

# **Towards Inclusion of Cross-Boundary Students from Mainland China in Educational Policies and Practices in Hong Kong**

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## Abstract

Every society has an obligation to provide quality education to children regardless of their socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. The number of cross-boundary students (CBS) from Mainland China in Hong Kong schools is increasing. This paper reviews educational policy and provision for educating CBS, presenting data from an empirical study. Data from three school-based case studies (pre-primary, primary and secondary) reveal an absence of systematic school-based policy or provision for newcomers. This paper draws on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, to review educational practices with regard to the CBS populations. Despite the rapid growth of CBS population, the case studies suggest that Hong Kong regional government's policies fail meet students' transitional needs or guarantee their rights. There remains a serious policy gap which is left to schools and teachers address as best they can. The paper concludes by discussing implications for policy-making and teacher professional development.

## **Keywords**

Cross-boundary students; educational policy; family backgrounds; transitional needs, integration; child rights

## **INTRODUCTION**

Following Hong Kong's change of status to become a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of China in July 1997, social and economic cross-boundary interactions continue to increase. For example, between 2008 and 2009 there were around 218,200 Hong Kong residents, mostly male, working in Mainland China (Census and Statistic Department). One significant trend over the last decade is an increase in cross-border marriages (So, 2003; International Social Service, Hong Kong Branch, 2009). Typically, cross-boundary families reside in border towns such as Shenzhen and Yantian and send their children to Hong Kong schools. Such practice is common for a variety of reasons: the cost of living in mainland China is lower than in Hong Kong; mainland mothers normally have to wait for some years to secure the right of abode in Hong Kong; and a move to Hong Kong also means a disconnection of women's established social and support networks (Yuen, 2004).

Cross-boundary families are also able to access a range of social and educational benefits for their children, since such children are recognised as full Hong Kong residents and are therefore entitled to all social and education benefits. These include access to the voucher scheme for pre-primary and the 12-year free and compulsory education. Their parents tend to believe that Hong Kong schooling also offers better opportunities for English language learning, and subsequent improved educational and employment prospects (Wong, 2001).

Children who reside in Mainland China but who attend school daily in Hong Kong, are known as cross-boundary students (CBS). According to the government statistics, between 2008/09 and 2010/11, the number of CBS has rocketed from 1,780 to 3,786 in pre-primary, 3,910 to 4,575 in primary and 1,078 to 1,538 in secondary schools (Hong Kong SAR Press Release, 15 June 2011). These newcomers pose challenges and have significant implications for Hong Kong education. Drawing on the minimum standards set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), this study appraises Hong Kong education policies and practices as applied to CBS, focusing here specifically on the perspectives of school principals and teachers working with children classified as CBS.

### **Common characteristics of cross-boundary students**

It is commonly understood that CBS are of humble origins, have complicated family backgrounds and with whom single parenting is very common. Typically, the Hong Kong father is usually the sole breadwinner, working long hours in a low skilled job, such as construction, catering or logistics. Father absenteeism and subsequent lack of parental input to children's education have places students and their families in a socially disadvantaged situation. The mainland mother usually becomes a full-time home-makers on marriage, coping single-handedly with parenting. Consequently, families are at risk due to limited

social capital, dysfunctional marriages and mother-child conflicts (International Social Service, Hong Kong Branch, 2009).

About 80 per cent CBS are under the age of 10 and are therefore clustered in kindergartens and primary schools. Because of the cross-cultural and cross-boundary family make up, children's educational and transitional needs are complex. With little or no knowledge of the Hong Kong education system and often only marginal English proficiency, the resident parent (generally the mother) can only offer limited homework support (Yuen, 2009). Living between Hong Kong and Mainland societies, children's understanding of Hong Kong is superficial and restricted to school and textbook experiences. Some students are quicker to make adjustments to Hong Kong / mainland cultural differences than others, the younger students seemingly doing better than the older ones (Yuen, 2011). A number of students have difficulties in adapting to Hong Kong learning styles and in establishing new social networks. One major educational challenge is the fixed bus schedule and long travelling hours which means that children's extra-curricular activities are sacrificed or compromised (Yuen, 2004; Bauhinia Foundation Research Centre, 2009). Concerns have also been expressed over child safety in making bus and train connections and crossing the checkpoint (Christian Action, 2007). However, schools tend to identify CBS needs as logistical or related specifically to language needs, rather than as perceiving policy questions to be more holistic concerns about guaranteeing child rights.

### **CBS education, child rights and public obligations**

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child of United Nations (1989) (CRC) outlines the minimum entitlements of every child under the age of 18. Among other things it specifies the educational provisions that State Parties (governments) need to guarantee young people to ensure their well-being. Since CBS face challenges resulting from their disadvantaged family backgrounds with divided families and the pressures of single parenting families, they are likely to need additional support to enable to adjust and succeed in Hong Kong schools.

English language is perceived as the common learning barrier at school, and this cannot be easily compensated by their parents (Yuen, 2011). The CRC Article 3 places an obligation on States Parties (the obligation on SAR HK government responsible for education) to:

ensure the rights in the Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.

Clearly, as a consequence of language, social and parental children classified as CBS are not able to access their rights on the basis of equality with their non-CBS peers. Failure to adequately address the disadvantages of geographical location, language background, social and other family status results in *de facto* discrimination in the case of such students, preventing them from fully participating in and benefitting from school life. Lacking the

knowledge of their rights, knowledge of the local education system and access to appropriate information (Article 13) increases the risk that cross border students' rights will be infringed.

Related studies reveal that Hong Kong schooling adopts an assimilationist approach to newcomers (Yuen, 2010b), and that little systemic change is accommodated, especially relating to learning and teaching. According to international minimum standards, all CRC ratifying states, including China and its SAR of Hong Kong, has an obligation to provide quality education services in keeping with the characteristics outlined in the Convention. For example, Article 17 specifies that: 'States Parties... shall ensure that the child has access to information and material from a diversity of national and international sources, especially those aimed at the *promotion of his or her social, spiritual and moral well-being and physical and mental health*' (my emphasis) and Article 29 confirms the right to a right to human rights and intercultural learning (Osler, 2010). Any narrow assimilationist approach is therefore likely to be found wanting. The CRC provides an education philosophy which is human rights-focused, and can serve as the benchmark and framework for evaluating and planning Hong Kong quality education for the benefits of all its students, including CBS.

## **EDUCATION POLICIES AND MIGRANTS**

Concern for academic success, and particularly English proficiency, has long been a focus for scholars, school personnel and educational policy makers in Hing Kong. As elsewhere, the

ideologies underpinning education policies and support programmes for newcomers are predominantly geared towards understanding the host culture and characterized by assimilation, i.e. making newcomers as one of *us* (Pastor, 2009). Educational success is a determinant factor in assessing processes of accommodation, adaptation and assimilation of descendants of immigrants. Zhou (1997) and Hirschman (2001) note that the experiences of immigrant descendants in America are segmented and dynamic. Yuen's (2010b) study on the identity formation of CBS also confirms such findings for Hong Kong. Policy helps shape such processes.

Ghosh (2004) notes how Canada, for example, has moved away from assimilation policies in order to prevent discrimination on grounds of ethnicity and race. Instead, compensatory programmes are provided to support students, rather than attempting to assimilate them into a mono-cultural Eurocentric worldview. Support measures include the hiring of minority culture teachers; teachers ethnic representation in the curriculum; and heritage-language classes to enable specific groups to maintain their languages.

In Hong Kong, Chan (1998) points out that the first year is the most stressful for new immigrants, as they experience environmental and personal changes. Their transitional needs are multifaceted. Although these studies offer important insights into the situation of immigrants, there is still a knowledge gap to be bridged as to how CBSs are recognized educationally, culturally and socially.

Existing support policies directed towards CBS focus on locating appropriate Hong Kong schools; improving students' English language skills; enabling travel across the boundary. The Placement and Support Section first assign CBS to schools located in the Hong Kong boundary areas. Under the school-based management policy, the receiving school will normally administer an entrance test for the new students, comprising English, Chinese and Mathematics, and to allocate them to a specific class accordingly.

The government body, Education Bureau (EDB), is responsible for the territory-wide school policies. It provides schools with a School-Based Support (SBSS) Grant for the all newcomers attending Hong Kong schools in their first year, HK\$2,805 per child at primary level and HK\$4,160 at secondary level in 2009/10. Most schools make use of the Grant to run supplementary English language classes for the first year entry CBS and other applicable immigrant students. The EDB also runs a 60-hour Induction (for age 6-15); and a 60-hour English Extension Programme for the CBS/newly arrived students (NAS) (age 9-15) through non-governmental organizations (NGOs), currently they offer "English Language Extension Curriculum" to help the NAS adjust to school and local community environment, but not CBS.

Co-ordination between Hong Kong and Shenzhen on matters of transport and immigration is critical to facilitating CBS schooling (Cheung, 2007; Ching, 2007; Hong Kong Social Service Federation, 2006; Bauhinia Foundation Research Centre, 2009). In

2009/10, the government approved eligible CBS to apply for the Student Travel Subsidy to cover the expenses that are incurred in travelling to and from school within the boundaries of Hong Kong.

In response to CBS perceived personal and emotional needs, the Hong Kong SAR has issued a circular to advise schools to use their non-teaching hours (such as lunch or recess breaks) flexibly, enabling the provision of pastoral and counselling services to these students (HK SAR Press Release, 2008). This is to maximize opportunities for support within a rigid school bus schedule. In response to such initiatives, schools are gradually developing various support measures.

The ways in which the Hong Kong government has implemented policies concerning CBS is somewhat tokenistic. Gibson and Carrasco, (2010) and Pastor (2009) suggest the assimilation policy has actually impeded the academic and social inclusion of the newcomers; lip service to English language learning also fails CBS, failing to close achievement gaps. Yuen (2011) has discerned that there are still significant service gaps experienced by CBS families. For example, there is lack of effective collaboration between schools and social services because Hong Kong social workers cannot provide the necessary services to mainland residents.

## **RESEARCH STUDY**

This study employed a case study method to address the “how” and “why” questions concerning the complex processes of educating CBS. Yin (1984) summarizes the key features of the case study method as use of multiple data sources, including direct observation and indirect evaluation of the phenomena; structured and unstructured interviews; and documentary review. In this study, one pre-primary, one primary and one secondary school with significant recruitment of CBS were selected. Parental consent was first obtained to enable the participation of students, although their students’ own consent was not formally secured. Semi-structured individual and focus-group interviews were administered to principals, teachers, social workers/ student guidance teachers and CBS. This paper reports only on the data relating to adult informants, and not to that elicited from students themselves.

### **The school contexts**

All three case study schools were located in the same district of Hong Kong, adjoining the mainland China boundary, and known to include significant number of CBS. The three principals were first contacted by the researcher and each indicated a willingness to participate in the study. Teachers of student guidance, English, Chinese and Mathematics in each school were nominated by Principals. All had first-hand experience and interactions

with CBS. A total of twenty teachers from People Pre-Primary School (4), Love Primary School (7) and Kind Secondary School (9) participated. All schools names are pseudonyms.

People Pre-Primary School has more than 10 years experience in educating CBS, with CBS comprising with 58 per cent of the school population. It is surrounded by Hakka villages in the northern district, and is very close to the Chinese boundary. The populations is aging, and the birth rate has declined over the last decade, as most young people move to the city or overseas for economic advancement and employment opportunities. CBS students at People School are mainly from low-income families and have limited financial and emotional support.

Love Primary School has almost 20 years experience in CBS education with such students making up 75 per cent of the total school population. It is located in a restricted area next to the Chinese boundary among very disadvantaged villages. Visitors need a permit to visit the school. With the constant decline of the local population, Love Primary School is very active in promoting Hong Kong schooling to cross-boundary families.

Kind Secondary School has a relatively short history in working with Chinese newcomers, 5 years in immigrant education and CBS education. However, its location is more isolated and students need to make connections to the school from the main train station. Because of the sharp decrease in local student enrolment and its close physical proximity to the mainland border, the school has increased admittance of CBSs in recent years that now

stands at 12 per cent. The socio-economic status of these CBS families is also in the low strata.

Although the three principals demonstrated a good understanding of the demographic features of cross-boundary families, they admitted that their schools did not have a clear policy on the CBS education. For identified English language learning needs and homework assignment, each school would provides some sort of learning support, mainly after school hours and on Saturdays. There were variations in education provisions between the three schools. What follows is a discussion of the key educational concerns and school-based support provision in each school from the perspectives of the principals and the teachers.

## **APPRAISAL OF EDUCATIONAL POLICIES AND SUPPORT**

### **People Pre-Primary School**

#### ***Principal's Perspective***

Principal WH has been in the leadership for People Pre-Primary for 20 years and was very aware of the challenging cross-boundary family issues such as single parenting; limited social networks; and poor knowledge of Hong Kong social and educational systems. Resourcing needy CBS families is high on the school's agenda. To address family needs, the following were provided: additional teacher assistance in school bus services at Lo Wu Check Point;

intensive pastoral care; and organized parent-teacher seminars in Shenzhen to facilitate greater participation of parents.

Principal WH's concerns focused on managerial rather than educational issues. For example, how to get the CBS familiarized with the school routine, adjusted to the bus journey and to observe new school rules. There was little accommodation for CBS in terms of curriculum support, during recess or after school activities. The approach was largely assimilationist.

### ***Teachers' Perspectives***

These four teachers of People Pre-primary all agreed with the viewpoint that:

there isn't any specific policy from our school...it's the teachers' duty to make adjustments (to help the students to adapt)...we are responsible for all subjects, and we also have to take care of their relationships (with teachers and other students) as well as how well they can blend in.

In terms of policy, People Pre-Primary shows no sign of adapting practices to promote intercultural integration. As the school-based support grant only applies to primary and secondary newcomers, this school was dependent on school fee income; funds from the education voucher scheme; and support from the school sponsoring body to cover the expenses. With such a high proportion of students from cross-border families, with complex family relationships and the low social capital, enormous additional responsibilities are placed on the teachers.

### **Love Primary School**

### *Principal's perspective*

Principal SK, like his counterpart at People Pre-Primary, saw CBS needs in managerial terms. For him, the main duty of administrators was to work with district councilors and government officials to ensure safe and smooth transportation and check point crossing. Like Principal WH, he offered no suggestions on how he might enable an equitable learning environment for all by addressing curricular and identity issues of CBS.

In relation to school-based learning support, Principal SK saw the after-school programme as the possible key item. CBS usually started their bus journey immediately after school and thus missed out on homework support or extra curricular activities. Principal SK stated that offering additional homework assistance was general school practice for all students, rather than a written policy. He did not think there should be different treatments for CBS, regardless of whether they were in their first, second and third years of entry in a Hong Kong school.

### *Teachers' perspectives*

Seven Love Primary teachers were interviewed. All appeared to be overloaded by the demands of CBS. In their conversations, they sought all kinds of support, observing that Northern District 'is packed with CBS'. Because Love Primary is located in a restricted and closed area of the frontier, it is geographically disconnected from the wider community. Although they wished to contact NGOs to offer after school remedial classes for CBSs, these

NGOs were unable to access the school: ‘we are on our own to help the students ... and not aware of any other government support policies’. The only available resource for CBSs is the School-Based Support Scheme Grant. They were discouraged by the limited family support and the multitude of identified CBS learning needs.

The teachers expressed a strong desire to collaborate with organizations on the mainland, so as to enable CBS learning, suggesting: ‘it would be good if there were several designated agencies or locations in Shenzhen where students could seek learning support, e.g. on Saturdays, and on long public holidays like Christmas’. They also wished ‘there could be workshops (in the mainland) to educate the parents on how to assist their children in school work...but there just isn’t anything available’.

It has not been an easy path for Love Primary to respond to the multiple needs of CBS. Given the changing student profiles and unfavourable family conditions, the best teachers could offer is small-scale after-school programmes and a readiness to negotiate with various government departments to ease the boundary crossing. Both the principal and the teachers believed the disadvantaged school location and the complicated family situations of CBSs have consumed their energy. They urged the government and policy makers to address the real issue, namely, offering professional support to those schools who are working to support CBS.

### **Kind Secondary School**

### *Principal's Perspective*

Kind secondary school did not have a formal policy to support student academic achievement across different social or ethnic groups. A special programme called 'Kind Freshman' led by the teacher with overall responsibility for discipline is offered to all newcomers. For CBS, in their first, second and third years of entry, this was the only special support on offer. This programme focuses on building up social networks and improving English language proficiency. Considerable attention is given to promoting positive learning behaviours and life aspirations among students. Although the school has adopted the two-class-teachers system from Forms 1 to 7 to better cater for student needs, the particular transitional needs of CBS are left of individual teachers.

As with the other principals, transportation arrangements for CBS were also the key concerns of Principal John. He argued that 'the government is really behind' in addressing transportation needs, 'they have called principals' meetings ...but the current measures are just not adequate ...those that live far away from Shenzhen wake up at around 5 a.m. and get back home at 6:45p.m'. According to the principal, this long-standing problem hindered students' integration in school and social networks. He observed that 'this logistic issue can only be addressed by the coordination among different government departments'.

Principal John saw the central problem as one of resources: 'It would be better if the government could provide more funding to school... to implement programs to meet the

students' needs... For example, it would be much better if we were given money to run tutorial classes (outside normal class hours), especially English classes. Additionally, the school needed additional resources to support communication with families: 'When CBS skip classes, even if we are willing to physically travel and find the parents and students, we would not be able to support the financial aspect of it'.

### ***Teachers' Perspectives***

The nine teachers admitted that they were not aware of any government provision and policies especially for CBS. They could only recall a few NGOs offering piece-meal one-time services to schools upon request. But they maintained that they were overwhelmed by their busy school schedules and seldom sought outside support. They believed that as the number of CBS was on the rise, there would be a pressing need to seek external support.

The Kind Secondary School has encountered different challenges in educating adolescent CBS. Both the Principal and teachers were aware of their particular social and emotional needs at this stage in the life course. They appear to have little faith in the Hong Kong government's provision of effective support measures for students at this stage in their academic careers. Several self-initiating school-based fund raising activities were launched to finance the CBS for some urgent needs such as transportation fees and lunches. All these create more pastoral care issues for school personnel and warrant further attention.

## **EDUCATIONAL AND TRANSITIONAL NEEDS**

### **People Pre-Primary School**

#### *Principal's Perspective*

Principal WH opined that the most pressing CBS needs were lack of family care and support for school learning. She believed that CBS tend to come from dysfunctional families with little support and uncoordinated parental relationships, with a number experiencing family violence. Common educational challenges are learning English, understanding spoken Cantonese and writing complex Chinese characters. She suggested CBS were rather shy and passive in class, experiencing difficulties in establishing room friendships. She noted that since these 3-5 year-olds often find it difficult to articulate their needs 'it is difficult for the teachers to understand their negative emotion at school, whether caused by personal or family problems'. With regard to the transitional needs of CBS, Principal WH only indentified language differences between the first, second and third years of entry. She opined that little children generally catch up with their peers after the first term.

#### *Teachers' Perspectives*

The four teachers interviewed were shocked by the differences between CBS and local students, especially relating to personal hygiene, eating manners and learning competencies. Educating CBS at the beginning stage was largely seen as an uphill exercise. Yet, teachers believed families were relatively unconcerned about basic matters they considered important.

Teachers faced a tension between being sympathetic to cross-boundary families' difficulties and maintaining high expectations of CBS students. They recognised that 'their families were coming from low SES...their fathers were usually in part time/temporary jobs...like in goods delivery/transportations, site constructions, restaurant chefs '. The school provided emergency relief funds for matters like students' bus fees. But the teachers also recognised aware that failing to meet the school expectations would cause real long-term difficulties for CBS: they 'have very weak family support on learning, the parents have little English...the most they can do is to look up the vocabularies on the dictionary with them...but some of the parents would just ignore teachers' instructions for homework'.

Compared with local students, CBS are stronger in Putonghua and weaker in English. But speaking and understanding Cantonese does not seem to be a problem to most of them: They could not manage Cantonese at first, they may have delayed response when you talk to them...so you need to use Mandarin to help...but (gradually) you will find they could actually understand the language well'. Emotionally, teachers found CBS tended to be more resilient and independent than local students: they 'are really good at adapting, they are very independent... it only takes a few days for them to stop crying, but with Hong Kong children it can take much longer'.

## **Love Primary School**

### ***Principal's Perspective***

Principal SK has long been actively involved in CBS education and the school has a long history of new arrivals to Hong Kong. He was particularly concerned about transportation issues which affect a high proportion of his students and frustrated by bureaucratic delays:

The department of transport only allows a limited number Closed Area permits to be issued to students, especially for schools not in the Frontier Closed Area, and students of higher grades (e.g. Primary 4) would not be given permits and therefore spend more time travelling between home and school.

Safety is one of the key concerns, since when students cross the boundary check point without adult supervision, traffickers may try to use their school bags to carry illegal goods.

Another concern is children's travelling time between the two cities. Not only does the restrictive school bus schedule impede pastoral and counseling support, but it can have a direct impact on academic achievement, since children are unable to attend 'remedial classes, additional curriculum training, or to attend extra classes for those who can learn fast'. Long journeys mean CBS have less time for homework and family.

### ***Teachers' perspectives***

The Love primary school teachers believed that the complexity of cross-boundary family relationships were one of the greatest obstacles in educating young children. This was, they felt a particularly acute problem in re-constituted families: 'some remarried couples would bring their previous kids to live in the same house ... and this may cause family problems

(e.g. quarrels), or there was nobody to take care of the kids (emotionally and academically), and this of course affected their learning motivation’.

According to the teachers, parental involvement in homework supervision is limited:

the fathers stay in Hong Kong and the mothers in Shenzhen, and the mothers have no idea of the Hong Kong education system, they just don’t know how to cooperate with the school and supervise their children in academic aspects...the mothers would always say to us to treat their kids in stern manner and give them punishments (when they do wrong).

School coordination between the father and the mother of CBS could be frustrating, with

some fathers seeing mothers as the one responsible for the child’s schooling: ‘When asked

about the kids, the fathers would always say they don’t know what’s going on and tell us to

ring the mothers instead’.

The English teacher revealed her frustration, since a number of children whose previous education had been on the mainland were new to English language learning. Her comments

suggest she had lacked sufficient alternative strategies for students who were beginner

learners:

Some of them are particularly weak in English;...some of the students don't know how to use the English dictionary...I need to teach them individually at lunch time...they don’t even know the English alphabet...the biggest problem is when they have English dictation, they do not even know how to read or spell the word and yet find themselves in a dictation session.

With regard to transitional needs, the teachers unanimously pointed out that the first year was the most critical stage when:

New students have not established good learning habit and didn’t observe the rules and regulations. For example, some of them would take out a bun and eat during the class,

failed to hand in homework and the reply slips of school notices. Parents never checked and signed student handbooks, forgot to pay for school charges.

This situation usually improved in the second year once both CBS and parents were familiarized with the school routines and mode of communication. Some students made remarkable academic improvements. They also began to seek help from the teachers. In the third year, CBS were treated no differently from their peers, and special support measures stopped. The first term in Love primary appeared the most crucial stage for most teachers, when they needed particular strategies to accommodate CBS learning needs. The perceived needs of CBS at Love Primary and the concerns of the teachers were very different from those identified by the pre-primary school. At primary level the focus was on literacy competency necessary to access the curriculum, together with academic readiness to cope with school expectations.

## **Kind Secondary School**

### ***Principal's perspective***

Principal John is a young and energetic school administrator with a good knowledge of student demography both in the local district and the Mainland. He echoed the view that CBS needs are multifaceted, raising concern about inadequate parental care; poverty coupled with negative peer influence; and engagement in high risk activities, such as drug-taking and gambling. He observed a scarcity of school resources meant that these wider family and social issues were often beyond the school's capacity to address.

In supporting the learning of CBS, the school relied on their own English teachers instead of collaborating with NGOs:

We once held a joint English remedial class with an NGO, they provided us with native English teachers (NET), but after a year of doing so I still failed to see much improvement of the English of CBS. The problem is that the NET didn't speak Cantonese or Putonghua, the teachers and students simply didn't understand each other, the students therefore could not learn much...Now, we would give extra money for our teachers to take up extra remedial English classes for CBS.

### *Teachers' Perspectives*

The teachers were not aware of any government provision or policies for CBS but recalled there were some NGOs offering piece-meal services to schools. Teachers felt problems concerning transportation, including security, impacted directly and indirectly on learning:

Some of the CBSs are always late, especially those who live far away. They catch the earliest bus they can, but ... and many just cannot make it by 8 am when the lesson starts. Safety is another problem when they cross the border. Some CBS told me that in certain places or in the public transport interchange, there would be people who snatch mobile phones and money.

Long traveling hours also means less studying and social time:

The further away the CBS live, the more likely the students are to do less well in school work or to hand in homework late. They spend more time travelling than reading...they are all in a hurry to go back home after school. This not only cuts their time for extra curriculum activities, but also checks their progress in catching up with their studies.

By contrast, with regards to academic performance the teachers were very positive about CBS:

What they learnt in the Mainland sometimes was more advanced than their peers in Hong Kong and they are actually quite competent in Chinese and Maths ... Those who have motivation are able to catch up with their peers very fast. Their abilities really differ; those

that I teach are very competent. They were even relieving my work burden by helping other weaker students...and I think they are more obedient than the local students.

A number of teachers felt some CBS are highly motivated:

CBS enjoy the new education experience here in Hong Kong, like outside classroom learning...they show much greater interest than local students...Some have really good learning attitude, it is really to do with their family. For example, those who lived in Shenzhen with their family and who are familiar with Hong Kong, given they have been reasonably good at studies, they would be able to do well in HK. I think CBS are less competent in certain subjects, but they are more industrious than their local counterparts.

Although teachers were concerned about the general well-being of some adolescents from cross-boundary families, they observed that they guarded their privacy carefully and were reluctant to confide family difficulties:

In Chinese language lesson students are asked to write weekly journals, diary or a thank you card, but they might not want to write too much about their unhappy family events and could end up with not writing much and failing in the assignment.

This teacher went on to observe that because some CBS have limited financial support, 'they would say they are not hungry (on school trips) but, in fact, wanted to eat'.

The teachers struggled with meeting CBS multiple needs, which extended far beyond those normally associated with schooling:

We as a school have already done more than what we are supposed to do. When has it been the school's responsibility to provide a place for students to stay and help them apply for immigration documents? But neither their parents were available nor any other organizations or /government (agencies) have noticed the needs of mainland students.

Additional learning support at Kind Secondary is restricted to English language learning alone, with provision limited to one session per week. Teachers sometimes also invited k students to come and read to them during a free period, but they felt 'teachers do not really

have much time to attend students' diversified needs. In identifying the transitional needs of CBSs, these teachers depicted a complex picture. Although they believed some CBS are flourishing, they also expressed concerns about group dynamics and relationships between mainland and local students. Teachers worked 10 -12 hours each day but observed how mainland students remained vulnerable:

In the first year, CBSs usually isolate themselves from local peers and studied hard. Some of them have to learn how to accept an empty home when they return from school in the evening... Some struggled with basic needs because of the lack of means. But they never tell the others about their family situation.

## **DISCUSSION**

There are significant differences both in the ways the three schools responded to cross-boundary students and in the perceived needs of such students, some of whom appeared to adjust well to Hong Kong schooling, while others experienced significant transitional problems. While some CBS clearly have limited family support it is interesting to note how some teachers placed blame on the families while others recognise that parents, and in particular mothers, are carrying heavy parental and educational responsibilities that they may be ill-equipped to manage. The secondary school teachers appeared to have a greater awareness of the range of difficulties their students faced, perhaps, in part, because these students were of an age where they were able to articulate some concerns, relating to non-family matters, while jealously guarding their familial privacy.

Regardless of individual students' ability to cope, all CBS continue to be vulnerable as a result of policy gaps and inadequacies. In a number of respects, the authorities are failing in their duty to guarantee the rights of children from cross-boundary families in line with their obligations in the CRC. The safety and security of students of all ages in their journeys to school and the duty 'to ensure the child such protection and care as is necessary for his or her well-being' putting in place 'all appropriate and administrative measures' (CRC, Article 3) is a pressing priority. There is also a need for Hong Kong and mainland authorities (education, social work and other children's services) to cooperate to protect those children who may be vulnerable to abuse or neglect (Article 19), particularly as a consequence of parental employment pressures and lack of adequate supervision. Such measures would also support children's learning.

With regard to education policy, teachers appear to be plugging gaps without adequate professional or financial support. In particular, steps need to be taken to make the curriculum accessible to all, with appropriate financial assistance, and other measures to encourage regular attendance and reduction of drop out (Article 28). Such measures need to guarantee equal curriculum access to that of local children, without discrimination (Article 2) and which imply on-going language support and respect and support for the child's own language (Article 29). Importantly, teachers need professional development to enable them to respond to the changing social and cultural contexts of schooling, highlighted by the presence of CBS.

Teachers are increasingly aware of students' transitional needs, but in many cases professionally ill-equipped to meet them, with regard to pastoral care, appropriate pedagogies and policy frameworks which support the need to prepare students to learn to live together, in line with Article 29 of the Convention, including learning which enables 'respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values'. It is imperative to provide staff professional development courses to equip school administrators and frontline teachers with the necessary knowledge, skills and attitude in integrating intercultural learning and international human rights into plans, strategies and policies associated in their programmes, especially for the schools with large numbers of CBS (United Nations Children's Fund, 2007:.2).

Schools are currently taking the initiative, in the absence of adequate policy frameworks, holding parent meetings in the border town Shenzhen; offering an extra English class on Saturdays; allowing newcomers to use Putonghua to express their ideas during lessons; tailoring essay topics to include the life experiences of the cross-border families; and, providing more individualized attention to these students.

Teachers' knowledge of government's policies and current NGO's support measures remains limited. This may be partly due to the inadequacy of official policy and resources. However, with reference to the essence of CRC, current school-based initiatives only address some of the logistics and initial learning problems rather than to cater for deeper academic,

social and emotional needs which guarantee educational access. The school policy direction is towards assimilation (Pastor, 2009; Alba and Nee, 1999) rather than the intercultural learning spelt out in Article 29 of the CRC.

Parental perspectives are currently largely absent from educational debates on the needs of CBS, as are the voices of the students themselves. A student perspective (Osler, 2010) is essential in designing relevant policy that is responsive to students needs, and is also essential in terms of fulfilling students' participation rights (Article 12). There is a need for territory-wide consultative meetings with the frontline teachers, parents and students to draft and assess policy, as well as avoid policy failure.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child sets a minimum standard against which policy-makers can measure their success in implementing child rights in education as in other areas of social policy affecting children. It covers all children in a territory, regardless of their migration status, and so is applicable to CBS as to all other children in Hong Kong schools. Meeting the provisions of Articles 28 and 29 has resource implications; it is clear inadequate resources remain a key obstacle to the successful education of CBS, alongside appropriate professional development of teachers. But their knowledge of government's policies and NGO's support measures was rather thin. This may be partly due to the inadequacy of policy advocacy and available resources from the government. But their knowledge of government's policies and NGO's support measures was rather thin. This may

be partly due to the inadequacy of policy advocacy and available resources from the government.

Article 28 requires education authorities to ensure that education is made accessible to all, which implies accessibility and has direct implications for language learning policies. Without addressing these policy and service gaps, schools will not be responsive to the educational needs of CBSs. Moreover, principals and teachers should be charged to review their current piecemeal approach to CBS and address the issues of home-school collaboration more comprehensively, if they wish to adequately address the identified needs more adequately.

Despite the fact that all the case study schools utilize the same grant for support services, due to economies of scale and in the absence of a policy framework, the quality of support programmes varies considerably from school to school.

Successful and effective education for the children of immigrants is an important means to secure intergenerational cohesion improvement and promote wider educational and societal cohesion (Osler, 2011). It is in the best interest of all to address the issue sooner rather than later. The future prosperity of Hong Kong depends on the success of today's CBS, particularly given that they continue to be one of the fastest growing population groups. Hong Kong needs a proactive and comprehensive policy that addresses the challenges and harnesses the opportunities that are created by today's large non-mainstream population. This

is a wake-up call for the government to provide viable and responsive policies for supporting cross-border students and their families and for guaranteeing their rights.

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