



**Response to the Consultation Paper on
Developing a ‘Supplementary Guide to the Chinese Language Curriculum for
Non-Chinese Speaking Students’**

March 2008

A. Forewords

Ever since her colonization, Hong Kong has always been a multi-cultural community. According to the 2006 Bi-census, the ethnic minority population exceeded 340,000. Hong Kong is the permanent home to these people; some of their families might have settled here for more than 3 to 4 generations. Regrettably, our governments, either the previous Colonial or the present Special Administrative ones, have never taken good care of them. The officials even turned a blind-eye to obvious discrimination.

The Hong Kong Unison Limited is a non-government funded charity organization. Our aim is to foster cross cultural equality and multi-racial harmony. We fight for equal rights and opportunities for ethnic minority groups. In the education field, we have always been asking for a special Chinese Language curriculum catering for the Non-Chinese Speaking (NCS) students. With the mastery of Chinese language, NCS children could further their studies or seek job opportunities in Hong Kong. They could, then, preserve their competitiveness in the pre-dominantly Chinese-speaking community.

When the Consultation Paper on Developing a ‘Supplementary Guide to the Chinese Language Curriculum for Non-Chinese Speaking Students’ (the Consultation Paper) was released in January this year, we thought that our years of struggle has finally borne fruit. However, we were greatly disappointed by the document. It was vague and unsubstantial, at its best. The 4 proposed curriculum framework could not possibly cater for the needs of NCS students.

According to the 2006 Bi-census, there are 28,722 full-time ethnic minority students. If students of alternative learning mode were included, the number goes up to 31,689. We hope our government would really uphold her Racial Equality Principles by putting more resources on the development of a specific Chinese Language curriculum and graded assessment criteria for the NCS students so that they could learn the language gradually and practically.

B. Unison’s Response to the Consultation Paper



1. Did not take into consideration good, practical examples of our neighbouring regions like Mainland China, Taiwan and Singapore



Before drawing up the Consultation Paper, EDB officers were sent to visit Mainland China, Taiwan and Singapore. Their task was to study the implementation of Chinese Language curriculum in these regions. However, little of these experiences were considered; only a brief outline of the practices was included in Section III of the document. There was neither a detailed study nor an evaluation on their curriculum planning, assessment and implementation measures. Worst of all, no usage or reference were made to the good, practical examples observed from the visits in drawing up the Consultation paper. Unison considered the visits a waste of public resources.

2. *Painting a rosary picture, disregarding the bleak reality*

It was repeatedly stressed in the Consultation Paper that the current Chinese Language curriculum already provides a sufficiently “adaptable and wide curriculum framework” that could cater for the needs of all students in Hong Kong, ethnic minority students included (*see Page 1, paragraph 1.2 of Page 3, paragraph 3.5.1 of Page 14, paragraph 3.5.1 of Page 15*). We cannot find any solid proofs on this claim throughout the document. On the contrary, according to the findings of a research jointly carried out by the Hong Kong Professional Teachers’ Union (PTU) and Unison last July (*see Attachment II, the Research*), 75% of the teachers interviewed opined that the current Chinese Language curriculum designed for local Chinese students was NOT assessable to the NCS ethnic minority students. The discrepancy reflects that officers do not have a genuine understanding of the reality in schools.

3. *Enforcing integration, neglecting students’ needs and problems*

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, the majority of teachers (75%) opined that the current Chinese Language curriculum is not assessable to the NCS students; however, the EDB still insisted on an “integration” policy (*see paragraph 3.5.2 of page 18*) that is to put NCS students into the same classrooms with local Chinese and use the same Chinese Language curriculum (*see paragraph 3.5.3 of page 19*). Out of the 4 curriculum frameworks proposed, 3 were targeted on it (*see paragraph 4.2.1 of page 27, see paragraph 4.2.2 of page 32, see paragraph 4.2.4 of page 38*): to get NCS students integrated into the Chinese medium stream and to learn Chinese with their local counterparts as quickly as possible through extra out-of-classroom support.

We believe that the learning of Chinese takes a long period of time; some out-of-classroom support plus odd short-term intensive courses could not enable the NCS students to acquire sufficient proficiency to join in the main stream Chinese



classes. If integrated, they will eventually lose their interest and motivation to learn Chinese when they fall far behind their schoolmates academically.

Unfortunately, EDB officials underestimated the difficulties NCS students face in learning Chinese. They assumed that having started to learn Chinese at a young age should solve all the problems (*see paragraph 1.2.2 of page 4*); but reality is very different from the assumption. Besides, the Consultation Paper failed to take into consideration a major dilemma faced by most NCS students, and that is ‘**speaking but not reading and writing**’. If the NCS students could not master the reading and writing skills of Chinese, they could not meet homework and assessment requirement even though they could understand their teachers in class.

4. Shirking responsibility, failing to provide sufficient support to teachers and schools

The Consultation paper suggested schools and teachers to tailor-make curriculums, to provide therapeutic support, to adopt small class teaching, etc (*see paragraph 3.5.1 of page 15, paragraph 4.1 of Page 26*) for NCS students so as to cater for their diversified needs. In our opinion, curriculum design is not a part of teachers’ core duty; it is not their specialty as well. The above-mentioned suggestion not only added to the already overload burden of teachers, it might also affect their teaching.

On the one hand, EDB increases the demand on front-line teachers; on the other, the bureau is not providing sufficient resources for these addition measures. Curriculum designing and tailoring, small class teaching, all requires extra resources and manpower. According to the Research (*see Attachment II*), 75% of teachers interviewed could not find suitable Chinese textbooks for their NCS students; 73% said they encounter difficulty while designing an alternative curriculum and 76% complained that EDB had not provided them with appropriate curriculum and assessment guides for the teaching of Chinese language to NCS students. As such, EDB should provide extra resources for designated schools to help teachers overcome their difficulties. Most important of all, a specific curriculum and related guidelines should be designed to cater for the needs of NCS students. Besides, EDB should also sponsor publishers or organizations such as universities to write Chinese textbooks and other teaching material.

There were similar precedent cases of government-funded production of high quality Chinese textbooks and teaching material. Quoting the 1994 SCOLAR Report,



“2.68 In 1998, the Government has formed Chinese Textbooks Committee, to explore how to encourage the publication of high quality Chinese language textbooks and teaching materials. Until now, there have been 92 sets of Chinese language teaching materials being published for 32 secondary schools under the Government subsidy.”

(Translated version, please refer to the Chinese original wordings)

As there was precedence, and the outcome was encouraging, the government should seriously consider sponsoring publishers for such ventures.

5. Few schools get extra subsidies and support

At present, there are over 180 schools which admit students whose mother-tongue is not Chinese. Among them, only 15 designated schools (according to the 08/09 Budget plan number of designated schools will be increased to 25 with 2 years) receive extra assistance and funding from the government. The consultation documents mentioned that the schools could use the subsidies in a flexible way and applied for Quality Education Fund (paragraph 3.6.2.on p.21). However, the funding and subsidies do not aim at helping the NCS to learn Chinese. The schools have to take into consideration the needs of different subjects and the other students when they utilize the resources.

Besides, in paragraph 4.8 of the consultation documents, supporting service such as school-based supporting service, partnership plan and community support are mentioned (p.45-47). These measures do not address our major needs. The EDB must take more responsibility in rendering financial assistance and providing extra manpower to the schools.

6. Categorizing students randomly, thus making them virtually illiterate in Chinese, is against the principles of Education.

The 4th chapter of the documents emphasized that most NCS of the ethnic minority consider Hong Kong as their home (p.25). Then, in contradiction, they are said to be divided into 2 groups. It was said that part of them would only stay in Hong Kong temporarily and they would neither further their studies nor work in Hong Kong. Hence, they only need to use Chinese as their second language for daily use and communication (paragraph 4.2.3 on p.36).

The above categorization does not have any empirical support. This reflects the serious mistake made by the Curriculum Development Institute. They provide two sets of Chinese curricula for the NCS because they need to learn Chinese for a transient



purpose. But, actually the NCS wish to learn Chinese as a second language and require a suitable

Chinese curriculum. However, the CDI has not made sufficient preparation for the NCS students so that they can reach a satisfactory level of Chinese which enables them to learn Chinese together with the local Chinese students. This is really a disappointing policy.

7. The problem concerning the career prospects of the NCS has not been addressed.

The NCS and their parents show concern about their career prospects. According to the population statistics, there are 23,444 NCS who are under 15 years of age and there are only 5,278 NCS who are over 15. This great difference indicates that many NCS cannot continue their studies after secondary five due to the language problem.

The consultation documents point out that the NCS, after taking the Chinese curriculum, can sit for the HKCEE, HKALE or the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination (paragraph 4.2.1 on p.30). However, it is extremely difficult for the NCS to get good results in the public examinations. If their results are unsatisfactory, their future prospects will be adversely affected.

Many NCS choose to take the GCE, IGCSE, or the GCSE. However, the examination fees are very high (the fee is 4 times that of the HKCEE). This is a heavy burden to most of the NCS. We request that the government subsidizes the examination fees of the NCS so as to encourage them to take other recognized Chinese examinations besides the HKCEE. At present, the government also subsidizes students taking French in the IGCSE so that the examination fee is comparable to that of the English and Chinese subjects in the HKCEE.

In addition, the EMB has encouraged the NCS to take Chinese in the GCSE. However, since the results of this examination are released two weeks after that of the HKCEE, even though their results meet the requirement, they are unable to apply for a place in Form Six. Due to this time gap, we hope that the relevant results of the IGCSE will be released earlier, and if possible, on the same date and on the same result slip of the HKCEE, just as the arrangement made for the release of the results of French in the IGCSE. This can facilitate the admission procedures for the NCS and this will do justice for them as well.

Most importantly, the new senior curriculum will start in September next year. The EMB should make clear whether these examinations will still be recognized. Is it



compulsory for the NCS to take Chinese in the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination? Is there any special arrangement for them?

8. *Lack of consistent assessment tools and assessment criteria*

In order to assess the Chinese standard of the NCS, we need a system of consistent assessment criteria. However, this is lacking in the consultation documents. Besides a suitable Chinese curriculum, the EMB has to set suitable tests to assess the Chinese proficiency of the NCS in different stages so as to improve their Chinese standard. To the prospective employers, the results of the assessment will enable them to gauge the Chinese proficiency of the NC graduates.

9. *No incentives to encourage teachers to improve their teaching effectiveness*

Teaching the NCS who lack a good foundation in Chinese and an environment to use the language is an uphill task. The consultation documents require teachers to make extra preparation, but no incentives such as formal training, encouragement and merits are given. The relevant professional qualifications of the teachers are not recognized. Hence, suitable persons are not encouraged to enter the profession.

10. *Only verbal support. No concrete measures are taken.*

The 5th chapter of the consultation documents proposed that the current teaching materials for NCS will be examined and diversified teaching materials, diagnostic tools and bridging programmes will be designed. Yet the time frame of these measures has not been decided. This makes us doubt about the sincerity of the Government.

11. *Grammar drilling is insufficient*

The 2nd chapter of the consultation documents point out the difference between the Chinese and the mother tongue of the NCS. The language interference may affect their learning process tremendously. This constitutes their major learning hurdle. Regrettably, the document only points out the difficulties, but there are no solutions. As pointed out by many teachers, the NCS have to master the grammatical items in Chinese before they can learn Chinese well. The present curriculum lacks drilling in this aspect.

12. *The consultation documents show discrimination*

The Government reveals that the aim of this consultation document is to enhance the teaching effectiveness of Chinese for the NCS by designing supplementary curriculum



guidelines. Ironically, the document has only a Chinese version (the English version is only made available at the end of February only because of the server critics by Unison and other concern groups). The NCS and their parents cannot understand the contents by any means. This reflects the insensitivity of the Government officials and this also raises the issue of racial discrimination.

Besides, the Government officials who write this document lack sufficient knowledge of the ethnic minority. For example, on page 20 in the document they mentioned the Indians mainly eat rice and curry. This is in conflict with the reality.

One issue which is worth mentioning is that (consultation document paragraph 4.4) the EMB has developed a self-access learning software for the NCS. Yet most of the NCS families are not well-off and they do not have a computer at home. Worse still, one of the software called “vocabulary table for primary students” (p.62 appendix 8) requires students to type Chinese characters. How can the NCS whose Chinese vocabulary repertoire is limited manage to type the characters? Have the officials who design the software realised that? Do they only want to complete their assigned task and forget the real needs of the students?

C. Summary and our requests

Owing to their limited Chinese language proficiency, the ethnic minority community in Hong Kong has long been suffered from direct and indirect discrimination, facing unnecessary obstacles in employment and further studies. Some of them have to rely on social security, which in turns increase the pressure on the society. Being influenced by their religion and culture, most of them would love to make a living by themselves, instead of reliance on social welfare.

Another matter neglected by the Government is the composition of the ethnic minority population. While the general population is moving towards aging, the majority of ethnic minorities living here is young people. For those ethnic minorities residents aged below 15, if they were provided enough opportunities to learn Chinese; they would be more easily integrated into the society and more likely to escape from the poverty cycle. To the society as a whole, these people constitute a valuable resource of manpower, which could contribute to the continuing development of the economy.



D. Our requests

- 1) The Education Bureau should formulate a language education policy with the Chinese as second language. An independent tailor-made Chinese Language curriculum should be provided for NCS students, together with relevant guides and learning materials;
- 2) The Education Bureau should develop independent assessment tools and benchmarks for NCS students, with learning objectives in different stages. The idea is to enable NCS students to learn Chinese Language on a step-by-step basis, so that they could catch up with local Chinese students gradually;
- 3) To deal with the problem of lack of textbooks, the Education Bureau should commission/sponsor publishers or other institutions (like universities), to produce Chinese textbooks and other learning materials specifically for NCS students;
- 4) Besides those designated schools, the Education Bureau should provide additional resources and supports to all the other schools admitting NCS students;
- 5) As the new academic structure for senior secondary education is about to be implemented, the Education Bureau should clarify if it would still recognize the qualifications obtained from GCE, IGCSE and GCSE exams in future, or the NCS students have to take the Chinese Language subject in the new HKDSE. Bridging and transitional arrangements, if any, should also be announced as soon as possible;
- 6) The Education Bureau should provide financial assistance to those NCS students enrolling the aforesaid international recognized Chinese Language examinations, so that the entry fee will be the same as that of HKCEE;
- 7) The Education Bureau should discuss with relevant parties, to have the results of the Chinese Language exam in GCSE announced at the same time with HKCEE. For the convenience with admission of students, a unified examination report should also be provided, containing results of HKCEE and other exams taken by the students.
- 8) The Education should provide suitable incentive, for example, reward and validation, systematic and in-depth training and recognition by professional qualification, to encourage more teachers undergo training about Chinese Language teaching for NCS students.

Encl.:



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Appendix 1:
(1994)

Paragraph 2:55 to 2.85, SCOLAR Report, Education Commission

Appendix 2: “Ethnic Minority Students Learning Chinese”, A Survey of Frontline Teacher’s Experiences, by Hong Kong Unison and Hong Kong Professional Teacher’s Union (*Chinese Version Only*)

