

**Research Project: Educational Provision for Ethnic Minority Students in Hong Kong:
Meeting the Challenges of the Proposed Racial Discrimination Bill (HKIEd8001-PPR-2)**

REPORT ON RESEARCH FINDINGS

What we can learn from the school experience of ethnic minority students?*

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Introduction

Under the research project, *Educational Provision for Ethnic Minority Students in Hong Kong: Meeting the Challenges of the Proposed Racial Discrimination Bill*, interviews were conducted respectively in two of the project schools. Interviewees included 24 school teachers and 24 ethnic minority students from India, Pakistan, Philippines, Nepal, Indonesia and Thailand. The objective of the interviews is to explore the school lives and the cross cultural experience of the ethnic minority students. The interviews conducted were transcribed and analyzed. Based on the interview data, the research team has identified various challenges aroused with the multi-cultural education in Hong Kong classrooms. This report illustrates the challenges faced by schools in the school and classroom levels. In addition, it will address the implications of the research findings to policy making and research in the area of multi-cultural education.

Challenges at Whole School Level

Complexity of School Diversity

During the school interviews, the research team, based on the proportion of Non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students to Chinese Speaking (CS) students, has identified three major types of schools, namely:

1) Schools where the percentage of NCS was low.

In these schools, NCS were minority whereas CS were majority

2) Schools where NCS constituted more or less 50% of all students.

In these schools, the sense of majority and minority was less.

3) Schools where the percentage of NCS was high and the number of CS was low.

In these schools, Chinese students and teachers were minority whereas NCS were majority.

Table 1 illustrates the characteristics of these 3 types of schools, and also their strengths and weakness in supporting multi-cultural education.

Table 1: Characteristics of the 3 different types of schools

Diversity of the Students	Complexity of School Diversity		
<p>The proportion of NCS and CS in a school</p>	<p>Schools where the percentage of NCS was low. In this school, NCS were minority whereas CS were majority.</p>	<p>Schools where NCS constituted more or less 50% of all students. In this school, the sense of majority and minority was less.</p>	<p>School where the percentage of NCS was high and the number of CS was low. In this school, Chinese students and teachers were minority whereas NCS were majority.</p>
	<p>Strength: Offered a good context where NCS were acculturated to the local culture and language. Weakness: Limited resources were available for supporting the learning of NCS. Students may feel being marginalized.</p>	<p>Strength: Offered a context NCS were acculturated to the local culture and language. An environment for bilingualism and multiculturalism was created. Weakness: CS and NCS could stay with those students with same ethnic background. More time and resources were needed to develop appropriate curricular for the two different groups of CS and NCS, especially in the subjects of Chinese and English Languages.</p>	<p>Strength: NCS felt easily being included and found support from their own ethnic group of peers. An environment for multiculturalism was created. Resources were available for the support of NCS. English was commonly used as a medium of communication. Weakness: NCS had less opportunity to assimilate to the culture of Hong Kong society and the local language.</p>

In spite of the diversities of the schools as illustrated above, the research team is able to identify some common practices within these schools:

Promoting an ethos of cultural integration

All the schools participated in interviews had intentionally promoted cultural integration, and all the teachers interviewed believe that they had the role in doing so. School could generally establish the culture of bilingualism and multiculturalism. Efforts were made by schools in developing the whole school programmes, which aimed at promoting cultural integration, cultural respect and mutual acceptance.

However, when coming to the classroom and curriculum levels, teachers were looking for better strategies to support cultural integrations in class.

Developing a sense of cultural awareness

In general, teachers interviewed had developed a sense of cultural awareness . They were sensitive to the cultural differences of students, and were knowledgeable about their religion, customs and culture In addition, they were more empathetic to the background of, and difficulties faced by ethnic minority students. Therefore, they tried to make school guidance and discipline culturally responsive.

Dealing with Diversity

Teachers interviewed had generally expressed their concern about the diversity of students' needs, not only in their language ability, but in border areas such as emotional and affective needs, their difficulties in acculturating into the culture of Hong Kong society, and the relations between different ethnic groups of students.

At the whole school level, teachers were concerned about issues such as streaming of classes, arrangements for guidance and discipline, curriculum adaptation, and use of teaching strategies.

Differences between CS and NCS classrooms

On the issue of managing diversity among students, language was the core factor to be considered by schools. Upon this, schools tended to stream students into different classes. Table 2 shows the complexity of different classes:

Table 2: Complexity of 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

The effects of school practices:

The following summarizes the effect of the practices mentioned above to the ethnic minority students:

Table 3: Effect of school practices to the NCS students:

- 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.
- Two teams of teachers were segregated, those who taught CS and those who taught NCS.
- In some schools, teachers who taught Chinese classes rarely taught in NC or Mixed classes.
- In the mixed class, the same phenomenon of segregation could be seen.
- The interaction between Chinese and non-Chinese students tended to be limited.
- They were only “connected” when requested by their teachers to engage in collaborative learning activities or school programmes.
- Mostly, Chinese students stayed along together whereas non-Chinese students did the same.

Challenges at the class room level

Table 3: Combination of 4 categories 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
	<p>Mastered Chinese and Cantonese, but relatively weak in English language.</p> <p>Quite knowledgeable about the culture of other ethnicities.</p>	<p>Mastered English; and could speak Cantonese, but found hard to write and read Chinese.</p> <p>Knowledgeable about the culture of Hong Kong society and other ethnicities.</p>	<p>Good at their mother language; some mastered English but most could hardly speak a single word of English.</p> <p>They picked up either one of the languages very fast. Hard to master two second languages at a same time. Felt alienated to the culture of local society</p>	<p>Good at Mandarin. They picked up Cantonese very fast. Excellent at the reading and writing of Chinese, but were very weak in English.</p> <p>Knowledgeable about Chinese culture; and could be easily assimilated into the culture of Hong Kong society.</p>
Other Diversities	different levels of language ability, learning motivation, academic self-concept, students' interest, different of numbers and mathematics, different style of communication, a varied way of relating to others, different cultural expression of emotion and aggression, a variety of attitude towards school and community, and different concepts of themselves as learners.			

Understanding the diverse needs of students

In general, teachers understood the diversity needs of students in the classroom and their realized that NCS brought a number of unique characteristics to their classroom situation such as 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.

An interesting finding from the interview data is that most teachers enjoyed teaching the NCS. Comparing to the Chinese students, teacher interviewed found that NCS engaged more actively in learning activities. In the teachers point of view, NCS students were more enthusiastic in learning, more respectful, friendly and more able to interpret teachers' intention in positive ways – especially when punishments were exercised.

When comparing NCS students to the Chinese students, NCS felt more satisfied with what they had and what they were. They were more happy and enjoyable with what they had at present, and were more optimistic about their future. In addition, NCS felt being accepted by school managers, teachers and peers, and all parents of the NCS students interviewed were basically pleased with their children's schools.

Working against the grain of examination-oriented culture

On the issue of managing diversity in classroom, teachers interviewed had encountered much difficulty. One of the points teachers highlighted is the impact of the overwhelming examination-oriented culture. In order to cope with the examinations, teachers had experienced difficulties in putting through what they thought were right into their classroom, or tailoring the curriculum in the way they wished. Teaching strategy was bonded by the school and public examinations and teachers felt it necessary to stay close to the syllabus. Further, the limits of spaces and resources were constructed as unfavorable factor for developing strategies for diversity management.

Raising students' learning motivation of Chinese language

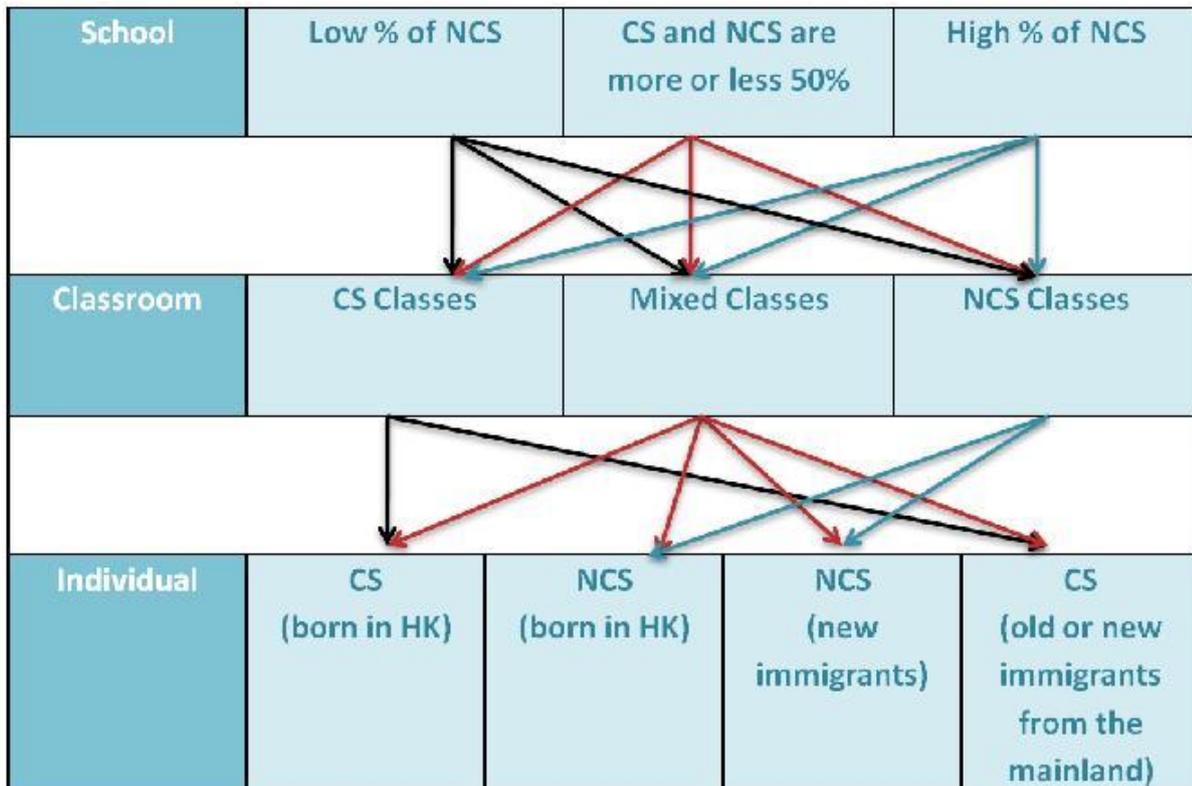
In general, teachers interviewed were concerned about the learning motivation of students. Teachers generally believed that with better learning motivation, students could learn well at schools. However, for most NCS students, in general, they experienced vast difficulties of writing and reading Chinese. 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. On the other hand, for those who planned to further their study abroad, learning Chinese became totally irrelevant to them.

Implications of the research findings

The following highlights the implications for the research findings as reported above:

Implications for our understanding of the complexity of diversity

The first implication of the research findings is that 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. As the reported in the earlier parts, in different contexts and situations, the problems and challenges in a culturally diverse classroom could be different.



Implication for developing culturally responsive strategies for teaching and learning

The research findings also reflect that ethos of cultural integration could be promoted through whole school activities. It is necessary to strengthen the ethos of cultural diversity and lead students to better recognise the diversity in class.

In addition, 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

According to the research findings, schools were deeply concerned with language issues which became the centre part of school policy on classroom arrangement and integration processes in the school life of students. Hence, 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

Based on the research findings, the research team concludes that 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, they are namely:

- 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.