

# *The 'No Loser' principle in Hong Kong's education reform: Does it apply to ethnic minority students?<sup>1</sup>*

香港教育改革「人人皆可成才」的原則，是否適用於少數族裔學生？

**Kerry J KENNEDY**

*The Hong Kong Institute of Education*

## **Abstract**

An important feature of Hong Kong's education reform over the past decade has been the articulation of the 'no loser principle.' It was meant to signal that all students are valuable and will benefit from both basic and senior secondary education. Yet barriers remain for the 2.9% of students under age 15 who can be classified as ethnic minorities. There is a declining participating rate as students move from primary to tertiary level, the medium of instruction remains alien to most of these students, and there are no curriculum provisions to meet their special needs. This paper will examine both the policy context in which provisions for ethnic minority students have been made in Hong Kong schools and also classroom practice that operationalises this policy on a daily basis. The purpose is to make an assessment of the extent to which the 'no loser principle' can be said to apply to ethnic minority students.

---

<sup>1</sup> The research to be reported here is drawn from the General Research Fund project, *Exploring Cultural Diversity in Chinese Classrooms: Can Assessment Environments Cater for the Needs of Ethnic Minority Students in Hong Kong*, [GRF-HKIEd840809] funded by the Hong Kong Research Grants Council. The views expressed here are those of the author.

## Keywords

ethnic minorities, non-Chinese speaking students, Chinese curriculum, Chinese as second language, racial discrimination

## 摘要

香港教育改革在過去十年的一項要點，乃明言以「人人皆可成才」為宗旨，意即每個學生都有其價值，他們將受惠於基礎和高中教育的改革。然而，對於教育制度中僅佔百分之二、被歸類為少數族裔的學生來說，障礙仍然存在。在小學至專上教育的過程中，他們的整體參與率逐步下降；教學方面始終存在語言隔閡，亦未能提供切合他們需要的課程。本文將檢視香港少數族裔教育的政策背景和課堂實務，旨在評估這「人人皆可成才」的原則對少數族裔學生的適用程度。

## 關鍵詞

少數族裔，非華語學生，中文課程，中文為第二語言，種族歧視

## 1. Introduction

In its first consultation document on the education reform, the Education Commission (1999) enunciated what was to become a dominant theme:

*There is an urgent need to introduce fundamental reforms to our education system. Reforms in education should bring new learning opportunities to every citizen, and should bring new opportunities for the future development of Hong Kong. This should be the guiding principle for education reform in Hong Kong.*

This idea was eventually formulated as one of the five principles of the reforms – the ‘no loser’ principle (Education Commission, 2000, p.9):

*There should not be, at any stage of education, dead-end screening that blocks further learning opportunities... Teaching without any discrimination" has been a cherished concept since ancient times. We should not give up on any single student, but rather let all students have the chance to develop their potentials. The aim of the education reform is to remove the obstacles in our system that obstruct learning, to give more room to students to show their initiative and to develop their potential in various domains.*

The 'no loser' principle has been addressed in different ways throughout the reform process. The 'through train' concept, reform of the primary and secondary admissions system, a full six years of secondary education for all students, support for students with special needs, a core curriculum for all students and the reduction in public examinations. These are all important reforms and I do not want to underestimate them. Yet in this paper, I want to raise a question about the extent to which the "no loser" principle applies to all students in Hong Kong schools. In particular, I want to focus on ethnic minority students. I shall examine three broad areas:

1. The policy context for ethnic minority education in Hong Kong – contested terrain.
2. Who are Hong Kong's ethnic minority students and what do they think about learning?
3. Can the 'no loser' principle work for ethnic minority students?

In focusing on these areas, I do not want to underestimate the role of schools, teachers and NGOs in supporting ethnic minority students in Hong Kong, The all play an important, and indeed vital, role. But the focus of this particular paper is on the broader policy context that influences ethnic minority students.

## **2. The policy context for ethnic minority education in Hong Kong – contested terrain**

The policy context related to the provision of education for ethnic minority students in Hong Kong can only be described as volatile and contested. In what follows I shall try to present two sides of the policy debate – the practical issues and the theoretical underpinnings.

### **2.1 Practical policy and its contexts**

In a report prepared last year, the relevant Working Group of the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) was highly critical (Equal Opportunities Commission, 2011, pp. 10-11):

*Having considered EDB's current education policies and having examined the problems with the relevant stakeholders, the PARC/WG is of the view that while a number of accommodation measures have been adopted by EDB in recent years, they are far from adequate in fulfilling its policy goal of providing equitable and quality education for EM students. The PARC/WG therefore urges the EDB to carefully examine its current policies and practices to ensure that they are effectively fulfilling the policy goals as declared on the one hand and that they do comply with the spirit and legal obligations of the anti-discrimination legislation on the other. There is a strong body of opinion within the PARC/WG that should there be no committed improvement to current policies and practices on this issue by the Government, action under the RDO might have to be instigated.*

At about the same time, EDB provided an update on its policies and measures taken to support ethnic minorities (Legislative Council, 2011) but its tone and focus were quite different from the EOC report. There is no reference at all to the kind of issues raised by the EOC but rather a catalogue of the support measures provided by the government for ethnic minority students. This kind of policy debate – where each side seems to ignore the existence of the other – has characterized this area since the early part of this century when the issues first started to gain public prominence (Kennedy, 2011). It is thus difficult to get an objective picture or at least a detached picture – but let me try to provide that because it is important.

There is little doubt that the government has provided resources and support for ethnic minority students in Hong Kong (Kennedy, 2011; Legislative Council, 2011). This has ranged from language support for new arrivals, grants to schools where there are concentrations of ethnic minority students, the designation of specific schools that receive professional development support and other kinds of resource support and direct front line support to teachers through professional development programmes, especially for the teaching of Chinese. Thus there is a public record of support measures. But these measures are often seen differently by different groups in the community and this is where the perceptions developed of lack of support and, at times, even antagonism.

Take, for example, the 30 designated schools endorsed by EDB for ethnic minority students. The rationale, from EDB's perspective, is very clear (Education Bureau, 2011, p.8):

*The objective of providing focused support in the “designated schools” is to facilitate schools’ accumulation of experiences and development of expertise in the learning and teaching of NCS students so that these schools may serve as the anchor point for sharing experiences with other schools which have also admitted NCS students through a support network formed for all NCS students in the local schools to benefit from the arrangement*

Yet a contrary view was reported to the Equal Opportunities Commission (2011, p.7),

*There is a view that the policy of allowing designated schools for EM was itself discriminatory because it reinforced segregation rather than encouraged integration.*

This view is not attributed in the report but there is evidence elsewhere of community dissatisfaction with some aspects of designated schools. Hong Kong Unison (2009, p.2), for example, pointed out in its response to the government’s report on the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination that “given their lower Chinese language standard, they (i.e. ethnic minority students) have been put in a disadvantageous position under the existing secondary school allocation scheme. Usually they end up studying at either designated schools, or those schools admitting most students from the lowest banding”. This view was expressed even more strongly in a media report that linked designated schools to a form of racism (Zhao, 2011):

*“It’s racial segregation,” says Fermi Wong Wai-fun, executive director of Hong Kong Unison, a non-governmental organisation focusing on helping minority groups. Wong says up to 80 percent of minority students attend designated schools – but, she claims, some Hong Kong parents become unwilling to choose these schools for their children. “They [minority students] have been living and studying in a very narrow social circle and have become disconnected with the mainstream society. It will harm social integration,” says Wong.*

The point I want to make here is that the same initiative can be viewed in different ways, depending on the perspective taken. The same can be seen with what is perhaps the most controversial issue, the teaching of Chinese.

There is no disagreement between EDB and ethnic minority groups, including NGOs such as Unison, that it is important for ethnic minority students to learn Chinese. But after that the agreement quickly evaporates. EDB has insisted for many years now that

this should be done through a standardized Chinese curriculum for all students. Their one concession has been the production of a Supplementary Guide to the Chinese Curriculum and encouragement for school based adaptations to meet the special needs of ethnic minority students. Yet this approach has been criticized loudly and publicly.

The alternative proposal has been to develop a Chinese as a Second Language Curriculum tailored specifically for the needs of second language learners. Such a curriculum is seen to meet the needs of ethnic minority students in terms of both the content and the pedagogies associated with second language learning. Of course, it also means different kinds of assessment, different pacing of content and indeed different content that would be more relevant to the backgrounds and cultures of ethnic minority students. EDB will not give in on this issue and therefore it remains contested and becomes a ground for claims that the government is not supporting ethnic minority students. The key issue is that the government is supporting ethnic minority students in one way but it is not the way preferred by many in the community; and so it causes concern and public debate. Hong Kong Unison (2010, p.2) put it this way:

*Despite repeated requests from a wide range of parties including education sector, concern groups, law makers and even the international society, the Government has refused to adopt “**Learning Chinese as a second language policy**”. Your Bureau insists the current Chinese curriculum is suitable to EM students, so long as certain adaptations have been made by teachers. The reality is teachers in primary and secondary schools have been struggling in developing their own curriculum and teaching materials, without adequate references and support. A survey conducted by the Unison and the Hong Kong Professional Teachers’ Union in July 2007 revealed that about 75% of teachers considered the current central Chinese curriculum designed for local Chinese students was not suitable to NCS (non-Chinese speaking) students.*

There has been no resolution to this issue and it remains contested ground.

## **2.2 Policy and theory**

There are a number of broader policy issues that also need to be recognized. The government has labeled ‘ethnic minority students’ as ‘non-Chinese speaking students’ as though their language deficit is the only characteristic that defines them. It is not entirely clear when this slippage from one to the other took place. Early Legco debates refer freely to ethnic minorities but since around 2009 the focus shifts to non Chinese speaking

students. The change is not just one of linguistics – it signals an attitude to difference and probably an objective of not highlighting differences in Hong Kong society. This view is consistent with concepts of 'harmony' and 'the harmonious society' yet to comes at the expense of recognizing the contributions that diversity can make to a pluralistic society – multilingualism, multiculturalism and multi religions. By focusing on language deficits in ethnic minority students, the government misses the opportunity to provide a broader framework in which its own work can be better appreciated and understood. At the same time, schools could better appreciate the contribution of ethnic minority students within this broader framework of contributions that can be made by different groups in the community to a more inclusive Hong Kong society.

Another way of valuing the contribution of ethnic minorities is through a commitment to multiculturalism and multicultural policy. This is entirely lacking in Hong Kong so that support for ethnic minority students has been pursued within an integrationist framework that regards all members of society as being the same. This has implications for the way the school curriculum is viewed. Skerrett and Hargreaves (2008) identified different orientations to educational diversity and it is possible to sue this framework to analyze Hong Kong's approach to education for ethnic minority students. They identified three orientations to diversity within schools and while the framework was meant to apply to the United States, we can apply the categories to the Hong Kong context. In doing so it will also be possible to account for community tensions on the issue of ethnic minority education. The Hong Kong government's support and actions reflect a monocultural view of educational provision: students are referred to as "NCS students", the aim of support is to facilitate the integration of these students into Hong Kong society, the key issue is to support the learning of Chinese since language is seen as the best way to achieve integrationists goal, particularly in relation to workforce integration. The views of community groups, however, and in particular Hong Kong Unison, reflecting a desire for multicultural education and at times come close to reflecting the values of critical multiculturalism. This policy tension is a significant one – it is reflected particularly in the recent report of the Equal Opportunities Commission and its resolution will not be easy given the underpinning values of the different view.

Table 1: Skerrett and Hargreaves' (2008) Orientations to Education Diversity

Orientation	Description	Proponents
Monocultural education	All students benefit from the same curriculum, instructional strategies and assessment practices.	Edmonds (1970); Gilborn (2004)

Multicultural education	Schools and the school curriculum reflect the knowledge, values, skills, pedagogies, assessment practices, policies etc that recognize, support and celebrate the contribution of all groups represented in the school community	Banks (1986)
Critical multiculturalism	Teaching against all forms of racism is explicit and eliminating all forms of discrimination is a key goal.	Troyna and Carrington (1990)

To get a better understanding of ethnic minority students themselves, the next section will examine census data to highlight the range of ethnicities in Hong Kong schools and how these students think about their learning.

### 3. Who are Hong Kong’s ethnic minority students and what do they think about learning?

#### 3.1 Identifying ethnic minority students

Data on ethnic minority students is very recent and not always readily available. The first formal census was in 2006 and provided these details (Census and Statistics Department, 2007):

Table 2: Ethnic Minority Students at Full-time Courses by Age-Group in 2006

Level	Ethnic Minority Age < 15		Ethnic Minority Aged 15 and over		Whole population	
	Age group total	at full time course		at full time course	< 15	15 and over
Pre-primary		6,777			166,364	30
Primary		12,819		60	439,630	1,484
Lower Secondary		3,550		955	189,183	78,897
Upper Secondary		298		2,233	1,926	187,454
Sixth form				737		62,549
Post-secondary				1,293		147,014
Total	32,289	23,444		5,278	79,7103	477,428

A number of points can be made about these figures:

1. There appears to be a large number of 'out of school' ethnic minority students under the age of 15 – well over 8,000. It is not clear who these are but probably they can be accounted for at the pre-primary and sixth form levels. Thus not all ethnic minority students seem to benefit from pre-primary education. Assuming that the numbers entering primary school are stable over time,<sup>2</sup> Table 2 indicates that only 52% of ethnic minority students have access to pre-primary education. Assuming that the 2006 figure for primary enrolments has been stable over time, then just over 6% of ethnic minority students make it into Form Six.
2. There appears to be a major transition issue for ethnic minority students under the age of 15 in the move from primary to lower secondary. Just 27% of the primary cohort appear to make the transition (assuming that the figure for 2006 is stable over time).
3. It can also be noted that the participation rate for post secondary education is also very low – just 10% of the primary age cohort - again assuming a stable primary cohort size over time.

These data need to be treated with some caution because the ratios make assumptions about the stability of age cohorts over time. Yet there are also other reasons for treating the data with some caution. In a paper submitted by the government to the Legislative Council's Bills Committee on the Racial Discrimination Bill (Hong Kong SAR Government, 2008, pp. 6-7), a quite different set of figures is provided indicating that in September 2007 there were 5,671 ethnic minority students in primary schools and 3,097 in secondary schools. The primary school figure differs by over 7,000 from the official figures and by several thousand for secondary figures (depending what is included in the secondary figures. It is not clear why there is this discrepancy but it does seem when EDB refers to numbers it is often their own rather than the Census Bureau's that they prefer. EDB, of course, is much closer to schools and is in a good position to conduct an on-the

---

<sup>2</sup> The assumption of the following statistics is that the figure for primary enrolments in 2006 would be stable over time. In reality, students entering primary school in 2006 would not reach lower secondary until 2012, Upper Secondary in 2014 and Sixth Form in 2016. The projections made here, therefore, are based on assumed future enrolments not actual enrolments.

ground survey but we shall need to wait until the finalization of the 2010 census to get a better picture.

In the government paper referred to above (Hong Kong SAR Government, 2008, p.7) there is a good picture of the spread of ethnic groups in Hong Kong schools. The table is reproduced below. Because DSS schools have been included as well it is not possible to see if there is a different distribution of ethnic groups between these two types of schools which in all possibility cater for different groups of students. Neither is it possible to tell from this data whether ethnic minority students are concentrated in CMI or EMI schools. As I said at the beginning of this section data sources are relatively new and there are considerable gap. Nevertheless Table 3 does provide an interesting picture of the range of ethnic groups, especially the concentrations of particular groups such as Pakistani, Indian, Nepalese and Filipino. But what else do we know about these students, particularly in relation to education?

Table 3: Distribution of Student Ethnicities in Hong Kong Government and Direct Subsidy Schools, 2007-08

	Primary Schools	Secondary Schools
Filipino	1025	620
Indonesian	71	38
Japanese	68	49
Korea	23	19
Thai	133	76
Indian	870	457
Pakistani	1948	833
Bangladeshi	43	29
Sri-Lankan	15	12
Vietnamese	75	37
Nepalese	885	538
Other Asian	64	39
Other ethnicities not classified above (including mixed)	451	350
Total	5671	3097

From: Hong Kong SAR Government (2008, p.7)

### 3.2 Ethnic minority students and learning

As part of our research project on ethnic minority students and assessment

environments<sup>3</sup> we have developed a new instrument. For the purposes of this paper I shall draw on selected results that include some scales from McInerney's (1992) Inventory of School Motivation (ISM) and one scale from Brown and Hirschfield (2007, 2008) Students' Conceptions of Assessment (SCoA).

### **3.3 Instruments**

#### ISM Scales

1. Students' attitudes to school work – particularly task orientation (4 questions) and effort (7 questions)
2. Students attitude to affective aspects of learning – particularly praise (5 items) and affiliation (3 items)

#### SCoA Scale

3. Students' attitudes to assessment (8 questions)

Students responded to each question using a five point scale (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree).

#### Sample

106 Students in Grades 5 (61%) and 6 (38.1%) from two primary schools completed 106 surveys. Two were unusable leaving 104 to be analyzed. The average age of the sample was 10.85 years (SD=1.13) Of these, 47% were female and 53% were male. 56.7% were Chinese students with the remainder from ethnic minority students. Amongst these, 12.5% were Nepalese, 8.7% Pakistani, 7.7% Indian, 5.8% Filipino 1.9% American and 1% Thai with 4.8% represented by other ethnicities.

#### Analysis

Descriptive statistics were computed for each item and Cronbach's reliability coefficient ( $\alpha$ ) is reported for each scale.

---

<sup>3</sup> Exploring Cultural Diversity in Chinese Classrooms: Can Assessment Environments Cater for the Needs of Ethnic Minority Students in Hong Kong, [GRF-HKIEd840809]

## Results

### *Students' attitudes to school work*

Figure 1 shows student orientation to tasks – all the questions are measuring much the same construct ( $\alpha=.73$  for Chinese students and  $.62$  for ethnic minority students). Ethnic minority students scored slightly higher ( $M=5.46$ ,  $SD=.66$ ) than Chinese students ( $M=5.34$ ,  $SD=.68$ ) but these differences are not significantly different ( $t=.881$ ). Two important points can be made about these results. First, ethnic minority students have very positive attitudes to work – these are not lazy students. Second, if we regard ‘orientations to school work’ as a single latent construct then ethnic minority students tend to endorse either end of the scale more positively than Chinese students. The most strongly endorsed aspect of the scale is ‘I like to see that I am doing better in my school work’ and this aspiration is shared by both Chinese and ethnic minority students.

Figure 1: Students' orientation to tasks

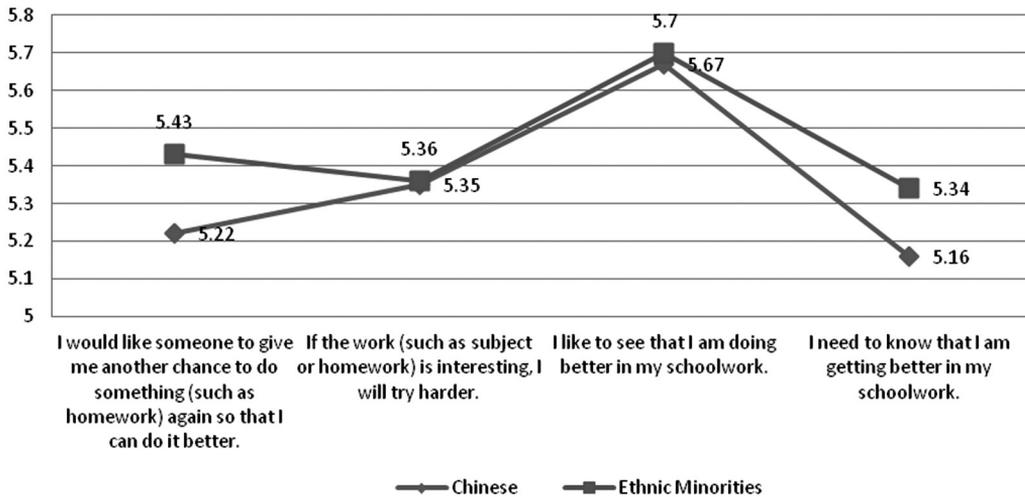
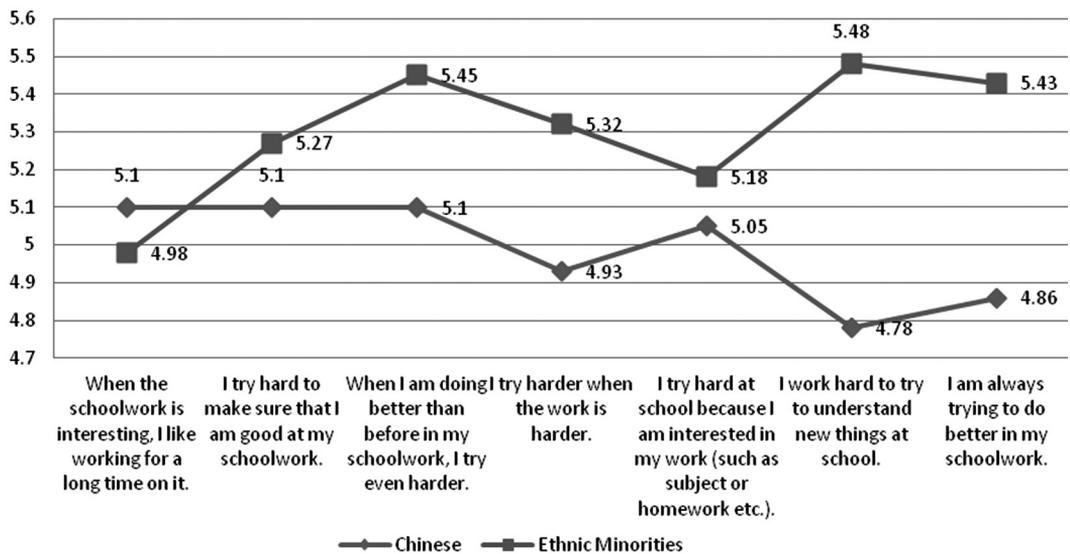


Figure 2 shows students' attitudes to the effort they put into their work. The student responses to these questions are very consistent ( $\alpha=.76$  for Chinese students and  $.82$  for ethnic minority students). Ethnic minority students scored slightly higher ( $M=5.30$ ,  $SD=.79$ ) than Chinese students ( $M=4.99$ ,  $SD=.71$ ) and the differences are statistically significantly different ( $t=2.06$ ,  $p<.05$ ) and the size of the difference is moderate ( $d=.41$ ). Yet these differences should not mask the fact that for both groups of students, effort is important. What is surprising, given the extent to which Chinese learners often attribute

effort rather than ability to their academic success, is the strength of the endorsement of ethnic minority students for the importance of effort in their learning. The largest difference along the latent construct is on the item, 'I am always trying to do better in my school work' suggesting that this is a very important learning attribute for ethnic minority students.

Figure 2: Students' attitudes to the effort they put into their work



*Students' attitudes to affective aspects of learning*

Figure 3 shows students' attitudes to praise as a feature of classroom life. The student responses to these questions are very consistent ( $\alpha = .91$  for Chinese students and  $.88$  for ethnic minority students). Ethnic minority endorsed these items more strongly ( $M=4.93$ ,  $SD=1.09$ ) than Chinese students ( $M=3.97$ ,  $SD=1.33$ ). The differences are statistically significantly different ( $t= 3.97$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and the size of the difference is strong ( $d=.78$ ). Ethnic minority students require praise to enhance their learning but it should be noted that Chinese students also endorse these items positively – just not as positively as ethnic minority students. These students require praise from teachers, friends and family – with the latter rating very highly. This suggests the need for a particular kind of classroom and school environment for ethnic minority students – one characterized by positive feedback and regular encouragement both inside and outside the classroom. It could be assumed that where such environments do not exist, student learning will be negatively affected.

Figure 3: Students' attitudes to praise as a feature of classroom life

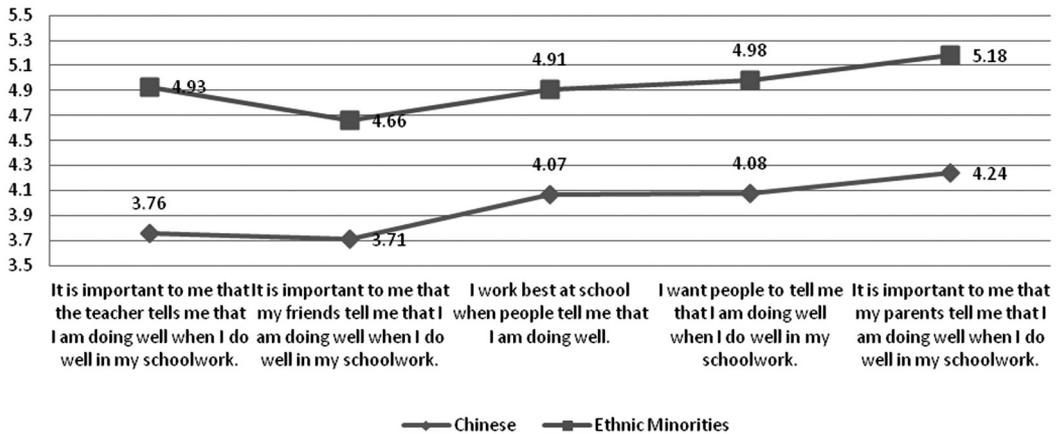


Figure 4 shows students' attitudes to working together as a learning process. The ethnic students' responses to these questions are very consistent ( $\alpha = .80$ ) but for Chinese students there is little consistency in their responses ( $\alpha = .33$ ). This suggests that these items function differently for these different groups of students. For ethnic minority students working together is a more important part of their learning than it may be for Chinese students. We cannot compare the scale scores of the two groups of students because of the lack of scalability for the Chinese group. But it can be noted that ethnic minority students have responded very positively to these items while Chinese students are less positive although by no means negative on the individual questions. Further work is needed on both the construct itself (often referred to as 'Affiliation'), the cultural contexts in which it is manifested and its impact on learning.

Figure 4: Students' attitudes to working together as a learning process

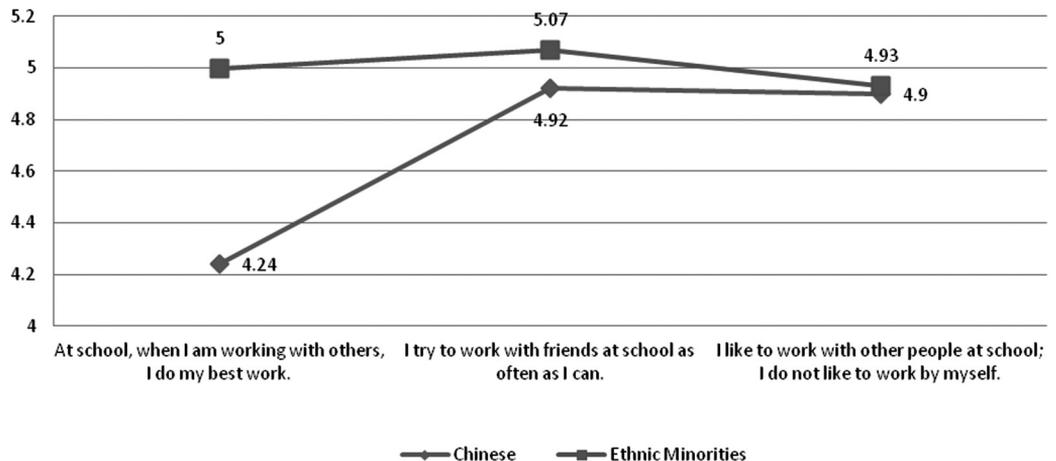
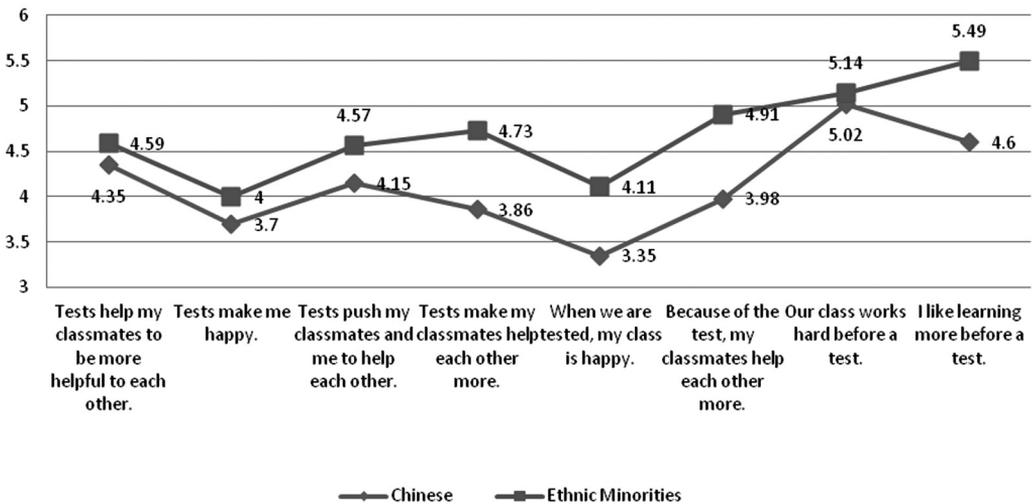


Figure 5 shows students' attitudes to assessment, and in particular the use of classroom tests. The student responses to these questions are very consistent ( $\alpha = .91$  for Chinese students and  $.88$  for ethnic minority students). Ethnic minority endorsed these items more strongly ( $M=4.69$ ,  $SD=.84$ ) than Chinese students ( $M=4.19$ ,  $SD=.99$ ). The differences are statistically significantly different ( $t= 2.48$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and the size of the difference is moderate ( $d=.53$ ). Ethnic minority students 'moderately' or 'mostly agree' with these questions while Chinese students agree 'slightly' or 'moderately' agree. Thus the differences between the two groups is one of emphasis rather than any substantive disagreements. Given the predominance of testing in Hong Kong classrooms, these results indicate the relationship between testing and learning and I all probability effort given to learning as well. Thus the two most highly endorsed items for both groups of students are 'our class works had before a test' and 'I like learning before a test'. The least strongly endorsed items for both groups relate to whether tests make students happy ('tests make me happy' and 'when we are tested my class is happy'). According to Brown and Hirschfield (2008) this is not a bad thing since in their study when students thought assessment was fun they tended to perform poorly on mathematics achievement tests!

Figure 5: Students' attitudes to assessment



While the data reported above cannot be taken as representative, since it is based on a small sample of primary school students, it does start to build a picture of ethnic minority students who want to learn, want to work with other students and who are not at all negative towards classroom testing practices. At the same time it is clear from these data that ethnic minority students, more so than Chinese students, require a learning

environment in which there is positive feedback on their performance and where they like to work with other students. That is to say, ethnic minority students' orientations to learning are very positive and provide a good basis for academic achievement. A similar view of Hong Kong's ethnic minority students was highlighted by Hue (2011) in his qualitative studies of ethnic minority students and their families. Yet what is also clear from the demographic data presented at the beginning of this section, learning opportunities are not always available. This may be at the pre-primary or senior secondary level where the participation rates are lowest. Increasing participation rates at these levels will be important but probably of greater importance is the quality of education provided at the primary school level where the great bulk of ethnic minority students gain their educational experiences. These experiences can build on preprimary education and can prepare students for secondary education. How the quality of primary education for ethnic minority students in Hong Kong might be improved will be the focus of the final section of this paper.

#### **4. Can the 'no loser' principle work for ethnic minority students?**

There are three levels at which this question can be addressed: policy, curriculum and pedagogy. Finally, the important area of teacher professional development will be considered.

##### **4.1 Policy**

Previously the tension between different views of current policy for supporting educational provision of ethnic minority was described. Basically this tension is between providing support within a basically monocultural framework where ethnic minority students are expected to adopt the values of the dominant culture or recognizing the multicultural nature of many of Hong Kong's schools and building policy that respects these multiple cultures and seeks to build them into more inclusive educational provision. It is important to recognize that at the school level this latter approach has already been adopted by individual schools although this is not a common practice. But what would it involve at the system level? What would multicultural education policy look like and what difference would it make?

It is important to state at the outset, that in moving towards multiculturalism as a policy driver it is not necessary to adopt slavishly Western notions of multiculturalism. Will Kymlicka (1995, 2007), the great advocate of liberal multiculturalism, has made

the point that his views were formed in the context of particular issues in Canada and may not be applicable in all contexts. He has acknowledged the distinctive Asian traditions related to diversity and the importance of these to framing local approaches to multiculturalism (Kymlicka & He, 2005). One such approach has recently been suggested in Singapore where the policy objective was seen to be better expressed as "social resilience" rather than multiculturalism per se because of "fears of social fragmentation along ethno-religious lines (that) have compelled governments of multicultural societies to devise policies and strategies to ensure their nations' ability to cope with attacks on their social fabric" (Ramakrishna, 2008). This may seem like a somewhat extreme way of viewing the issue but it has to be recognized that international policy discourse since the unfortunate event of 11 September 2001 has not been in favour of an unbridled multiculturalism. Such an approach has the potential to break society into distinct and often oppositional social groups that can to undermine social cohesion and, in the worst case scenario lead to explicit conflict. Defining the balance between support for ethnic minorities and maintaining a cohesive society is now the challenge for twenty first century multiculturalism.

For the Hong Kong government, the issue is to recognize that integration and assimilation may be better replaced by goals such as social resilience (Vasnu, 2007) and respect for diversity. Ethnic minorities have much to contribute to Hong Kong – socially and economically. They can work alongside the Chinese community to contribute to the development of a resilient society that values the common good, where there are no threats to the existence of any group, where there are equal opportunities for all groups and where the benefits of society can be shared. There is not time in this paper to look more deeply into the concept of social resilience but Vasnu (2007) and his colleagues have done that in the Singapore context so they are able to argue that political participation, the development of social capital and the development of a sense of rootedness all contribute to social resilience (Goh, 2007, p.36). Alongside social resilience, and complementary to it, must be respect for diversity. That is, difference in a socially resilient society must be valued. It may be racial, linguistic, sexual or religious difference but it must be seen as positive. The interaction between social resilience and difference will constantly bring society to a new level of awareness and understanding of its strengths, its values and its priorities.

Thus multiculturalism does not have to be constructed in a way that automatically leads to social fragmentation. Social systems can change and adapt to new ways of thinking while maintaining structures and institutions that work in the interests of all citizens. This is the basic idea of social resilience that can support a diverse society with common goals and aspirations. It would provide a sound foundation for an inclusive

multicultural society in Hong Kong and could be considered as the basis of a new multicultural education policy. The implications of such a policy will be explored in relation to the school curriculum and its pedagogies in the following sections.

## 4.2 Curriculum

The most pressing curriculum issue concerns the provision of Chinese language skills for ethnic minority students. The current approach as referred to earlier has championed a single curriculum for all students with the rationale that such an approach will provide the much needed language skills. At the same time such an approach reflects a commitment to monoculturalism rather than multiculturalism – it assumes that all students are the same and can be taught at the same pace and in the same way. Yet, in a socially resilient society, it would be recognized that a major curriculum change, such as introducing a Chinese as a Second Language Curriculum, would not be catastrophic and could be easily managed. Having two pathways to language competence for Hong Kong's students will cater better for entry level skills, structure learning opportunities in a way to meet the needs of a group for whom Chinese is not a native language and send a message about the importance of language skills for all students. In a socially resilient society, the purpose of ensuring ethnic minority students have access to a sound Chinese curriculum is not so much to facilitate integration but to provide skills and capacities that will ensure ethnic minority students are able to contribute to their own future as well as that of Hong Kong. Socially resilient societies are prepared for change, for stress and for adaptation in a rapidly changing world.

The relationship between language skills and competence in other curriculum areas is also an area that needs some exploration. Hau (2008, p. 11), for example, found that when ethnic minority students entered P1 with a high level of mathematical competence, they tended to do well in mainstream schools and often better than Chinese students. Yet many students who started out with poor competency levels showed no positive improvement at all. At the same time Hau (2008) reported low levels of Chinese competence amongst ethnic minority students. Could it be that when Chinese is the MoI in mathematics lessons for students whose language competence is already problematic, that this in itself would make progress very difficult? Hau (2008) does not make reference to this kind of interaction but since his report focuses on mainstream primary schools it can be assumed that the MoI for all classes is Chinese. This is an area worth investigating and I shall make some reference will be made to it in the following section.

### 4.3 Pedagogy

The results of students' preferences for classroom environment discussed earlier help us to understand better what might work better for ethnic minority students. Two aspects that stand out the importance of feedback and working together. This may mean that ethnic minority students will have more opportunities for learning in these kinds of environments. This requires teachers to think about the kind of learning environments they create in their classrooms and modifying them to especially meet the needs of ethnic minority students. Such environments, of course, will also support Chinese students – but they will be particularly helpful for ethnic minority students.

In considering the kinds of interactions that go on in classrooms, some consideration needs to be given to Medium of Instruction (MoI). In the example provided above of ethnic minority students starting off with poor mathematical skills, it may be that where the MoI for the class is Chinese, some feedback and questioning could be in English since this is often a stronger area of competence for ethnic minority students than Chinese (Hau, 2008). That is to say, MoI can be differentiated to ensure that ethnic minority students receive the feedback they prefer in a language that they are sure to understand. This suggestion is likely to be controversial because it can equally be argued that complete immersion in Chinese is important – at least in the longer time term. Yet this is where the teacher's judgment is so important. Do the students understand? Do they need more reinforcement, practice? Do they need to ask questions? Varying the MoI can thus help teachers find out about their students' learning and then develop appropriate strategies and responses to follow up.

If what students are telling us about classroom tests is indicative of attitudes to assessment, then teachers need to take advantage of what seems to be a positive attitude to testing and learning. Tests are not just ends in themselves – they are linked to learning in the minds of students. This link can be reinforced with students and it create an assessment environment that values student learning above all else. If such environments are also characterized by feedback and praise for achievement, then they will support ethnic minority students in particular but they will also support Chinese students. Assessment plays such a large part of life in Chinese classrooms that every effort needs to be made for assessment to be meaningful and relevant building on students desire to learn and providing feedback on the progress they are making in their learning journeys.

Would classrooms look different if they adopted the kind of strategies mentioned

above? I think they would – more cooperative, more feedback, multilingual, focused on learning and achievement. These are classrooms that will meet the needs of all students but in particular they will support ethnic minority students who are committed to learning and need an appropriate environment to ensure they can reach their goals.

## **5. Conclusion**

There is a need to bring together policy, curriculum and pedagogy in a real attempt to ensure that the no loser principle will also apply to ethnic minority students. In a socially resilient society change should not be threatening and the contributions that all individuals and groups can make should be nurtured and valued. Cho, Willis & Stewart-Weeks (2011, p. 6) have pointed out that “the struggle for resilience will not be won within the walls of government agencies, but rather in the broadly distributed communities that they serve and with which they interact”. This means that all communities must be valued and must have a role to play in the development of the social fabric. Communities must be connected in meaningful ways since “the point of resilience is enabling people to maintain and improve the quality of lives they lead and the strength and capability of their communities in times of transition and risk. Resilience, in those conditions, relies heavily on the widespread capacity to connect for deep and authentic collaboration (Cho, Willis & Stewart-Weeks, 2011, p.9). Only communities that are equally valued will be able to connect and work together. Schools play a key role in contributing to connectedness in any society – ensuring that all students are treated fairly and provided with relevant curriculum and learning and guaranteed outcomes that will help them contribute in a productive way. This paper is a start in the direction of supporting greater connectedness for Hong Kong’s ethnic minority students by rethinking current educational provision. It is only in this way that the ‘no loser principle’ can be applied to ethnic minority students who, if allowed, can play an important role in contributing to Hong Kong as a resilient society. But the paper is only a beginning and hopefully action in terms of policy, curriculum and pedagogy can follow to make the ideas outlined here a reality.

## References

- Banks, J. (1986). Multicultural education: Development, paradigms and goals. In J. Banks & J. Lynch (Eds.), *Multicultural Education in Western Societies* (pp. 2-28). New York: Praeger.
- Brown, G., & Hirschfeld, G. (2007). Students' conceptions of assessment and mathematics: Self-regulation raises achievement. *Australian Journal of Educational & Developmental Psychology*, 7, 63-74
- Brown, G., & Hirschfeld, G. (2008). Students' conceptions of assessment: Links to outcomes. *Assessment in Education: Principles, policy and practice*, 15(1), 3-17.
- Census and Statistics Department. (2007). *2006 Population By-census. Thematic Report: Ethnic Minorities*. Retrieved November 6, 2011, from: [http://www.censtatd.gov.hk/freedownload.jsp?file=publication/stat\\_report/population/B11200502006XXXXB0100.pdf&title=Hong+Kong+2006+Population+By-census+Thematic+Report+%3a+Ethnic+Minorities&issue=-&lang=1&c=1](http://www.censtatd.gov.hk/freedownload.jsp?file=publication/stat_report/population/B11200502006XXXXB0100.pdf&title=Hong+Kong+2006+Population+By-census+Thematic+Report+%3a+Ethnic+Minorities&issue=-&lang=1&c=1)
- Cho, A., Willis, S., & Stewart-Weeks, M. (2011). The Resilient Society - Innovation, Productivity, and the Art and Practice of Connectedness. A CISCO White Paper. Retrieved November 6, 2011, from: [http://www.cisco.com/web/about/ac79/docs/ps/The-Resilient-Society\\_IBSG.pdf](http://www.cisco.com/web/about/ac79/docs/ps/The-Resilient-Society_IBSG.pdf)
- Edmonds, R. (1979). Effective schools for the urban poor. *Educational Leadership*, 37(1), 15-27.
- Education Bureau. (2011). Legislative Council Panel on Education Progress of Support Measures for Non-Chinese Speaking Students. LC Paper No. CB(2)1213/10-11(01). Retrieved November 2, 2011, from: <http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr10-11/english/panels/ed/papers/ed0314cb2-1213-1-e.pdf>
- Education Commission. (1999). *Learning for Life – Education Blueprint for the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. Retrieved October 15, 2011, from: [http://www.e-c.edu.hk/eng/online/on4\\_2nd2.html](http://www.e-c.edu.hk/eng/online/on4_2nd2.html)
- Education Commission. (2000). *Review of Education System Reform Proposals*. Retrieved October 15, 2011, from: <http://www.info.gov.hk/archive/consult/2000/Full-Eng.pdf>
- Equal Opportunities Commission. (2011). *Education for All – Report of the Working Group on Education for Ethnic Minorities*. Hong Kong: The Author. Retrieved November 6, 2011, from: <http://www.eoc.org.hk/EOC/Upload/UserFiles/File/EducationReportE.pdf>

- Gilborn, D. (2004). Antiracism: From policy to praxis. In G. Ladson Billings & D. Gilborn. (Eds.), *The RoutledgeFalmer reader in multicultural education*. (pp. 35-48). New Work: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Goh, C. (2007). Social resilience and its bases in multicultural Singapore. In N. Vasnu (Ed.), *Social Resilience in Singapore – Reflections from the London Bombings* (pp. 27-50). Singapore: Select Books, 27-50.
- Hau, K. T. (2008). Tracking the Adaptation and Development of Non-Chinese Speaking Children (NCS) in Mainstream Schools. Retrieved November 6, 2011, from: [http://www.edb.gov.hk/FileManager/EN/Content\\_7065/exe\\_summary%20eng.pdf](http://www.edb.gov.hk/FileManager/EN/Content_7065/exe_summary%20eng.pdf)
- Hong Kong SAR Government. (2008). Administration's Response to the outstanding general issues on education raised by members of the Bills Committee. LC Paper No. CB(2)2308/07-08(01). Retrieved November 5, 2011, from: <http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr06-07/english/bc/bc52/papers/bc520614cb2-2308-1-e.pdf>
- Hong Kong Unison. (2009). Hong Kong Unison response to the Report of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. LC Paper No. CB(2)1905/08-09(01). Retrieved November 5, 2011, from: <http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/panels/ca/papers/ca0615cb2-1905-1-e.pdf>
- Hong Kong Unison. (2010). Use of Language Fund to enhance Chinese language proficiency of EM people in HK. LC Paper No. CB(2)2118/09-10(01). Retrieved November 2, 2011, from: <http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr09-10/english/panels/ed/papers/ed0513cb2-2118-1-e.pdf>
- Hue, M. T. (2011). Building up a culturally responsive school: Cross-cultural experience of ethnic minority students in Hong Kong schools. In J. Phillion, M. T. Hue & Y. Wang (Eds.), *Minority Students in Far East Asia: Government Policies, School Practices and Teacher Responses* (pp. 141-154). New York: Routledge,.
- Kennedy, K. (2011). The 'long march' to multiculturalism: Policymaking in Hong Kong to support ethnic minority students. In J. Phillion, M. T. Hue & Y. Wang (Eds.), *Education for Minority Students in East Asia: Government Policies, School Practices and Teacher Responses* (pp. 155-173). New York: Routledge.
- Kymlicka, W. (1995). *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kymlicka, W. (2007). *Multicultural Odysseys - Navigating the New International Politics of Diversity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kymlicka, W., & He. B. (Eds.) (2005). *Multiculturalism in Asia*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. University and Unison Hong Kong.

- Legislative Council. (2011). Progress of Support Measures for Non-Chinese Speaking Students . (LC Paper No. CB(2)1213/10-11(01) ). Retrieved October 31, 2011, from: <http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr10-11/english/panels/ed/papers/ed0314cb2-1213-1-e.pdf>
- McInemey, D. M. (1992). Cross-cultural insights into school motivation and decision making. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 13, 53-74.
- Ramakrishna, K. (2008). Opening Address. *(Un)problematic multiculturalism and social resilience*. Report of a Conference Organized by the Centre of Excellence for National Security (CENS) at the S. Rajaratnam School Of International Studies (RSIS). Retrieved November 6, 2011, from: [http://www.rsis.edu.sg/publications/conference\\_reports/Unproblematic%20Multiculturalism.pdf](http://www.rsis.edu.sg/publications/conference_reports/Unproblematic%20Multiculturalism.pdf)
- Skerrett, A., & Hargreaves, A. (2008). Student diversity and secondary school change in a context of increasingly standardized reform. *American Educational Research Journal*, 45(4), 913-945.
- Troyna B., & Carrington, B. (1990). *Education, racism and reform*. London: Routledge.
- Vasnu, N. (Ed). (2007). *Social Resilience in Singapore – Reflections from the London Bombings*. Singapore: Select Books.
- Zhao, S. (2011, October 25). Racism in the classroom? *Time Out Hong Kong*. Retrieved November 5, 2011, from: <http://www.timeout.com.hk/big-smog/features/46441/racism-in-the-classroom.html>