

# SUPPORTING ETHNIC MINORITY STUDENTS LEARNING THE CHINESE LANGUAGE IN MULTILINGUAL HONG KONG

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## Abstract

This paper examines progress made in four schools in Hong Kong over a two-year period in providing for students with markedly different language backgrounds and competence learning Chinese in the same classrooms. It centres in particular on ways of delivering the curriculum to classes containing immigrant and local children, a growing issue in Hong Kong where the number of non-Chinese speaking school-age children has doubled since the year 2000. The Hong Kong Equal Opportunities Commission has expressed concern about the impact on the indigenous local students of steps taken to integrate their non-Chinese speaking immigrant peers into Hong Kong's schools. This paper considers a number of intervention strategies, including streaming by ability, grouping students according to their mother tongue, providing differentiated instructional materials and learning objectives and deploying resources specifically designed for linguistically disadvantaged students. Shortcomings in provision are discussed as well as problems faced by children who speak a "foreign" language in school and go home to environments in which only their mother tongue is spoken. Comment is directed at opportunities for non-Chinese speaking students to learn their mother tongue in school and at steps taken by schools to engineer multicultural environments.

Keywords: multilingual, multi-culture, ethnic minority students, differentiated curriculum, language learning

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Hong Kong is a vibrant city located in South-East Asia at the crossroads between East and West. Ethnic Chinese citizens with family roots in mainland China make up the largest demographic group, with only 329,571 (5%) of Hong Kong's population originating from other countries (Census, 2012). In British colonial times, Hong Kong Chinese residents used their ability to communicate in Chinese and English to great effect, particularly in the field of international trade and commerce, many Hong Kong citizens amassing considerable wealth in the process. Of the groups from other countries, people from India and Pakistan, Nepal, The Philippines, Indonesia and Thailand predominate. These non-Chinese citizens live and work in Hong Kong, their non-Chinese speaking (NCS) children being entitled to the same education routinely offered by the government to all local students. Hong Kong is multi-cultural and multilingual and most of its inhabitants are plurilingual, with numerous differing and often dissimilar dialects of Chinese being heard on its streets. All school leavers are expected to be competent in Putonghua (the official spoken language of the Peoples' Republic of China), English and Cantonese (a dialect of Chinese), most teachers and students in Hong Kong habitually using Cantonese in their daily life. Cantonese is also used as the regular medium of instruction in most schools (The Curriculum Development Council, 2008).

To help NCS children adapt to the Hong Kong environment and cope with study difficulties, the Hong Kong Education Bureau declared, soon after the handover of power from the British in 1997, that all eligible local children and NCS children from overseas would be entitled to the same number of years of free and compulsory education (The Curriculum Development Council, 2008). Here, the Hong Kong government was following the international trend of integrated education and absorbing immigrant ethnic minority children into the local education system (Hong Kong Secretariat of Legislative Council, 2009). To assist in the attainment of this objective, NCS parents from 2004 were given the right to have their offspring admitted into (a) mainstream schools where most of their classmates were local Chinese students; or (b) schools specially designated for admitting students from ethnic minorities and where teachers were experienced in teaching children outside the Chinese ethnic circle. In these designated schools, English was usually the medium of instruction for all subjects except Chinese Language; the medium of instruction in non-designated schools being Cantonese in all lessons except English Language. If the number of students in non-designated school was 10 or more, extra resources were allocated and students had access to special classes in which English was the medium of instruction (Yang Memorial Methodist Social Service, 2000).

Students from NCS minority families can now be found in a number of different types of school in Hong Kong. A small number go to international schools that are not government-sponsored, the rest studying in one of two types of government-funded school: the first in 'regular' mainstream schools attended by children from

the local catchment area and the rest in schools that, besides teaching the local children have some staff trained to teach students whose mother tongue is not Chinese. The number of ethnic minority students in non-designated schools ranges from one to thirty students admitted to a range of regular classrooms, these children forming a distinctive but often unobtrusive minority group among the indigenous student body. In contrast, ethnic minority students in specially designated schools usually constitute a much more conspicuous sub-group. No matter which type of school the ethnic minority students attend, 'Chinese Language' is a major foundation subject on the curriculum (Hong Kong Secretariat of Legislative Council, 2011).

### *1.1 NCS students learning Chinese*

The issue of NCS students being required to learn the Chinese language has prompted considerable public concern and debate, the importance of providing equal educational opportunities for all being quite contentious. A working group of the Equal Opportunity Committee (EOC), charged with ensuring that ethnic minority students receive the same educational opportunities as the rest of the school-age population, has warned (EOC, 2011) that the present system of admitting NCS students into designated and non-designated schools is not working well. Specifically, it makes the case that designated school provision is (a) not conducive to integrating NCS students into Hong Kong society; and (b) is failing to reach the objective of having all students become proficient in the Chinese language. The EOC notes that the home environments of most immigrant-background students are linguistically distanced from those of the local Chinese language-speaking majority. It also suggests that the poor Chinese language skill of most ethnic minority students stems from the absence of effective Chinese language support at home; that the curriculum is distorted by the steps taken by Hong Kong schools to cater for NCS students; and that there is an absence of any official monitoring of the effects of 'adjusting' the school curriculum to accommodate NCS students. The EOC report also points out that the Chinese language assessment criteria used in schools fail to take into account particular weaknesses and problems associated with the first language of the individual student. It is also aware of the reality that when students of similar ethnic background chat socially in school they inevitably talk in their own mother tongue. In fact, after struggling to speak Chinese in lessons all day, many NCS students go home and are relieved and happy to speak a different language (EOC, 2011).

The situation is in many respects similar to the dilemma faced by some schools in Europe. Workers enjoy a degree of freedom within the European Union to seek work in other EU countries, many doing so by migrating to countries paying higher wages to those offered in the home country. Their children are sent to local schools where in almost every case the indigenous students and teachers do not know the language spoken by the newly arrived children and where there is no state organ-

ised, large-scale provision for children who do not understand the medium of instruction used in the classroom. Although plurilingual and intercultural competence are often articulated in social objectives in the constitutions of many European countries (Cavalli, Coste, Crisan, & Van de Ven, 2009), the newly arrived immigrant children in foreign countries in the EU find themselves in pretty much the same situation as the NCS children in Hong Kong. Rarely do their teachers speak a word of the child's language; the linguistic registers of subjects on the curriculum are unknown, even though the concepts may be known by the immigrants; it is uncommon for schools to employ staff who speak the home language of the students fluently; and parents are usually unable to help much. The main difference between the NCS children in Hong Kong and those in the EU is that the language featuring in the debate addressed in this paper is Chinese, the language with the largest number of speakers on Earth.

Perhaps the best-known academic debate on the issue of second language learning within a 'foreign' community has been led by Krashen in the USA (1982; 1985a; 1985b), a country in which many different languages are spoken by immigrants. Krashen was inspired to write on behalf of numerous minority groups who had migrated to the USA with children who, speaking very little English, were sent to schools in which they frequently encountered hostility from native Americans who resented the fact that time and resources were being spent on immigrants that might have been better spent on native children in the local community. Krashen was aware that the education policy in his home state of California had become increasingly hostile to bilingualism and bilingual education and he campaigned vigorously for language minority education, proposing that second language acquisition is probably best achieved by immersing the learner in an environment where the second language is the norm. The EOC in Hong Kong, aware of the debate led by Krashen suggests that all NCS students should (a) study in non-designated schools, and (b) receive a full-scale immersion programme through being taught in schools that mainly use Chinese as the medium of instruction. The EOC reasons that NCS students will learn Chinese most effectively and rapidly if they are immersed in the school's rich Chinese cultural language environment; if the students are taught by specialists (if available) familiar with the problems immigrant learners face; and if lesson planners modify lesson content to anticipate and overcome learning difficulties associated with learning via a second or foreign language.

## 2. THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS UNDERPINNING LANGUAGE LEARNING: PLURILINGUAL AND MULTICULTURAL PHENOMENA

After relaxation of the 'iron curtain' barrier in post second-world-war Europe and the resulting consequence of several Eastern-bloc countries deciding to seek membership of the European Union (EU), many countries applying to join the EU sought to create a stable 'European' environment central to which was the promotion of

plurilingual and intercultural tolerance. According to Cavalli et al. (2009), plurilingual education not only involves foreign languages it also includes languages in geographical proximity, the language lexicons of learners, the language used in schools and the linguistic registers of subjects on the curriculum. Plurilingual education seeks to realise the “fundamental rights of each learner, based on values which guarantee his/her education as an individual and as a citizen” (Cavalli et al., 2009: 6).

When children from the Canton region of China arrive in Hong Kong, they are usually also able to converse to an extent in the Cantonese dialect of Chinese widely spoken in Hong Kong. These children easily settle into Hong Kong schools, but when immigrant children from countries outside Asia enter the system a communication problem arises. A number of options are open to them. A relatively small number may enter privately run international schools, for example schools that specifically provide for German-speaking or Swiss students. The parents of these children usually enjoy relatively high social and economic status and can afford the very high tuition fees. However, when immigrants from Asian countries arrive with their parents in Hong Kong, the situation is often more complicated. The parents of such children are usually unable to afford to send their children to private schools so they send them to ‘ordinary’ local government-aided schools primarily established to cater for Hong Kong-born students. Provision in these schools usually needs to be modified in order to accommodate the newly-arrived ‘foreign’ students and, sensitive to the needs of such children, the Hong Kong government provides funding for some schools to offer mother-language tuition for NCS children as an elective subject. However, finding large numbers of teachers able to converse fluently in the mother-tongue language of the children of immigrants often proves to be extremely difficult (Education Bureau, 2011). Sadly, in schools that do not provide any special service for NCS children, their mother tongue tends to be neglected.

The arrival of increasingly large numbers of immigrants from countries in Asia has thus forced many Hong Kong schools to have to adjust provision in order to accommodate the number of ethnic minority students now found in many classrooms in Hong Kong (The Curriculum Development Council, 2008). Supporting ethnic minority students learning the range of subjects on the school curriculum, especially the Chinese Language, has become a serious and public issue in Hong Kong, a city that prides itself on its multilingual capability. It has also caused schools to reflect seriously on the choice of strategy for coping effectively with the increasingly large number of students struggling to master the language of their teachers in Hong Kong classrooms.

### *2.1 The immersion approach to foreign language learning*

Research into the effectiveness of immersion strategies for helping learners acquire a foreign language suggests that the language gains of students immersed in target

language environments surpass those of matched learners on conventional programmes. The immersion approach is perceived as a highly effective method for initiating and sustaining progress in foreign/second language learning (Fernandez, 1996; Johnston, 2002), despite the fact that the native-like speaking and writing skills achieved by many are not always acquired by all. Nevertheless, many studies have demonstrated that language learners in such programmes frequently go on to acquire academic and cognitive gains and a deep understanding of intercultural and bilingual characteristics of the target language (Meier, 2010). Baker (2006) has demonstrated that, in fact, bilinguals often have distinct advantages over monolinguals in terms of personal, societal and global perspectives about phenomena in environments other than their own. A major achievement of learners in immersion programmes is that they “encourage linguistic/cultural minorities to maintain their language and heritage and teach all students the value of cultural and linguistic diversity” (Howard, Sugarman, & Christian, 2003: 27).

Similarly, with respect to claims made in the earlier-mentioned EOC report, many educationists confidently expect ethnic minority students to learn the Chinese language more efficiently by immersing them in the Chinese environment of Hong Kong and having them spontaneously use the Chinese language to communicate with local peers in non-designated schools. However, this expectation is not always realised and many teachers of ethnic minority students in non-designated schools find that these students often distance themselves from local students in Chinese language lessons, whether or not the medium of instruction is Chinese or English. Some school principals believe that since the language ability of NCS and local students is quite diverse the best arrangement is to stream them according to their overall language ability so that teachers can more easily cater for the learning diversity of students from contrasting home backgrounds in the same class. The hope is that ethnic minority students in schools where they are expected to learn the Chinese language alongside their local peers will be propelled into making greater gains.

Whether or not the children in the class are homogeneous in terms of ability, many of their teachers in Hong Kong habitually rely heavily on textbooks designed for local students. As a consequence of this ‘one size fits all’ strategy, the experience of many teachers in Hong Kong is that not all NCS students immersed in a Chinese language-learning environment seem to learn well (Tse, Ki, & Shum, 2012b). The EOC (2011) is aware of this feeling and has suggested that the poor Chinese language attainment level of many NCS students is largely the result of schools failing to apply the immersion approach and other techniques in the ways experts and theorists have recommended. In other words, teachers are not modifying their customary practice to accommodate the characteristics of the NCS students. The EOC hints that the poor Chinese language progress of many NCS students is largely attributable to the fact that schools are not using methods addressing their special Chinese language learning problems.

## 2.2 *A Chinese Language curriculum for NCS students*

Ethnic minority groups in Hong Kong find themselves socially marginalized and, in consequence, many parents are determined to have their offspring learn the Chinese language used so widely in the community. The government is aware of this and the Curriculum Development Council of Hong Kong in 2009 published a "Supplementary Guide for non-Chinese speaking students to the Chinese Language Curriculum." This Guide is based on the official Chinese Language Curriculum applying since 2008, the intention being to facilitate NCS students' learning of the Chinese language *per se* rather than simply as a second language. The underlying rationale is that all NCS students are legally entitled (alongside Chinese-speaking peers) to be taught how to write Chinese and English, and to communicate in Cantonese, English and Putonghua under the "bi-literate and trilingual" policy (Hong Kong Secretariat of Legislative Council, 2009). Although the Guide provides a curriculum framework, it does not specify learning content and subject matter. Instead, schools are expected to take the background, learning ability and existing language proficiency of their NCS students into consideration when planning the programme, and to develop school-based curricula that prepare students for school-leaver examinations. Due to the different learning paths and the diversity of learning outcomes, NCS students are permitted to take the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination. Alternatively, they may take Chinese as a second language examination from overseas (e.g. the English GCSE) in order to obtain qualifications that afford successful students access to tertiary education.

## 2.3 *Particular difficulties encountered by NCS students in learning Chinese*

The ability to understand the teacher's language is essential if students are to progress in their learning, and those students able to follow only a few of the teacher's words are at a serious disadvantage. Plurilingual and cross-cultural considerations are important components of the school curriculum in several countries in Europe, and in some countries a number of key school subjects are taught to minority students in their own language (Cavalli et al., 2009). These subjects include literacy and numeracy and the reading system used in the country in which the minority groups now reside. However, it is not always easy to find teachers able to speak the mother tongue of all students in the class.

In Hong Kong the inability of NCS students to understand their Chinese-speaking teachers and to read Chinese are handicaps that impact on the learning of all subjects on the curriculum. In their study of ethnic minority students, Ku, Chan and Karamjit (2005) found that nine out of ten ethnic minority students were well aware that their reading and writing skills were poor but that, rather than displaying their ignorance, they often preferred to remain silent in lessons. To complicate matters, there was considerable learning diversity in mixed ability classes so that teachers could expect to find children in the same class with vastly differing levels

of intelligence, motivation, language ability and previous experiences of learning the Chinese language. The progress made by individual children over a school term created further diversity of learning with, for example, some students good at speaking the language but poor at reading it; some students with very limited powers of listening; and others with markedly differing degrees of Chinese language knowledge. In many cases the class teachers were unable to find common ground and they resorted to speaking in English, even though many NCS actually knew little English. The complexity of the task facing the Chinese Language teacher is great, especially if the teacher is to engage all students successfully in learning all subjects and to respond to the learning needs of all students in the class.

Chinese is not an easy language to learn, especially for children whose mother tongue is written in alphabetic script. In the case of languages that are alike in major ways, for example alphabetically, semantically and syntactically similar, a degree of transfer is possible and this eases the task. Transfer of existing language competency in an alphabetical language to the mastery of an idiographic language such as Chinese involves the task of mastering issues that are entirely new, and such mastery is very complex indeed if the subject matter in communicative exchanges feature subject language registers outside the learners' lexical experience. Thus, NCS students in Hong Kong encounter difficulties in learning to read and write the Chinese language itself, as well as in mastering subjects such as mathematics taught through the Chinese medium. In consequence, the realization of basic interpersonal communication skills and the academic language proficiency of NCS students are often quite limited (Cummins, 1981).

#### *2.4 Lesson planning and a differentiated curriculum*

For years, argument has raged about whether all students in the same form should cover the curriculum specified for the year group at the same pace (EOC, 2011). If all children in the class are indeed more or less at the same level, then the whole class can conveniently proceed as a homogenous group at the same speed of learning and the teacher can plan a whole term or even a year's lessons at a stroke. However, the Chinese ability of students in any one class is rarely on a par in Hong Kong and teachers need to plan lesson activities that target the learning needs of all students in the class (Tse & Tan, 2011). In fact, it is far from easy for Chinese Language teachers to plan lesson activities and assignments so that the needs of students at all levels of language knowledge are addressed in equal measure. Such differentiation of classroom tasks and lesson input to match the varying ability levels of different students in the same class or grade has been the focus of much research in European countries such as England, and in American countries such as Canada and the USA (Krashen, 1985b). When differentiation takes the form of planning different courses to suit the pace of learning of ability groups or individuals in the same class, such preparation is seen as a key strategy for providing rele-



vant opportunities so that the diverse learning needs of every student in the class are targeted (Hart, 1996).

Montgomery (1998) suggests that differentiation in practice can be viewed under two main headings: 'structural' approaches that focus on subject matter complexity and 'integral' approaches where curriculum content and lesson assignments are prepared for individual learners. From a structural perspective, differentiation implies the use of different curricula frameworks for different groups or individuals (Simon, 1985). When wrongly applied, it seeks to make learners fit the teacher's system rather than matching learning tasks to the known needs of individual pupils (Hart, 1996). Bearnes (1996) warns that viewing knowledge acquisition as sorting complex processes into separate 'bits' to be learned may lead to a form of stepped differentiation that does not really match the way learners actually successfully master a foreign language.

Moves toward communicative language teaching have led many schools to reject simple organizational solutions such as streaming, and instead to focus on delivering the curriculum to the individual child or to sets of students of similar ability (Strandling, Saunders, & Weston, 1991; Weston, Taylor, Lewis, & MacDonald, 1998). In the UK, the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED, 2008), writing about the changing landscape of language teaching and learning in England, stresses the need for a guiding framework for the management of language teaching and differentiation. The framework includes having a suitable assessment policy, targets and evaluation; curriculum planning that is linked to assessment information and attainment targets; and accurate and appropriate target setting. Students' motivation and 'learning to learn' capabilities should also be taken into account, and there should be equal opportunity considerations so that students with learning difficulties and special education needs have access to the curriculum on the same basis as their more intelligent peers (Weston et al., 1998).

The present study investigated the effectiveness of arrangements in Hong Kong for NCS students to learn the Chinese language, and whether students actually learn well in designated schools. Although immersion and the social integration of immigrants are important concerns in any examination of the effectiveness of educational provision for second language learners, in a report conducted by the EOC (2011) there is a strong recommendation that the learning diversity of the NCS student should be addressed specifically. A wider issue is whether or not catering for the learning diversity of NCS students in learning the Chinese language requires the services of specialist 'Chinese as a second language' teachers.

With the above considerations in mind, the investigation reported here made use of a guiding framework to analyse the ways students with differing language and subject knowledge were being taught and expected to learn in the same class or school in Hong Kong. It looked for the presence of a well-thought-out, school-based Chinese Language curriculum; the provision and utilisation of an interesting supply of learning resources with graduated language complexity and demands; the use of differentiated planning of lessons so that the learning needs of all in the

same class were being appropriately addressed; a monitoring system so that the progress of every student was carefully being recorded and utilised; and the presence of teachers able to teach the Chinese language competently.

### 3. METHOD

The study first investigated how well NCS students were progressing in a small number of schools specially designated to cater for teaching the Chinese language to NCS immigrants. A key comparison here was to examine the progress of NCS children in schools designated for the task against that of children attending schools in which no special provision had been arranged. The research consisted of two broad probes, the first being to examine and describe how well designated schools were actually catering for the diverse needs of NCS students in Hong Kong. In this connection, an in-depth qualitative, case study approach was taken with multiple sources of evidence gathered. The second probe was to examine the impact of a specially devised approach to catering for the diverse needs of NCS students using a differentiated curriculum and lesson planning, together with an extensive range of teaching materials and use of imaginative teaching strategies. Given the constantly changing scenario in Hong Kong schools, the study was rather exploratory in nature and gathered evidence that was both qualitative and quantitative.

#### *3.1 Sample of schools*

The four participating schools were chosen on the basis of their experience and reputation for teaching NCS students. All of the schools had previously collaborated at some time or other with Chinese Language specialists from Hong Kong University who had visited the schools and offered advice about ways to teach Chinese literacy. One of the designated schools was selected at random for an intensive investigative study, the other three serving as a contextualising and comparison group. The staff in all four schools knew the researchers and were used to them using their schools for investigative purposes, but none were told that they were taking part in a comparative study. All were mainstream government-aided schools and all had received identical support and guidance from the Hong Kong Education Bureau about teaching NCS students. All four schools were comfortable with having the researchers visit the school and try out innovative procedures and so on but none had adopted any special approaches or strategies to portray the school in any particular light.

#### *3.2 Design of the research*

The study focused upon the impact of approaches used by each school over the course of the research, with some help being offered to each school to prepare

lesson materials and resources. In other words, the research was to a degree both interventionist and participatory. The intervention mainly focused on the effects of using a school-based differentiated curriculum to guide lesson planning and content. Instead of using the usual prescribed texts used in most schools, the research team (in collaboration with the teachers concerned) over the course of the study developed story books with different in-built levels of complexity to cater for learning diversity. The contents of lesson materials was based upon the known interests of students of the age group in question in Hong Kong, and to write stories and prepare lesson assignments about China and different ethnic minority cultures.

It was very soon apparent during early collaborations with the teachers that the Chinese Language staff had already needed to use an approach other than their customary choice of teaching strategy in order to respond to the diverse needs of the NCS students. Simply sitting NCS children among their Hong Kong peers, learning the same prescribed texts which did not arouse interest or suit their language levels and expecting them somehow to follow lessons had been unrealistic and unproductive. The NCS children were soon bored and disaffected. Accordingly, the research team set about redesigning curriculum materials around themes familiar to the NCS students. Rather than using a prescribed text to promote the learning of Chinese, the research team helped the teachers develop story books with different levels to cater for differing learning capabilities and prior Chinese language competence. In order to promote a multicultural element, the theme and content of the story books were concerned with ethnic minority cultures, folklore, myths, legends and historical events and stories. When developing story books with pictures that appealed to specific learners, the teachers were able to present language in the text at different levels of linguistic sophistication and difficulty. The stories were also accompanied by specially devised comprehension exercises and learning assignments at differing levels of language difficulty and complexity. These 'special' materials allowed the teacher to hold picture book appreciation activities and other teacher-led activities with the whole class, and to assign differentiated exercises to students with differing levels of language ability. At every stage, teachers in the schools assisted whole-heartedly, trying out and refining lesson materials and in deciding on the best ways to use the 'new' textbooks.

The team also helped participating schools to modify lessons so that work at the appropriate level was being set for all students. For example, a story book intended for local students was rewritten into three different levels for use by the NCS students. Level two of the story and accompanying work was used first, and careful note made of the responses of the NCS students. On the basis of the observations and the responses of the NCS students, the class was divided into three groups. The weakest group would use the level 1 book; the group with highest language competence would use the level 3 book; and the middle ability group would use the level 2 books. In other words, different levels of language demand were presented, each level targeting students able to cope with the assigned task. Advice was also given to teachers about differentiated strategies to use, for instance

decoding of words and explanation of content were used with low ability groups of students; questioning, summarization and discussion were used with average and high ability learners. In summary, the support measures included on-site school collaboration with resources and lesson planning, teacher training and help in diagnosing students' learning difficulties.

### *3.3 Case Studies*

In the research and evaluation phase, the four schools that had received support from the research team were studied in-depth, with classroom observation and analyses of students' work and performance. Semi-structured questionnaires were administered to collect information about the grouping measures as well as the materials used in classrooms. Semi-formal interviews were held with teachers and school management about the ways NCS students were being taught generally in the school. The interview responses were recorded and transcribed and checked by the interviewees to ensure the reliability and validity of the information collected. Information was gathered about how NCS students were allocated to classes; the teaching strategies used by Chinese Language teachers with 'regular' and NCS students; and how the school and teachers were catering for the diverse range of NCS students and their needs. Classroom observations were also conducted to identify the teaching approaches used with NCS students in lessons not normally attended by the researches.

### *3.4 Classroom observations*

The research team conducted classroom observations to collect data in the four schools, lessons being video-recorded. The lessons were graded A to C (A being very good; B being average/acceptable; and C being below average) according to the raters' assessment of (a) the teaching strategies employed to cater for learning diversity; (b) the learning responses and behaviour of students when responding to lesson demands and their use of the Chinese language; (c) the quality of performance of students in class, their answers to teachers' questions, and the standard of the class and homework completed; and (d) the level of their participation in the tasks allocated in class. A class where the teacher usually employed different strategies to cater for learning diversity and provided different opportunities for students to engage in learning and to respond to the teacher's questions and use Chinese language would be rated grade A. A class in which the teacher only ever employed direct instruction with the aim of covering textbook content with students listening to the 'lecture' with little or no interaction and engagement would be rated grade C. Four lessons were observed in each school, a total of 16 lessons being observed by the research team.

The observation criteria were quantified jointly and categorised by the team and their judgments and assessments were counter-checked by Chinese Language

experts who had been asked to verify independently the recordings and post hoc qualitative interpretations by the team of what had been seen. Two of the experts were experienced teachers with at least five years of teaching NCS students; one was an eminent Professor in the Education Faculty of Hong Kong University; and the fourth was an expert from the Singapore Ministry of Education.

### *3.5 Interviews*

In order to verify the team's analyses of the data and their judgments about the approaches that had been selected for catering for learning differences, a number of Chinese Language teachers were interviewed after the classroom observations. The interviews were searching and the responses and issues raised were discussed in an open and friendly, stress-free atmosphere. The team's interpretations of strategies that had been employed to cater for learning diversity were analysed; the class teachers' views about school-based curriculum development and resources were explored; the ways the teacher observed had attempted to plan and cater for learning differences were examined; and the responses of the students were scrutinised.

### *3.6 Data analyses*

The research team conducted pre-test and post-test comparisons of the students' attainment and made careful note of any changes observed. Attainment test papers were applied based upon assessment tools developed by the Hong Kong Education Bureau. The test items included awareness of Chinese character components, mental lexicon size estimates; understanding the meaning of Chinese words, sentence writing and reading comprehension. Formal comparisons of pre-test and post-test results were carried out to examine the statistical significance (if any) of any changes or differences.

## 4. RESULTS

### *4.1 The opportunities for NCS students to learn their mother tongue in school*

The researchers found that the opportunities for NCS students to be taught and learn their mother tongue seemed quite different from those applying in many European countries. Although the government provides financial support for schools to offer ethnic minority language subjects for NCS students, very few of the NCS students questioned had ever encountered such assistance. In fact, Table 1 shows that only two of the schools had ever offered first language tuition to NCS students.

*Table 1. Mother tongue lessons offered in the four schools*

<i>School</i>	<i>L1 courses</i>	<i>Subject provided</i>	<i>Number of NCS students in the school</i>
<i>School A</i>	No first language courses provided		12
<i>School B</i>	1	Nepali	12
<i>School C</i>	No first language courses provided		0
<i>School D</i>	1	Urdu	15

Furthermore, in each of the schools that provided ethnic minority language tuition, only a single language was ever on offer. Interviews established that this was all that the school felt confidently able to offer. As can be seen in Table 1, the number of students who had taken a mother language course was very small. Incidentally, the Koran is a crucial element of the Muslim religion and mosques provide free Arabic classes very regularly each week. Some of the students questioned in the present study said that they had at least three Arabic lessons each week, their parents giving strong support for this provision.

#### *4.2 The multicultural element of learning*

For the purpose of facilitating the learning of Chinese by the NCS students, multicultural aspects were deliberately incorporated into the teaching materials and texts used in the schools. Folklore and traditional stories associated with different cultural backgrounds, for instance, Indian, Pakistan and Nepalese, were translated into Chinese and printed in booklet form. The NCS students were also invited to tell the researchers about their daily lives, interests and customs. Stories based on the students' own cultural backgrounds were written in Chinese and included in the reading materials used in class. These included religious and social festivals, cultural celebrations, favourite food and norms, religious and special beliefs associated with different nationalities. The students were very pleased and thrilled to encounter such materials and they found the exercises in the texts much easier to execute since they were able to bring background knowledge into lessons.

In all four schools, activities such as folk dances, cooking classes and drama performances by the NCS students' cultures were organized. These made the NCS feel proud and they also greatly interested the indigenous Hong Kong students. The friendly and engaging school environment strengthened the sense of belonging of the NCS students and boosted their learning motivation.

#### *4.3 Quality of learning*

It was observed by the researchers that all four schools had invested substantial energy and resources into allocating the NCS students into appropriate classes or

groups and ensuring that the work assigned would tax but not over-face them. The number of NCS students allocated to each class was carefully controlled and, because care had been taken to ensure that the Chinese language level of the NCS was appropriate, the teachers said they were able to cater for the needs of manageable groups of NCS students. The children were compliant and tranquil, and the teacher had been able to plan ahead with the ability level of every child in mind.

#### *4.4 Teaching and Learning in the Classroom*

The ratings of the lessons observed by the four experts (see Table 2) show that the teacher in School B, a school that had made use of differentiated learning material, had been awarded a Grade A for the overall performance. The participation ratings of students in Schools A and C, which used commercially published school textbooks, were lower than the ratings in School B. Since the textbooks used in Schools A and C had been designed for students with average to good Chinese language ability, it was not surprising that the NCS students had struggled. It was clear to the observers that the NCS students had found it hard to participate or contribute much in the lessons. In fact, they appeared to be bored and showed little interest in lesson assignments. In terms of the pedagogy selected, the teacher in School B (who had used differentiated learning materials) had adopted a variety of approaches in order to engage students who had differing levels of Chinese language ability. This had succeeded in attracting and interesting all of the students in the class. In contrast, the students in classes taught by teachers who had relied on commercially available materials with all students in the same class appeared quite disaffected. The teachers had generally used 'chalk and talk' strategies with teacher-centred instruction for most of the time. Although these teachers had actually organized different learning activities with the hope that all students would engage in learning, the impact of the lessons was quite poor, especially since all of the students in the class had been required to learn using listening and memorisation strategies.

#### *4.5 Catering for Learning Diversity*

All students in Hong Kong are required to take a diagnostic test in September at the start of each academic year. NCS students usually take Chinese reading and writing tests, with extra time allowed. On the basis of the students' performance, schools usually stream them into different classes. As shown in Table 2, three ways of streaming students had been employed in the four schools: grouping of students (a) within the same grade level; (b) within the same class; and (c) across grades.

Table 2. Lesson observation summaries

<i>Expert</i>	<i>School</i>	<i>Pedagogy for learning diversity</i>	<i>Engagement in learning</i>	<i>Effective learning</i>	<i>Participation rate of students</i>
A	A	C	C	C	C
	B	A	A	B	A
	C	C	C	C	B
	D	C	B	C	B
B	A	C	C	C	B
	B	B	A	B	A
	C	C	C	C	B
	D	B	C	C	B
C	A	C	C	C	C
	B	A	A	B	A
	C	C	B	C	C
	D	C	B	C	B
D	A	C	C	C	B
	B	B	A	B	A
	C	C	C	C	C
	D	C	B	C	B

In schools where extra resources and finance have been allocated, NCS students are often taken out of class for special Chinese Language tuition. They form a small group (5 to 15 pupils) and are cared for by another teacher. There was, however, no clear uniform pattern of provision across the schools, the form of streaming students to take account of learning diversity being dependent upon school resources and management decisions. Even when schools have been allocated extra resources and have streamed students in the hope of facilitating teachers' planning for learning diversity, many teachers in the schools still found it difficult to teach in classes containing NCS students. As one of the teachers interviewed commented:

"I cannot really handle NCS students in my class because their proficiency level is behind that of local students. They cannot read and write Chinese - all they can do is to try their best to learn as much as they can. Our school has arranged a remedial class for them after school but most of the time they are not willing to attend."

#### 4.6 Variations in the Choice of Learning Materials Designed for Catering for Known Differences in Ability and Competence

Data from the observations and surveys show that the teaching and learning materials used in Chinese Language lessons varied across the schools studied.



Table 3. Materials used by the schools

<i>Nature of school</i>	<i>School</i>	<i>Material used</i>
<i>Designated</i>	<i>A</i>	Commercial published textbook for NCS
	<i>B</i>	Differentiated materials
	<i>C</i>	Commercial published textbook for NCS
	<i>D</i>	Commercial published textbook for NCS

Table 3 summarises the materials used in the different schools. It is clear that, despite the presence of the official Chinese Language curriculum, a number of schools are using their own school-based curriculum and producing learning materials for NCS students. However, it was soon apparent that having to comply with a school-based curriculum was taxing many teachers. As one Chinese language teacher commented, she felt unable to comply with a school-based curriculum for NCS students due to the lack of time, resources and know-how:

“Since the number of NCS students is a relatively small proportion of the total number of students, we do not have the resources to develop school-based materials for them. School-based curriculum development needs time and resources which cannot be provided by the school. Besides, we do not have the professional knowledge and experience for developing learning materials. It is more convenient for us to use published textbooks from the commercial market.”

It seemed clear that many of the teachers questioned in this research were well aware of the difficulties involved in teaching NCS students alongside native Chinese-speaking students. However, even when extra resources and remedial assistance had been made available, some teachers said that they had no effective strategies for catering for the diversity. Whether this was really the case or whether the teachers were simply unwilling to plan differentiated lesson materials is open to question.

#### 4.7 Analyses of Students' Performance on the Language Proficiency Test

Alongside the observations made in schools, language proficiency tests were administered, the results of which would hopefully cast light on the effects of the different approaches used to teach Chinese. Two tests (A and B) were designed to collect data from the 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 school cohorts, each set of tests comprising pre-test and post-test papers. All NCS students in the four schools took Test A in Secondary 1 (2008-2009), and Test B on promotion to Secondary 2 (2009-2010). The specifications of the test papers are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Test specifications

<i>School year</i>	<i>Test specification</i>	
2008-2009 (Test set A)	Awareness of character components	Identification of components of Chinese characters
	Mental lexicon assessment	Students write down their mental lexicon in Chinese
	Understanding the meaning of Chinese words	Students recognize Chinese words with picture stimulus
2009-2010 (Test set B)	Sentence writing ability	Students write sentences with picture stimulus
	3 reading comprehension passages	Students read the passage and answer questions

A total of 299 NCS students were tested in Secondary 1 and Secondary 2 (Grades 7 and 8) on their reading and writing of Chinese (see Table 5).

Table 5. Numbers of students taking the tests

<i>School</i>	<i>2008-09 No. of students</i>	<i>2009-2010 No. of students</i>
A	90	90
B	18	18
C	152	152
D	36	36
<i>Total</i>	299	299

Table 6 shows that all students gained similar marks on 'character recognition with components' in both the pre-test and post-test. It can be seen that NCS students have built up concepts and an awareness of Chinese characters, regardless of the learning materials used in the four schools. From the test results, it is clear that the NCS students recognized the concepts of strokes, stroke order and the components of Chinese characters. It is very important for NCS students to identify independent characters that stand alone, unlike the case with letters in alphabetic languages.

Knowing how to separate characters into components and join the components into characters is a crucial benchmark in the learning of Chinese.

Table 6. Scores on the Chinese character test

School	Item	Pre-test				Post-test			
		Min. Score	Max. Score	Mean	s.d.	Min. Score	Max. Score	Mean	s.d.
A	Antonym	1.00	5.00	4.80	.74	3.00	5.00	4.92	.39
	Character recognition with components	.00	5.00	3.48	2.15	.00	5.00	4.49	1.46
B	Antonym	5.00	5.00	5.00	.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	.00
	Character recognition with components	.00	5.00	3.61	2.15	2.00	5.00	4.83	.71
C	Antonym	2.00	5.00	4.98	.24	3.00	5.00	4.99	.16
	Character recognition with components	.00	5.00	4.11	1.86	.00	5.00	3.77	2.12
D	Antonym	2.00	5.00	4.72	.74	1.00	5.00	4.83	.74
	Character recognition with components	.00	5.00	4.28	1.60	5.00	5.00	5.00	.00

Table 7 shows that, with support from University staff and through using learning material that targeted students in their own school, the performance of students in all four schools improved. The improvement index for School B was highest, with an average increase of 4.3 per student. In contrast, the mean score for students in the control group of schools had only risen from 1.1 to 1.95. The results for School B are noteworthy in that students had made impressive advancements in all three categories of mental lexicon acquisition. The mean score for acquiring the mental lexicon for family and society categories was over 7. Although the mean score for the 'school' category was comparatively lower than for the other two categories, it was still the second best score among the four schools.

Table 7. Score of the mental lexicon test

School	Item	Pre-test				Post-test			
		Min. Score	Max. Score	Mean	Standard Deviation	Min. Score	Max. Score	Mean	Standard Deviation
A	Family	.00	14.00	2.96	3.84	.00	14.00	4.03	3.91
	School	.00	10.00	1.40	2.27	.00	14.00	2.60	3.45
	Society	.00	14.00	2.17	3.09	.00	14.00	3.42	3.95
B	Family	.00	14.00	2.67	3.43	.00	14.00	7.67	3.66
	School	.00	9.50	1.25	2.26	.00	14.00	3.83	2.98
	Society	.00	10.00	2.33	3.25	.00	14.00	7.67	3.39
C	Family	.00	14.00	4.75	3.48	.00	14.00	5.84	3.82
	School	.00	14.00	3.32	2.96	.00	14.00	4.05	3.16
	Society	.00	14.00	3.81	3.51	.00	14.00	5.16	3.57
D	Family	.00	14.00	2.56	3.43	.00	14.00	4.89	4.82
	School	.00	14.00	2.06	3.61	.00	14.00	3.53	4.18
	Society	.00	14.00	2.14	3.67	.00	13.00	4.19	4.23

Taking into account observation data, survey information and students' scores, it would appear that teachers in school B profited from using a differentiated curriculum and learning materials to help students recognize Chinese character and words, as can be seen in Table 8. These teachers also employed differentiated levels of the same story books to teach the full ability range of students in the same class. This seemed to have helped students to learn grammar and sentence patterns from the differentiated storybook with pictures: skills that would later help them to acquire and extend writing proficiency. A teacher in school B pointed out:

"Obviously, by using these story books, students have greater interest in learning Chinese language than before due to the fact that they seem familiar due to the cultural stories. They are eager to share their version of the story and to talk about it. By so doing, they learn to speak and relate Chinese characters. Although there are different ability students in my class, they can learn from the same story."

As can be seen in Table 8, although the total mean score for School B was relatively low in the pre-test, through adopting a differentiated curriculum approach the teachers in School B had helped their NCS students to learn the Chinese language well. The overall final mean score showed an increase of some 22 marks, the largest increment among the four schools. The lowest test score was 33 marks and the maximum score was 100 marks.

Table 8. Overall scores of pre- and post-tests

School	Pre-test				Post-test			
	Min. Score	Max. Score	Mean	s.d.	Min. Score	Max. Score	Mean	s.d.
A	5.00	99.00	<b>35.53</b>	20.63	19.00	94.00	<b>46.83</b>	18.24
B	18.00	94.50	<b>37.19</b>	18.76	33.00	100.00	<b>59.33</b>	16.66
C	12.00	100.00	<b>49.46</b>	18.46	8.00	100.00	<b>55.31</b>	17.69
D	11.00	92.00	<b>37.03</b>	20.21	16.00	91.00	<b>54.56</b>	19.16

To check the impact of teaching Chinese to the NCS students, a second proficiency test (Test B) was administered when the students were promoted to Secondary 2 in the 2009-2010 school year. Pre- and post-test comparisons were carried out to check the impact of the different approaches that had been used for a year, and to investigate the effectiveness of the teaching experienced.

Table 9 summarizes the overall reading comprehension test results of students in the four schools. Students in School C and D performed well on the pre-test and their mean scores were higher than those of the other two schools. However, students in School B had made a great improvement in the post-test, achieving the highest mean test score. As pointed out earlier, School B teachers had adopted a differentiated curriculum strategy for catering for students with different learning needs in the same classroom. It is apparent that this had greatly helped students to elevate their attainment. In contrast, teachers of classes in schools A, C and D seemed content to stick with whole-class, undifferentiated activities when teaching students in the same class.

The classroom observation data revealed that the teaching and learning materials in these three schools were fairly rudimentary, low level and traditional. It was apparent that teachers in these schools preferred to use low-level learning materials in the hope that every student would at least learn something. In fact, the evidence was that most students in the classes were easily able to execute the fairly undemanding, knowledge-finding tasks the teachers had set. The teachers seemed to think that it was acceptable to keep students occupied. The NCS students in fact learnt quietly without problem and consistently completed assigned class work. Although the teachers knew that there were students who had fallen behind or who were struggling with their work, this scenario was perceived by the teacher as 'normal'. The teacher seemed to think that, although the Chinese language proficiency of these students was below standard, it was difficult to help the students concerned to attain the required standard in a short period of time unless special resources were provided. The teachers with this perception seemed to believe they were powerless to perform well, and that extra help was needed if they were to

raise the learning level of all students. The teachers in these classes were content not to vary the relative complexity of the learning material in order to challenge and extend the skills of students of all ability levels. Although the survey confirmed that schools authorities were willing to invest extra resources and for schools to stream students or place them in different ability groups in the same class, it was evident across the two-year period that the teachers scrutinised were reluctant to modify their teaching to meet the special needs of NCS students.

Table 9. Scores on the reading comprehension test

School	Item Passage	Full Score	Pre-test				Post-test			
			Min. Score	Max. Score	Mean	Standard Deviation	Min. Score	Max. Score	Mean	Standard Deviation
A	1	3	.00	3.00	.98	1.03	.00	3.00	.99	.97
	2	3	.00	3.00	.46	.77	.00	3.00	.51	.83
	3	8	.00	7.00	.76	1.66	.00	7.00	.82	1.61
	Total	14	.00	12.00	2.20	2.98	.00	13.00	2.31	2.97
B	1	3	.00	3.00	1.18	.98	.00	3.00	1.45	.93
	2	3	.00	3.00	.73	1.19	.00	3.00	1.27	1.10
	3	8	.00	6.00	1.45	1.92	.00	7.00	2.18	2.32
	Total	14	.00	12.00	3.36	3.75	1.00	13.00	4.91	3.78
C	1	3	.00	3.00	1.28	1.04	.00	3.00	1.70	1.06
	2	3	.00	3.00	.92	.92	.00	3.00	1.08	.99
	3	8	.00	8.00	1.52	2.01	.00	8.00	1.61	2.12
	Total	14	.00	14.00	3.72	3.19	.00	13.00	4.39	3.64
D	1	3	.00	3.00	1.52	1.07	.00	3.00	1.58	1.03
	2	3	.00	3.00	1.02	.99	.00	3.00	1.12	1.11
	3	8	.00	5.00	1.36	1.76	.00	8.00	1.82	2.30
	Total	14	.00	11.00	3.89	3.29	.00	14.00	4.52	4.06

Table 10 summarises the learning improvements observed in the 4 schools over the two-year period. School B, which had adopted a differentiated curriculum, had made the greatest progress in the sense that its students had made the greatest improvements among the four schools over the two-year period. The effect size for School B was 1.25, suggesting that teaching had consistently been satisfactory over the period of the research. In fact, the learning effect size of all four schools combined was fairly low in the second year. Although the students in School B had

made progress, the learning of students in the other three schools was not impressive.

*Table 10. Effect size of school*

<i>School</i>	<i>Effect size</i>	
	<i>08-09 (Secondary 1)</i>	<i>09-10 (Secondary 2)</i>
<i>A</i>	0.58	0.04
<i>B</i>	1.25	0.41
<i>C</i>	0.32	0.20
<i>D</i>	0.89	0.17

## 5. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The general impression arising from the research reported here was that Chinese Language teachers in Hong Kong secondary schools are reluctant to change favoured pedagogy, pedagogy that they have found to work in the past. Instead, they seem to find solace in principally using the prescribed textbook and the language scaffold framing its contents, and to stick to methods that respected teachers have used and have not changed for years. Furthermore, the teachers seemed reluctant to meet the NCS immigrant students half-way and to utilise methods that capitalise on the first-language prowess the NCS students bring to Chinese Language lessons. It was disappointing to see that, although funding is available to help schools provide for ethnic minority NCS students, there seemed to be considerable resistance in the small number of schools studied to using such funding to help teachers change the teaching approach they habitually use with regular Chinese-speaking students. One is tempted to wonder about what can be done to persuade Chinese language teachers ever to change their practice.

Nor were the schools studied willing to employ specialist teachers able to teach the ethnic minority immigrants in their mother tongue, or to help the students understand difficult concepts in subjects across the curriculum by teaching these topics in the NCS students' mother tongue. One explanation for this is that there is a known shortage of qualified teachers in Hong Kong actually able to speak the languages spoken by NCS students: more probable is the case that the parents of many NCS students are not keen to have their children learn their mother tongue in school. Many of the teachers taking part in this study offered anecdotal evidence that the parents of NCS students say that their offspring can learn the spoken language of their mother tongue at home, and that it is far more important for their children to attend schools in which they will learn Chinese, a language that is growing increasingly important around the world (Hau, 2008).

It was also apparent that the Chinese language teachers seemed to know very little about the immersion approach to learning a second language advocated by theorists such as Krashen (1985a). Krashen's 'acquisition-learning' distinction is fundamental to the underlying hypothesis in his theory and is respected by linguists and language experts worldwide. According to Krashen, there are two independent but interrelated systems of second language prowess: the 'acquired system' and the 'learned system'. The 'acquired system' is the product of subconscious processes that are very similar to those children acquire when learning their mother tongue. The NCS learners in the present study desperately required meaningful communicative interactions in the Chinese language, not in the form of repetitive utterances in class but via genuine communicative exchanges in Chinese. Krashen's notion of the 'learned system' is the product of formal instruction and it comprises conscious knowledge 'about' the language, for example knowledge of Chinese language word clusters and grammar rules. According to Krashen, 'learning' is much less important than 'acquisition', but sadly the NCS students in the present study were bombarded with a ceaseless flow of learning exercises.

The present study is unable to offer readers empirically tested conclusions based upon extensive research with carefully controlled large samples of students. In fact, the exact nature of the problems addressed were likely to vary with each group of NCS students examined, for many of the individual NCS students bring languages to the classroom that are very different from the ideographic Chinese they are asked to learn in Hong Kong schools. As it was, planning lessons in order (a) to accommodate NCS students and (b) to respond to the learning diversity in classes containing both NCS and 'regular' students turned out for some teachers to be very difficult and demanding. On the other hand, general discussions and interviews with staff revealed that the Hong Kong Chinese students and Chinese teachers positively welcomed and accepted NCS students into their classrooms. In fact, the researchers found no discrimination in any school whatever and all of the NCS students took the learning of Chinese very seriously indeed.

The diversity factor varied to an extent with the ethnicity of the learners as well as with their Chinese language proficiency. Discussions with staff in schools revealed that the diversity factor severely taxed Chinese Language teachers. Many said they genuinely felt at a loss about what to do and how to cover syllabus and textbook content when NCS students were present in classes alongside 'regular' Hong Kong children who had been learning Chinese for many years. At the same time, although the survey revealed that the school authorities were willing to invest extra resources and to stream or set students according to their ability and place them in relatively small classes or groups in order to help teachers deal with the learning difficulties faced by many students in the same class, many Chinese Language teachers seemed content to keep to tried and tested methods. In consequence, the Chinese language proficiency of many individual NCS students improved little: it even regressed in some cases.



Although Hong Kong teachers have the reputation of being very hardworking (Tse, Lam, Loh, & Cheung, 2012a), many seem to prefer to teach the whole class as a single group whenever possible. This simplifies lesson planning and allows teachers to chart the progress of individual students against that of peers in the same class. Some of these teachers admitted that they liked intensive drill and practice teaching and that they were anxious about NCS students who had not been regularly 'drilled' taking internal and public examination in the Chinese Language and in subjects tested in Chinese. They pointed out that the EOC had admitted that many NCS students struggle due to cultural differences which bear on their language 'deficiency'. Furthermore, the assessment tools used with Hong Kong students are designed for first language speakers of Chinese, not for NCS students.

On a more positive note, School B, which had adopted a differentiated curriculum approach, was the most successful school among the four schools studied in terms of students improving their Chinese language attainment. This school energetically modified the curriculum and planned differentiated teaching materials and teaching strategies in an effort to cater for the sizeable diversity among NCS students. The school also sought wherever possible to ensure that all the students in the class had purposeful and germane learning materials. The teachers employed different teaching strategies and assessment tools for gauging gains by students whose mother tongue made the learning of Chinese a complicated affair. The school also checked whether the NCS students had any special educational needs, and provided the students and teachers with extra support if necessary.

As to the language environment, it is common knowledge in Hong Kong that in many designated schools for NCS students the medium of instruction across subjects is very often English. Consequently, the NCS students in these schools often speak with their peers in English rather than in Chinese. In Chinese Language lessons, the NCS students are extracted and placed into small groups to learn Chinese. Thus the chances to learn Chinese together with the local students are diminished even further and the diversity between local students and NCS students widens. Many designated NCS schools in Hong Kong have a 50% mix of local and NCS students who are expected to use and learn Chinese across all subjects, not just in Chinese Language lessons. They are encouraged to mix with local students in extra-curricular and co-curricular activities, a strategy that encourages communicative interactions and Chinese language development.

A major consideration is that most students who are literate in an alphabetic language really struggle to learn the ideographic Chinese. As mentioned earlier, in some Hong Kong schools, the indigenous language of the NCS students is offered as an elective subject. This signals respect for the national language and cultures of all students and is a pointer to possible actions by the mass media to make the issue of multicultural and pluralistic language policy more widely discussed. It also makes the task of students in Europe learning a language spoken in a different EEC country appear to be a simpler affair, for almost all European languages are alphabetic and phonetic in nature. What is also apparent is that there are more teachers in

Europe prepared to learn a foreign alphabetic language than there are teachers in Hong Kong who are prepared to learn the range of alphabetic languages spoken at home by many NCS students in Hong Kong.

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