The HKU Scholars Hub    The University of Hong Kong    香港大學學術庫

| Title | Learning about Diversity in Hong Kong: Multiculturalism in Liberal Studies Textbooks |
|---|---|
| Author(s) | Jackson, EJ |
| Citation | The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher, 2017, v. 26 n. 1-2, p. 21-29 |
| Issued Date | 2017 |
| URL | http://hdl.handle.net/10722/244409 |
| Rights | The final publication is available at Springer via http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s40299-016-0323-0; This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License. |

Learning about Diversity in Hong Kong: Multiculturalism in Liberal Studies Textbooks

*[Accepted for publication by The Asia-Pacific Educational Researcher in August 2016.]*

Liz Jackson
University of Hong Kong
Runme Shaw 421
Pokfulam Road, Hong Kong
lizj@hku.hk / 852 5978 4745

Abstract

Improving mainstream perceptions of diversity in Hong Kong is fundamental to enhancing equality and human rights in the society in the future. The importance of mainstream members of society learning to recognize diversity with less prejudice undergirds many of the aims of a recent educational reform, Liberal Studies. This paper evaluates the capacity of Liberal Studies to educate for multicultural understanding of cultural difference. Its primary data source is Liberal Studies textbooks, and it employs a qualitative content analysis to consider how diversity and ethnic, cultural, and religious differences are represented in the texts. The analysis is complemented by an examination of related resources teachers may use in the classroom (and are encouraged to use by the Hong Kong Curriculum Development Council): mainstream news articles and resources from the (government-provided) Web-based Resource Platform for Liberal Studies. The voices and views of some practicing teachers and pre-service teacher education students related to multicultural Liberal Studies resources are also included to provide a balanced picture. Based on this analysis, multicultural education as provided in major resources within the Liberal Studies curriculum appears inadequate. As diversity is reflected upon in resources analyzed here most often as problematic and stereotypical, interventions are needed if Liberal Studies is to enable multicultural appreciation and understanding among students in Hong Kong in the future.

Keywords:

Hong Kong, multiculturalism, textbooks, diversity, ethnic minorities, Liberal Studies

Learning about Diversity in Hong Kong: Multiculturalism in Liberal Studies Textbooks

Hong Kong faces numerous social tensions today. Identity politics between Mainland Chinese and Hongkongers has been a challenge since the handover in 1997. New Chinese immigrants to Hong Kong face prejudice and discrimination, while strong negative views about China's educational and legal systems have been reflected in recent Hong Kong political events, such as the Occupy and Umbrella Movements and the National Education controversy in 2012 (Jackson, 2014a). At the same time, the ethnic minority population of Hong Kong has risen over 30% in the last 10 years, to over 6% of the population (Kapai, 2015). A recent report has found that despite the long-term presence and feelings of loyalty of ethnic minorities within Hong Kong, their need for equal rights has been repeatedly overlooked, while they are cast in the media and public sphere as transient and migrant, only temporarily in Hong Kong (Kapai, 2015; see also Unison, 2012). Improving mainstream perceptions of diversity in Hong Kong is fundamental to enhancing equality and human rights in the future.

The importance of mainstream members of society learning to recognize diversity with less prejudice undergirds many of the aims of a recent educational reform in Hong Kong: Senior Secondary Liberal Studies ("Liberal Studies," or SSLS). Liberal Studies became part of the curriculum in 2009 in local schools, as the only required subject in senior secondary education apart from Chinese language, English language, and math. Germane to the needs for multicultural education in Hong Kong, this innovative, interdisciplinary subject aims to help students "appreciate and respect diversity in cultures and views in a pluralistic society," "assess the impact of reform and opening-up [of] China," recognize the impact of globalization on individuals and communities, and "demonstrate an appreciation for the values of their own and other cultures, and for universal values, and be committed to becoming responsible and conscientious citizens" (CDC, 2007/2014, p. 5-6). As the first cohorts of specially trained Liberal Studies educators are now emerging from teacher education programs and teaching in schools, research is ongoing regarding this curriculum.

This paper evaluates the capacity of Liberal Studies to educate for multicultural understanding of cultural difference. Its primary data source is Liberal Studies textbooks, and it employs a qualitative content analysis to consider how diversity and particular ethnic, cultural, and religious differences are represented in the texts. The analysis is complemented by an examination of related resources teachers may use in the classroom (and are encouraged to use by the Curriculum Development Council): mainstream news articles and resources from the

(government-provided) Web-based Resource Platform for Liberal Studies. The voices and views of practicing teachers and pre-service teacher education students on the topic of multicultural resources for Liberal Studies are also included to provide a balanced picture. Based on this analysis, multicultural education as provided in resources for Liberal Studies appears inadequate. As diversity is reflected upon in resources analyzed here most often as problematic and stereotypical, major interventions are needed if SSLS is to effectively enable multicultural appreciation and understanding among students in Hong Kong in the future.

Multicultural education and Liberal Studies

Most generally multicultural education can be defined as an education that responds to the presence of diversity in society or in the classroom. *Assimilationism* has been one historical approach to multicultural education. It asks that minorities develop capacities and cultural characteristics aligned with or representative of the mainstream in society. Assimilation can be piecemeal and pragmatic: for instance, learning the common language in society (which is indeed a challenge for ethnic minorities in Hong Kong—see Kapai, 2015). It can also have a deeper impact on one's identity and cultural values, if a student is asked to intrinsically prefer mainstream cultural practices and beliefs to those of their home or local community. However, some educators have argued that this latter practice can result in needless harms to minority youth self-esteem and educational capabilities (Feinberg, 1998).

Multicultural education has been most commonly conceptualized in recent years as an education focused not only on cultural integration of different students, but also on increasing positive perceptions of diversity, among minority youth themselves, and in educating mainstream children. That cultural diversity should be approached with open-mindedness and a positive or generous spirit of curiosity, rather than skepticism, has been put forward by Charles Taylor (1992). However, some people have labeled this approach "tacos and piñatas" in the United States, or as "saris, samosa, and steel bands," in Britain, as the focus on artifacts of cultural diversity and on student self-esteem can risk reduction of diverse identities to stereotypes among well-meaning but culturally naive educators (Jackson, 2014b). As Anthony Appiah noted in a response to Taylor (1994), no one (particularly among young people) wants to be seen as abnormal, deviant, or a minority—or asked to frame their personal or individual sense of pride narrowly on their *different* status.

Contemporary multiculturalism is thus increasingly focused on intersectional identities of all students, within an *intercultural* approach to difference (Jackson, 2014b). According to this view, none should be defined by single identity factors, such as ethnicity, race, gender, or religion, and each individual represents a unique identity across these social categories. People still may face advantages and disadvantages, stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination, based upon their identities. However, students should learn in an intercultural approach about the complexity and dynamism of identity, and how cultures change, rather than being taught overly general stereotypes of African culture or Indian culture, for example. Such learning is in line with Liberal Studies' aims, particularly to help students "appreciate and respect diversity in cultures and views in a pluralistic society," as appreciating diversity and pluralism that we do not reduce or stereotype identities based on cultural differences.

When it comes to implementing multicultural education, the attitudes and knowledge of teachers and the reference materials and resources they use are fundamentally important. However, not all educators are multicultural experts or committed scholars of social science or cultural anthropology. Research within (Hue & Kennedy, 2014; Jackson, 2015; Jackson, 2014c), and outside Hong Kong (Ladson-Billings, 2001) indicates that schoolteachers often feel ill-equipped to handle diversity issues and may not have much, if any, relevant educational background or outside experience. Diversity in society is not like math, English, or Chinese, where the vast majority of knowledge germane to primary and secondary education is a matter of global or disciplinary consensus. Instead, diversity is dynamic, and its importance is subject to political and global changes in real time. The significant issues for students and educators are complex and are often controversial and sensitive. For this reason, educators may be particularly inclined to rely upon text resources and instructional supplements such as news media, in dealing with current events and topics related to diversity in the classroom.

However, these educational and instructional materials may be far from perfect. Textbooks focusing on the social domain can have latent political and sociological biases. These may reflect the views of publishers and textbook editors, or be the result of simplifying texts or aiming to avoid controversy (Fitzgerald, 1979; Jackson, 2014b). Sometimes this can backfire; in 2014 in Hong Kong, there was controversy over primary general studies textbooks, which included lessons wherein children were asked to assign nationalities to occupations in society, such as English teacher, domestic helper, sushi chef, and security guard (Zhao, 2014). Many found the response by the publisher to the criticism surprising, as a representative emphasized that it was the intent of the texts to inspire appreciation toward diversity (Zhao, 2014). Political analyses (de Leon Mendiola, 2007) reveal how debates over

disciplinary framings and political ideologies can undergird decision making about textbook content in textbook approval processes. Though in social studies subjects teachers may supplement texts with content from newspapers and other media, these sources can also be problematic when it comes to representing diversity. As Kapai (2015) notes, within Hong Kong media minorities are not always portrayed in a balanced way, in part due to media's (intentional, expected) focus on worst cases and social problems. Analyzing all major resources used is thus imperative for assessing a curriculum's potential impact overall.

This research relies primarily on textbooks, as textbooks are the most commonly used resources by educators and students, globally and in Hong Kong, and across school subjects, including Liberal Studies. The Curriculum Development Council in Hong Kong discourages reliance on textbooks for teaching Liberal Studies, and recommends extensive use of supplementary sources, identifying the government-provided Web-based Resource Platform for Liberal Studies, among other media resources. For this reason, it does not review textbooks for SSLS, as it does for all other major subjects. However in recent research by Wong, Chan, and Ho (2012) Liberal Studies teachers reported relying heavily on textbooks, which is particularly common early in a subject's history and among inexperienced teachers (Kaviani, 2007). SSLS teachers use texts to provide students with background information, to satisfy expectations of students and parents, and as a source for learning activities (Wong, Chan, & Ho, 2012). This paper thus analyzes textbooks and related materials for Liberal Studies as a significant part of the curriculum, evaluating the messages within these resources as they pertain to understanding and appropriately recognizing diversity in Hong Kong.

Method

The research team examined all available published textbooks for Liberal Studies in the three of its six modules that are related to learning about society: Globalization, Hong Kong Today, and Modern China (the remaining three domains are Personal Development and Interpersonal Relationships, Public Health, and Energy Technology and the Environment). 28 textbooks were obtained, which were published between 2009-2014, by Aristo, Hong Kong Educational Publishing Company, Ling Kee, Marshall Cavendish, and Pearson. All textbooks were read and analyzed by the principal researcher and a research assistant, who also translated many of the texts from Chinese to English. Any mention of diversity, culture, ethnicity, race, religion, and related terms was entered into a database, along with any references to specific cultures, ethnicities, races, or religions (i.e., Indian, white,

black, Asian, Muslim, Christian, Pakistani, etc.). A quantitative analysis was completed, wherein the number of pages relating to diversity and associated topics was calculated as a percentage of the whole for each textbook. This information was also coded for qualitative analysis. Text was coded according to the following categories:

- its location within the textbook—as part of main text, a feature section, or review or self-assessment section;

- by its major subject and the geographic and historical context (i.e., Hong Kong or society worldwide, historically or today); and

- whether the reference was neutral, positive, or negative (about something good or bad happening, or in society), and whether the depiction of diversity or a minority group was neutral, positive, or negative.

Images were similarly coded, using coding categories employed by textbook producers for illustrations (Mikk, 2000). Comparisons were made by publisher, year, and module.

Though these coding procedures follow best practices in textbook research (e.g., Sleeter & Grant, 2011), text interpretation can be subjective, and it is possible that different readers would focus on different aspects in evaluating the discourse normatively, as neutral, positive, or negative. Therefore reliability exercises were employed. First, coding of 50% of the data was conducted in parallel by the researcher and research assistant, who was responsible for completing the rest of the data coding independently. The coding was then compared to examine any discrepancies in analysis. As discrepancies were negligible, the research assistant completed the rest of the coding, while an undergraduate research assistant (who was studying to be a Liberal Studies teacher) gave a selective parallel coding of the remainder. After coding was complete, a teacher reliability exercise was conducted. 10 Liberal Studies teachers (ethnic minority and mainstream teachers) with varying degrees of experience were recruited on a voluntary basis through public advertisements. They were given five text extracts and asked to give their view of the subject, whether the text as a whole was neutral, positive or negative, and whether the treatment of diversity was neutral, positive or negative (Bello & Shaver, 2011). 2 of the five text extracts were selected on the basis of being deemed easy to code as neutral, positive or negative, while the other 3 were deemed to be a bit trickier. The findings from this exercise echoed the research team's interpretations. The researchers and recruited teachers interpreted the textbook information in highly similar ways.

Though textbooks are the primary resource used to teach Liberal Studies, they do not give the whole picture. Teachers' practices and their uses of supplementary materials are also significant. Thus, the research team scanned the Web-based Resource Platform for Liberal Studies ("HKEdcity"), provided by the Curriculum

Development Council, for relevant materials; in addition to relevant articles from Hong Kong's major newspapers, *South China Morning Post*, *Apple Daily,* and *Oriental Daily*, from 2009-2015. Similar analyses were conducted of relevant sources in these venues. Finally, we conducted a questionnaire of 20 final-year Liberal Studies pre-service teacher education students at the research team's university to ask them about their experience using resources to teach Liberal Studies while engaging in teaching practicum alongside experienced teachers. (Participants in this questionnaire were majority mainstream Hongkongers, with a few ethnic minority and international students.) Though this study by no means reveals everything happening across Hong Kong schools, it provides a foundation for further enquiries from the perspective of resourcing Liberal Studies, and gives a fairly comprehensive picture of what Liberal Studies resources reflect and represent when it comes to diversity and minorities in society.

Findings

*Textbooks*

Textbooks varied by publisher and by module in the amount of multicultural content. The module of Modern China had the most scant coverage. One textbook for Modern China had no relevant content; on average about 6% and 3% of Modern China textbook pages discussed ethnicity (including race), and religion, respectively. Modules for Hong Kong Today and Globalization had more references: 10-11% and 5% of pages covering ethnicity/race and religion. However, much variation could be seen across publishers and editions overall, with some texts devoting nearly 20% of pages to relevant themes, and others only mentioning them in a handful of pages. Thinking of Liberal Studies as a classroom subject, with 6 modules and 168 classroom hours allocated, we might consider that if teachers were to follow textbooks and allocate proportionate classroom time to textbook content, teachers would spend 4-10 hours overall discussing multicultural issues in class, or 1 or 2 weeks of the 3-year curriculum (though these weeks would be spread out across the modules).

About 1000 entries were coded that dealt with multicultural content. The majority of these were categorized as "general" references. Rather than focusing on a particular group in society, culture, ethnicity, race, religion, or related ideas were discussed in the abstract. For instance, in the book on Modern China with the most multicultural references (14%), 21 out of 27 entries discussed culture, race, religion, ethnicity, etc., in China, without discussing a specific community or group. These include definitions of cultural capital, cultural identity, and

cultural diversity, that reference "traditional cultures" and "ethnic groups," without giving further details. For instance:

> China has a diverse traditional culture. These cultures have been set up by our ancestors and kept to today. Many customs such as festival, worship, marriage and funeral may contain other cultures.…Participating in or practicing these customs can be said to represent Chinese culture. (Au & Wong, 2009, p. 140)

Many such references give abstract valuation to cultural preservation, human rights, and cultural diversity, in Hong Kong, Mainland China, and worldwide. Within these extracts, many include multicultural categories in lists:

> According to the United Nations, the definition of human rights is those "rights humans are born with." It includes personal freedom and political and social rights. Different people in the world should enjoy these rights and not be restricted by nationality, ethnicity, skin color, gender, sexual orientation, political views, religious belief, or social status. (Ngai, 2013, p. 112)

> Frequent interactions have gradually led to common beliefs and visions such as peace, friendship, equality, freedom, democracy, human rights, etc. Because the general public, regardless of religious belief, ethnicity and nationality, agree with those commonly held and praised values, these values are called "universal values." (Chu, Ho, Leung, & Cheung, 2014, p. 7).

About 400 (40%) references were made across texts to specific groups in the world or in Hong Kong. These were usually related to political events in world history. This is not surprising as Globalization is one module, so SSLS does not deal only with Hong Kong. When we focus only on those specific references to particular diverse groups or individuals in Hong Kong, the number of entries plummets. Many textbooks for Globalization do not refer to any minority groups in Hong Kong but may reference generically Western or Chinese culture. It is also common to mention cultural or national goods from different regions that can be enjoyed in Hong Kong. For instance:

> Usually before I go to school, I will have breakfast at McDonalds…I will discuss schoolwork with classmates in Starbucks. We will try Chinese food or sushi at night. When I go back to my hall, I will watch Korean or Taiwanese Drama, browse Facebook, write blogs, etc. During holidays, I will go shopping with my friends and [watch] films [from] US [but] there are also Chinese and Hong Kong actors. (Fung et al., 2009, p. 5).

One textbook references people of diverse ethnicities and nationalities (Shanghainese, Indians, Pakistanis, and Africans) in Chungking Mansions, Hong Kong, as an instance of local diversity. There are a few references to local

religious diversity, and most of these are pictures rather than text, of Sikh or Buddhist temples or mosques. Likewise texts on Modern China have few or no references to life, society, and diversity in Hong Kong.

Most references to diversity in Hong Kong are in texts for Hong Kong Today. Most textbooks for Hong Kong Today had between 25-50 references to diverse groups in Hong Kong. However, more than half of these are simply statements attesting to the existence of diversity in Hong Kong, or references generically to ethnic minorities. Such references dramatically conflate the experiences and identities of a very broad and diverse group of people, as Kapai (2015) highlights, from domestic helpers and white people, to permanent residents of every race, culture, and nationality. Take for example the following relatively substantive overview:

[T]he proportion of ethnic minorities represents around 5% of the total Hong Kong population, of which 80% are South Asians or Southeast Asians, including Indians, Pakistanis and Nepalese. The difference of ethnic minorities in culture and language from mainstream society has caused much prejudice and discrimination. To protect all people from discrimination based on ethnicity, the Hong Kong government passed the Racial Discrimination Ordinance in July 2008…According to the Ordinance, giving worse treatment or harassment due to ethnicity is illegal…different ethnicities will enjoy equal treatment in life. (Ng, Wong, & Wong, 2010, p. 278).

Of note here is how people residing in Hong Kong from different ethnic backgrounds are positioned as a single category, rather than as a highly diverse population. Most textbooks give this generic view, such as another textbook that lists ethnic minorities as a category of disadvantaged groups in Hong Kong, that has "obvious differences [from local Chinese] in terms of appearance, skin color, language or culture and lifestyle," has difficulties learning Chinese and communicating, and must adapt to the local environment (Bak et al., 2013, p. 141-143). Nearly all references mention challenges ethnic minorities face, equating all experiences with "grassroots" experiences. Social mobility, educational opportunity, adaptation, and mainstream prejudice are complex issues impacting different groups and individuals in contrasting ways, but they are described simplistically in most text discussions.

With regard to discussion of specific ethnic or religious minority groups, there is wide variation in coverage. Most Hong Kong Today texts contain about 15 references to particular ethnic, national, and/or religious groups in Hong Kong, while others have as few as 5 or as many as 45. Most references are to South Asians in Hong Kong and still remain relatively abstract, for instance stating that South Asians and/or South East Asians (or more specifically in some texts: Indonesians, Filipinos, and Indians) are the largest groups of ethnic minorities in Hong Kong. Some

textbooks may contain one reference to a locally known ethnic minority individual who has more or less assimilated, as a kind of success story; most references discuss abstract or real-life cases where ethnic minorities face struggles to adapt to Hong Kong or to be recognized as residents, in relation to lack of Chinese literacy, local people's prejudice, and/or disadvantaged socioeconomic status, as mentioned above.

Some textbooks do not reference any religions, though most have a few specific religious representations. Textbooks most frequently mention religion in Hong Kong indirectly through images of temples, or by referencing particular religious community organizations (most typically Christian missions) who do good works for ethnic minorities, socioeconomically disadvantaged groups, and so on. Some texts may also have 1 or 2 references to Muslims facing challenges in Hong Kong due to divergent practices from mainstream norms. Sometimes these are cryptic references, and may explore prejudice or legal or structural challenges experienced particularly by Muslim ethnic minorities. (Chinese Muslims are not visible in the texts.) As discussed by Jackson (2015), these references are problematic in some of the overgeneralizations they make about Islam and Muslims in Hong Kong. One text states:

> Although the Hong Kong lifestyle affects obedience to Islamic dogmas (such as believers have to pray five times a day, women need to use headcovers all the time, they are forbidden to cook pork, etc.), their freedom of religion is not deprived. Karim says that the Hong Kong government does not intervene with the freedom of religion. He can preach outdoors and sometimes even the police will actively help maintain order (Hui, 2009, p. 152; Jackson, 2015, p. 48).

As Jackson (2015, p. 48) notes,

> This excerpt does not have as its aim to educate students about Islam, specifically….[and] there are some problematic features. First, hijab is neither universally practiced…nor do Muslim women "need to use head covers all the time." …Second, the passage raises more questions than answers—how does Hong Kong life impact practices? Why do police "help maintain order?" Is praying disorderly…?

As Jackson (2015) goes on, this local coverage of Islam is paralleled by other problematic discussions in Globalization textbooks, that casts Islam and Muslims as anti-modern, sexist, and anti-Western, and which support a "clash of civilizations" view of the religion, falsely suggesting that Muslims cannot assimilate within diverse liberal (and/or democratic) societies. Such references to Islam and Muslims, within and outside of Hong Kong, fail to show the diversity of Islam as a faith practiced most often through principles of peace and toleration. Such discussions are

not helpful for enabling students to understand pluralism in a balanced or accurate manner, but are likely to risk enabling students to have negative impressions of the religion and Muslims locally and worldwide.

In summary, these textbooks do not reveal a rich world of intercultural diversity but suggest a traditional multicultural or assimilationist framing, wherein a mainstream ethnic majority is a standard-bearer, with a choice to appreciate or discriminate against others based on such factors as language, religion, diet, and dress. References conflate diverse minorities' experiences overall. Students are unlikely to develop appreciation for the significance and role of religion in diverse people's lives from such references, but rather accept a simplistic view that religions less familiar to them, particularly Islam, are problematic or scary.

*Supplementary Materials*

The government-sponsored HKEdCity website contains hundreds of newspaper articles and related materials for studying Liberal Studies for teacher and student use. However, only 1 article discusses diversity substantively: the case of an ethnic minority's legal challenge in Hong Kong. Our team also examined news media as an informational source students and teachers may use in SSLS. In *Oriental Daily* and *Apple Daily*, Hong Kong's two major Chinese-language newspapers, about 20 articles per year for the last several years (2009-2015) focused on issues of ethnic or religious diversity. In *South China Morning Post*, Hong Kong's English-language newspaper, about twice that many articles per year were identified. Predictably, given news media's focus not on educating but on sharing items perceived as urgent or serious (Jackson, 2014b), most of these sources had a negative tone, discussing problems ethnic minorities face. Again, Muslims were the most frequently cited religious group, while specific South East Asian or South Asian nationalities were the most commonly referenced (Indians, Indonesians, Filipinos, Nepalese, Pakistanis, etc.). Such representations provide a highly general understanding of minorities' experiences and views, typically casting them as deficient, challenged or victimized, and/or problematic.

*Teacher Views*

We obtained a sense of teachers' views and use of textbooks and related resources in Liberal Studies through our reliability exercise for practicing teachers, and a questionnaire of final-year pre-service teacher education students' practicum experiences. The data from these sources reflect concerns of both groups regarding the quality and representativeness of texts. One teacher participating in the reliability exercise observed that one text extract could suggest that "Indian/Pakistani people commit crime in Hong Kong," while others felt the extract was discriminatory and "provided one side of the story." Interpreting another extract, teachers felt that South Asians

were cast as the only ethnic minority group in Hong Kong, and *as* one singular entity despite their internal differences. Others observed the extract seemed to lack evidence for controversial statements, and stereotyped South Asians as "deficient," "lower class in general," and as having "refused to participate in affairs," echoing Kapai's (2015) observations of political discourse about ethnic minorities' participation in Hong Kong. When asked about their views about using textbooks, some teachers described it as their role to supplement textbooks by helping "readers learn a proper attitude…and triangulate the things they read," while another conceded to having "a superficial understanding of ethnic minorities. Therefore it is hard to develop a deep analysis" with students.

The questionnaire of final-year Liberal Studies pre-service students focused on how much and how they taught about multicultural topics in their practicums. Of the 20 participants, 17 reported they had not taught any topics related to ethnic minorities during their practicum; of those who had, they described it as moderately or very difficult. 4 had taught something related to religious diversity or religious groups, and among them half described it as difficult or moderately difficult. When asked what factors made it easier for them to teach, students reported that the background knowledge of students was more helpful than the content of textbooks or the background knowledge of teachers, perhaps in part reflecting the student-centered pedagogy recommended for Liberal Studies. During their practicums, half of the student teachers reported that they used textbooks for teaching SSLS most days, although a handful used them never or once per month. In contrast, most felt they should use textbooks once per week at most. When asked about the quality of textbooks, most described it as "satisfactory," while 2 thought it was "good" and 5 described it as "marginal." They identified as weaknesses of the texts that they are outdated or lacking in criticality, while they saw as strengths of the texts that they were organized, clear, and readable.

Discussion

Liberal Studies, according to the Hong Kong Education Bureau, should help students understand diversity and pluralism, and appreciate and respect different views in society. However, our study has found that representations of ethnic and religious diversity in Hong Kong and the world provided by Liberal Studies resources are not adequate for students to develop balanced or accurate views of how different experiences, cultures, and values play a role in people's lives and society. Textbook coverage was scarce on these topics. In terms of the nature of coverage, representations tended to echo stereotypical views that have been found problematic in Hong Kong society and media in the past. Ethnic minorities are regarded most often as a homogeneous group despite the high

degree of internal diversity of minorities not only from South Asia (a highly diverse region itself), but from around the world, who permanently reside in Hong Kong. Religion and ethnicity were primarily discussed in an abstract sense. When their import was addressed, a deficient or problematic framing was most frequently used, which regarded their differences as problematic or causing social challenges. While such statements may be accurate for some or many ethnic minorities, a reductive treatment risks enabling students to conflate all ethnic minorities with South Asian, grassroots residents. The role of religion in people's lives was hardly addressed; when it was, Islam was conflated with sexism and anti-Western sentiment, reducing a diverse community to an extreme minority of the faith. Beyond textbooks, local media was found wanting. Teachers and student-teachers agree such sources are satisfactory at best, and problematic in relation to multicultural teaching and learning. Interdisciplinary social studies curricula in other parts of the world similarly deemphasize multiculturalism compared to other topics, such as economics and politics (Jackson, 2014b). In this case, an incidental de-emphasis in resources (perhaps caused by attempts to decrease social studies curriculum as a whole) may result in overgeneralizing statements that obscure rather than illuminate multicultural perspectives.

Teachers, textbook publishers, policy makers, and teacher trainers in Hong Kong can do more to align teaching and learning of Liberal Studies with its multicultural aims. In the classroom, teachers should help students develop a critical orientation toward what they learn in textbooks and media via critical media literacy (Jackson, 2014b). They should not suggest that learning ends with the texts but encourage students to read broadly and see textbooks with a critical eye, weighing their claims and representations against different sources of information. Text publishers should work with multicultural groups and/or consultants with relevant expertise to develop textbooks to be substantive and accurate when it comes to discussing diverse members of society. The significance of ethnicity and religion should be elaborated in textbooks in a critical rather than simplistic way. Policy makers and teacher trainers can also support efforts to enhance various resources for teaching toward multicultural aims. Developing space for teachers and students to learn about issues in-depth from multiple perspectives should be emphasized. Currently few resources sponsored by government authorities focus on multiculturalism; without emphasizing this area, a hidden curriculum or implicit view may be sent to teachers that these topics do not require critical attention. Educational leaders should also help teachers empower themselves as social science researchers in relation to such issues. As our study found that pre-service and practicing teachers did not see their own knowledge

as a major strength, work can be done through teacher education and professional development to equip teachers with critical research skills, which they can provide in turn to students.

Finally, though multicultural issues may be difficult and complicated to teach, local policy makers and teacher trainers may also benefit from developing more sustained thinking regarding the requirements of meaningful multicultural education. It is not enough to say that South Asians face problems in society. What is needed to help students to appreciate how differences matter in society is more than a few general statements. Students should be encouraged to grapple in contentious conversations to develop intercultural capacities rather than bolster stereotypical views they receive elsewhere (such as from media). Debate and systematic inquiries should give students real-world understanding of the importance of diverse worldviews and of how no community is monolithic, simple, or static. These may also be valuable lessons for teacher trainers and policy makers (Jackson, 2015), some of whom may also not be very well informed about cultural diversity, given the scope of Liberal Studies.

Conclusion

Multiculturalism has been emphasized as key among the aims of Liberal Studies. Multicultural education should help students learn about diversity and pluralism around them, and see the importance of diverse experiences and ways of thinking. These aims are not assimilatory in nature, as they do not disparage difference or ask students to become mainstream; instead the aims adopt a celebratory and/or intercultural view that considers difference as important in life and implies that critical awareness of diversity is valuable for students to become productive members of society who work well within diverse communities. In Hong Kong there can be no doubt that such education can be useful to ameliorate negative perceptions of minority groups commonly held (Unison, 2012), which are also reflected in policy statements and mainstream media discourse (Kapai, 2015). However, past research also suggests that social studies subjects do not always have a positive influence on student perceptions. In relation, educators are not necessarily diversity experts, and the resources they use can contain latent biases, or frame issues in ways that cast minorities in a negative light. Therefore it is important not to assume these materials and educator knowledge will be effective toward teaching for multicultural aims. This study thus examined the resources used in Liberal Studies to identify and evaluate the multicultural content of references to diversity.

Our research found that more is needed for Liberal Studies to provide multicultural education in line with curricular aims. Textbooks are not strong in reflecting local diversity accurately, conflating differences and

homogenizing a diverse segment of society discussed as "ethnic minorities." Students are not likely to learn from

such textbooks meaningful lessons for intercultural understanding, without teachers supplementing the texts with

their own knowledge and/or other resources. However not all teachers feel comfortable and knowledgeable in this

area, while supplementary sources can also reflect negative biases and stereotypes. In this context, a systematic

method of enabling multicultural education within Liberal Studies will see teachers further build their knowledge

and skills, with important implications for policy makers and teacher trainers. Text producers can work to ensure

negative latent content does not risk enabling students to develop overly simplistic views from reading texts.

Empowering the next generation to enhance Hong Kong as an equitable and just society cannot be the role of

teachers alone. All stakeholders have a role to play in students developing a productive view of diversity and its

importance in society.

References

Appiah, K. A. (1994). Identity, authenticity, survival: Multicultural societies and social reproduction. In A. Gutmann (Ed.), *Multiculturalism: Examining the politics of recognition* (pp. 149-164). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Au, C. K., & Wong, H. F. (2009). *Modern China 2*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Education Publishing Company.

Bak, M. K., Lee, T. H., Wut, L. M., Woon, P. C., Wu, W. Y., Ko, W. P.,… Lau, C. C. (2013). *Hong Kong today*. Hong Kong: Marshall Cavendish.

Bello, M., & Shaver, A. N. (2011). The representation of Christopher Columbus in high school history textbooks: A content analysis. In E. F. Provenzo, A. N. Shaver, & M. Bello (Eds.) *The textbook as discourse: Sociocultural dimensions of American schoolbooks.* New York: Routledge.

Chu, K. W., Ho, K. C., Leung, H. Y., and K. K. Cheung. (2014). *Globalization*. Hong Kong: Aristo.

Curriculum Development Council. (2007/2014). *Liberal studies curriculum guidelines.* Hong Kong: Education Bureau.

de Leon Mendiola, A. (2007). *Traditionalists versus multiculturalists: Discourses from the 2003 U.S. history textbook adoption in Texas* (Doctoral dissertation). University of Texas at San Antonio.

Feinberg, W. (1998). *Common schools/uncommon identities: National unity and cultural difference.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Fitzgerald, F. (1979). *America revised: History schoolbooks in the twentieth century*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press.

Fung, Y. Y., Mak, K. W., Tse, C. H., Wu, C. S., Lam, C. G., Hung, C. F.,…Lo, S. K. (2009). *Globalization*. Hong Kong: Lingkee Publisher.

Hue, M. T. & Kennedy, K. J. (2014). Creating culturally response environments: Ethnic minority teachers' constructs of cultural diversity in Hong Kong secondary school. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education, 34,* 273–287.

Hui, T. M. H. (2009). *Hong Kong today 2*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Education Publishing Company.

Jackson, L. (2015). Religion in Hong Kong education: Representation in Liberal Studies textbooks, *Asian Anthropology, 14:1,* 43-56.

Jackson, L. (2014a). Who belongs in what Hong Kong? Citizenship education in the Special Administrative Region. In A. M. Kuntz & J. E. Petrovic (Eds.), *Citizenship education: Global perspectives, local practices* (pp. 22-42). New York: Routledge.

Jackson, L. (2014b). *Muslims and Islam in U.S. education: Reconsidering multiculturalism*. New York: Routledge.

Jackson, L. (2014c). Under construction: The development of multicultural curriculum in Hong Kong and Taiwan, *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher, 23:4,* 885-893.

Kapai, P. (2015). *Status of ethnic minorities in Hong Kong, 1997-2014*. Hong Kong: Centre for Comparative and Public Law, University of Hong Kong.

Kaviani, K. (2007). *Teachers' gatekeeping of the Middle East curriculum* (Doctoral dissertation). University of Washington.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2011). Teaching and cultural competence, *Rethinking Schools, 15*.

Mikk, J. (2000). *Textbook: Research and writing*. New York: Peter Lang.

Ng, L. F., Wong, M. L., & Wong, T. C. (2010). *Hong Kong today*. Hong Kong: Aristo.

Ngai, P. K. (2013). *Hong Kong today*. Hong Kong: Pearson Longman.

Sleeter, C. E. & Grant, C. A. (2011). Race, class, gender, and disability in current textbooks. In E. F. Provenzo, A. N. Shaver & M. Bello (Eds.), *The textbook as discourse: Sociocultural dimensions of American schoolbooks*. New York: Routledge.

Taylor, C. (1992). *Multiculturalism and 'The politics of recognition."* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Unison Hong Kong. (2012). *Racial acceptance survey report*. Hong Kong: Unison.

Wong, K. L., Chan, E., & Ho, L. (2012).    Implementation of NSS liberal Studies curriculum: A comprehensive study. Paper presented at the Faculty of Education, University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, July 6.

Zhao, S. (2014, June 4). Publisher insists controversial textbooks 'promote racial harmony.' *South China Morning Post*.