.	(iii) NCS separated from Chinese medium of Instruction main school student body, NCS medium of instruction <b>is</b> English.
(iv) Staff Chinese with 1 Native English Teacher (NET), with additional staff (6) from Canada, Philippines, Europe and the UK, 1 NET teacher.	(iv) Staff Chinese teachers with addition of 2 trained teaching staff from Nepal, & 1 NET teacher.

<u>F. Wan Primary School</u> <i>Non-designated /Private School</i>
(i) 68 students <b>80%</b> are Ethnic Minority,
(ii) NCS student body comprised of Indian, Thai, Nepalese, Turkish and other European ethnicities; English first language for some, others it is not.
(iii) English medium of instruction across whole school.

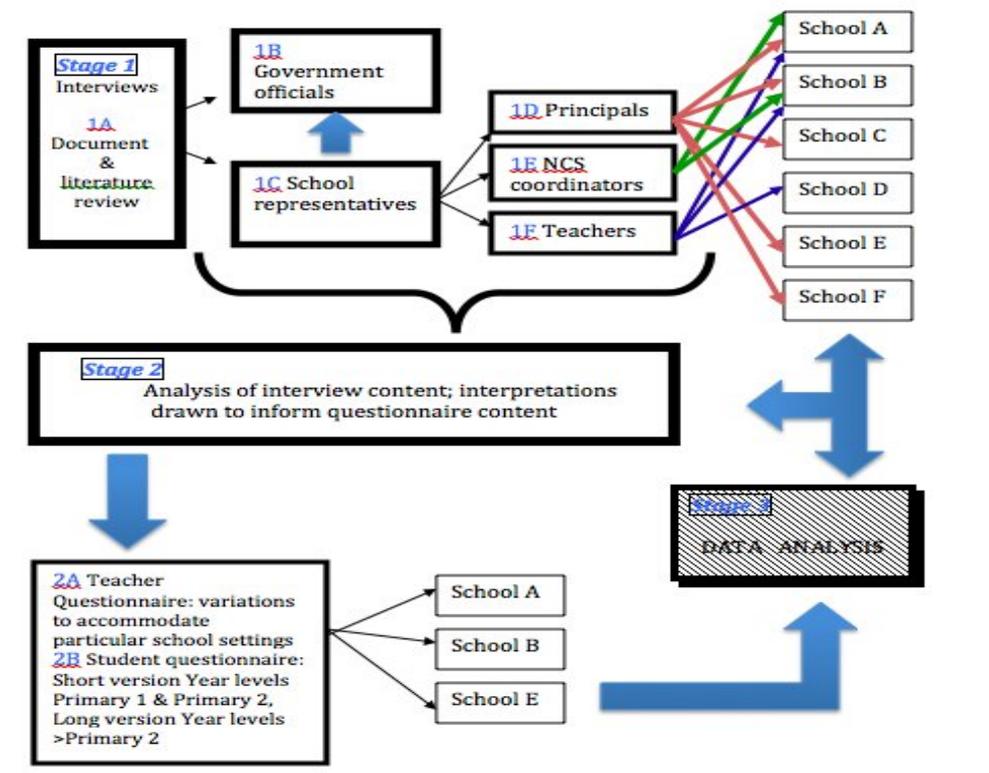
(iv) Principal is Turkish, teachers are comprised of local Chinese, European – Turkish, American and Australian.

Table 2 reveals the ethnic diversity of the students; the differentiated use of support measure funding and the introduced school-based curriculum and organisation structures that each school implemented.

### Research Methodology

Data were obtained through semi-structured interviews and online teacher and student questionnaires (Figure 1). Interviews were conducted in English and Chinese (Cantonese) depending on participants' preference. Following the interviews, researchers returned transcripts for member checking to ensure accurate interpretation of views.

Figure 1:  
Research Design Overview



## Analysis of Data

Data were analysed on two-levels. Level 1 involved an analysis that aligned the findings with research questions. The level 2 analysis was carried out on data that fell outside the scope of the questions, i.e. unexpected and uncalled for perceptions and interpretations that emerged. At both levels, data provided the following answers to the inquiry questions.

### *Do the Support Measures alleviate the obstacles of Language and Cultural Barriers?*

Principals' and teachers' perceptions of the purpose of the funding support measures were generally in line with the government's intention to alleviate the obstacles of language barriers. However, cultural barriers were rarely articulated. The only initiative attempting to address the issue was Peninsula Primary's employment of Ethnic Minority Teaching Assistants (TAs) to help facilitate communication between Ethnic Minority parents and teachers.

### *Are the Support Measures facilitating Smooth Integration?*

It was a repeated concern across the research sites that teachers working in a NCS/EM setting felt they didn't know how best to teach the students – not only in Chinese but also in other subjects. The response to this pedagogical challenge differed from school to school.

Bayside Primary teachers felt they often had to find their own way to meet students' language learning needs and confessed that a lot of extra time was spend tailoring the Chinese curriculum particularly beyond Primary 3. Although a supplementary guide to the Chinese Language Curriculum had been provided to teachers, the issue remained that the Chinese Language Curriculum was originally developed for native Chinese students and was too advanced for Chinese Second Language learners. At Bayside Primary, a teacher reasoned that as the majority of the Non-Chinese speaking students were immigrant students with mixed heritage, they had different learning needs from other designated schools

with South Asian Ethnic Minority students (a statement that reveals a form of stratification exists inside the ranks of designated school).

At Bayside Primary the Teaching Assistants (TAs) developed lesson materials for Chinese language teachers thus lessened their teaching preparation and administrative work. Nevertheless the teachers all expressed the need for more support in their efforts to ‘manage’ their mixed heritage immigrant students. ‘Manage’ was a term repeatedly heard in interviews at Bayside Primary; upon clarification it was revealed that teachers labelled the NCS/EM students as being ‘more active’ which demanded a different pedagogy. Consequently the school separated the NCS/EM students from local Chinese students in each Grade level and labelled the immigrant class the B Class. Teachers claimed that integrating immigrant students with Chinese students hindered the progress of Chinese students’ learning of Chinese, and hindered immigrant students’ progress in learning English (as the immigrant students were more proficiency in English than their Chinese peers).

Separation on the basis of curriculum needs was also given as the reason why Northern Secondary taught its Ethnic Minority student body separately from its Chinese mainstream students. In this designated school, an NCS/EM precinct was physically separate from the mainstream school section. For the small segregated Ethnic Minority group the medium of instruction in all subjects was English, as it was the students’ strongest second/other language (although it was by no means competently spoken or written). Northern Secondary’s NCS/EM section did not follow the government-endorsed curriculum closely and therefore failed to prepare its NCS/EM students for success in the public examination. Teachers at the school expressed the view that a separate curriculum structure was appropriate for these students because:

... a gap exists between the linguistic capabilities of Chinese and Ethnic Minority students and if we were to integrate the two groups of students it would lead to greater teaching challenges such as those associated with mixed abilities. (Northern Secondary teachers)

However, an Ethnic Minority (Nepalese) teacher, at Northern Secondary viewed the pedagogy practices as problematic. He explained that some Chinese teachers have difficulty conveying their subject

content in English to NCS/EM students; for example some senior NCS/EM students complained that their Information and Communication Technology results were poor and blamed this on their local Chinese teacher because the teacher could not explain the concepts clearly enough in English. Consequently many students wanted to drop the subject and the Ethnic Minority teacher claimed ‘they lost the motivation to achieve in the subject and foresaw a dark future because of their poor performance’. Combined School Assemblies and Parent & Teacher meetings at Northern Secondary were conducted in Cantonese thus ignoring the language barriers of NCS/EM parents; in effect this prevented smooth integration.

At a number of schools the strict use of only Chinese or English was enforced. At Peninsula Primary, discipline sheets completed by student monitors at the conclusion of each lesson noted particular student misbehaviours. Along with more common misbehaviours, the speaking of a language other than Chinese or English was recorded as inappropriate.

Language was not the only barrier. Cross-cultural issues were also evident. Teachers at Northern Secondary and Peninsula Primary held the view that Ethnic Minority immigrant parents placed more emphasis on their children’s participation in religious activities than in educational activities. After pressure from two Ethnic Minority teachers, Northern Secondary granted NCS/EM students a holiday at the time of their specified cultural/religious festivals.

From data drawn from Bayside Primary another issue emerged. A teacher reported being confronted with conflicting parental expectations and recounted his difficulty in balancing demands of the NCS/EM and the Chinese parents. The teacher observed that Chinese parents considered the teachers too lenient with Ethnic Minority immigrant students, whereas immigrant parents felt that teachers were too strict on their children. Drawing a comparison between Chinese and immigrant students, a Bayside Primary teacher expressed the view that education is very much valued in the Chinese culture and gave the example of Chinese students being more diligent with their homework, whereas from her observations NCS/EM parents did not value education because their attitude to homework was ‘less strict’.

At Peninsula Primary teachers were in consensus that NCS/EM parents did not engage in their children’s education as much as local Chinese parents. Their view was that NCS/EM parents were

reluctant to come to school because interacting with teachers and school administration presented them with difficulties. The principal recognised this cultural barrier and even though she believed her school was going against the intended use of the support measure funding, she defended her decision to employ Ethnic Minority Teaching Assistants (TAs):

... our school has been admitting South Asian students ... some of the parents cannot communicate in English. The issue is worse especially if they have just emigrated from their home country. ... we employ TAs from India, the Philippines, Pakistan and Nepal. ... [over] several years we have seen the great benefit they bring in terms of communication between the school and families; ... it has prevented misunderstandings.

As the TAs came from the same Ethnic Minority background as the students, they were able to perform much needed liaison duties, which included communicating with NCS/EM students and their parents and facilitating teacher and the school administrative needs.

### Language as a barrier for teachers

Interactions with parents can present the teacher with a language challenge. At Bayside Primary (where segregated B Classes were established across all grades) NCS/EM parents predominantly spoke English. It was apparent from teacher interviews that there was apprehension on the part of some teachers because they lacked confidence in using English. One teacher commented that;

In the B Class, teachers need to contact parents who don't speak Cantonese. The teacher would need to have studied or majored in English if she/he needs to contact parents to handle any problems. (Bayside Primary teacher)

To overcome this challenge, Chinese teachers at Northern Secondary sought the assistance of fellow teachers who were from the same Ethnic Minority group or spoke the student's language (the Nepalese teacher could speak both Nepalese and a number of Indian dialects). These teachers were called on to handle student disciplinary issues that arose between Chinese speaking teachers and Ethnic Minority parents (this mediation role was over and above normal teaching duties). In Northern Secondary

all forms of written communication with parents was in Chinese unless one of the two teachers with ethnic minority backgrounds translated the communiqués.

These examples represent some of the language related issues recognised in the schools participating in this inquiry. It is not only the language challenges of Chinese teachers but also their lack of cultural and linguistic knowledge about the NCS/EM communities that contribute to poor integration within the linguistically diverse school contexts.

*Do the Support Measures positively impact Immigrant students' educational opportunities?*

Determining the educational outcomes of the support measures for Ethnic Minority students is complex. Although teachers claim they benefit from the Chinese Curriculum Supplementary guide and onsite pedagogical workshops organised by the EDB, the pathway towards better Chinese language acquisition for NCS/EM students is fraught with difficulties. From a survey administered to students in the Year levels beyond Primary 3, the spoken and written language they found the most challenging was Chinese. The few students, who did not find it a challenge, were those who had spent some of their school life in non-designated schools.

In designated schools Chinese language teachers maintain that they need to devote a great deal of time and effort to modify the curriculum to suit their NCS students' needs. Some teachers found that preparing a glossary in advance was helpful. Some confessed to their limited proficiency in English, which occasionally caused frustrations when students, who used English as the medium of instruction in school, needed immediate explanation of Chinese vocabulary. These teachers also faced similar frustrations when NCS/EM students asked for explanations in English of Chinese idioms and cultural nuances.

Teachers at Kowloon Secondary explained that even when NCS/EM students were doing well in their Chinese language learning they still faced a major hurdle in the public examination. A Chinese language teacher witnessed Ethnic Minority who had previously been progressing well in their Chinese

language learning, suddenly experience a sense of failure after performing poorly in the Chinese public examination (benchmarks are set for specific Grade levels based on the expected achievement levels of native Chinese speaking students; no separate examination syllabus was developed for Chinese-as-a-second language learners). Despite the careful sequencing of teaching and the incremental learning inside daily Chinese lessons, NCS/EM students sitting the public examination and year-end exams still found themselves ill-prepared for the examination and subsequently achieved poor outcomes.

A Kowloon Secondary teacher stressed that ‘we shouldn’t be using the standards of local students to measure the progress of second language Chinese students’. Another teacher explained that students who moved to Hong Kong in senior primary years were bound to fail in the Chinese Territory-wide System Assessment (public testing conducted at Primary 3, Primary 6 & Secondary 9 levels, across the subjects of Chinese, English and Maths).

There are significant numbers of Ethnic Minority students who join the school in their late primary and secondary school years. These new arrival students possess limited ability in the English language, and little to no Chinese language background. Immediately upon their admission into Hong Kong schools they are put into Chinese language classrooms using a curriculum that caters for students who are native Chinese speakers.

Secondary teachers in these situations expressed helplessness; they have had no training in how to teach older students who are beginning Chinese language learners. Kowloon Secondary and Northern Secondary teachers lamented that there was an absence of a consistent language policy for Second language Chinese as opposed to Chinese for native speakers. It was also expressed that there was a lack of direction in designing appropriate curriculum and support that addressed issues of NCS/EM students who potentially have special learning needs, i.e. Special Educational Needs students (SEN).

In this inquiry all teachers from designated schools welcomed the support measures and the various pedagogical practices launched with the additional funds. Overwhelmingly all schools claimed more was needed - more support for Chinese Language curriculum adaptations, more Chinese language teaching resources, and more Chinese language professional development.

Whilst the government claims the support measures will alleviate cultural barriers and facilitate smooth integration of NCS/EM students, the inquiry's findings reveal little evidence of this. Only Peninsula Primary attempted to address cultural barriers by employing Ethnic Minority Teaching Assistants. There was no evidence from other schools participating in this inquiry that acknowledged the need for the kind of support that would raise Chinese teachers' awareness about how to best teach in multicultural and multilingual contexts.

A stark finding (and one that was contrary to the government's original intention) was that the Designated School Policy was creating further divisions both between and inside schools. The practice of NCS/EM students being separated as a consequence of structural arrangement within the schools, limited opportunities for mutual respect and multicultural awareness. Separate schools and school-based segregation as evidenced in this inquiry were seen to be contributing to the invisibility of cultural diversity.

## **Conclusion**

### **Beyond Language: Other Barriers**

A plethora of educational solutions have been attempted in culturally and linguistically diverse jurisdictions with more or less success. Finding the answers to frequently voiced concerns within the Hong Kong context will necessitate policy and practice change impacting curricula, teaching strategies, teacher attitudes and school admission.

To address barriers beyond language issues requires an ideological shift in thinking on the part of Hong Kong society. Even though Hong Kong is readily identified as an international city, this extends only to economic trade and international tourism. In schools such diversity is ignored. Essentially government schools operate within a monoculture mindset. The government needs to acknowledge that the world is increasingly a global one, and that the diversity of its schools' and society's workforce will continue. Embracing diversity needs to be considered the new norm for Hong Kong as it 'launches its boat' on a pathway to achieving sustainable social, cultural and economic development in Hong Kong.

Regrettably in this inquiry there were no practices emanating from the support measures that can be reported as being exemplary for NCS/EM students. There were however, a few practices and personal attitudes that were identified as examples of shifting perceptions. The previously mentioned practice of employing Ethnic Minority TAs is one, and the need for an attitude shift expressed by the Kowloon Secondary principal is another. The Kowloon Secondary Principal is also the principal of Esplanade Primary a non-designated school – he is a well-respected and long-term advocate for NCS/EM students. His assessment of the current circumstances prompted him to state that if he were in charge of the educational issues related to NCS/EM students:

... I would use resources to help the Ethnic Minority by targeting the [whole] education system first. The system is not healthy at all to support the education of Ethnic Minority. ... most schools, if they have choice, won't admit Ethnic Minority [students]. We need to encourage schools ... it's not easy. We have to provide them some benefit, so that they have the intention to admit NCS/EM students and for the schools to understand the good part to having Ethnic Minority students in their schools, not only for the Ethnic Minority but for everyone in the school. The greatest challenge for me now is to expose the teachers to the best part of our Ethnic Minority kids no matter where they're from. I'm looking at one of the practices, which has been doing well in the US. It's called two-way immersion. Truthfully, if I were looking for a strategy to work in the best interests of Ethnic Minority students it would be to not have designated schools.

### ***Social and Cultural needs of Ethnic Minority students***

The struggle Ethnic Minority immigrant students' face in terms of their social and cultural identity is related to social and cultural capital, and subsequent loss of agency. NCS/EM communities have different cultural and social practices from that of the dominant Chinese community. Jenlink (2009) argues that non-recognition results in discrimination, marginalization, and/or subordination. A rationale response from many older NCS/EM students is to drop out of senior secondary and prematurely enter the

unskilled workforce, as recently reported by the EOC report (Centre for Civil Society and Governance & Policy 21 Limited, 2012).

The issues surrounding NCS/EM students' efforts to achieve success in educational endeavours are complex and do not rest entirely on successful acquisition of Chinese. Hue and Kennedy's (2012) recent research, points towards the need for broader focused intercultural support for both teachers and students, in addition to Chinese Language enhancement for NCS/EM students. Ladson-Billings (1999, 2001), speaks of the huge shift that non-immigrant teachers need to make when they do not share their students' linguistic or cultural background. This shift involves accommodating different cultural frames of reference and different pedagogical practices. A two-pronged process is necessary, involving local teachers engaging in professional development related to perspectives on multiculturalism and cultural sustainability that would be applicable to the Hong Kong context (not imported models from Anglophone jurisdictions) and another involving the employment of more Ethnic Minority Teaching Assistants and teachers in schools where Ethnic Minority immigrant students are enrolled. There is no disputing the fact that Ethnic Minority teachers and teaching assistants can help students bridge the cultural and linguistic worlds of home and school.

Heung (2006) calls for the recognition of emotional and behavioural needs of Ethnic Minority immigrant students. In an effort to advert the stress of these emotional, behavioural and identity issues, Ethnic Minority teachers and teaching assistants, could facilitate NCS/EM students' understanding of racism, and build resilience to it (Hue and Kennedy, 2012). If such support is not provided Ethnic Minority immigrant students will hold negative views about their cross-cultural experiences and regard themselves as being unaccepted and discriminated against, which can induce increased anger about injustice and inequity metered out to them by HK society (Hue and Kennedy, 2012).

The inquiry's findings point towards Hong Kong's need to avail itself of common principles for effective education of ethnic and linguistic minority students e.g. respect for students' cultural needs, recognition of, and respect for their first language, and effective support for students' efforts in gaining proficiency in second/additional language/s. Employing pedagogy that builds on what students bring to

their learning contexts – their funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992) – is unspoken in Hong Kong schools, but it is crucial for effective engagement in learning, as are policies that increase equity of educational opportunities, inclusive of access to higher education institutions. Recommendations from this inquiry echo the recent calls by members of the Legislative Council (LegCo, 2012) who called on the Chief Executive to act upon the nine recommendations outlined in the Equal Opportunities Commission (2011). It also urged that a comprehensive database be established to track the academic and social development of NCS/EM students. This inquiry would add that there is an urgent need to establish the mechanisms for; (i) transparent public evaluation of the support measures (ii) a qualitative inquiry into pedagogy what works (and determine why) and what doesn't work (and determine why not), and (iii) systematic data collation of comparable data to be drawn from NCS/EM students' performance in those public examinations at Year levels Primary 3, Primary 6 and Secondary 3 in order to track the students' performance and determine whether support measures are making any inroads into their educational outcomes.

It is through these mechanisms that the best economic and social potentiality can come about for Hong Kong's NCS/EM students and their teachers.

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