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**Creating Culturally Responsive Classrooms: The diverse learning needs of ethnic minority students in Hong Kong schools**

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**Abstract**

Many Hong Kong schools are concerned with the growing number of enrolments of ethnic minority students. This article examines teachers' views of the cross-cultural experience of ethnic minority students and how the diverse needs of ethnic minority students are fulfilled. Qualitative data were collected from unstructured interviews with thirty teachers from primary and secondary schools. This study shows that the diverse learning needs of ethnic minority students and their classroom behavior are culturally different from the majority of Hong Kong Chinese students. To manage classroom diversity, teachers struggle to conceptualize a new rationale for responding to cultural diversity. They develop a sense of inter-cultural sensitivity, promote cultural responsiveness to diversity, and strengthen the home-school connection. This article argues that, like students, teachers simultaneously engage in a cross-cultural process through which they learn the culture of ethnic minority students, re-learn their own culture and re-examine the relevant rationale underlying cultural responsiveness. They also adopt a 'relative' view in constructing an understanding the diverse needs of ethnic minority students and the classroom situation in which they participate. Teachers take a 'relative' perspective to examine the diverse needs of ethnic minority students by comparing them with students from the majority culture. Yet teachers realize that ethnic minority students and their parents tend to use another 'relative'

perspective to construct their cross-cultural experience by comparing what they currently have in the host society with what they would have in their home country. This sense of relativism forms an essential element for the creation of culturally responsive classrooms. This gives school practitioners of ethnic minority hope and motivation to face new challenges and to explore new opportunities. Finally, the implications for the creation of a culturally responsive classroom will be outlined.

### **Introduction**

Hong Kong is well known as an international city that bridges East and West. Its colonial history and its current status as a Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China attest to its special status bridging two worlds. While Hong Kong has been predominantly a Chinese society there is today some evidence of its colonial background as well as a current demand for unskilled labour that results in a more ethnically diverse community. In the most recent census (2007) some 2% of the school age population comes from diverse ethnic backgrounds such as Pakistani, Indian, Nepalese, Indonesian, Filipinos and Thai. In a predominantly Chinese society, these numbers are few but a recently passed Racial Discrimination Ordinance has alerted authorities to the need to ensure equitable educational provision for these ethnic minority students (Kennedy 2008). While concerns have been expressed about how all students can be equally valued in schools, Hong Kong schools have become aware of their responsibility for catering for the diverse needs of every individual student, regardless of their background, such as ethnicity and languages spoken (Education Commission 2000; Education and Manpower Bureau 2004a, 2004b). The Hong Kong SAR Government has been attempting to formulate an educational policy

ensuring provision for ethnic minority students, and have been exploring various ways to implement this in the classroom to fulfill the legal requirement that all students are equal and that diversity should not be taken as grounds for any form of discrimination.

The purpose of this study was to examine how teachers construct the cross-cultural experiences of students in general and specifically how the diverse learning needs of these students were addressed. Understanding what classroom experiences these students have and what challenges and difficulties these students have been dealing with in relation to cultural, social, and psychological changes is a way to help school practitioners think about the effective management of diversity in the classroom and their roles in supporting the education of these students. This can optimize the individual student's potential regardless of ability, ethnicity or socio-cultural background. Such understandings can assist us to develop ways of creating a culturally responsive classroom in the context of Hong Kong education.

In what follows, the discussion begins with an examination of relevant studies into the learning difficulties of ethnic minority students in schools in Hong Kong, the United Kingdom, and the United States. A theoretical framework is established to examine the cross-cultural experiences of ethnic minority students on the basis of the literature. The research method adopted and some findings from this study will then be reported and lastly, the implications for the provision of education to ethnic minority students will be discussed at the two levels of curriculum and whole-school programme.

## **Literature Review**

According to the Hong Kong population census statistics, the number of ethnic minority students has been growing in Hong Kong while their needs and rights have not been properly addressed. In 2001, there were 11,204 ethnic minority students under 15 years, who were legally required to be enrolled in schools with free education. By 2006, the number had grown by 20% to 13,472, while in 2007 there were 28,722 ethnic minority students studying full-time in schools or educational institutions in Hong Kong (Census and Statistics Department 2007). Compared with local Chinese students, the rate of school attendance of ethnic minority students aged above 15 was relatively low particularly for those enrolled in educational programmes at post-secondary level. This difference in attendance rates can be compared between the whole population of students in the two age groups of 17-18 and 19-24, which are 82.8% and 37.3% respectively, whereas, for the population of ethnic minority students in these two age groups, the rates are 74.3% and 6.7% respectively (Census and Statistics Department 2007).

In response to the growing ethnic minority student population in Hong Kong, there is a developing body of literature on the education of these students. Loper (2004) found that many ethnic minority students such as Indians, Pakistanis, Nepalese and Filipinos were excluded from Hong Kong schools (Loper 2004; Yang Memorial Methodist Social Service 2000, 2002). Public concern about the education of ethnic minority students has been reflected in stories of these students' experiences, difficulties and struggles in Hong Kong schools and communities, as reported in Hong Kong newspapers (Ku, Chan, and Sandhu 2005; South China Morning Post 2006a, 2006b). However some positive experiences were

reported from teachers in classrooms where ethnic minority students participated. Kennedy, Hue and Tsui (2008) showed that teachers reported a higher level of self-efficacy when teaching non-Chinese compared to Chinese students and that they were equally able to engage all students in their learning.

The education of ethnic minority students is also an issue of great concern in western societies and it is accepted that the enrolment of ethnic minority students has brought diversity to the classroom. The diverse needs of these students have been highlighted in studies into their cross-cultural experiences in the classroom (Codjoe 2001; Haque 2000; He, Phillion, Chan, and Xu 2008; Mansouri and Trembath 2005; Rassool 1999). In general, these ethnic minority students have difficulties learning the local language, while their families struggle with economic insecurity or poverty (Cummins 1989, 2000; Cuypers 2001; Rutter 1994; Stevenson and Willott 2007). It is evident that for these students their personal growth, when associated with economic insecurity, is exacerbated by language barriers, migration and acculturation processes (Ruiz-de-Velasco, Fix, and Clewell 2000; Rutter 1994).

While the diverse needs of ethnic minority students have been examined, extensive research has also been done on multiculturalism and other diversity issues that are central to mainstream schooling. These studies seek to discover how ethnic minority students can be better supported in the classroom (Caballero, Haynes, and Tikly 2007; Cheminais 2001; Dentler and Hafner 1997; Ladson-Billings 1994; Phillion 2002). They include studies on the management of students' behaviour problems (Atzaba-Poria, Pike, and Deater-Deckard

2004; Fuligni 1998) and learning styles for students from different ethnic groups in different school subjects (Ali 2003; Nabobo and Teasdale 1994; Paku, Zegwaard, and Coll 2003; Taylor and Coll 2002). Some studies have raised concerns for teacher education in the context of multicultural education and the understanding of ethnic minority students (Arora 2005; Garcia and Lopez 2005; Santoro 2009; Solomon, Portelli, Daniel, and Campbell 2005; Thomas and Kearney 2008).

## **Methodology**

### *Theoretical Framework*

This study adopted the sociological framework of the social construction of reality to help make sense of the ethnic minority students' schooling experience, and how the knowledge of social realities was constructed in everyday classroom life (Berger and Luckmann 1973; Holzner 1968). To explore this knowledge, the methodological approaches of narrative analysis and personal experience were employed for interviews (Anderson 1991; Clandinin and Connelly 1995; Denzin 1998; Geertz 1973; Holstein and Gubrium 1995). Specifically, the methodological approach suggested by Clandinin and Connelly (1995) was used to explore what constructs the teachers used when talking about the cross-cultural experiences of ethnic minority students across three dimensions, namely 1) the change of the 'space' from the classroom to the home of ethnic minority people; 2) in the 'place' of the Hong Kong classroom where they participated, and 3) throughout the 'time' when they were in the classroom, the school and the home and how they interacted with others. Furthermore, the analytical framework of moving 'inward', 'outward', 'backward' and 'forward' was adopted. Moving 'inward' was to discover their inner feelings towards

others' cross-cultural experiences, whereas with moving 'outward', the constructs of the host society of Hong Kong and the community of the ethnic minority people were explored. Moving 'backward' and 'forward', was to narrate how these teachers related the stories of their 'past' experience to 'the present' and how it shaped their aspirations for 'the future'.

### *Research Methods*

This study was qualitative in nature. Unstructured interviews were conducted in three secondary schools where large numbers of ethnic minority students were enrolled. Having received school permissions, thirty-two teachers were invited to attend one-on-one interviews. Each interview lasted about sixty minutes and was tape-recorded. The interviews were conducted in either English or Cantonese. This was intended to provide the interviewees with substantial freedom to talk about the issues concerned. The unstructured interview method adopted for this study could be considered a type of active interview as proposed by Holstein and Gubrium (1995), in which the parents and the interviewer play significant roles in constructing a conversation.

Since this study involved gathering information about individuals or individual situations from teachers, some important ethical considerations were taken into account, as recommended in the literature (Alderson 1995; Ball 1981; Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific 1999; Hargreaves 1967; Hill, Laybourn, and Borland 1996; Lacey 1974).. For example, participation was voluntary and would not result in harm to participants and other school members. Furthermore, confidentiality issues which might arise were addressed with participants having a clear understanding of how their

contributions would be reported (Bentley, Oakley, Gibson, and Kilgour 1999).

### **The Findings**

The enrollment of ethnic minority students into Hong Kong schools was regarded as one of the key factors which made the classroom more diverse and multicultural. With the range of diversity of these students' races, cultures, religions, customs and socio-economic backgrounds, teachers realized that ethnic minority students had different learning needs compared to local Chinese students. When fulfilling their needs, the teachers struggled with conceptualizing a new rationale for cultural responsiveness to diversity, developing an ability of intercultural sensitivity, promoting cultural responsiveness to diversity, strengthening the home-school collaboration and broadening ethnic minority students' aspirations of education and career. These were the five themes emerging from the data collected. They will be explained below.

#### *Making sense of cultural responsiveness to diversity*

The teachers regarded the classroom as a context where ethnic minority students could be helped to integrate into the culture of Hong Kong society and where multiculturalism could be promoted, in addition to transferring knowledge and teaching to public examination standards. To put this into practice, they intended to minimize the differences by insisting that all students were equal, and that all cultural differences, such as celebrating traditional customs and religious festivals, should be accepted and appreciated. This could be reflected by teachers' narratives of 'multiculturalism', that is, the culture they intended to create in the classroom and beyond. This construct was also linked to the other ethos of



‘cultural integration’ and ‘cultural harmony’. It could also be further shown by how they disagreed with the term “non-Chinese students” used by the government to indicate ethnic minority students, as this term reflected the domination of the host society culture and neglected the cultural diversity of ethnic minority students. When invited to interpret these constructs in depth, some teachers apparently felt puzzled by the adoption of the dominant local culture for acculturation, and questioned the type of culture into which ethnic minority students had to be integrated. As two teachers put it,

*Is there a culture called non-Chinese? What do they behave like? Where is non-China? If you are ethnically Chinese but lived in South Africa, what is your culture? We have Chinese students like this. What about ethnic Pakistanis that behave Chinese? Focus on the individual and less on the group. I have seen Filipinos behave like Chinese and Chinese behave like Pakistanis.*

*We don't see them (ethnic minority students) as non-Chinese students. It is very wrong to put ethnic minority students as a single category of students, compared to Chinese. If you looked at them (ethnic minority students) closely, you would understand that they are all so different. The differences are so vast, much different than you could imagine. They occur because the students come from different countries, with different religions. They have different family backgrounds, and different characters. Even students with the same ethnic background, can be so different. It is just like Chinese students. They are so vastly different... In my eyes, there is no distinction between Chinese students and non-Chinese students. Rather, I try to see them all individually. Race is one of the differences between them.*

In some schools, teachers became aware that the current ethos of ‘cultural harmony’ led teachers to focus more on treating ethnic minority students fairly with Chinese students, drawing them to see the similarities among the different racial groups of people rather than addressing their differences. Under the notion of being fair to every student, teachers were worried that they would be accused of being unfair and unjust if they acted or intended to manage Chinese and ethnic minority students differently. When managing diversity in the classroom, teachers therefore made an attempt to maintain the fairness between Chinese and ethnic minority students and keep relations between the majority and the minority in harmony. As common Chinese sayings suggested, ‘under the same principle of benevolence, all people should be treated equally’ (一視同仁) and ‘people do not mind having nothing at all, but they do mind inequality’ (不患貧而患不均). The philosophies of benevolence and equality underlying these sayings were rooted at Confucianism. They were used by some teachers to describe how ethnic minority students were supported and how their needs were fulfilled by teachers adhering to these philosophies. As two teachers put it respectively,

*If I pay excessive attention to them (ethnic minority students), what Chinese students would say is, “the teacher is unfair” ... You know, these students need more support, but some students and parents may not see it as we do... We need to be fair. As said, “people do not mind having nothing at all, but they do mind inequality”, this is what we are doing.*

*We are trying to ensure that all students are treated equally, especially when they are*

*disciplined. This is crucial in our school, because students come from different countries. They are very sensitive to how you manage things; and the issues of race come up quickly, for example, when you manage the behavior of a student who has a particular racial background; and the way he is managed is different from other students who have different racial background. Therefore, we are trying to ensure that "under the same principle of benevolence, all people should be treated equally".*

In fulfilling the diverse learning needs of students, however, as teachers stressed, the current ethos of 'cultural harmony', which was regarded as being overly rooted in the dominant culture of Hong Kong and as "too Chinese", was unable to offer a favourable ground whereupon fairness, justice and equity could be resolved. Teachers therefore asserted a need for formulating 'a new rationale of multiculturalism' and developing a model of 'cultural harmony', both of which were contextualized in Hong Kong schools. As one teacher said,

*It is impossible for their (ethnic minority) culture to be taken away, especially when we teach in the classroom. It is a must to keep their culture, and not emphasize the "mainstream" culture (Chinese). Show respect to it (the culture of ethnic minority people). In the course of integration, their characteristics should be preserved... so that they are provided with a sense of security... We certainly need to have a new rationale, a new way and a new model for cultural integration. How do I say it... the current one is too Chinese; the new one should be built upon the broader value of culture.*

### *Developing an ability of intercultural sensitivity*

When students from different cultural backgrounds were put in the same classroom, their learning needs became diverse. The complexity of this cultural diversity could be reflected in the four categories of students identified. They included Hong Kong Chinese students, ethnic minority students born in Hong Kong, the new immigrant ethnic minority students and new immigrant students from Mainland China. Each had their specific learning needs and brought a number of unique characteristics and cultural diversities to the classroom, in terms of language abilities with Chinese and English, academic achievement, ways of numerical thinking, styles of communication, ways of relating to others, and different concepts of themselves as learners. They experienced cultural and linguistic differences and struggled with differences in school systems, classroom experiences and academic programmes.

The teachers insisted that the management of learning and classroom behaviour could be more effective when they incorporated knowledge of cultural differences into the classroom and brought positive aspects of students' cultural experiences to their learning. In doing this, they demonstrated a strong sense of empathy and tried to see the world from the perspectives of ethnic minority students, which were different from Chinese students' perspectives in some ways. The teachers stressed that Chinese teachers could feel frustrated if they expected ethnic minority students to behave, show emotion, and express feelings like Chinese students. They could also fail to interpret the social behavior of ethnic minority students. To avoid this happening, in addition to enhancing their knowledge of the cultures of the different ethnic groups of students, they needed to reflect on their own

methods, standards and expectations. For example, one teacher explained why some ethnic minority students liked sitting with their peers on the ground in the park and on the floor in the compartment of the metro (train) while chatting loudly. This behavior was described by the ethnic minority students as a way of expressing friendship and togetherness. Any negative perceptions of such behavior as 'selfish', 'noisy' and 'the result of poor parenting', held by some Hong Kong Chinese, were considered inappropriate. This could also be seen from one teacher's classroom experience as narrated below:

*Superficially, you may find some ethnic minority students very impulsive; and they seem used to beating each other up. This is what I once experienced when teaching in a junior class. A girl from a senior class rushed into my classroom and did not say anything to me but kept crying loudly. She got close to the seat of another girl and slapped her face. I asked her why she did so. She explained to me that she was instructed by her mother, as this girl bullied her (younger) sister, so she could beat her up without telling teachers about it. This was what the girl was taught at home; she therefore insisted that there was nothing wrong at all. I then called up her parent and told her what her child had done in the classroom. The mother said, "Oh, it is okay!" She just could not see how serious it was, as I did. It took me a long time to get her to view the issue from my point of view while I understood hers. Later on, I talked to a Pakistani teaching assistant. I was told that some tribes in Pakistan had a culture like this. When any member in a tribe was beaten up, the whole tribe could act and beat up the tribe of the attacker. This is part of their culture.*

With regard to learning difficulty, when compared to Chinese students most ethnic

minority students had vast difficulties in learning the three subjects: Chinese Language, English Language and Mathematics. What made teachers deeply concerned was how to raise ethnic minority students' learning motivation, while reflecting on how to tailor the existing curriculum and develop effective teaching strategies. As one teacher put it, "even I can use lots of the most advanced strategies and IT to teach, but it means nothing if students do not want to learn." Amongst the four categories of students, the teachers found it hardest to improve the learning of the new ethnic minority student immigrants, as they struggled to master simultaneously the two foreign languages of English and Chinese. When teachers looked for an explanation, it was contended that ethnic minority students' low learning motivation for learning the Chinese Language was rooted in the students' beliefs that the labour they put in acquiring proficiency in the dominant language, Chinese, would not be properly rewarded in terms of jobs and social recognition. For those students who planned to further their study in their home countries or to migrate to western societies, learning Chinese became even more irrelevant to their aspirations of education and future careers. Therefore, what teachers did was to persuade students about the importance of learning this foreign language for the success of their future career development, but as they later realized, the effort they put in reasoning with the students was not effective enough to get them motivated to learn the Chinese Language.

#### *Strengthening home-school collaboration*

To manage better the diversity issues arising from the classroom, teachers realized that it was crucial to collaborate with parents. However, In practice, however, they experienced difficulty in achieving their expectations. This was partly because, compared to Chinese

parents, ethnic minority parents had different expectations of their parental role and different aspirations for their children's education and future careers. As the teachers narrated, minority parents, especially of Pakistani and Indian students, made sense of their role only in terms of complying with the law, which required them to send their children, aged under 15, to school. Most were not keen on helping teachers improve their children's classroom behaviour and only very few worked with teachers to supervise their children's learning at home. Teachers estimated that almost 70% of ethnic minority students did not submit the assigned homework by the date requested. Although the parents acknowledged that they had to take responsibility for working with teachers, they did not have sufficient knowledge about how to support their children's classroom learning, especially those parents who did not speak and read any Chinese and English. The underlying message of teachers' and parents' narratives was that the parents were overwhelmed with a sense of powerlessness. This feeling was intensified when teachers attempted to 'pull' the ethnic minority parents into collaborating with the school, but they were 'pushed' away by the parents. As one teacher put it,

*Parents do not have any expectation for their children's academic achievement. It is the form tutors who get parents to have expectations and let them know that their students are expected to submit all homework. It is very hard (to get parents to do so) because they do not have expectations. Too little. They even have no understanding of what they can do. In this school, most of the teachers are very good. They are used to calling up parents when they find their students are unable to do what is expected.*

When teachers made sense of the role of ethnic minority parents when engaging in the

classroom learning of their children, they realized that cultural and religious perspectives should be taken into account when making sense of parental roles and expectations of children's education. From a cultural perspective, the gender role in the family of ethnic minority students was culturally stereotyped. This was particularly the case for Pakistani and Indian parents. Mothers were expected to stay at home and do housework and cooking whereas fathers should earn money and refrain from all housework. In general, a wife was not supposed to leave home or get in touch with males without the permission of her husband. There was no exception made even when male teachers needed to discuss a student's learning. This was one of the reasons why teachers found it hard to work with ethnic minority parents. As one teacher explained,

*If the males (in a student's family) work outside, they definitely do not have any holidays and do not have to stay at home. For the females, it may be their natural character. They keep 'the self' from the outside world. Ever since they arrived in Hong Kong, they have rarely gone outside. More often, they are subordinated to their husband. They even feel shy when they participate in school activities, even in the company of their husband. It may be related to their religious beliefs.*

From the religious perspective, what made ethnic minority students distinctive from Chinese students was that most ethnic minority students were devoted to their religion, for example, Muslim, Sikh and Hindu. Many students had to attend classes after school to learn the holy texts in Mosques or Sikh Temples, and these finished at approximately 7:00 pm. When students went back home, they felt too tired to study and complete their homework. It was found that for most ethnic minority students, religion played a very



important role in their everyday life; and this should be taken into account when caring or guidance is offered to them. As a teacher narrated,

*The Muslim church puts a very strong emphasis on children's religious education. The first priority is to pray and participate in religious activities. It is completely different from what our school emphasizes, that is, academic achievement. If the schedule of their religious activities clashes with the schedule organized by school, especially religious activities not relevant to academic matters, it goes without saying that they will certainly choose praying and chanting.*

The narratives of students and teachers showed that religion was regarded as first priority, especially for Pakistanis and Indians, whereas academic matters came second. As teachers, however, insisted that in the school setting, this religious priority should be put aside and academic matters should always have first priority. Due to the differences in priorities between home and school, any practices from the school which went against the teaching of their religion were abandoned or ignored at home. For example, as students explained it, "Fai Chun", the poster displayed over walls and doors during Chinese New Year with blessings printed on it, was not allowed to be displayed at home as it was in school, because it was considered to be against the teaching of Muslims. Parents of ethnic minority students were also unable to understand why it was inappropriate to encourage their children to be absent from school when celebrating some religious or cultural festivals which were not included in the school calendar. In summary, the differences in religious values between the school and the ethnic minority students' family, and between teachers and ethnic minority parents, sometimes became a factor which made teachers feel they were being

‘pushed’ away from working with ethnic minority parents.

*Broadening ethnic minority students’ aspirations of education and career*

In addition to building a connection with ethnic minority parents, teachers found it challenging to broaden the views of ethnic minority students’ aspirations for their education and future career. As teachers and students narrated, most students did not establish a plan for pursuing their education at post-secondary levels. Nor did they have any plan for their career development in Hong Kong society. Even if they had a vision of becoming a professional, they had no idea how it could be realised, or which programmes offered by local universities they should enroll in. What they envisaged was completing the public examination of The Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE), equivalent to The General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) in the UK, even though very few declared that they planned to further their study either aboard or in their home country. Most ethnic minority students were not confident of getting good results in the public examination and being able to master the local Chinese language, and so planned to engage in the same careers as their parents, such as musicians, chefs and construction workers.

When talking about their aspirations for education and future careers, ethnic minority students and their parents were used to comparing opportunities offered in the host society, Hong Kong, with what they were likely to be in their home country. They believed that they would have more and better opportunities in Hong Kong. The frame of reference which allowed them to maintain an optimistic view of their future possibilities was ‘life in

Hong Kong will be a lot better than in their home country; at least they will be able to find a job and earn a living in this city.' To hold onto this belief, once ethnic minority students completed their secondary education, girls were encouraged to take on women's domestic roles and marry at a very young age, such as fifteen years old, and were not expected to achieve a high level of education. Boys could be expected to start working and earn money to support the family. They were normally introduced and encouraged to get involved in the careers or businesses run by their family, relatives and friends. Most were types of laboring work, such as working on construction sites, loading and unloading goods, and working in restaurants as waiters or waitresses. As one teacher put it,

*I have discussed it with many colleagues. We think that they do not have any sense of belonging (to the society of Hong Kong). What they want to do is to earn more money and transfer it to their family (in their own country). They hold the belief that education is not important. Even without education, they can easily access the career of their parents or relatives, such as chefs, construction-site-workers, waiters and so on. Most ethnic minority students in this area rely on the social welfare subsidy from the government. In their mind, there is not such a strong sense of 'future'. If they can live today, it's fine for them; and they do not think it is necessary to think about tomorrow. Probably it is their religious belief too, so it is easy for them to feel satisfied... They know they have not yet been accepted by the [local] society, so they think they are merely 'visitors'. Even if their children do well in education, they will still find it hard to get a job.*

When talking about their classroom lives, the students tended to make sense of their social

reality by using a frame of reference based on their perception of their own country's social reality, rather than that of the host society, Hong Kong. It allowed them to compare their present situation in their host society with their former situation or with their "back-home" experience. Although such a frame of reference enabled them to develop and maintain an optimistic view of their classroom lives, and diverted their thoughts to positive aspects of their classroom experience, it was found that their teachers also intended to broaden their thoughts about their future. The teachers passed onto ethnic minority students a belief that education was a means of integration into the host society and a way towards occupational and social mobility. For these students, deciding to stay in Hong Kong appeared the most likely way to break the cycle of poverty and create different lives from their parents.

When the teachers encouraged ethnic minority students to think about their future in more expanded ways, the teachers had to simultaneously work for the values of two cultures, that is, the examination-oriented culture of local Hong Kong society and the traditional culture of the students' home. On one hand, they intended to help ethnic minority students deal with the examination-oriented culture and so taught according to the examination syllabus, rather than to the academic ability of the students, all the while encouraging them to think about possible careers and offer information on educational programmes at post-secondary level. On the other hand, they stressed gender equality, which was lacking in most ethnic minority students' homes and intentionally encouraged girls to develop their full potential and create a vision of their own future.

## Conclusion

In the narratives of the ethnic minority students, teachers' views showed vividly how ethnic minority students' learning and cross-cultural experiences in classroom and home, which underwent a process of cultural integration to the Chinese society of Hong Kong, is totally different from the students' own countries. Like these students, the teachers who interact with them simultaneously engaged in a cross-cultural process through which they learnt the cultures of the ethnic minority students, re-learned their own culture and re-examined the rationale of "cultural harmony", while struggling to create a culturally responsive culture in the classroom as well as fulfilling the diverse learning needs of students. Furthermore, they struggled to construct a new understanding of multiculturalism and of fairness, equality and justice, upon which the value of cultural responsiveness was built.

Apart from fulfilling the diverse learning needs of ethnic minority students, the teachers asserted that it was important for the homes of these students to be supported. However, The teachers, however, appeared to feel powerless in getting ethnic minority parents involved in the learning of their children in the classroom, and believed this was due to the expectations of the parents' role, the culturally stereotyped gender roles, and cultural and religious practices. Meanwhile they constantly looked for ways to strengthen home-school collaboration. Despite their recognition of insufficient support for ethnic minority students and their homes, they held a relative view that the social resources which they received in Hong Kong were a lot more than those offered by their home country; and so too their educational opportunities and career prospects. This frame of reference was constructed as one of the elements creating a culturally responsive classroom, as the teachers realized that such a frame of reference could help these students relieve the 'pain' of negative feelings

aroused during the process of learning and acculturating into the culture of the host society. It gave them motivation, so that they had the courage to explore the new opportunities which they might not have had in their home country.

In narrating the diverse needs of ethnic minority students, as this study showed, the concepts that teachers envision for creating a culturally responsive classroom include four dimensions: a new rationale of multiculturalism, a sense of intercultural sensitivity, a cultural responsiveness to diversity, and a quality partnership between teachers and parents. They will be explained below.

When creating a new rationale of multiculturalism, the cross-cultural experience of classroom practitioners should be re-constructed and there is a need to broaden the frame of thinking which is currently adopted for making sense of the concept of multicultural education and cultural responsiveness. This new frame of understanding should not be built upon the dualistic concepts of dominant-culture and non-dominant-culture, minority and majority, and core and periphery, Rather, it should be moved beyond these dual concepts and the culture of host society, i.e. Chinese culture in the context of this study, so that a broader perspective can be developed to help teachers rethink their understanding of 'cultural harmony' and multiculturalism. It is hoped that a universal value will be established to promote a common sense of morality and human dignity for all school practitioners, and this forms the basis of an ethos for a single moral community in the school. With this in place, regardless of one's ethnicity, religion, and socio-economic background, all school practitioners have positive feelings for cultures other than their own

culture of origin. This kind of rationale could be borrowed from the discipline of sociology, and is formulated as cosmopolitanism. Under the ethos of cosmopolitanism, as Appiah (2006) claims, any divisions of cultures or society are morally unnecessary and irrelevant. This can pass on a value to school practitioners that everyone has a responsibility for each individual member of the school. To ensure this occurs, Beck (2006, p.45) has identified the fundamental foundations for building up such a rationale, and these rest upon acknowledging the five dimensions of otherness, including 'the otherness of those who are culturally different', 'the otherness of the future', 'the otherness of nature', 'the otherness of the object' and 'the otherness of other rationalities'.

When promoting teachers' intercultural sensitivity, as this study revealed, the classroom experience brings teachers to a multicultural context where they see the social world of their classroom and students from perspectives which are very different from the one in which they have been brought up. They gain knowledge of different cultures and ethnicities through lived experiences and internalize them into their professional life when they constantly reflect upon them. This knowledge will lead them to see the world both from the viewpoint of their own culture and others, and so communicate with people from different cultures effectively, establishing relationships with them. Borrowing the concept developed by Alred et al. (2002, p.4), this can also be referred to those who have 'both the awareness of experiencing otherness and the ability to analyze the experience and act upon the insights into self and other which the analysis brings.' This is actually a cross-cultural process of learning and re-learning one's own culture and that of others, a crucial element for the creation of culturally responsive classrooms. In this process, teachers feel it is

necessary to examine their ideologies, confront their misconceptions and ignorance, and think about their students differently so that a sense of empathy towards the needs of ethnic minority students can be developed, and they can be better able to accept the 'new' culture of their students.

With the new rationale of cultural responsiveness and teachers' sense of intercultural sensitivity, it would be more easily possible to create a culturally responsive culture for the effective management of classroom diversity. While teachers demonstrate to their students how different cultures should be respected, accepted and adapted to, students will develop a sense of obligation to others, and not necessarily limited to those with whom they are related by kinship or race. This sense of obligation and cultural respectfulness should be extended to all school members and to citizens with whom they interact in the community. They need to see not just the different races of classroom practitioners but of others in their particular sphere. With this ability and attitude, students will be more able to learn from the differences and assimilate cultures from different races, not necessarily limited to the culture of the host society.

In practice, teaching strategies should be developed to recognize the diverse needs of students. Accordingly, the rationale of diversity management should be extended from fairness to equity. As shown in this study, the teachers' emphasis of diversity management is largely put on being fair to everyone, the rationale under which could be traced back to the Confucian's philosophy of benevolence and equality. Under the principle of fairness, a classroom teacher should promote the good of every student. Any special arrangement



selectively made for some groups of students, but not for others, may be in the threat of being regarded as the act of prejudice or favoritism, which in turn violates the principle of fairness. To a certain extent, the current strategies for diversity management, grounded largely upon the Confucian's rationale of fairness, could be described as promoting harmony and sufficiency for students rather than promoting equality between individuals. If this analysis is correct, it is then proposed that the rationale of diversity management should be further extended so as to better address the diverse needs of students and promote equality and justice.

In addition to the extension of the rationale of diversity management, at classroom level, the various aspects of students' cross-cultural experience should be addressed. The emphasis in pedagogy and curriculum should not only be on the cognitive elements of education, but the affective and social elements should also be dealt with. For most ethnic minority students school is a crucial context where they are socialized to be citizens of the school, the community and the world. It is therefore suggested that schooling is not only about what students should know, but also about how they feel about the past, the present and the future; and about how they live with others in various social contexts. This is particularly true for immigrant students. What they fear is not the past and the present, but the future; and what they fear is not the living with their family members or people of the same race, but with people from different racial backgrounds. In the whole-school curriculum, for example, three of the foci could be what students feel about their future education and career; how different cultures, religions and social behaviours could be addressed; and how they can become cosmopolitan citizens, so that they create some new

vision of life out of their cross-cultural experience and have motivation and hope to face up to difficulties and challenges which they will have in the host society.

Many teachers have difficulty in achieving the creation of quality partnerships between teachers and parents. It is suggested that the weak home-school relationship cannot be separated from the low attainment of acculturation of the second culture in the home, where the mother culture is strongly promoted and the second culture is apparently not accepted or assimilated. In particular, most ethnic minority students, such as Pakistani, Indian and Nepalese, come from families with comparatively few economic resources, and lack the cultural and social capital which is necessary for a successful education and professional career in the host society. Rather than making a change by adapting the dominant group's cultural frame of reference into their own, their home tends to strongly maintain their own cultural and religious ideologies. While they find it hard to make a change, the school is responsible for playing a leading role to create an ideal context in which a culturally responsive culture could be promoted where ethnic minority practitioners feel included and some opportunity is offered for positive home-school collaboration. It is, therefore, suggested that any programmes, aimed at promoting a quality home-school relationship, should help not only ethnic minority students, but also their home life, relearn the culture of their own and learn the culture of the host society. Furthermore, their aspirations for education and career should be broadened, so that they can formulate optimistic views about the future, not necessarily limited to the 'relative' view of cross-cultural experience, which leads them to narrowly compare what they have in Hong Kong to what they would have in their own countries and tentatively makes them

feel satisfied with the living standard and education which they have in the host society.

In summary, issues regarding the education of ethnic minority students are no longer peripheral to mainstream schooling. They become a central discourse in the support of all students, bringing together concerns about formulating a new meaning of multiculturalism in the context of Hong Kong schools, developing teachers' attitudes to inter-cultural sensitivity, promoting cultural responsiveness to classroom diversity, and strengthening home-school collaboration. Catering for diversity is an educational challenge for teachers and school managers. The principles of the framework suggested above may not be the only way to cater for the diverse needs of students. By adopting a culturally responsive and school-based approach, it would be more easily possible for teachers to discover effective strategies for implementing multiculturalism and cultural responsiveness in the classroom. This may be an important way to create a just and fair society and as such all school practitioners, teachers, students and parents, have a vital role to play if this important goal is to be achieved.

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Creating a Culturally Responsive Classroom:  
The Diverse Learning Needs of Ethnic Minority Students

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**Introduction**

- Teachers and students interviews.
- Explored the knowledge of their school lives and the cross-cultural experience of ethnic minority students.
- Some initial findings:
  - Challenges at classroom level

**Challenges at Classroom Level**

1. Segregation between CS and NCS

- Language was the core factor.
- Students were streamed into different classes.

| Diversity                                     | Complexity of Different Classes         |                                       |                                     |                                  |   |
|---|---|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|---|
| The Proportion of NCS and CS in the classroom | CS Classes                              | Mixed Classes                         |                                     |                                  | NCS Classes                                 |
|   | Classes where all students were Chinese | Classes where NCS are in small number | Classes where CS and NCS were mixed | Classes where CS in small number | Classes where all students were non-Chinese |

**Challenges at Classroom Level**

- Effects:
  - CS and NCS were seemingly segregated.
  - In term of learning Chinese their opportunities to interact with their second language peers became less.
  - In the school where a large proportion of NCS were enrolled, such opportunities were even less. Because English was used as the most common medium of communication.
  - As the students realized, they were in fact the majority whereas the local Hong Kong Chinese teachers and students were minority.

**Challenges at Classroom Level**

- Effects:
  - Two teams of teachers were segregated, those who taught CS and those who taught NCS.
  - In some schools, teachers who taught CS classes rarely taught in NCS or Mixed classes.

**Challenges at Classroom Level**

- Effects:
  - In the mixed class, the same phenomenon of segregation could be seen.
  - The interaction between CS and NCS tended to be limited.
  - They were only "connected" when requested by their teachers to engage in collaborative learning activities or school programmes.
  - Mostly, CS stayed along together whereas NCS did the same.

**Challenges in the Classroom**  
2. Understanding the diverse needs of students

| Diversity                                      | Complexity of Classroom Diversity  |  |  |   |
|--|--|--|--|---|
| The combination of four categories of students | The local Hong Kong Chinese students   | The NCS who were born in Hong Kong   | The new immigrants of NCS  | The new immigrants of Chinese students from the Mainland  |
|  | Mastered Chinese and Cantonese, but relatively weak in English language.                     | Mastered English, and could speak Cantonese, but found hard to write and read Chinese. | Good at their mother language; some mastered English but most could hardly speak a single word of English. | Good at Mandarin. They picked up Cantonese very fast. Excellent at the reading and writing of Chinese, but were very weak in English. |
|  | Quite knowledgeable about the culture of other ethnicities.                                  | Knowledgeable about the culture of Hong Kong society and other ethnicities.            | They picked up either one of the languages very fast. Hard to master two second languages at a same time.  | Knowledgeable about Chinese culture; and could be easily assimilated into the culture of Hong Kong society.                           |
| Other Diversity                                | Different levels of language ability, language acquisition, academic self-concept, students' |  |  |   |

**Challenges in the Classroom**  
2. Understanding the diverse needs of students

- NCS brought a number of unique characteristics to their classroom situation:
- e.g. different levels of language ability, academic self-concept, students' interest, different ways of thinking numbers and mathematics, different styles of communication, different ways of emotional expression, and different concepts of themselves as learners.

**Challenges in the Classroom**

- Enjoyed teaching NCS.
- Compared to CS,
  - NCS engaged more actively in learning activities.
  - more enthusiastic in learning.
  - more respectful.
  - more friendly.
  - more able to interpret teachers' intention in positive ways.

**Challenges in the Classroom**

- Compared to CS,
  - NCS felt more satisfied with what they had and what they were.
  - more happy and enjoyable with what they had at present.
  - more optimistic about their future.
- NCS felt being accepted by school managers, teachers and peers.

**Challenges in the Classroom**  
3. Working against the grain of examination-oriented culture

- Overwhelmed with examination-oriented culture.
- Experienced difficulties in putting through what they thought were right into their classroom, or tailoring the curriculum in the way they wished.
- Bonded by the school and public examinations, teachers felt necessary to stay close to the syllabus
- Further, the limits of spaces and resources were constructed as unfavourable factor for developing strategies for diversity management.

### Challenges in the Classroom

#### 4. Raising students' learning motivation

- Recognized the importance of learning Chinese.
- It was crucial for students to have a learning motivation and a positive attitude towards being bilingual and bicultural.
- For most students, in general, they experienced vast difficulties of writing and reading Chinese.
- For those in public examination classes, they preferred to do the subjects which they felt more confident in getting a high grade in A-Level or HKCEE.
- For the students, who planned to further their study abroad, learning Chinese became totally irrelevant to them.

### Implication for our understanding of the complexity of diversity

- When any policies and strategies are made on the educational provision for NCS, it is necessary to contextualize what they suggest into the specific categories of the schools, the specific types of classrooms and the specific types of students.
- In different contexts and situations, the problems and challenges are different.

### Implication for developing culturally responsive strategies for teaching and learning

- The culturally responsiveness to diversity could be promoted.
- Lead students to better recognize the diversity as a way to enhance their learning motivation.
- At the levels of classroom teaching and curriculum, the teachers are keen on looking for better ways to manage the diversity of students, in terms of their culture, religion, customs, learning motivation and classroom behavior.

### Implication for developing formal and informal curriculum on Chinese and English languages

- The schools are deeply concerned with language issues which become the centre part of school policy on classroom arrangement and integration processes in the school life of students.
- It is necessary for the schools to have more support in promoting students' learning of languages, through formal and informal curriculum.

### Implication for further research

- More research should be done to examine the impact of the three factors upon students' learning of Chinese and English learning and the cross-cultural experience of students:
  - the variation of the proportion of NCS in a school EM schools, and
  - the classroom arrangement of the CS, NCS and Mixed classes.
  - the proportion of the different categories of students in a class.

**THANK YOU**