"Just the School Make[s] Us Non-Chinese": Contrasting the Discourses of Hong Kong's Education Bureau with the Lived Experiences of its non-Chinese Speaking Secondary School Population

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Abstract

For its non-Chinese speaking (NCS), economically marginalised, secondary school students, Hong Kong's education system is an exercise in which school success is mediated through English and future opportunities are mediated through both English and Cantonese. Hong Kong's Education Bureau (EDB) states that NCS students must learn Cantonese to integrate into the community and ultimately become "local". Interculturalism looks to a common ground for diverse people to come together through real dialogue and real exchange. This project sought to problematise the way NCS students experienced interculturalism in Hong Kong. It required exposing the discourses surrounding the terms *integrate* and *non-Chinese speaking* produced by Hong Kong's EDB and comparing these discourses with the student-participants' lived experiences. Students asserted that the term non-Chinese speaking referred to much more than just not speaking Chinese and included references to race, ethnicity, othering, and multilingual and multiliteracy practices in its depictions. The evidence from this study suggests that the EDB's policy goal of making NCS students local was not penetrable to ethnic minority NCS students in Hong Kong. Intercultural exchange must occur in an authentic, and valued, manner for students to feel that they are "a part of Hong Kong" (Education Bureau Participant, October 11, 2012).

Keywords: Interculturalism; Ethnic Minorities; Hong Kong; Educational Policy; Multiliteracies.

Introduction

Hong Kong's Education Bureau (EDB) has the stated goal of schooling all students to become biliterate and trilingual citizens, which refers to the reading and writing of traditional Chinese and English and to the listening to, and speaking of, Chinese (Cantonese), Putonghua (Mandarin), and English (Education Bureau, 2011, p. 10). The EDB also states that non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students should learn Cantonese in order to integrate into the community. This paper originally appeared as a part of my unpublished master's thesis

(Burkholder, 2013) which sought to problematise the way NCS students experienced this integrating policy in Hong Kong's publicly funded schools. In 2005, Hong Kong's EDB created a policy directed at ethnic minority children in an effort to promote their inclusion in government schools. Before then, the government had restricted its NCS students to attendance at one of ten NCS schools, and the policy change was made in attempt to level the playing field between NCS and Chinese-speaking (CS) students (Heung, 2006). However, as other authors (Fang, 2011; Law & Lee, 2012; Loper, 2001) have noted, additional measures to support Chinese as second language learning did not exist in these newly available schools. Interculturalism looks to a common ground for diverse people to come together through real dialogue and real exchange. Interculturalism also acknowledges that relations between cultures and between people are complex and that, unlike multiculturalism, our society and our schools do not treat all cultures, languages, or ways of knowing in an equal or symmetrical fashion (Boido, 2004; Maxwell, Waddington, McDonough, Cormier & Schwimmer, 2012; Walsh, 2009).

Researcher Location

One of the tenets of interculturalism is to identify one's own experiences and identities before engaging in thoughtful and authentic exchange (Holmes, 2006). My relationship to this project and my identity as a white, English-speaking Canadian female teacher must therefore be made explicit. From 2008 to 2010, I worked as the English and homeroom teacher of the 20 student participants in this study. During my time as a teacher at a direct subsidy school in an economically marginalised area of Hong Kong, I began to question my students' access to the language of instruction, and question what I perceived as their exclusion within the school. I had preconceived notions about what effective multiculturalism and intercultural exchanges looked like, and when it seemed that my students' participation was marginalised and othered I felt discouraged as an educator invested in social change. At the end of my tenure, I felt I had created an inclusive intercultural environment within my classroom based on dialogue, empathy, and real exchange, but had not made any real impact on the school culture at large. This research project was built out of my desire to understand the experiences of my students and to identify the policy discourses directed at the NCS population in Hong Kong.

Hong Kong's Ethnic Minority Non-Chinese Speaking Population

According to Hong Kong's 2006 census, 95% of its population is ethnically Chinese. Of the 5% of the population who are considered non-Chinese (NC), 1.64% are Filipinos, 1.28% are Indonesians, 0.3% are Indians, 0.23% are Nepalese, and 0.17% are Thais (Fang, 2011, p. 251). In the Education Bureau's discourse, *non-Chinese* refers to students who do not speak Chinese as a first language. However, the 2006 census refers to non-Chinese as being people living in Hong Kong who are not ethnically Chinese (in this latter definition, Chinese includes Hong Kong-born and mainland China-born Chinese people). The distinction between NC as a way to denote language ability and NC as a way to denote ethnicity is often unclear, and any usage of the term relies upon the assumptions of the speaker and the listener. Language and politics are inextricably linked in Hong Kong because learning:

> *Cantonese can strengthen a person's sense of identification with Hong Kong as a distinctive culture; learning Putonghua [Mandarin] can strengthen a person's sense of identification with [the whole Chinese nation]; learning English before 1997 could strengthen a person's dentification with Hong Kong as a colony of the United Kingdom*
>
> *(Morris & Adamson, 2010, p. 147).*

In the context of post-colonial Hong Kong, Chinese and English are "legitimate" or dominant and knowing (or not knowing) and producing (or not producing) these languages provides linguistic capital for their speakers (Chan, 2002).

Research Questions

Examining the lived experiences of NCS students creates an opportunity to think critically about the discourses provided by the Education Bureau through its policy documents. Students' lived experiences of school and intercultural exchanges are potentially different from the discourses set out by the EDB. With that in mind, this qualitative and ethnographic project was guided by the following questions:

- How do non-Chinese speaking students view themselves in relation to their language practices, identities, and status as non-Chinese in a Hong Kong government-funded secondary school?

- How do non-Chinese speaking students' lived experiences of intercultural exchanges, their language practices, identity, and sense of belonging in secondary school align with the discourse of Hong Kong's Education Bureau?

- What can interculturalism offer to improve the educational status quo for Hong Kong's NCS population?

Sociocultural Context: Hong Kong's Race Discrimination Ordinance (2008)

Hong Kong has operated as a semi-autonomous region of China since its independence from Britain in 1997. The political shift changed what it means to be a citizen and an ethnic minority in Hong Kong. Law and Lee (2012) have argued that Hong Kong has been described as a "harmonious multicultural society," because many people from a variety of cultures and ethnicities live in close proximity to one another without "serious conflicts" (p. 117). However, they also note that these groups live separately and that, in the case of Hong Kong, the concept of multiculturalism "merely describes the presence of various ethnic groups" rather than the inclusion of multiple points of view, a mutual exchange of diverse cultures, experiences, languages and identities. From this brand of multiculturalism, the Race Discrimination Ordinance (RDO) was developed and brought into law in 2008 to address the rights and needs of the ethnic minority population. However, defining multiculturalism in the RDO exclusively through ethnicity creates complications and is inherently problematic because it expressly excludes mainland Chinese immigrants from its provisions (Kennedy, Hui, & Tsui, 2008, p. 3).

The Race Discrimination Ordinance has also had an impact on the education of NCS ethnic minorities in Hong Kong. One of the goals of the ordinance was to provide new educational language policies that would directly affect NCS groups (Fang, 2011, p. 251). Loper (2004) argued that while this language provision may appear to promote educational equality for all ethnicities and races, in actuality "these policies limit access to education for certain ethnic groups who may be less likely to speak or read Chinese" (p. 27). NCS students can now be admitted to Chinese as medium of instruction (MOI) or "local" schools (regardless of their pre-existing Chinese language skills) but are not necessarily provided with specific tools to scaffold their language learning. This is because schools were not "required to do anything once students entered the school to support their particular learning needs" (Kennedy et al., 2008, p. 3).

Conceptual Framework: Interculturalism

Interculturalism asks diverse people to come together and exchange ideas through respectful dialogue in an effort to come to an agreement about divisive issues that can arise in a multicultural context. Cultures, like languages, create opportunities for "expression and interaction between oneself and the other" (Abdallah-Pretceille, 2006, p. 475). For robust intercultural exchange to be realised, we must know about others' identities so that we can know our own identities. Further, citizenship education must be employed to "create critically reflective citizens" (Holmes, 2006, p. 21). In an educational context, Kramsch (1998) suggests that effective teachers must understand the social and cultural contexts of the community, the school, and the student population they are teaching in through meaningful exchanges that create opportunities for understanding and interpreting meaning. However, in such reflection, we must also

question the privileging of particular ways of knowing and communicating within schools or intercultural exchanges will remain at the surface level (Holmes, 2006). Yuen (2010) has suggested that lack of intercultural communication and awareness has led Hong Kong's teachers to have "low expectations" and view the "low academic and behavioural performances of the minority-group students" (p. 732) as indicative of students' individual flaws, rather than implicating the practice of schooling, and the privileging of particular ways of knowing. In the context of Hong Kong's NCS classrooms, Yuen (2010) argued that:

> it is seen as the personal responsibility of immigrant students to adapt to the education system. They are mainly trained in a predominantly mono-cultural programme and for one dominant culture. [Teachers] are either insufficiently prepared for, or lacking in, the personal intercultural awareness needed for creating the appropriate classroom environment and relevant pedagogical practice necessary to foster effective learning
>
> (Yuen, 2010, p. 733).

For any effective amelioration of the schooling practices for Hong Kong's NCS students, and to enact policy change, NCS voices need to be heard. Further, the practice of enacting policy must be modified to address the diverse needs of the increasingly diverse secondary school population.

Methodology

Education Bureau Participant

In compliance with Concordia University's[1] ethical guidelines for research with humans, I e-mailed the Hong Kong EDB's Education services for NCS students. I was put in touch with a member of the bureau who agreed to meet with me at the EDB's government office when I arrived in Hong Kong. I subsequently met with the policy maker and conducted a semi-structured, private and individual interview. Our encounter was mediated by my insider-outsider status as a former Native English Teacher of NCS students and foreign person. I had pre-conceived insider/outsider ideas about the way that school had been designed for NCS students, and the way that inclusive education could be implemented. The participant's responses to my outsider-assumptions and insider-knowledge were cautious, and did not stray from the EDB's stated policy goals. The responses generated by the EDB participant must be mediated through this knowledge. The interview worked through a variety of topics, but focused particularly on the EDB's:

- policies directed at NCS ethnic minority students
- ideas about multiculturalism, integration, and multiliteracies
- perceptions of students' linguistic, social, and cultural border crossings.

The Student Participants

In further compliance with the ethical guidelines provided by Concordia University regarding research involving humans, I e-mailed 35 of my former students privately and individually. Twenty students responded that they would like to participate in the project. The home languages spoken by the NCS students involved in the study were diverse and included Bangla, English, Hinko, Kashmiri, Nepali, Punjabi, Tagalog, Tamil, Thai, and Urdu. In the e-mails, I requested that students be available to meet with me privately and individually for semi-structured interviews in Hong Kong. The interviews focused on a range of topics, but focused particularly on:

- how they viewed their experience as NCS individuals in school
- the language usage at school

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[1] At the time of the data collection, I was completing my Master's degree at Concordia University.

- their perceptions of linguistic, social, and cultural border crossings
- their understanding of the term, non-Chinese.

Data Gathering Procedures

This qualitative inquiry sought to understand the alignment of students' beliefs about schools, with the policies put in place for them by the EDB. Data collection included two approaches: analysing online publications by the EDB on their website (www.edb.gov.hk/ncs), and open-ended, semi-structured interviews.

The discourse analysis was informed by Baker (2006) and focused on 27 key documents from the EDB's website that addressed non-Chinese speaking secondary school students and their parents. These documents were published in English for NCS students and their parents to access. One limitation of this discourse analysis is that documents published in Chinese (traditional or simplified) were not consulted. Further, this analysis did not include any publications directed exclusively at NCS primary students or their parents. However, all documents directed at both secondary school- and primary school-aged students were analysed.

I combined the policy documents into a single text file which I analysed through the program, HyperRESEARCH. The total size of the corpus of data was 41,373 words. I began by coding the text file for themes and, through this process, noticed the repetition of particular terms including *non-Chinese speaking* and *integration*.

Findings

After all the data had been coded and examined for themes, the following five themes emerged, were investigated, and will be elaborated upon in the next sections:

- Competing definitions of non-Chinese speaking
- Hong Kong Education Bureau discourses pointing to the integration of NCS students into schools and the community as being a priority
- Chinese language skills being necessary to have diverse employment options, access to postsecondary education, and to become a part of Hong Kong
- Authentic and respectful intercultural exchanges not being a significant part of students' secondary school experiences
- Students' lived experiences at school suggesting a lack of alignment with the EDB's policy goals.

## Discourses Present in the Hong Kong Education Bureau's Online Materials

The term, non-Chinese speaking, permeated the discourse of the EDB. As such, it is important to first acknowledge the EDB's definition of what counted as non-Chinese speaking. The EDB defined NCS students as "those whose spoken language at home is not Chinese" (EDB, 2013b). In other words, students whose ethnicity is Chinese but who are non-Chinese speaking based on the spoken language at home are also classified as NCS students. In this definition, NCS referred exclusively to language usage and did not refer to Chinese as an ethnicity. To the EDB, NCS referred to language practice only.

The Discourses Surrounding non-Chinese speaking

HyperRESEARCH includes a tool with which it is possible to identify and isolate particular words or phrases within a document. Within the 27 online documents targeting NCS students and their families, I began by searching for the term, non-Chinese speaking. Importantly, I also searched for the acronym, NCS, which was used frequently to describe non-Chinese speaking students. I coded *NCS* and *non-Chinese speaking* using ranked frequencies (Baker, 2006, p. 100). A ranking by frequency showed how many times other words occurred within five words of the search terms in the 303 instances that the search terms occurred in the 27 online documents provided by the EDB on their website. In the search, I omitted all articles and from the data collected, I built the collocational network displayed below (Figure 1). Words and phrases that appeared most are represented in the collocational network by larger font size.

Figure 1

Collocational Network of *non-Chinese Speaking* in the EDB's Online Documents
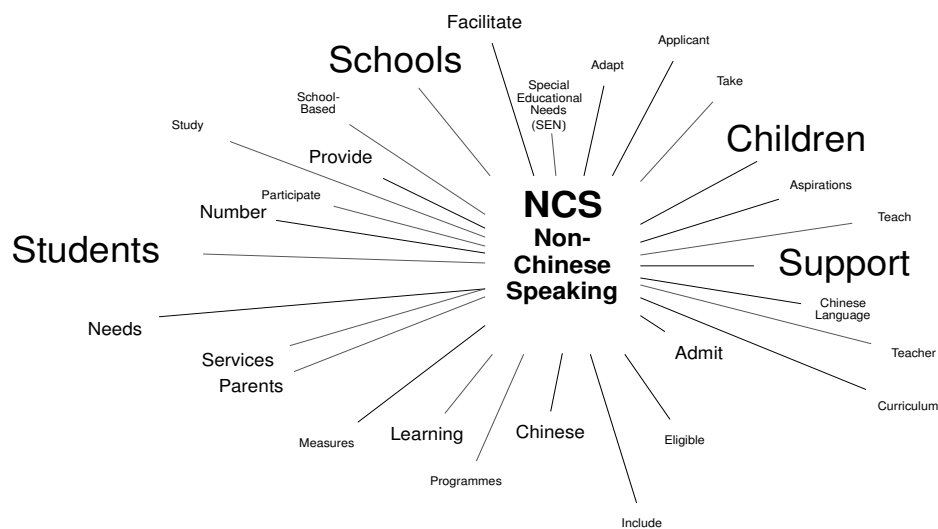
In its online materials, the EDB used NCS most often in conjunction with the terms *schools*, *students*, *children*, and *support*. Throughout the discourse of their online materials, the EDB referred repeatedly to examination subsidies and to assistance in the learning of the Chinese language as primary supports required by NCS students. The EDB noted that:

> *NCS children are generally poor in Chinese. To enhance their Chinese proficiency, EDB encourages schools to adapt their curriculum, pedagogy & evaluation with a view to catering for differences in students, teaching according to students' aptitude, and promoting students' learning motivation*
>
> *(EDB, 2013a).*

In this description, the discourse surrounding NCS is rooted in a deficit model. NCS students are "generally poor" and "different." Their existing multiliterate and multilingual practices are not valued, and their lack of Chinese skills is described as rooted in a motivational problem (EDB, 2013a). In the description, NCS students' existing literacy practices are marginalised in favour of a discussion of what they are lacking. Their "poor" Chinese skills make it difficult for NCS students to integrate in the community or participate in intercultural exchanges. Further, the EDB's discourse suggests that NCS students should integrate as quickly as possible to learn Chinese and to gain access to postsecondary education and careers in Hong Kong.

Problematically, the integration project was complicated by the pooling of NCS students in a group of designated schools, which could prevent them from integrating in the local curriculum. The EDB noted that they provided extra recurring financial support to these schools, which admit "a critical mass of NCS students . . . [to] . . . enhance the learning and teaching of NCS students" (EDB, 2013c). If schools admitting a critical mass of NCS students receive recurring grants, what is the benefit to these schools to integrate NCS students with less-subsidised local or CS students? This complication challenges the EDB's stated goal of integration. If increased numbers of NCS students studying in a school meant that the school would receive more funding, then schools would have less motivation to combine NCS and CS students. Separating these populations to increase funding was a complication that directly challenged the EDB's goal of integration.

The conception of non-Chinese speaking as a description of students' language abilities has been previously established in the EDB's written discourses. However, some of the EDB's discourse surrounding NCS mingled with ideas about nationality, ability, and ethnicity. The EDB also noted that:

> some NCS children are born in Hong Kong. Their learning ability may not be poorer than that of local pupils. Teachers of NCS children find that NCS children are active in learning. They are lively and cheerful. Positive impact can be brought about either on facilitating learning or ethnic integration when they are in the same class with local pupils
>
> (EDB, 2013a).

Learning deficits are discussed here as being rooted in nationality. Students who come to Hong Kong later in their school lives are at a clear disadvantage, but some NCS students who have attended school in Hong Kong from an early age may not have a poorer ability to learn than local students. The discourse suggests that to be local, you must be born in Hong Kong *and* be Chinese speaking. This is inherently problematic, especially in a document that was explicitly discussing integration. The complications in this statement are myriad. This language is inherently contradictory. What was the real goal in employing this contradictory policy to promote integration?

The Discourses Surrounding Integrate

It is at this point necessary to turn to the EDB's statements surrounding the concept of integration. As such, in the discourse analysis, I searched for collocates of *integrate*, *integrated*, *integrates*, and *integration* using ranked frequencies in HyperRESEARCH (Baker, 2006). The words and phrases that appeared most frequently are represented in the collocational network by larger font size (Figure 2).

The EDB has suggested that integrating is a primary concern for NCS students who are schooled in Hong Kong. Since 2004, the EDB has targeted 13 secondary schools for extra support for those with a critical mass NCS population (EDB, 2004). Because these schools admitted larger numbers of NCS students, the EDB helped form a support network for NCS students in order to:

> promote the mutual support among the schools through experience sharing and enhance the interest and ability of non-Chinese speaking students in learning Chinese Language. A more effective learning environment will be created as a result and these students will adapt to and integrate into our community more quickly
>
> (EDB, 2004).

The EDB suggests that they must "enhance the interest and ability" of NCS students to learn Chinese in order to result in "these students adapt[ing] to and integrat[ing] into our community more quickly" (EDB, 2004). This discourse suggests that if students were only more interested, or if they only had the ability to speak Chinese, they would easily integrate into the community. The EDB has clearly pointed to language as being the ticket for NCS students to integrate into Hong Kong's schools and communities. The EDB further stated that it:

> *encourages non-Chinese speaking students to integrate into the local education system and community as early as possible and has also strengthened Chinese language teaching and learning support for them. As non-Chinese speaking students' families tend to have different expectations and have spent less time living in Hong Kong than local people, the EDB gives them the option of enrolling in "designated schools." As a result, it is far from true to say that such students may only study in Chinese*

> *(EDB, 2010).*

Figure 2

Collocational Network of *Integrate* in the EDB's Online Documents
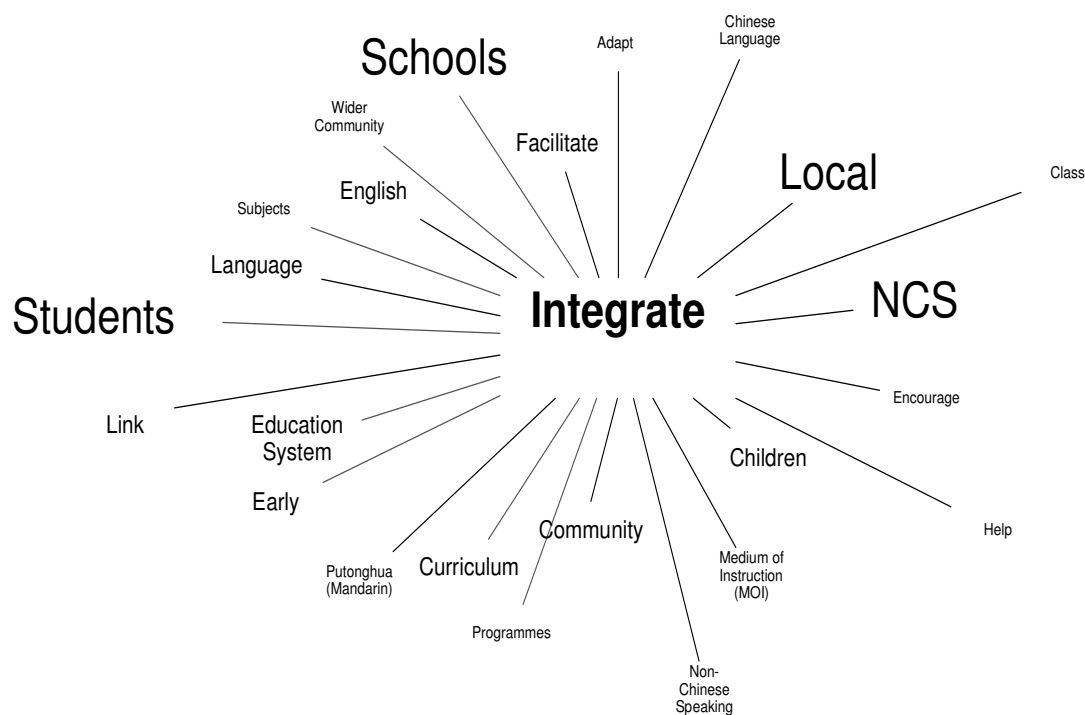
NCS people are described as having "different expectations," so they are given the opportunity to study in designated schools (EDB, 2010). These designated schools accepted larger numbers of NCS students and used English as the medium of instruction (MOI) rather than integrating NCS students into schools with local students and using Chinese as the MOI. This choice puzzles me. The EDB documents suggested that its vision is to integrate NCS students but its policy was to direct NCS families towards designated schools using English as the MOI. If Chinese was the key to helping NCS students integrate, why were families with students at secondary school age directed towards these designated schools? Integration is acceptable, and even desirable, unless a "critical mass" of NCS students is accepted into a school. In contradiction to this practice, the EDB noted that in the future, integrating NCS students with CS students was not undesirable.

In fact, moving forward, the EDB promoted the mixing of NCS students with local Chinese speaking students, by noting that:

schools which admit a small number of NCS children will arrange these children in the same class with local pupils. In fact, there are also great differences in learning among local children. Therefore, strategies in handling learning differences also apply to local children. A positive impact can be brought about either on facilitating learning or ethnic integration when they are in the same class with local pupils

(EDB, 2013a).

The EDB was therefore advocating the integration of non-local and local students and acknowledging that, in fact, NCS students' prior knowledge might not be poorer than local Hong Kong students (EDB, 2013a). These discourses speak to the marginalisation of the language and cultural practices employed by NCS students, and serve to legitimise local conceptions of what counts as appropriate knowledge and appropriate language practices.

In my interview with the participant from the Education Bureau, I asked about the EDB's vision in schooling NCS students and creating supports for them within schools. What was the EDB's vision in regards to policies towards NCS students? The participant replied that the Education Bureau's vision for NCS was:

integration. In fact, many of the NCS students live only in Hong Kong. They claim to stay in Hong Kong for good. They are part of our community and, in fact, we are together. So, what we are going to do and what we really wish is just, they have nothing different, just like everybody. Just another classmate, just another teammate in the workplace. That is what we really wish

(EDB Participant, October 11, 2012).

If integration was the vision, the way in which the participant described integration might fit better with the word, assimilation. The goal is for NCS students to become a part of Hong Kong, to be together with local people. NCS students and NCS citizens are "nothing different," they are "just like everybody" and, ultimately, the discourses present in the online materials were echoed by the EDB participant. The question remained: How does the EDB support NCS students to become a part of Hong Kong?

As I discussed the schooling of NCS students with the participant from the EDB, the participant noted that to promote integration, they provided:

advice to schools on respecting cultural differences, accommodating diversity and reminding schools of the need to communicate with NC parents, to have parents understand about the school, about the children and schools have the responsibility to promote a culturally harmonious environment in the school,. Also we remind schools during our visits and remind schools to observe the law, don't break the law. And also in our curriculum, in some subjects, there are elements cultural, mutual respect, ideas like, what we called those, equality

(EDB Participant, October 11, 2012).

The EDB suggested that one way to help students integrate and develop ideas about what it means to be a Hong Kong citizen was through the teaching and learning of the Chinese language. Another way was through a variety of supports, sharing sessions, informational leaflets, and professional development for teachers. If integration was intended to effect intercultural exchanges, the EDB believed that Chinese language skills were the key for students to access and integrate into the community.

The Students' Lived Experiences

Experiencing School Itself

The 20 students[1] interviewed all had different histories, different language abilities, and different responses to the schooling of NCS students in Hong Kong. In fact, a number of these NCS students had high abilities in Chinese language skills, and two self-identified as ethnically Chinese. When I was a teacher at the school, the NCS population was the minority and was instructed in English. The majority of the school was populated with Chinese-speaking students who were instructed in Chinese as the MOI. However, the school had since shifted demographically and the NCS students had become the majority. This shift in demographics was not lost on the students. Amrit noted, "before, when I was in Form 1, I felt not comfortable when I came [to school], but now I do." In the two years since I left, the school changed markedly. Yuna also pointed to the change in the school:

> *I think, it's like now, now Chinese and NC are equal now. Same amount of students now, so [the] school are trying to give us some more things for NC students. Now they are also focusing on NC students more.*

Yuna suggested that support had increased for NCS students. Instead of integrating the NCS and CS sections together to enhance NCS students' Chinese skills and increase CS students' English skills, the situation had merely reversed. In this, the changing demographic had not increased intercultural exchanges. What did not exist for NCS students when I was a teacher at the school, now did not exist for CS students. The situation had reversed, which did not work to help NCS students become an integrated part of Hong Kong or increase authentic intercultural exchanges.

Experiencing Language and Difference

Mai Chan, who self-identified as "half-Chinese," noted that with the increase of NCS students within the school, the ethnic makeup of the classroom also diversified, which was something she valued:

> *Actually, I have close friends. They are nice, but we are different nationalities. But we still can be very good friends. About friendship with classmates, it's also good but maybe it's just some part of the language problem because I'm the only one [who speaks] Thai in the classroom but it still no problem. We are still close, I think.*

Mai Chan did not marginalise the diverse language practices of her classmates, but valued the difference. While Mai Chan suggested that the school had become a more inclusive and better place over time. Amber disagreed and suggested that the school had degenerated in the past two years. She stated that the school had changed:

> *and in a really bad way. It used to be, I felt, when I first came to [the school] I felt so happy. Because like, it felt like an actual school. I felt like I had actual good teachers, and actual good friends. The teachers weren't so strict with like appearance, and everything, and yet, like they pushed you to study ... now, they care more about your appearance, or like all of your conduct. Academics don't seem to amount to much to them. And a lot of the teachers, it seems that they don't know how to work with non-Chinese students. Especially in Chinese [language learning].*

The students' perceptions about the shift in power interested me because when I was at the school, I had noticed that the NCS minority students were not given equal access to classes and curricula, and their pre-

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[1] All names have been changed to protect anonymity.

existing language and literacy skills were devalued in their participation in the school. Ann, who was quite advanced in her Chinese skills, used to study in a school with Chinese as the MOI. She clarified:

> *Actually, before I studied in a Chinese school, but I actually feel really hard to catch up. Because I feel like I'm not in their level. It's like that school doesn't suit me because I had to learn really long big words of Chinese. Especially their history, I had to remember all and then I had like difficulties in learning.*

Ann's experiences at her Chinese MOI school reflected Loper's (2004) assessment of the state of schools for NCS students. Although NCS students were able to attend those schools, sufficient support was not provided in the schools to facilitate students' success at secondary school. Daniel, who was born in Hong Kong, explained that he had been raised in the Philippines for the first part of primary school. As such, when he returned to Hong Kong in 2007, he didn't feel he could attend a school with Chinese as the MOI because: "I only started [learning] Chinese in Grade 6. So I don't know much of Chinese. When I went to secondary school, I didn't want to [go to] any Chinese school. Because it's going to be hard for me."

This discussion of the difference between learning Chinese and learning in Chinese was necessary to understand the EDB's call for NCS students to integrate and achieve authentic intercultural dialogue. Because integration was a main goal that was repeated in the discourse of the EDB, it was necessary to see the way integration and interculturalism played out in school. Some students had even resisted the acquisition of Chinese. While CS students were instructed with Chinese as the MOI at the school in question, NCS students were instructed with English as the MOI. If CS and NCS students cannot integrate and promote dialogue within their interactions in school, it is important to note that this separation might carry over into NCS students' community participation at large.

Experiencing Integration

One of the main questions this project looked to address was how students experienced intercultural exchanges within school and how this aligned with, and potentially contrasted with, the discourse of the Education Bureau. As such, I asked students to think about belonging and about integration, and to explain their ideas about the current state of their school. Beyond the school, the students also offered insights on what it meant to belong in the larger community. Amber suggested that her main barrier to integrating in Hong Kong was "the fact that I don't speak any Chinese. It will be really hard to get a job here. The way people look at you, or something. Because we're obviously not Chinese. It's a barrier."

Khan echoed this sentiment about belonging being linked both to language and to ethnicity, as he stated, "I cannot speak Chinese and I'm not part of them." Veronica noted that the ticket to belonging was not just language ability but also understanding the culture that existed in Hong Kong, and that after some time, "I change myself so I tried to adapt their culture, slowly, slowly. So now I'm really good at it." However, Shawn, who was born in Hong Kong, believed that he had the ticket to belonging. He stated that he felt like a part of Hong Kong:

> *because I'm a permanent resident here. So, you know, I'm equivalent to everyone else here. If you're not a permanent resident, then it may be quite difficult, I think … if you're new in town and you're not really sure what to do.*

Rocky arrived in Hong Kong when he was a baby and highlighted a similar sentiment: "I think I'm Chinese. Because I'm like living here for 17 years, already. I didn't think I'm non-Chinese. I just think we are same. Just the school make us non-Chinese." This is an insight worth delving into. Rocky stated that the school

made them non-Chinese. The school, and by extension the EDB, created the category of NCS. It was socially constructed. The more interesting question remains: why segregate students into categories of NCS and CS if integration is a main policy goal? If Rocky thought of himself as a Hong Kong person and could speak Chinese, why would the school insist that he was non-Chinese? Where can dialogue and intercultural exchange occur if students are kept apart? Here, there was a clear lack of fit between the discourse of the EDB and the experience of the students.

Within her classroom, Mai Chan noted that some students found it easier to integrate than others did. When discussing an NCS classmate, Mai Chan noted that her classmate "is real Chinese. Her mom and dad are Chinese, but for me, my mom is Thai and my dad is Chinese. For her, it's easier to adapt than me." To me, this was an interesting distinction because they had equal footing in terms of language skills (they both spoke Cantonese but studied in English) but Mai Chan thought that her classmate had it easier in terms of integration, perhaps because she self-identified as half-Chinese.

Rocky, stated that he was discriminated against by other NCS students based on his skin colour because "[his skin colour] is not white," but that because of his high level of Chinese skills, "Chinese people are friendly" to him. Discrimination based on skin colour, ethnicity, and race between the students in the NCS stream was not apparent to me when I was a teacher at the school but in my interviews with students I learned that this kind of discrimination was prevalent within their school. Another NCS student, Shawn, who was born in Hong Kong, but was of Pakistani heritage, suggested that:

> a lot of people in my class are, like, Pakistani. So, it's really fun talking to them too. Yeah. I'm not saying that I don't enjoy, you know, people of other race[s], but that's, it's just, more close … in a way.

It is in separating ethnic minority NCS students from their Chinese-speaking local schoolmates, that these "us" and "them" discourses seemed to have solidified as students made their way through school. In this, the EDB's call for integration seemed to be failing. Dialogue and exchanges were happening within the category of non-Chinese where the multicultural, multilingual, and multiethnic students experienced school together within their separate participation in the school. However, within the school of inquiry, intercultural exchanges were mostly absent between CS and NCS learners.

Experiencing Interactions with Chinese-speaking Students

In my interviews with student participants, I wanted to see where the student participants noted that they had interacted with CS students within the school. Amber noted that their classroom had been moved to the third floor that year. As such, Amber explained that their classroom was:

> with all of the other Chinese students. It's the only non-Chinese class [on that floor] … It's not really uncomfortable, but I'm not really used to being on a floor with so many Chinese people. So it's like, before, walking to class, all of the faces of the people I saw walking to class, I knew. And now, it's like, only one or two of the Chinese students, I know. So, that's a bit, like, awkward because I can't speak their language.

This idea that it was awkward to integrate with the CS students is worth delving into. These two populations existed and attended school simultaneously. They were in contact in all of the periods of leisure time during the school day, but there was very little integration between the CS and NCS students unless the NCS students established Chinese-language skills. Avatar suggested that it was possible for intercultural exchanges to occur within the school, and that these friendships could exist as long as

communication skills were present. Avatar noted that his class had changed since he began attending the school: "there's like, different people from different countries. And they've become my best friends. And you can be best friends with someone from another country, it doesn't have to be India. Just [have similar] communication skills, that's all." Like Avatar, Singh believed that the key to friendships was communication when he described his school situation:

> *We were not learning with Chinese [people] … Because we only [had] non-Chinese students. Most people were [South] Asians. So, we know each other's language. We didn't have any difficulty, like, communicating. So I think, I came here, I did a good job because I can like communicate in Chinese now. I can also speak English.*

Although Singh remained in the socially constructed category of NCS, and was instructed in English, he prided himself on his Chinese language skills. What type of impact do these socially created categories have on relationships and on the development of ideas about belonging (and not belonging)?

One of the interesting discourses that emanated from the EDB and that was repeated in the discourses of the students was the idea of equal opportunities. Aman repeated this idea, and complicated the notion of equality when he noted that:

> *according to the Hong Kong government, everyone is equal here. Everyone's got the same chance. People say that it's true. But the reality's not the same. Sometimes we do get discriminated [against] by Chinese. We don't got all the same jobs as the Chinese got. Because not everyone can speak fluently Chinese or read and write Chinese.*

For Aman, the ticket to belonging and adapting was speaking Chinese. Shasad echoed this sentiment of equal access when he suggested that in the four years he had been in Hong Kong and attended school, "what [the] Chinese [students] got, we got. And in the, from the government, what [the] Chinese [people] got, we got. Same." Daniel disagreed with this idea when he suggested that things were not so equal within his school between the NCS and CS students. In Daniel's opinion, NCS students were clearly at a disadvantage, because:

> *they [Chinese speaking students] have more opportunities than us. I think it's … I don't know. Because we sometimes see these pictures in our school, they're mostly Chinese. They're not NCS, so they have more activities than us. Sometimes I see these pictures and they're on the third [floor]. They're so happy. I don't know. We don't get a chance to do that.*

While in a global sense most of the students believed that the access to school was equal between NCS and CS students, when it came down to specific instances in school, including access to curricula, to employment, and social services without the requisite Chinese language abilities, they felt that the situation was not quite equal.

Conclusion

This project examined the 27 Hong Kong Education Bureau's documents that pointed to the policy goal of integrating NCS students into the community while simultaneously separating NCS students from local students, and compared these policies with the lived experiences of 20 NCS students. Because Chinese-speaking and non-Chinese speaking students had few opportunities to interact, authentic dialogue showed little chance of flourishing within the students' lived experiences of secondary school. Although, since 2005,

the Hong Kong government had allowed NCS students to enroll in any of its schools, existing resources were not enough to support the students' needs. Clearly, opening up mainstream government schools was a step in the right direction but much more must be done to support language learning and inclusion for NCS students in government schools for intercultural exchanges to happen beyond the surface value.

The findings from this inquiry suggest that students' experiences of school did not align with the discourse of the Education Bureau or with the goals of interculturalism. The EDB suggested that learning Chinese was the requirement for the integration of NCS people into the community and as a way to become full participants in Hong Kong society. The practice of schooling NCS students showed that this was not quite happening. As the EDB notes, "in Hong Kong, Chinese is the first language" (EDB, 2013a) therefore, integrating is something that is accessed through the development of Chinese language skills. Students who were born in Hong Kong, but did not speak Chinese did not qualify for this integrated status. Access to Chinese language skills had huge consequences on NCS students' development of ideas about what it meant to be a citizen in Hong Kong. The EDB's policies were acted out and complicated by the practices of their teachers, which affected NCS students' ideas about how they should (and if they could) become a part of Hong Kong.

For Hong Kong's NCS students to experience school positively and become a part of the community, real dialogue and intercultural exchange need to occur. One of the primary goals of interculturalism is to promote authentic opportunities for discussion and exchange between diverse peoples and cultures. For its NCS secondary student community, the framework of interculturalism provides the tools to promote inclusion within Hong Kong's schools and within the larger society. It is not enough to point out what is not working without making suggestions for real social change, and a cultural shift within schools toward dialogue and intercultural exchange must occur to support the inclusion of the NCS community. This change will need to be addressed through policy measures put forth by the Education Bureau and supported by administration and the school community to be effective. Most importantly, this shift must include the participation and voices of NCS citizens – students, as well as their families, and communities. Participatory change is integral in a project to create real change and for schools to address social justice. For authentic and participatory intercultural exchange to be realised in the project of schooling NCS students in Hong Kong, the dialogue that occurs between policy makers and concerned NCS populations must address the social asymmetry that presently exists. Before any change can occur, NCS families, students, communities, and the EDB must work together to create a respectful and inclusive dialogue.

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