

**Mission and Challenge: A Case Study on Supporting the Non-Chinese Speaking
Students Integrate into the Local Education System in an Aided Multiethnic School in
Hong Kong**

by

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Abstract

Hong Kong is an international city, with people of different races. In recent years, the number of people from South Asia, especially from Nepal, Pakistan, and India, is rising rapidly. Increasingly more of them are choosing to study in public schools, where learning the Chinese language is compulsory. However, the Chinese language is too difficult for them to learn, and their failure in the public examination usually presents an obstacle to further study in universities as well as to their career prospects in Hong Kong.

Moreover, many non-Chinese-speaking (NCS) students have experienced racial discrimination in daily life in public transport, public places, and schools in Hong Kong. They find it difficult to make friends with the local people because they do not know Cantonese or use inaccurate pronunciations. Since 2006, the mission to provide formal education to NCS students was buttressed by ‘designated schools’¹ which were nominated by the Education Bureau (EDB) to admit more NCS students. However, recent complaints regarding the allocation of NCS children in multiethnic schools² as a form of cultural segregation and discrimination has resulted in an increasing demand for spaces in mainstream schools where Chinese is the main medium of instruction. Hence, NCS students have to face more difficulties in learning and in managing interactions with local students.

In this research, a case study of a multiethnic school was performed to examine the major challenges faced by the non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students when learning Chinese and how the school helped these students overcome their challenges. How the multiethnic school developed a suitable environment for promoting multicultural integration and harmony in the school was also studied. Through investigations of school documents, observation of lessons and activities, and discussion with teachers and students, the school was determined to have applied a suitable range of strategies to provide pleasurable and productive language learning experiences for its students. However, regardless of what the multiethnic school does, it is still seemingly impossible to help all the NCS students overcome their major difficulties in learning the Chinese language, especially regarding reading and writing. Moreover, it was determined that the school had worked diligently to develop an inclusive environment for the students and hence it is inaccurate to claim that the NCS students are disadvantaged by studying in a multiethnic school. Conversely, multiethnic schools have a substantial role to play in helping newly arrived NCS students learn Chinese in a more strategic manner and grow up happily with their NCS peers. NCS students who are born in Hong Kong may study in mainstream schools to be immersed in a richer Chinese language environment. Professional matching of the right school for the right student after careful consideration of the life plan and ability of individual students should be performed by the government. Helping the teachers of mainstream schools prepare to teach the NCS students is also an urgent task of the Education Bureau.

¹ From 2006/07 to 2012/13, some schools admitting a large number of NCS students were called designated schools. Additional funding and professional support services from EDB will be provided.

² The multiethnic schools in this thesis refer to designated schools that have admitted a large number of ethnic minority students.

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List of Abbreviations

CMI	Chinese as Medium of Instruction
CUHK	The Chinese University of Hong Kong
DSS	Direct Subsidy School
EDB	Education Bureau
EM	Ethnic Minorities
EMI	English as Medium of Instruction
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
HKAL	Hong Kong Advanced Level
HKCE	Hong Kong Certificate of Education
HKDSE	Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education
HKIEd	The Hong Kong Institute of Education
JUPAS	Joint University Programmes Admissions System
IVE	Institute of Vocational Education
MOI	Medium of Instruction
NCS	Non-Chinese Speaking Students
PDS	Professional Development School
PEVS	Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme
POA	Primary One Admission

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Chapter 1: Background

1.1 Education System in Hong Kong

Parents typically begin placing their children in kindergartens when they are approximately 3 to 6 years of age. Because all kindergartens in Hong Kong are privately run by non-profit making agencies and private enterprises for children, parents are required to pay the school fee which is usually relatively expensive because of the high cost of renting the school premises. To reduce the financial burden on the parents, since the 2007/08 academic year, the government has introduced the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme (PEVS) to provide fee subsidies for parents. After completing the pre-primary education, the majority of children participate in the Primary One Admission (POA) System, and they are allocated to Primary 1 of a government-run school or an aided primary school. Some students also apply for private schools or Direct Subsidy Schools (DSSs), where they are required to pay the school fee. After completing the 6-year primary education, students can be allocated to a Secondary 1 place through the Secondary School Places Allocation System in government-run or aided schools. They must study the local curriculum and participate in the public examination after completing the 6-year secondary education. Some students choose to apply for the DSSs, private schools or international schools, where a different curriculum is offered.

Before 2008, the government provided free and compulsory primary and junior secondary education for 9 years to all children. This meant that parents were not required to pay any school fees in public schools, but that they were required to place their children aged 3 to 15 years in day schools for compulsory schooling. Beginning in the 2008/09 academic year, senior secondary education was also provided free, thus providing 12 years of free education. In addition, the former two examinations, namely the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) taken at the end of Secondary 5 and the Hong Kong Advanced-Level

Examination (HKALE) taken at the end of Secondary 7, were combined into a single public examination (the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education [HKDSE] Examination) at the end of Secondary 6.

After completing secondary education, students may choose to seek employment or to further their study in tertiary institutions. Eight institutions of higher education are funded through the University Grants Committee: the City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong Baptist University, Lingnan University, the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), the Education University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong Polytechnic University, the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology and the University of Hong Kong. These institutions admit students applying at their own discretion as well as those with HKDSE results that fulfill the minimum entrance requirements may apply for degree, associate degree, or higher diploma programmes through the Joint University Programmes Admission System. Although the University Grants Committee (2014) indicated that ‘the new academic structure provides opportunities for all students to receive six-year secondary education and four-year higher education’, a large number of Secondary 6 graduates were unable to secure a place in tertiary institutions. This is because the number of spaces is limited, and the HKDSE examination is too difficult for most students to fulfill the entrance requirements of the institutions. Therefore, many of them must further their study in universities abroad or settle for different practical programmes provided by local post-secondary colleges (eg, the Vocational Training Council).

1.2 Arrival of Ethnic Minorities and their Schooling

Ethnic minorities became a part of Hong Kong when Hong Kong was a British colony in the nineteenth century: a number of Indian and Nepalese soldiers and policemen were dispatched by the British government to maintain law and order in Hong Kong; many businessmen from

South Asia travelled to Hong Kong periodically to run their business when it was developed as a critical entrepôt; and many Filipinos were hired in bars to play music and dance for the marines. In colonial times, English was the official and international language in business and civil services, and thus, ethnic minorities were not required to learn the Chinese language. Because most of them were of the middle class, they usually sent their children to schools which did not follow the local curriculum, and where English was used as the medium of instruction. Therefore, it was unnecessary for the government to provide special learning support to non-Chinese-speaking (NCS) students at the time.

Later on, a number of these ethnic minorities chose to settle and reside in Hong Kong. The number of ethnic minorities continued to increase because of marriages and family unions. Because these families tend to have more children, the number of ethnic minorities increased further after a few generations, and many of them were born in Hong Kong. These ‘Hongkongers’ usually regarded Hong Kong as their home, and were determined to stay in Hong Kong even when it was returned to China in 1997. However, the increasingly high standard of living as well as the importance of the Chinese language after its return to China became major challenges for these new generations. In recent decades, the import of foreign labour for construction purposes has also attracted a large number of unskilled peoples from South Asia to reside in Hong Kong. According to Thematic Report: Ethnic Minorities (Census and Statistics Department 2012), the majority (75.8%) of working ethnic minorities were engaged in ‘elementary occupations’. These new arrivals tend to place their children in local schools, so that they receive free education, and studying Chinese is compulsory in the local curriculum. If they choose to study in public schools, they must follow the education policy of Hong Kong. The government’s language policy is ‘to enable students to be biliterate (to master written Chinese and English) and trilingual (to speak Cantonese fluently, Putonghua and English). Non-Chinese speaking children are encouraged to study the local

curriculum to integrate into the community as early as possible’ (Education Bureau Website).

All students arriving from South Asia are categorised as a group of ‘non-Chinese speaking students’. In actuality, it is inaccurate to call them such because many of them, especially those born in Hong Kong, speak Chinese fluently. Many of them are second- or third-generation ethnic minorities in Hong Kong. Their parents can also speak Cantonese fluently, and they can provide a richer Chinese language environment to their children should they wish or choose to do so. With improved speaking and listening skills, they could focus on enhancing their reading and writing skills by adopting the same learning strategies used by the local students in mainstream schools. They could also participate in the HKDSE examination which is highly recognised by local Universities.

According to 2011 by-census, the number of ethnic minorities increased significantly by 31.2% over the past 10 years, composing 6.4% of the whole population in Hong Kong. The school attendance rates in 2011 for age groups 3-5 (pre-primary stage), 17-18 (senior secondary) and 19-24 (post-secondary) were 86.9%, 75.7% and 13.8% respectively for ethnic minorities while those for the whole population were 91.3%, 86.0% and 43.8% respectively. The school attendance of ethnic minorities was found to be relatively less common than the whole population.

1.3 Support Measures in Education for Ethnic Minorities

When increasingly more NCS students were searching for free education in local schools, they were found to face difficulties in finding a place. Even NCS students born in Hong Kong who could speak and listen to Cantonese fluently could not secure a place in mainstream schools, because most of these schools accept only Chinese students. To resolve this issue, certain schools which admitted a large number of NCS students were nominated by the EDB

to become ‘designated schools’³ since 2006. These schools received an annual grant of up to HK\$600,000 for providing learning support to NCS students, including developing school-based teaching materials and support programmes, organising a 4-week bridging programme for new NCS students, and providing a supplementary guide and a series of curriculum resources for NCS students (eg, Chinese lexical lists, Chinese character courseware to the Chinese language curriculum and organising after-school extended Chinese learning activities to help NCS students learning Chinese; EDB 2011). However, the support provided to NCS students was still considered to be insufficient because of a dearth of multiethnic schools, and because many NCS students could not maintain pace with the Chinese language curriculum. Even NCS students born in Hong Kong exhibited considerable weaknesses in reading and writing which substantially affected their progression to universities and a future career. Moreover, teachers in multiethnic schools were unfamiliar with the culture and learning habits of NCS students, and found it difficult to adjust their teaching methods to suit the needs of these students. In response to these complaints, the government has gradually increased the number of multiethnic schools (from 15 schools in 2006/07 to 30 schools in 2011/12 [EDB 2011]) and has provided additional training for teachers.

Because certain NCS students arrived in Hong Kong in the middle of the academic year, additional support was required before they entered schools with a formal curriculum. Three types of programmes were provided to the new NCS arrivals: the Initiation Programme, Induction Programme and Bridging Programme. The Initiation Programme was a 6-month full-time programme commencing in March and September of every year. It was offered to new arrivals before their study in mainstream schools. The programme aimed to help new

³ From 2006/07 to 2012/13, certain schools admitting a large number of NCS students were called designated schools. The EDB provided additional funding and professional support services.

arrivals integrate into the local education system and society by teaching them the languages (English and Chinese), study skills, as well as social adaptation and local cultures in a real classroom setting in Hong Kong. By contrast, the Induction Programme was a 60-hr programme provided by nongovernmental organisations with government subsidies to new arrivals to cope with problems in learning and adjustment. It was conducted in small groups during daytime, evenings or weekends when the students began studying in day schools. Finally, the Bridging Programme was mainly organised in the summer to prepare NCS students for learning in the following academic year.

Because the local Chinese language curriculum was difficult for NCS students, including those born in Hong Kong, they were usually encouraged to study the GCSE curriculum. A pass in the GCSE examination for the Chinese language was ‘accepted’ by universities as meeting the basic standard of Chinese (EDB 2011). However, the GCSE examination was claimed to be too simple and easy because its standard was only at an approximate Primary 3 level (Equal Opportunities Commission 2011, p. 6). Many Universities and employers did not regard a pass in the GCSE examination to display a sufficient Chinese language ability. Conversely, the HKDSE examination was substantially too difficult for NCS students, and even those born in Hong Kong were unable to pass. In addition, the ‘designated school’ policy has recently been argued to be a form of racial segregation. NCS students were said to be unable to receive a better education compared with local students, especially in learning the Chinese language. Dr John Tse, a member of the Equal Opportunity Commission, reported that designated schools may be discriminatory and encourage segregation, and therefore, in the long term, the government should not separate local Chinese from ethnic minorities, and they should all be under a single school system (New York Times 2013). In 2013, the term ‘designated schools’ was no longer officially used to eliminate the labelling effect. All schools could also receive special funding to provide support for NCS students, in

accordance with the number of NCS students admitted, so that mainstream schools would become more willing to admit NCS students.

In the Policy Address⁴ 2014, the government promised to provide comprehensive support for ethnic minority students in learning Chinese. Since the 2014/15 academic year, the EDB has provided a ‘Chinese Language Curriculum Second Language Learning Framework’ with learning and teaching support materials to schools, and has offered additional funding support to enhance Chinese teachers’ professional capability in teaching Chinese as a second language. In 2015 the government began to offer senior secondary NCS students two new Applied Learning programmes⁵: ‘Chinese for the Service Industry’ and ‘Practical Chinese in Hospitality’.

1.4 Change and Choice

The change in education policy provided a wider range of schools for NCS students to choose from. Before 2004, NCS students did not participate in the Central Primary One Admission System or the Secondary School Places Allocation System, and hence, they did not have the opportunity to be ‘allocated’ to mainstream schools by the computer allocation system. Since 2004, a change in policy has made NCS students eligible to participate in the POA system and the Secondary School Places Allocation System. Afterwards, NCS students could choose from mainstream local primary schools with Chinese as the medium of instruction. Moreover, the rapid decline of the birth rate resulting from changes in family planning for late marriages and not having children after 1997 provided more vacancies in mainstream schools. From the beginning of the twenty-first century, NCS students have become a new source of student

⁴ Policy Address is an annual plan prepared by the Chief Executive of Hong Kong to announce the government’s planned actions for the coming year.

⁵ Applied Learning programmes are diverse elective subjects in addition to the 4 four core subjects in the senior secondary, and is under the New Academic Structure which was implemented in 2009.

intake for many schools (mainly lower-banding schools) with inadequate student enrolment to avoid ‘school killing’. To cater for the needs of NCS students, these schools have adopted English as the medium of instruction, and provide simplified Chinese language curriculum. However, this change did not favor local Chinese students, and therefore, NCS students and local students were separated in different classes, so that the different medium of instruction and different Chinese language curricula could be adopted. Hence, opportunities for communication and integration for NCS students was eliminated. The increasing drop in local student enrolment after the admission of a larger number of NCS students in these schools resulted in further segregation between the local and NCS students.

A new 3+3+4 academic structure comprising 3-year junior and 3-year senior secondary education and a 4-year undergraduate degree was implemented in 2009. Under the new system, all students would have the opportunity to complete a 3-year senior secondary course, so that they would be better prepared for employment or further study. One new public examination (ie, HKDSE) replaced two public examinations (one easier HKCE and one more difficult HKAL examination). In the past, although many students did not have an opportunity for further study in Form 6, they could choose between a number of practical programmes offered by certain institutions, or even secure employment with the five passes in the HKCE examination. Under the new academic structure, all secondary students are required to sit one examination which is more difficult than the HKCE examination. Failure in this ‘one-take’ examination represents a complete failure in their learning process. The Chinese language examination has become the most difficult paper in the HKDSE examination (HKET.net 2013, Apply Daily 2014, dbc 2015), and the introduction of a new core subject, namely Liberal Studies, presents greater obstacles for NCS students.

In Hong Kong, English-medium schools are typically considered to be superior to Chinese-medium schools. In 1998, only 114 secondary schools which fulfilled certain criteria

(eg, student ability, teacher capability to teach in English and the support measures provided by the school) were permitted to adopt English as the instructional medium. Therefore, these schools were extremely popular and highly competitive for entrance amongst local students. It was difficult for NCS students, who typically had better English language skills but were not proficient in the Chinese language as well as other subjects, to secure a place in EMI schools. The changes in the finetuning arrangements for the medium of instruction for secondary schools in 2010 provided greater flexibility to all secondary schools to adopt English as the medium of instruction in certain classes or subjects. Therefore, this finetuning arrangement presented more possibilities for mainstream schools to admit NCS students. In this context, NCS students had a wider range of mainstream schools to choose from which adopted English as the medium of instruction.

Moreover, because the government considers language to be better learnt when the child is small, the government encourages NCS parents to have their children start learning Chinese before the primary level, although this may create another challenge for educators in pre-primary education. The introduction of the pre-primary education voucher scheme in 2007 to provide course fee subsidies to parents could encourage NCS parents to place their children in kindergartens. According to the figures presented by the EDB, the population of NCS students attending kindergarten has increased by 20%, from 9,242 in 2006/07 to 11,192 in 2010/11 (Education Bureau 2011). With the implementation of 15-year free education in 2017/18, all children aged 2 years 8 months could enjoy free pre-primary education in most local kindergartens. This significant change of policy in pre-primary education in 2017/18 would enable all parents to send their children to kindergartens.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Multicultural Education

2.1.1 What is Multicultural Education

Multicultural education is a concept, an educational reform movement and a process (Banks 2007). As a concept, multicultural education aims ‘to create equal educational opportunities for all students’, including those from different racial, ethnic, and social-class backgrounds. Multicultural education aims to create equal educational opportunities for all students by changing the school environment in its entirety, so that it reflects the diverse cultures and groups within society.

Banks (2007) presented five dimensions for multicultural education: content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy and empowering school culture. The five dimensions are interrelated, and cover the aspects of curriculum design, classroom teaching and student care. Therefore, multicultural education does not only concern placing students of different races inside the same school or classroom; more effort and compassion should be provided in planning and implementing the curriculum, as well as care for student growth.

Robies de Melendes (2004) presented a number of enquiry questions for school management and teachers, so that they could review the five dimensions for multicultural education in their school.

Content Integration:

What is the content of my curriculum? How is diversity reflected in and included consistently in the topics of the curriculum?

Knowledge Construction:

Are children given the opportunities to examine and discover likenesses/differences? Are the classroom arrangement and materials exposing children to diversity?

Prejudice Reduction:

Are the textbooks and teaching materials free of cultural stereotypes? Does the classroom atmosphere inspire respect and tolerance?

Equitable Pedagogy:

Are all children treated equally and offered a sense of success in the classroom? Do I show children that I respect and value their cultural identities?

An Empowering Classroom/School Culture:

Is different cultural identity acknowledged during lesson planning and teaching? Is the classroom constantly acknowledging the children's identities?

Although Bennett (2003) recommended four similar dimensions for multicultural education (ie, curriculum reform, teaching towards social justice, equity pedagogy and multicultural competence), he emphasised that the primary goal of public education was 'to foster the intellectual, social and personal development of ALL students to their highest potential' (p. 14) in his multicultural education theory.

Whereas Banks emphasised 'equal opportunities' in education, Bennett underscored 'developing the highest potential' of the students. Could an equal learning opportunity fit the needs or characteristics of every student, especially those from different cultures, so that they could develop to their highest potential? Bennett (2003) argued that the exclusive use of the core language in the classroom provided 'equal treatment' without equity to a child who could not understand the language. The language of instruction was unfair to such children,

because all other subjects were taught in that language only. The voice for providing equal opportunities to non-Chinese-speaking (NCS) students to study in mainstream schools has recently created similar ‘unfair’ situations for these students as they face greater challenges in learning Chinese and other subjects in mainstream CMI schools.

Tiedt and Tiedt (1999) found that promoting multicultural education in society was difficult because it was not supported by the majority of people, who usually believed that this pertained only to certain minority groups; and many teachers avoided discussing multiculturalism because they were not used to the topic, nor were they confident in discussing it. Because Hong Kong is a cosmopolitan city with a wide range of foreigners, the government should provide additional public education through various types of media and activities to enhance public awareness, including for teachers and local students regarding the importance of cultural harmony.

2.1.2 Three Outcomes of Cultures Meeting

Bennett (2003) found three possible outcomes when different cultures establish contact: cultural assimilation, cultural pluralism and cultural suppression.

In the United States, cultural assimilation (also known as melting-pot theory) is widely accepted by teachers in the classroom. It is a process through which people from different ethnic and racial backgrounds come to interact, free of restraints, in the larger community. All students are taught in the same manner in schools. It is a one-way process through which members of an ethnic group relinquish their original culture and are integrated into the core culture which is predominant in the host society. When a large number of Europeans immigrated to the United States in the nineteenth century, the Education Authority assigned schools the role of forcing assimilation upon newly arriving ethnic groups, so that they could fragment their groups and settlements, assimilate or amalgamate these people as part of the

American race, and to implant in their children values upheld by the people. Certain people believe that multicultural education is synonymous with cultural assimilation. They believe it is the responsibility of ethnic minorities to adapt to the core culture once they choose to immigrate to another country. However, the ethnic minority group may lose its original culture after a few generations because of nationalism.

Another theory of cultural pluralism is considered to be an ideal form, because it presents a process of compromise characterised by mutual appreciation and respect between two or more cultural groups. Members of different ethnic groups are permitted to retain many of their cultural traditions (eg, language, religion and food preferences) to contribute to the beauty and strength of the whole societal composition. However, cultural pluralism has been argued to be dangerous to society because it heightens ethnic group identity, and may lead to intergroup antagonism. The government must assume a critical role in maintaining peace and harmony through public education and relevant policies.

By contrast, cultural suppression occurs when ethnic minority groups are separated or marginalised. The minority culture is considered inferior and cannot be assimilated with the core culture. After a certain period, the minority culture may gradually lose its original traits, but it is still deemed unacceptable by the upholders of the core culture. Eventually, the core culture and the minority culture become mutually exclusive, and minority groups become isolated and neglected by the host country.

Cultural pluralism can be visualised along a continuum, with cultural assimilation at one end and cultural suppression at the other. Degrees of assimilation and suppression exist, with cultural pluralism falling somewhere between the two extremes (Bennett 2003).

Cultural Assimilation

Cultural Pluralism

Cultural Suppression



<p><u>Ethnic minority groups:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Give up original culture - Absorbed into core culture - Become indistinguishable from core culture 	<p><u>Ethnic minority groups:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Retain own traditions, eg language, religion etc - Adopts many aspects of core culture eg language, monogamy etc - Develop ethnic perspective and also identify with the country as a whole - Respect and appreciates different ethnic tradition 	<p><u>Ethnic minority groups:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Segregated from the rest of society - Develop a unique culture or retain original culture - May develop a ‘dual consciousness’ in order to survive
<p><u>Core Culture:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accepts members of other ethnic groups once they give up their original identity - Views other cultures as unacceptable, inferior, or a threat to social harmony - Suppresses the culture and contributions of other 	<p><u>Core Culture:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Respects and appreciates ethnic diversity - Encourages ethnic minorities to keep many of their traditions alive - May or may not adopt some ethnic traditions 	<p><u>Core Culture:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regards ethnic minority as inferior - Sets up policies to preserve the rights and interests of local people - Suppresses the culture and contributions of other groups

groups		
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Many people may expect cultural assimilation to occur eventually because immigrants should respect or love the host culture based on their choice to immigrate to the country. In actuality, many Hong Kong residents have immigrated to other countries in the past, and they were proud of becoming assimilated into the culture of the respective foreign countries, such that their children could speak native English and act akin to a foreigner upon their return to Hong Kong. However, many Chinese people in foreign countries are living collectively in China Towns, where they are separated from the host country. They may not feel isolated or discriminated against because they are happy to live together with their compatriots. Therefore, whether cultural pluralism is actually the ideal option for minority groups and core groups should be explored.

Berry (1992) presented four acculturation strategies: assimilation, separation, marginalisation and Integration which are similar to the three outcomes presented by Bennett. Bennett (2003) considered and grouped 'separation' and 'marginalisation' into 'suppression'. Berry (1992) related the four outcomes with high or low identification with the core group and ethnic group.

Identification with core cultural group	Identification with own ethnic cultural group	
	High Identification	Low Identification
High identification	Integration	Assimilation
Low Identification	Separation	Marginalization

This shows that integration would occur only when ethnic groups have high identification with both the core and ethnic cultural groups. Assimilation would occur when ethnic groups have low identification with their original culture, but identify highly with the core culture.

This may occur easily in ethnic minority emigrants who are born and raised in the host country, and therefore, consider the host country their own home. Separation and marginalisation should be prevented, but occur when ethnic groups have lower identification with the host country. The host country should be aware of this, and assume responsibility in raising their identification with the core cultural group through various means. Afterwards, integration may occur; otherwise, assimilation should be expected.

Banks (2003) defined a culturally pluralistic society as an open society in which people could take full advantage of the social, economic and educational advantages of a society, while also maintaining their unique ethnic identities and allegiances. Ethnic minorities are not required to be assimilated into the dominant culture to survive in the community. The rights of ethnic and cultural minorities for maintaining the critical aspects of their cultures and languages while enjoying full citizenship rights are permitted in the host country (Banks 2006).

Although the assimilationist policy of the United States has prevented the country from becoming an ethnically Balkanised nation, it forced many immigrants to become marginalised and to deny their family and heritage (Brodkin 1999, Dershowitz 1997, Jacobson 1998). This situation should not be considered lightly, because denying one's basic group identity is a painful and psychologically unsettling experience. Certain NCS parents in Hong Kong are undergoing this process, especially when their children are born and raised in Hong Kong, and they consider themselves residents in the cosmopolitan city, rather than immigrants from a poor and undeveloped country.

2.1.3 Multicultural Education in Other Countries

Multicultural Education has been a critical issue in other countries for a long time. Charmian and Tina (2008) presented examples of good practices in Europe: The government of

Sweden provided financial resources to local councils for initiatives regarding language development, including conducting research and in-service teacher training on bilingual learning. In the United Kingdom, governmental policies acknowledged the value of using the first language in learning. Bilingualism in schools was considered a good practice in fulfilling the needs of second- and third-generation migrant children. In France, university researchers developed a curriculum for teacher education, so that mainstream primary teachers could support students learning a second language. In the Netherlands, study on policies for ethnic minorities was conducted to promote the positive aspects of diversity, rather than its negative aspects. Subsidies were provided for various intercultural activities (eg, education, welfare, sports and the arts). In a similar manner to Hong Kong, in the 1960s and 1970s, many unskilled workers arrived to Utrecht, the Netherlands, from South European countries including Spain, Italy and Greece. A number of them stayed in Utrecht, whereas others returned to their home country after a few years. Most of them were Moroccan or Turkish immigrants who usually married their partners in their country of origin and brought them to the Netherlands. A policy called ‘Diversity and Integration’ promoted multicultural togetherness through a range of local projects. For example, a ‘Cultural Sunday’ took place once a month, a day on which many cultural institutes, museums and theatres might have organised exhibitions or activities (eg, opera, dance and storytelling) for the public (Kenner and Hickey 2008).

Conversely, a number of extreme cases involving multicultural education also emerged in Europe (Kenner and Hickey 2008). For example, the Paris government stated in a 2004 report that the parents of children aged under 3 years should speak French only at home; otherwise, it was regarded as a form of juvenile delinquency. The Dutch minister attempted to prohibit the use of other languages (other than Dutch) to be spoken on the street in 2005. Moreover, a shutdown of London bilingual science classes by a school principal gained considerable

support from the media in 2006. Furthermore, in 2008, an ‘anti-immigration’ political campaign was organised in the Netherlands.

Wong and Fong (2006) compared multicultural education in different countries. In the United States, the development of multicultural education was a gradual and evolutionary process. In its early stages, assimilation was a key strategy for Indians and other Western immigrants from Europe. Educators emphasised modifying the immigrants’ culture, behaviours and customs by splintering their centralised living areas, so that they could integrate into and become a part of the country. Later, when many black immigrants arrived to the United States, marginalisation was used for separating black immigrants, and antagonism between white and black people arose. Separate courses were provided to African American students and Asian American students. When increasingly more ethnic groups were present in the country, more educators began to recognise that reforming the course of study in schools and colleges was necessary. Therefore, courses on ethnic studies were provided for all students, not only for students who were members of a particular ethnic group. A court in San Francisco ruled that ‘provisions for the same teachers, programs and textbooks in the same language for all students in the district did not provide equal educational opportunity when the native language of a sizable number of the student body was not English.’ The ruling held that equality of treatment was absent when providing students with only the same facilities, textbooks, teachers and curriculum because students who did not understand English (ie, the language of the country) were effectively prevented from pursuing any meaningful education.

In England, assimilation was the majority strategy targeting minority immigrants in the 1960s. The government emphasised the importance of learning English as soon as the children arrived. The government reported that the admission of a large portion of minority students by schools was not a sound approach because the schools might not help minority students adapt to the English community effectively. Moreover, all minority students were required to

undergo an identical assessment, including English papers, as that undertaken by local students. In the 1980s, cultural diversity was recognised by the government because ‘the immigrant children enriched the life of other students and brought energy to the school by introducing the new music, drama and dance.’ Afterwards, the teachers began to learn more regarding the cultural background of minority students to cultivate mutual respect and understanding. The assimilation policy was being phased out, while diversity and equality were being emphasised.

Canada has been a multicultural country for a long period, because it is a country for immigrants from different countries (eg, India, France, England etc). In the early 1970s, the Canadian government invested numerous resources into maintaining the culture of different groups. Students could learn in other languages (other than in the official languages, English and French) for 50% of school days. The government indicated that ‘a person has lost his freedom if a person is restricted in a particular culture because of his origin and language.’

According to census documents from Canada, nearly 25% of the population was born outside Canada (Statistics Canada 2003a). Approximately 50% of the population (other than those of British and French descent) had a non-European ancestry. The census documents identified more than 200 ethnic origins in Canada. Approximately 4% of the people considered themselves to be part of the aboriginal population. In addition, the 13.4% of the people, who comprised mainly Chinese, South Asians, blacks, and Filipinos, considered themselves to be a ‘visible minority’. Of the total population, 22% reported mixed ethnic heritages, and 16% were not native speakers of either English or French. In this percentage group, Chinese was the most frequently reported native language, followed by Italian, German, Punjabi, Spanish and Polish. Therefore, akin to Singapore, Canada was a nation characterised by rich multiculturalism.

Wendy Bokhorst-Heng (2007) explored multicultural education in Singapore and Canada. Education Canada (1997: p. 7) required that all provincial ministries and departments of education develop policies and processes for reviewing the curriculum and learning resources to ensure that they were free of racial, ethnic, cultural, gender and socioeconomic biases. Every Canadian, irrespective of his or her ethnic origin, was presented with the opportunity to learn at least one of the two official languages of Canada. Heritage language instruction has occurred both in and outside the public school system, with more than 25 languages taught with governmental support since 1990. An educational system which values the cultural diversity of its students and makes heritage language learning accessible enhances multiculturalism specifically in Saskatchewan in Canada. The government supports and encourages the various cultures and ethnic groups that provide a structure and vitality to the society. They are thus encouraged to share their cultural expression and values with other Canadians, thereby contributing to a richer life for everyone. The government believed the people of Canada were long overdue to increase their awareness of the rich tradition of the many cultures in Canada. Canada's citizens arrived from nearly every country worldwide, and brought with them every major world religion and language. This cultural diversity endowed all Canadians with a considerable variety of human experiences. The government regarded this as a heritage to treasure, and believed that Canada would be poorer if they adopted assimilation programmes that forced its citizens to forsake and forget the cultures they had brought with them (Trudeau 1971).

Singapore is a multicultural country in Asia, in which 76.8% of its population is composed of ethnic Chinese, 13.9% Malays, 7.9% Indians, and 1.4% who registered as 'other'. Singapore has four official languages in Singapore: Malay, Tamil and Mandarin are the mother-tongue languages, whereas English is regarded as the common language. Two national holidays exist for each of the four main religions (ie, Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism and Christianity) in the

country's national calendar, because different religious beliefs are respected and tolerated in the country. Every year, Singapore celebrates a 'racial harmony week' because 'unity in diversity' is the key model of this multiracial nation.

Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong used four overlapping circles to describe the concept of multiculturalism in Singapore, with each circle representing one community. The overlapping area is an open area, where all Singaporeans from various ethnic backgrounds could have equal opportunities to work and play together in their common language (ie, English). Outside this common area, where the circles do not overlap, each community can retain its original customs and speak its own language. Therefore, every community has two areas for living with multiracial harmony. This helps Singapore build a harmonious multicultural country (Tong 1999). However, because students are still required to attend separate 'mother-tongue' classes (eg, moral education other than the majority of subjects taught in English), it would widen the gap amongst races, instead of encouraging integration and a mutual understanding (Tong 1999).

2.1.4 Role of Teachers in Multicultural Education

To successfully foster multicultural education, a teacher must accept the dissimilarities between cultures and be sensitive to cultural differences (Bennett 2003). Based on my teaching experience over the past 20 years, a positive correlation exists between teacher expectations and academic performance. When teachers express a slightly higher expectation from their students, they teach in a more effective manner, and eventually, the students perform substantially better than expected. Conversely, when teachers hold students to a lower standard, they simplify the content, and therefore, the students do not gain sufficient training in addressing challenging issues. Moreover, the teacher's attitude affects student speaking and participation in class. More positive encouragement provided by teachers in the classroom increases active participation and the number of student responses. A study on

classroom interactions in the United States reported that when teachers have equal expectations of achievement for black and white students, more interracial friendships and interactions are established amongst the students. A classroom climate of acceptance amongst students was more likely to exist when teachers did not distinguish between the learning potential of black and white students (Bennett 2003). Other studies have shown the following: ‘Interculturally competent teachers are aware of the diversity within racial, cultural, and socioeconomic groups, and they are aware of the dangers of stereotyping. They are aware of how their culturally conditioned expectations and assumptions might cause learning difficulties for their students’ (Bennett 2003, pp. 26-27).

Banks (2005) indicated that effective teachers in a multicultural society must possess the following attributes:

- democratic attitudes and values;
- a multicultural philosophy;
- the ability to view events and situations from diverse ethnic perspectives and viewpoints;
- an understanding of the complex and multidimensional nature of diversity in Western societies;
- knowledge of the stages of cultural identity and their curricular and teaching implications; and
- the ability to function increasingly at higher stages of cultural identity.

Eggen and Kauchak (1994) identified the following four principles for multicultural teachers:

- accept student diversity openly (including different cultural elements in the learning content);
- truly care for the students;
- create opportunities for cultural integration (eg, peer tutoring and cooperative learning); and
- emphasise cultural uniqueness, so that the students can feel proud of their own culture and have positive feelings towards the culture of others.

Teachers are people who bring their own cultural perspectives, values, hopes and dreams to the classroom. They also bring their own prejudices, stereotypes and misconceptions (Banks 2005, Dilg 2003, Howard 1999, Irvine 2003). Teachers play a critical role in education. Other than rich subject knowledge, the effective use of pedagogies as well as the attitudes and beliefs play a more critical role in multicultural education.

Hollins (1993) indicated that teachers of multicultural education should be able to do the following:

- communicate with students from different cultural background (eg using verbal and nonverbal language or signs to exchange views and feelings);
- use appropriate teaching resources and pedagogy effectively to cater to the learning needs of different students;
- reflect and adjust the teaching plans flexibly;
- promote a harmonious and supportive learning environment for students; and
- improve learning effectiveness via appropriate assessments and evaluations.

Teachers are of greater importance than the curriculum and materials they use, because the ways in which they present the materials considerably influence how they view the students, and vice versa. For example, when a patriotic teacher explains the concept of ‘one country, two systems’, certain NCS students may sense hostility because they are not pure Chinese. To teach in a multiethnic school, teachers must be strongly committed to a racially tolerant school atmosphere. The attitude of teachers plays a critical role; however, it is ignored by certain teachers. Teachers should examine their own values and prejudices regarding NCS students. Do they bring preconceived notions to the classroom? How do their beliefs affect the students? Do they have appropriate expectations of the students? Afterwards, teachers should help the students respect one another and to accept differences between them.

Teacher training on multicultural education is certainly crucial because teachers have to help students from minority groups establish self-confidence and increase their learning motivation to learn. According to the performance Indicators for the Hong Kong School 2008 report published by the Quality Assurance Division in the Education Bureau (EDB), teachers should be skilful and accurate in using the medium of instruction to conduct learning and teaching activities, in a way that is geared to students’ abilities and creating an appropriate language environment for students to adequately express their opinions.’

Professional training on knowledge, skills and attitudes should be provided to teachers. Knowledge includes knowing the characteristics of and differences between ethnic minorities, as well as their language, family structure, religion, food, economic status, gender status, personality, learning and thinking styles, sense of national identity, and so on.

2.1.5 Segregation in Multiethnic Schools in Hong Kong

Regarding education for NCS students, the Equal Opportunity Commission has argued that the policy of concentrating NCS students in multiethnic schools was a form of discrimination because NCS students became segregated from their local counterparts. ‘There is a view that the policy of allowing multiethnic schools for EM was itself discriminatory because it reinforced segregation rather than encouraged integration’ (Equal Opportunities Commission 2011, p.7). NCS students should not be isolated in a few schools with poorer intake and lower banding. Instead, they should be granted access to the same type of education provided to local students in mainstream schools. In actuality, many multiethnic schools were invited by the EDB to provide school-based education to NCS students, including an appropriately designed Chinese language curriculum to fulfill their needs by using English as the medium of instruction for other subjects, adopting different teaching strategies to enhance learning effectiveness, providing training to teachers so that they could understand the learning needs of NCS students, and organising various cultural activities to promote cultural harmony in schools. Therefore, cultural pluralism may be applied instead of cultural suppression in many multiethnic schools, because students from different backgrounds could retain their cultural traditions in these schools and receive mutual respect. In Singapore, students are not allowed to wear a headscarf to school because the Singapore government argues that it will jeopardise Singapore’s racial harmony. (Singapore is surrounded by Muslim neighbours, and allowing exceptions to the school uniform is considered to jeopardise the racial harmony.) The implication is that cultural diversity is problematic in building shared values and a cohesive society. Wearing the headscarf in state schools is also prohibited in France, because it contradicts the state policy of ‘secularism’ which is based upon the constitutional principle of the separation between church and state. Wearing the hijab (ie, the headscarf), said to be an ‘ostentatious’ religious object, violates the secularisation of education. Singapore and France

underscore diversity as a barrier to building common ground (Chee 2012). By contrast, in Hong Kong, all multiethnic schools allow students to wear ethnic and religious clothing to schools, and even wear dresses with trousers and to grow a beard. ‘Some considered that designated schools provided a more supportive learning environment for EM students, while some were of the view that designated schools were not conducive to integration’ (Equal Opportunities Commission 2011, p. 7). However, certain educators issued complaints against one multiethnic school because it segregated NCS students and local students by holding recess at different times in the past, although the purpose of this arrangement was to prevent any cultural conflict between NCS students and their local counterparts. Whether multiethnic schools should affirm cultural pluralism or cultural segregation must be discussed.

Beginning in 2004, NCS students are permitted to choose to study in multiethnic or mainstream schools. The Hong Kong Christian Service indicates that ‘the new placement allocation arrangement can facilitate Ethnic Minorities children to have equal opportunity of study in mainstream schools.’ However, many mainstream schools have refused to admit NCS students because their Chinese language ability is too low. The Hong Kong Unison claimed that certain NCS students who possessed greater Chinese language skills, despite having been accepted into mainstream schools, had to withdraw from them eventually because they would fail many subjects taught only in Chinese. This is because the mainstream schools must consider the needs of the majority (ie, local students) first, and the few NCS students are typically expected to fit into the system on their own. Cultural assimilation is expected by mainstream schools because of insufficient resources and teacher training for catering to the needs of a small group of students. Eventually, NCS students in mainstream schools have to be absorbed into Chinese culture (ie, the core culture of Hong Kong).

Therefore, if cultural pluralism is considered the ideal condition for multicultural education, NCS parents and students should be advised to choose multiethnic schools. The government should provide sufficient financial resources and teacher training to multiethnic schools, so that they can provide a harmonious learning environment and a high quality of education for NCS students.

2.2 Impact of Language Learning for Multicultural Education

Thousands of languages exist worldwide. We need to use languages to understand our environment and to communicate with people we encounter in daily life. Language is not only a tool for communication; it is an intrinsic part of our identity (Winkler 2007). The way we talk represents our personality, education level, and beliefs in life. Language is a complex system of communication that includes pragmatics (sociolinguistic rules governing the use of a language), syntax (rules of word order in a sentence), semantics (meaning of words and sentences), morphology (rules of word formation) and phonology (the sound system of a language; Banks 2007). Obtaining a higher standard of language competency is difficult. When presenting more complex concepts and arguments, certain people with a higher standard of language competency typically have an advantage. Moreover, although most people do not have a problem using their first language effectively in daily conversation, their reading and writing competency could be poor or insufficient. Many non-literate and semi-literate people inhabited Hong Kong before the introduction of compulsory education in the past decade. They could speak the language fluently and accurately, but could not read and write in the language. A large number of Hongkongers who were born before the 1960s are non-literate because they did not have the opportunity to study in school. Therefore, the ability ‘to speak’, ‘to listen’, ‘to read’ and ‘to write’ is also critical when learning a language. Otherwise, a person loses many opportunities to secure a better career or life should he or she fail to obtain all of these language abilities.

2.2.1 Learning of Mother Tongue

The mother tongue should be acquired in a natural language environment over a longer period. The mother tongue should be acquired at home first, and then built upon when interacting with others in one's environment. When learning the mother tongue, the rules are not usually taught, because we could acquire them naturally through interactions with people in daily life. The mother tongue is learnt piecewise over a long period since birth. Early language acquisition theory, proposed by the behavioral psychologist Skinner (1957), posits that children learn their first language through imitation and reinforcement from their parents or caretakers. The environment and reinforcement by parents or caretakers were considered the key factors of acquisition. Although some biologists have argued that children's brains are biologically organised to recognise the patterns of language from their parents, the consensus view is that children's environment is a key factor in language acquisition. Learning a more academic first language involves intellectual thinking and rule coordination, which facilitates managing the language for first language learners when they have mastered a larger number of vocabularies and phrases.

Unlike local students who use Chinese as their mother tongue and were raised in a rich Chinese language environment, NCS students born in Hong Kong seldom speak Chinese at home. This is because their parents tend to communicate with them in their home language which they are more familiar with, and retaining the language is viewed as a recognition of their own identity and culture. However, they may be unable to read and write in their home language because of the lack of opportunities for them to practise. Schools rarely offer courses in these minority languages to students in Hong Kong. This means that NCS parents can only sustain the oral and aural capabilities of their home language. By contrast, second- and third-generation NCS students may face a dilemma: They consider themselves Hongkongers, but their family members who can speak Cantonese fluently still choose to talk

to them in their mother tongue. They thus miss a unique opportunity to acquire the Chinese language as a mother tongue. In actuality, most Hong Kong-born NCS children eventually speak Cantonese fluently after living in Hong Kong for a certain period. However, language development may differ for them compared with local children, who can naturally accept the customary features of the Chinese language in terms of the characters, pronunciation and grammar, and then practise more advanced thinking and expressions at home. If parents do not care to learn the local customs and language of a new country, their children cannot become motivated to do so on their own (Tokuhamo-Espinosa 2001).

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong (2005) of Singapore indicated that people should not allow their mother tongue to degenerate, because over time, the values and cultural heritage of the own origin would be lost, and ultimately, their self-confidence as a people would be undermined. Collin (2007) reported that the home language provided a sense of security when someone faced challenges and difficulties in life. People may look for someone to talk to, especially in their own language, so that they can freely express how they feel. In mainstream schools, local students may make fun of students speaking in a minority language (or what they call an alien language). When facing racist students, certain NCS students tend to speak only in the majority language in their presence, because they are establishing a security zone for their conversations, and do not have to worry about any inaccurate pronunciations. However, local students and NCS students eventually become separated into two groups, and cultural integration can hardly occur.

The NCS students should thus be trained to be bilingual. Although Collin (2007) stated that advantages exist for being bilingual (eg, a wider range of communication with people in the community and at work as well as an increase in self-esteem), he also indicated a number of disadvantages, including the concerns of and anxiety experienced by children especially when both languages are underdeveloped). Certain children may also experience an identity

crisis and conflict, especially for those born in another country. Moreover, the amount of effort expended by parents in raising bilingual children should not be underestimated, especially when expectations for success are too high. Although many people believe that most NCS parents do not have high expectations regarding their children's academic performance, the NCS parents may have high expectations in other aspects. The NCS parents may have relatively high expectations towards the success of sons rather than of daughters. They may also expect their children to follow their original customs (eg, dress codes, eating habits, religion and language). Therefore, many NCS parents insist on speaking their own language at home or sending their children to school in their home country for a few years so that they can learn their mother tongue. However, both the mother tongue and the host language may become underdeveloped because both languages are being rejected by the other group of people.

2.2.2 Learning a Second Language

Second-language learning typically begins once children have grasped their mother tongue. People may need to learn a second language when they attend school or move to a country with a different host language. At this time, learners should have already acquired a certain level of proficiency in their first language. Fromkin (2007) indicated that the native language influences second-language acquisition because of the 'transfer of grammatical rules' from their native language. Second-language learners may then speak with a similar accent as they transfer the phonemes, phonological rules or syllable structures of their native language to the second language. Fromkin (2007) provided the following example: Japanese speakers cannot distinguish between the 'l' sound (in light) and the 'r' sound in 'right', because Japanese does not contain an 'r' phonic. However, although the construction of L2 grammar is influenced by L1 grammar, Fromkin (2007) also reported that a strong creative component exists in L2 acquisition. The mother tongue of most NCS students does not have the characteristics of

modern Chinese (eg, ‘basically using monosyllabic characters’, ‘tonal’, ‘less morphological changes’, ‘obligatory use of classifiers’ and ‘the toleration of only single consonants’). Furthermore, no [f] sound exists in Burmese, Nepalese, Indonesian and Tagalog; and there is no distinction between aspirated and non-aspirated sounds in Indonesian and Tagalog, and the languages of South Asia do not have ‘tones’. Affected by their standard language, NCS students may exhibit habitual errors in the process of learning Chinese which might constitute different aspects of learning difficulties (EDB 2008, pp. 51–52).

Although one popular belief indicates that it is easier to learn a second language if it is similar to the first language because it is easier to revert to the rules of the first if they share many similarities, Banks (2007) argued that this may not be true. Therefore, multicultural teachers must learn the cross-linguistic similarities and differences, including the different aspects of language (eg, phonemes, spelling, writing systems and sociolinguistic rules; Wong, Fillmore, and Snow 2000). Most Chinese language teachers in Hong Kong are trained to teach local students, who learn Chinese as their first language. Therefore, Chinese language teachers in multiethnic schools must be well trained, because NCS students are learning Chinese as their second language. If more NCS students are admitted into mainstream schools, then ‘teaching Chinese as a second language’ would become a prerequisite of all Chinese language teachers in Hong Kong.

The age of learners is usually considered a key factor for success in second-language learning. Fromkin (2007) considered age to be a critical factor in second-language acquisition. A younger person is more likely to achieve L2 acquisition. Banks (2007) stated that although many people believe that younger learners are usually better language learners because they exhibit advantages in terms of pronunciation and accent, other researchers (eg, Snow and Hohle 1978) challenged the notion that adolescents and adults learn at a faster rate compared with children because their quantity and quality of exposure to the second language is more

critical than is the age of the students. Garcia (2009) indicated that in formal educational settings, adults can use their metalinguistic skills in a first language more efficiently and learn more quickly compared with younger learners. Johnstone (2002) found that with appropriate pedagogies, motivation and support, students could learn a language successfully at any age and stage, although older learners were less likely to reach the levels of a native speaker. Hence, it remains uncertain whether placing young NCS children in mainstream kindergartens or primary schools is necessary for them to acquire Chinese language proficiency, as this requires sacrificing the opportunity to grow up with friends from the same background.

Many theories of language learning posit that a personal desire to learn a language can be the most powerful factor (Tokuhamma-Espinosa 2001). This motivation can be self-motivation when someone wants to learn a new language because of personal goals (eg, wanting to play with children in another language). Schumann (1977) stated that people learn differently and have different levels of success depending on the value that the language holds for them, and this also depends on their relationship to speakers of that language. The ‘sink-or-swim’ method or ‘total immersion’ (ie, when people are immersed into another language and either use it or ‘drown’) has a strong motivational foundation in learning Chinese for NCS students in Hong Kong. However, motivation comes in two forms: positive and negative. The NCS students may work hard to learn the language to survive, but they concurrently experience a high level of stress. To utilise positive motivation, a happy learning environment is of utmost importance. Ki 謝錫金、祁永華、岑紹基 (2012) found that certain NCS learners who arrived in Hong Kong at 13 to 14 years of age could grasp the Chinese language successfully within 3 to 4 years because of their hard work and strong support from their family. By contrast, many Hong Kong-born NCS students could only speak and listen to daily-use

Cantonese, without having any ability in reading and writing the Chinese language because of a lack of confidence and learning goals.

Another theory of second-language learning is the input hypothesis. Krashen (1985) indicated that language learning consists of specific sequences and stages. Therefore, learners must be provided with comprehensible input that is immediately beyond their current level in natural and communicative situations. Interactionist theory, proposed by Lightbown and Spada (1999), emphasised that both input and output are crucial for language learning. Therefore, conversational interactions between speakers are critical in the process of language learning. However, NCS students in Hong Kong do not have many opportunities to speak Cantonese after school, because their parents tend to talk to them in their mother tongue. Young children do not engage in considerable interaction with the local community, and thus, the only place they can use the second language is at school. If the majority of classmates in their school are not Chinese, they do not need to engage in conversation with local Chinese students. Unless their schools deliberately arrange for more opportunities for NCS students to communicate with local students and the people in the local community, opportunities for practising Cantonese are limited.

Moreover, many NCS students of various ages arrive to Hong Kong, and some even arrive when they are teenagers. Unlike local students, who learn Chinese as their first language, NCS teenagers are learning Chinese as their second or even third language. When learners have passed their developmental stage, the plasticity of their vocal systems is relatively lower, and they may not grasp non-native pronunciations easily (EDB 2008, p. 36). In addition, their ability to imitate and memorise is not as strong as it is for early children. Compared with young children, older students may feel shame when they make mistakes in pronunciation and grammar because of a higher sense of self-esteem. Therefore, how to enhance the ‘quantity and quality of exposure to the second language’ as well as the motivation to learn

the language is critical. In most cases, a second-language learner constructs the language actively through comparisons and actual usage. Second-language acquisition typically involves undergoing a silent stage, an imitation stage, and an interlanguage stage. This means that learners absorb vocabulary ‘silently’ before they ‘imitate’ idiomatic phrases, and after a certain period, they express themselves in an ‘interlanguage’ that is a mix between their mother tongue and the target language (EDB 2008, p. 36). After practicing for a longer period, learners may eventually grasp the target language. The courage and effort of the learners, as well as the support and toleration of others, are key to attaining success in learning. The Curriculum Development Council recommended in the ‘Supplementary Guide to the Chinese Language Curriculum for NCS Students’ that different learning and teaching strategies be adopted for local students who are learning Chinese as their mother tongue and for NCS students who are learning Chinese as a second language.

In addition, when learning a second language in schools, certain scholars have noted that a distinction is required between learning a language ‘socially’ and learning it ‘academically’ (Cummins 1981, Hakuta, Butler, and Witt 2000, 2001). If the purpose of learning a second language is for daily communication with locals, the focus on speaking and listening in the language suffices. However, if the second language must be used academically (perhaps in higher education or the labour market), the ability to read and write gains even more importance. Learning a new language academically is a lengthy process which requires approximately 7 to 10 years (Cummins 1984), but obtaining conversational proficiency in a new language requires only 1 to 5 years (Banks 2007, p. 315). Therefore, learning a language academically is considerably more difficult which explains why many NCS students can speak Cantonese fluently, but their Chinese reading and writing skills remain weak. A number of later-generation NCS students born in Hong Kong actually expect to obtain the competency of using the Chinese language academically because they need to continue their

study in a university and find a senior post in the labour market, where this competency is of paramount importance.

2.2.3 Difficulties in Learning Chinese

Both the spoken and written forms of Chinese are difficult to learn. Unlike English words which contain one or more syllables, all Chinese characters are monosyllabic. Certain characters must be grouped together to form meaningful words, and various combinations may result in completely different meanings, and thus, knowing the meaning of individual words cannot aid the reader in understanding a phrase or a sentence. Moreover, many four-word Chinese idioms and jargons are commonly used in daily conversation. Without being familiar with the cultural background, history or folktales, using and understanding these idioms and jargons accurately is difficult. Moreover, Chinese is tonal, and the pronunciation of the various tones produces different words and meanings. The local Chinese can typically use the correct tones naturally without having to learn the tones, but new learners usually encounter many difficulties in pronunciation because they use the wrong tones. Furthermore, a classifier must be used between a numeral and a noun in Chinese (eg, in Chinese we say ‘three 隻 [classifier] cats’, instead of only ‘three cats’), and the use of a wrong classifier evokes laughter and can be embarrassing. The first languages used by NCS students in Hong Kong are mainly Urdu, Nepali, Hindi and English which do not have these characteristics, and therefore, NCS students commit habitual errors in learning Chinese (EDB 2008).

For written Chinese, the ‘square characters’ differ entirely from the alphabet languages worldwide. The concepts of ‘stroke’ and ‘component’ in the Chinese language are difficult for NCS students to grasp, and they usually regard the characters as pictures, and thus, writing problems (eg, an incorrect position of the strokes or confusion with the components) are commonplace (EDB 2008). Many Chinese language teachers insist that students learn the

correct stroke order, so that the characters can be written beautifully. Professor Kao (1986) conducted numerous studies on Chinese calligraphy by using psychological principles, and discovered an integration of the mind, the whole body, and character that were interwoven in the writing process. The cognitive planning, organising and processing of the visuospatial patterns of the character are executed. Hence, Chinese character-writing activates cognitive functions because the writing activity constitutes the reproduction, restoration and processing of the visual perception. Therefore, helping NCS students write Chinese characters in the proper stroke order is necessary.

Moreover, Kwan (2012) argued that Chinese language teachers typically speak too fast for NCS students to be able to follow. The ‘rate of speech’ of the three Chinese language teachers recorded in their Primary 1 lessons ranged from 174 to 282 words per minute, and thus, certain words had been ‘swallowed’. Native Chinese teachers may not even be aware that they are speaking too fast. Kwan關之英 (2012) recommended that teachers speak more slowly, and with greater stress and repetition. The selected vocabularies should be simple and concrete. Sentences should be short, simple and direct. However, when teaching a class including both local Chinese and NCS students, the teacher may experience difficulties in adjusting the speed to suit the abilities of all the students. In addition, it is a challenge for the teacher to adopt suitable teaching materials and pedagogy to cater to the diversified needs of both the local students and NCS students in the same class.

2.2.4 Language Immersion

Regarding the difficulties of learning the Chinese language, educators in language learning have recommended the approach of ‘language immersion’, in which the use of the learner’s second language is the major medium of classroom instruction. Some studies have evidenced that it can improve the language proficiency of the second language effectively. The studies on language immersion learners conducted in Canada have shown that early immersion

students ‘lag behind’ their monolingual peers ‘for the first few years only’, and can catch up to their peers later. Language immersion classes can currently be found throughout the United States because of the growing population of second-language learners and the success of such programmes. Three main types of immersion programmes are available in the United States: total immersion, partial immersion and two-way bilingual immersion. In total immersion, learners avoid speaking their mother tongue, and use only the target language. The purpose of total immersion is to enable students to communicate fluently in the target language by the end of the academic year (Center for Applied Linguistics 2011). In partial immersion, the time used in the target language may vary according to the situation, and nearly half of the time a foreign language must typically be used (Center for Applied Linguistics 2011). Two-way bilingual immersion programs emphasise learning both languages for fostering biliteracy and bilingualism, desirable cross-cultural attitudes, as well as behaviors in academic achievements (Cao 2013).

In Hong Kong, schools which admit a large number of NCS students use English as the medium of instruction in nearly all the subjects. Even in Chinese language lessons, English is used to assist with teaching, because the majority of students in Chinese language lessons are NCS students, and the students from various countries frequently rely on their own mother tongue in student–student interactions. Therefore, many languages are used in the classroom. Kwan關之英 (2012) recommended that total immersion be adopted in a second-language learning classroom. This means that students should be encouraged to use only Chinese in Chinese language lessons, and teachers can use the following pedagogies for promoting effective learning and teaching (Kwan關之英 2012):

- Provide a wide range of external support (eg, body language, gestures and facial expressions);
- Deliberately use clear and specific classroom instructions in lessons;

- Repeat and summarise the instructions frequently;
- Associate the “unknown” from “known”, unfamiliar from familiar, and new knowledge from previous knowledge;
- Utilise a wide range of teaching aids (eg, images and videos);
- Organise activities which students can experience using all five senses;
- Consistently review students’ level of understanding; and
- Identify and correct student errors without offering criticism.

Multiethnic schools are presented with a dilemma when contemplating the use of only Chinese in all Chinese language lessons, because some new NCS arrivals are completely unfamiliar with the language. Therefore, partial immersion must be adopted to cater to the language needs of students. Furthermore, because English has been adopted as the medium of instruction for the other subjects, the Chinese language environment may not be as rich as it is in mainstream schools. Therefore, if language immersion is claimed as a successful approach to teaching NCS students the Chinese language, they should be encouraged as early as possible to study in mainstream schools, where Chinese is mainly used as the medium of instruction. The Equal Opportunity Commission (2011, p. 7) also recommended that the EDB ‘provide immersion programmes for EM students at the earliest possible stage, preferably at the kindergarten level.’

However, the question concerns whether NCS students can learn Chinese effectively through immersion in mainstream schools, especially in a secondary school. Because ‘conversational interaction’ is key in language learning, two-way communication between NCS students and local students as well as communication between NCS students and teachers have positive effects on the learning outcome. However, according to a 2012 survey conducted by Unison Hong Kong, only 68% to 70% of local students accepted NCS students in their schools and

classrooms. Furthermore, the racial and ethnic stereotypes of teachers also affect student learning motivation. A 2005 joint study conducted by Hong Kong Polytechnic University and Unison Hong Kong reported that students were unwilling to learn from teachers who exhibited negative attitudes towards them. Therefore, the occurrence of sufficient interactions between local students and NCS students as well as teachers adopting appropriate expectations and strategies are crucial to promoting effective learning.

2.3 Research Objectives and Research Questions

When I was working at the EDB as a contract school reviewer, I had to conduct school visits and lesson observations in different types of schools. I was impressed by the multicultural learning environment in the multiethnic schools. I also had the opportunity to observe how NCS students learn Chinese when I was a volunteered assistant to a Chinese language teacher in the classroom. I found the learning difficulties of NCS students and the challenges of the teachers. I decided to conduct a research in a multiethnic school to investigate the education for ethnic minorities.

This study aims to examine two major challenges facing NCS students as well as the strategies adopted by a professional development school (PDS) to cope with these challenges:

- Learning the Chinese language; and
- Cultural integration on campus.

2.3.1 Importance of the Chinese Language in Hong Kong

Language gains further importance because of its political implications. Potts (2003, p. 190) indicated that the language used in schools has a specific purpose: political unity. After the handover to China in 1997, the EDB promoted the policy of using Chinese as the medium of instruction in most schools, except for the 114 schools which had fulfilled several strict

criteria⁶, and therefore, were permitted to use English as the medium of instruction. In addition, the Hong Kong government immediately included the use of Chinese as the official language in courts after the handover because of the significance of Chinese language in Hong Kong. Furthermore, the rapid economic development of China further promoted the importance of the Chinese language in communicating with business enterprises in China in the working environment. Therefore, most universities and business enterprises as well as the Hong Kong government require that applicants fulfill the basic requirement of having a good command of written and spoken Chinese. The ability to read and write in formal Chinese is a necessity for the new generation.

In Hong Kong, nearly all local secondary schools follow the mainstream Chinese language curriculum developed by the EDB, so that students can sit for the public examination which determines if they can advance to a university. However, many schools which admit a larger number of NCS students usually develop a simplified school-based curriculum to cater to the needs of their students. However, because the Chinese language curriculum emphasises developing the four basic language skills (ie, reading, writing, listening and speaking), in addition to enriching student knowledge on Chinese culture and literature, learning Chinese is of an unimaginable difficulty for non-native Chinese speaking students. Although many NCS children who are born in or have lived in Hong Kong for many years may listen and speak Cantonese as fluently as do the local students, but reading and writing in Chinese remains difficult for them. Moreover, under the new academic system established in 2009, the Chinese curriculum for secondary students has become more difficult because knowledge on Chinese culture and literature (eg, poems and classical Chinese) is required. Many local students cannot attain a pass for this ‘deathly paper’ in the HKDSE examination (HKET.net

⁶ The three prescribed criteria are ‘student ability’, ‘teacher capability’ and ‘support measures for schools’.

2013, Apply Daily 2014, dbc 2015). Learning the Chinese language becomes a major challenge for NCS secondary students.

Moser (2011) indicated that Chinese was significantly more difficult to learn than any of the other 30 or so major world languages, because the writing system was not highly phonetic. The sound does not provide the listener with a hint on how the character is to be written and pronounced.

Asim from Pakistan had a bad feeling regarding the education system in Hong Kong. 'I can understand the curriculum if you teach me in my language...' Students are facing difficulties only because of the language. An easy level of the Chinese curriculum should be offered (Caritas 2007).

2.3.2 Cultural Integration on Campus

The present challenge involves accepting diverse populations within national borders and living in harmony within them (Dominelli 2010). According to a 2005 joint survey conducted by Hong Kong Polytechnic University and Unison Hong Kong, more than 60% of respondents who were young NCS persons aged 14 to 24 years had experienced racial discrimination in public transport, public spaces and neighbourhoods in Hong Kong. Many NCS students (50%) considered making friends with ethnically Chinese Hongkongers to be only slightly difficult. Amongst the 167 respondents who found it difficult to make friends with locals, the majority (69.5%) reported that it was because they did not know Cantonese. Language is a major barrier to social integration. Difficulties in learning Chinese affect communication between NCS students and their local counterparts. In another survey conducted by Hong Kong Polytechnic University, a majority of NCS students found it difficult to make friends with locals. Most ethnic minority students had friends who were mainly non-Chinese, and they acknowledged that they did not have many Chinese friends.

They could recall only one or two close Chinese friends. A number of them felt rejection because of their ethnic background and/or religion.

In addition, many multiethnic schools group NCS students into a single classroom to cater to their special educational needs, particularly in learning Chinese (Ku 2005). They are then separated from the local students, and have fewer opportunities to understand each other. Moreover, the number of Chinese students in multiethnic schools is declining because many Chinese parents do not want to place their children in multiethnic schools. Although Hong Kong is a cosmopolitan city with a major population comprising different nationalities, the locals typically do not accept ethnic minorities from South Asian countries (eg, India, Pakistan and Nepal) as they do Westerners. They are occasionally labeled ‘dirty’, ‘violent’ and ‘criminal’ (Unison 2012). Even NCS people who are born in Hong Kong are rejected as being part of Hong Kong society with entitlement to the same rights and treatments as the local Chinese. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States, many people felt a lack of security in communicating with people from South Asia because many of them were Muslims. Hence, the local Chinese become a minority group in many multiethnic schools.

Many people have recently argued concentrating NCS students in many multiethnic schools constituted a form of discrimination. Therefore, beginning in the 2013/14 academic year, the label ‘designated school’ was no longer used to remove the labeling effect from these schools and from NCS students. This action implied that the arrangement of multiethnic schools was not a sound policy, and many NCS parents began to hesitate whether they should send their children to a multiethnic or mainstream school. The contribution of multiethnic schools in catering to the special needs of NCS students in the past has been neglected. These schools had played a role in promoting harmony in multicultural education in Hong Kong, so that students from different cultural backgrounds could feel accepted and celebrate and respect

each other's culture in school. The EDB may have underestimated the challenges in mainstream schools which are not yet prepared to accept NCS students.

“Living in harmony amongst diverse populations necessitates acceptance and belonging, tolerance, compromises, solidarity and egalitarian values. Understanding the dynamics of oppressive social relations is crucial to living in harmony with others who are different from oneself. Not fearing differences promotes acceptance and tolerance.” (Dominelli 2010).

Cultural integration is an outcome of cultural interaction which cannot occur without intercultural dialogue (Tahir-ul-Qadri 2001). The term ‘integration’ widely refers to ethnic issues (ie, a situation in which groups of people from different cultural backgrounds and holding different beliefs can participate in society without losing their essentially distinct individualities). In multiethnic schools, NCS students are usually allowed to preserve their cultural elements (eg, their dress codes, eating habits and prayer practices). However, cultural interactions may not suffice because local students and NCS students are usually separated in different classes or groups, so that cultural conflict can be prevented and a different medium of instruction can be adopted. Therefore, schools must provide opportunities to place local students and NCS students together outside the classroom. However, cultural interactions may not suffice also in mainstream schools, despite NCS students typically studying in the same class with local students. This is because local students may isolate the small number of NCS students because of language barriers, clashes in personality and other cultural factors which local students consider to be ‘abnormal’.

2.3.3 Research Questions

For my case study, I investigated the learning environment of a multiethnic school for NCS students, and examined whether cultural segregation occurred in the school.

The research questions were as follows:

Learning the Chinese language:

1. What were the major challenges NCS students faced in learning Chinese?
2. How did the multiethnic school help NCS students overcome their difficulties in learning Chinese?

Cultural Integration:

1. How did the multiethnic school develop a suitable environment to promote multicultural integration and harmony in the school?
2. Was cultural segregation or cultural pluralism found in the multiethnic school?

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Case Study

Many researchers adopt quantitative methods for collecting data from ethnic minorities. Participants are only required to respond to a number of 'multiple-choice questions' in English questionnaires, and no direct contact with ethnic minorities is required. This may restrict the rate of return of questionnaires from ethnic minorities who are proficient in English, and only a broad overview can be drawn from multiple-choice responses. The present study adopted the qualitative approach because personal experiences and perspectives can be determined while engaging in direct contact with both teachers and students. The case study was conducted because 'how' and 'why' questions could be asked, and could present the reader with a 'case situation as a unique and holistic entity' (Patton 1990, p. 387).

Although the case study was criticised as a 'weak' methodology (Stark and Torrance 2005) because of a lack of generalisability to wider populations, Thomas (2010) indicated that understanding the social based on generalisation is 'problematic and unattainable' (p. 577). In addition, Mackenzie and Knipe (2006) confirmed that the case study 'provides a means for considerations of trustworthiness, such as triangulation of multiple forms of data from multiple sources.' Miles (2015) also indicates that the case study is a method that aims for complexity in the account and analysis of practice which is itself complex. Miles (2015) also states that 'decisions are made that have implications for the generation and analysis of data and, ultimately, the meaningful, ethical and effective representation of the case.'

When choosing a school for my research, I attended a number of seminars on sharing good practices for providing quality education to non-Chinese-speaking (NCS) students. The school which shared good practices in the seminar was a professional development school (PDS) in primary education. The Education Bureau (EDB) invited a few schools with

exemplary teaching practices in a particular learning area to be a PDS. The rationale is to form ‘learning communities’ where partner schools can participate in different activities including collaborative lesson planning and observations, teaching experiences and resource sharing as arranged by PDSs. However, when I approached the school, the principal rejected my request because the teachers were extremely busy that academic year. When searching for another PDS on the EDB homepage, I found three PDSs in primary education, and only one PDS in secondary education for NCS students. Because I had taught in a secondary school for over 18 years, and was therefore, more familiar with this learning environment, I chose the only secondary PDS available for my research. I found that the PDS in secondary education was under the same School-sponsoring body (SSB) as the secondary school I had studied in. Based on my understanding of the SSB mission, and because of my interest in how one PDS can assume the heavy burden of providing support to all secondary schools which admit NCS students, I approached the case-study school, and the principal welcomed my participation for helping this less privileged group of students. Because the school was the only secondary PDS specialised in teaching NCS students, the methodology of the case study was chosen to investigate its unique situation in supporting the learning and teaching of NCS students.

3.2 Data Collection

Data were collected through the following methods: (a) performing document analysis; (b) conducting an observation of lessons and activities; and (c) engaging in a discussion with teachers and students.

Documents and data on the school Webpage (ie, school plans and annual reports, school programmes and activities as well as subject information and student achievement) were examined to identify other critical issues, so that a more holistic overview based on the perspective of the school management team and subject levels could be obtained.

List of Documents

3-year School Plan 2012–2015

Annual School Plan 2013/14

School Annual Report 2013/14

Chinese Language Subject Work Plan 2014/15

Chinese Language Teaching Guide (NCS classes) 2013/14

Chinese Language Teaching Guide (Local students) 2013/14

Chinese Language Teaching Scheme 2013/14

Schedule of Activities Organised by the Chinese Language Panel

School-based Teaching Materials

School Calendars 2012/13 and 2013/14

News reports from the following sources were also analysed:

- Hong Kong News on 1 July 2014
- Headline on 11 August 2014
- Asia Pacific Daily on 14 October 2014
- Wen Wei Po on 10 November 2015
- Asia Pacific Daily on 6 April 2016

I conducted an observation of two Chinese language lessons and one Liberal Studies lesson, and engaged in post-observation sharing with teachers and educators from the EDB. Through on-site direct experience, a more comprehensive perspective can be attained. I also observed certain school activities including the morning assembly, recess and sports day to examine regular school life and the activities of participants.

Table 1: Dates of Visit to School

<u>Date</u>	<u>Observation of Lessons/Activities</u>
8 Nov 2013	Chinese Language Lesson (video)
3 Dec 2013	Liberal Studies Lesson and Post-observation sharing with teachers and educators
3 Jan 2014	Morning Assembly and Recess
23 Jan 2014	Sports Day
28 Mar 2014	Chinese Language Lesson and Post-observation sharing with teachers and educators

I also held meetings and interviews with the principal and the teachers of the four core subjects: Chinese, English, Mathematics and Liberal Studies. Interviews involved one guidance and discipline teacher as well as a career teacher. Seven teachers were interviewed so that the perspectives of different teachers could be determined. The individually conducted interviews were arranged and spanned approximately 30 to 60 minutes each.

Table 2: List of Interviews with Teachers and School Principal

<u>Teacher</u>	<u>Subject taught/Duties</u>
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T1	Chinese Language
T2	English Language
T3	Mathematics
T4	Liberal Studies
T5	Guidance teacher
T6	Career master, Guidance teacher, teaching Moral Education and LS
T7	Principal

I held two focus group meetings for Secondary 1 students, two focus group meetings for Secondary 4 students and four focus group meetings with Secondary 6 students, with three individual interviews with 2 local Chinese students and 1 NCS student who had been awarded the 2013 award for ‘Outstanding Newcomer’. Therefore, 38 NCS students and 5 ethnically Chinese local students were interviewed. The focus-group interview was adopted not only because it is a highly efficient qualitative data-collection technique targeting a larger number of participants, but it also provides a number of quality controls in data collection in that participants tend to provide checks and balances on each other that filter out false or extreme views during the interview. (Patton 1990). The combination of students in the eight group interviews is shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Nationality of Students in the 8 focus-group interviews

	Secondary 1		Secondary 4		Secondary 6			
	Group	Group	Group	Group	Group	Group	Group	Group

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Pakistani	P1 P2 P3	P1 P2	P1 P2	P1 P2	P1 P2 P3		P1 P2	
Nepalese		P4	P3	P3	P4	P1 to P6	P3 P4	P1 P2
Filipino	P4	P5		P4			P5	
Vietnamese	P5		P4					
Thai		P6						
Colombiana	P6							
Indian			P5					
British			P6					
Chinese		P7			P5		P6	
TOTAL	6	6	6	4	5	6	6	2

English was mainly used in the interviews with NCS students. When engaged in discussions with NCS students born in or residing in Hong Kong for a long period, Cantonese was occasionally used to discern their proficiency in speaking and listening skills. Cantonese was mainly used when interviewing local students and teachers. Additional probing questions were asked to collect more in-depth explanations. The interviews were tape-recorded after

receiving the consent of the participants, so that more attention could be directed towards the participants' needs and cues.

Data analysis was an ongoing process throughout the 2013/14 and 2014/15 academic years. It was done between data collection. The data from the examination of schools documents was analyzed first. Useful data was highlighted and categorized under different headings in the data file. Enquiry questions were set to dig into the details and rationale of the plans and strategies described in the school documents. The enquiry questions were asked during the interviews with students and teachers. Transcripts of the recordings were made immediately after the interviews. The findings were placed into rows and columns in the excel table which contained headings of major questions asked during the interviews. Coded words such as 'Chinese language', 'culture', and 'mainstream' were written in data analysis form. The data collected from the semi-structured interviews were analysed and transcribed to identify the major categories. Immediate comparison and summary were made to find out what results were significant to the research questions via the excel functions. Important differences were highlighted during comparison and further questions would be asked in the following interviews to obtain additional insight from the data collected in the previous interviews. The constant comparative method of data analysis was used to generate and verify the theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967). This method was used to simultaneously code and analyse the data to generate a proposition (Taylor and Bogdan 1984).

Cross-interview analysis was conducted to summarise the concepts expressed in the interviews by different stakeholders to enhance validity. Therefore, the post-triangulated findings are presented holistically in Chapter 4. This helped with the comparison and cross-checking for consistency in the information derived through various means, including 'comparing observational data with interview data' and 'comparing the different viewpoints expressed by the participants, including the views of the teachers, NCS students, and local

students (Patton 1990, p. 467). By continually comparing specific incidents in the data, I could refine the related concepts, identified their properties, explored their relationships with one another, and integrated them into a coherent theory (Taylor and Bogdan 1984). The process of condensing the data was done at the latter stage to select useful and relevant information from the raw data for my presentation.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

4.1 The Case Study School⁷

4.1.1 Mission and Challenge of Case Study School

The school was founded in 1977 was one of the 13 aided schools founded by a Catholic sponsoring body. The school-sponsoring body was founded in 1953 with the primary purpose of offering relief and rehabilitation services to the poor and distressed. It continued to serve the community by offering a wide range of services, including education (from pre-primary education to tertiary education), social services, medical care and hospitality). The mission of the school sponsoring body was to ensure that children received equal educational opportunities by providing whole-person education for students with various abilities and aptitude types, so that they could engage in studies and career development, thus becoming responsible and moral citizens. Therefore, the schools aimed to provide quality education to children who were underprivileged and disabled in the last few decades. When opportunities for further studies were limited in the 1980s, the schools acted as technical or prevocational schools which provided various practical subjects for students preparing for a career after completing Secondary 5. However, parents labeled them as schools for lower achievers who could not enter university, and hence, academically bright students chose not to study there. These schools have since assumed responsibility over teaching the ‘lowest banding’ students. When the manufacturing industry in Hong Kong declined in the 1990s, schools became ordinary grammar schools, instead of technical or prevocational schools. The schools continued to admit most ‘Band 3’ (the lowest band in terms of academic performance) students, because many parents still regarded these schools as the last priority in their choice.

⁷ The information in this section was derived chiefly from the year plan and annual report on the school Website.

The number of students declined when the birth rate dropped significantly after the Asian financial crisis in 1997.

The case study school is located in a less privileged district. When free education for non-Chinese-speaking (NCS) students from lower economy classes was required, since 2000, the school assumed responsibility and became a designated school in 2007/08. It offered a local secondary curriculum for students from different ethnic backgrounds, including Nepalese, Pakistani, Indonesian, Indian, Filipino, Vietnamese, Thai, American, Australian, British, and German students. English was then selected as the medium of instruction in the school because some of these students (eg, Indians and Filipinos) spoke English.

The school successfully attracted numerous NCS students. However, the number of local Chinese students has since decreased rapidly, with no local Chinese student admitted for the 2010/11 academic year. To attract more local Chinese students for a more balanced and inclusive environment, the school began to reposition itself as a public international school in the community. As English was adopted as the major medium of instruction, a number of local and mainland Chinese students were successfully drawn to the English school environment, and chose to study in the school the following year. At present, up to 15 ethnic minorities are attending the school. In accordance with the annual report of the school, the class structure for the 2013/14 academic year is shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Class Structure of the School in 2013/14

Level	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	TOTAL
No of Classes	3	3	3	3	3	3	18
Local students	20	17	11	0	9	13	70

NCS students	20	34	29	72	55	55	265
TOTAL	40	51	40	72	64	68	335

Each form had three classes. The total number of students for the 2013/14 academic year was 335, comprising 79% NCS students and 21% local students. The number of local students in Secondary 4 was 0, because no local student was admitted in Secondary 1 for the 2010/11 academic year. After the hard work of the school over the past 3 years, the number of students increased, with the local and NCS students comprising 50% each of the total student population in the 2013/14 academic year.

While accumulating experience teaching NCS students for a few years, the Education Bureau (EDB) invited the school to become a professional development school (PDS) in December 2012, so that it could provide support to other schools which admit NCS students for 3 years, from 2013 to 2015. The school organised regular discussions, lesson observations and sharing, as well as individual enquiries throughout the year.

4.1.2 Curriculum

The case study school offered a local secondary curriculum for students from different ethnic backgrounds (eg, Filipino, Nepalese, Pakistani, Indian, Chinese and Western students). The school adopted English as the main medium of instruction.

The curriculum of the school for the 2013/14 academic year is shown in Table 5.

Table 5: The curriculum of the School in 2013/14

Junior Secondary (S1-S3)

Taught in Chinese	Chinese Language and Basic Chinese, Ethics and Religious Studies
Taught in English	English, Mathematics, Integrated Science, Liberal Studies, Music, Physical Education, Today's Business, Visual Arts, Moral Education, Innovative Computer
Chinese/English by class or by group	Liberal Studies, Chinese Language

Senior Secondary (S4-S6)

Taught in Chinese	Chinese Language HKDSE/GCSE/GCE, Chinese History
Taught in English	English, Mathematics, Liberal Studies, Biology, Chemistry, Tourism and Hospitality Studies, Business, Accounting and Financial Studies, Information and Communication Technology, Physical Education, Visual Arts, Combined Science, Economics, Applied Learning (Aviation Studies), Japanese, Urdu
Chinese/English by class or by group	Liberal Studies, Chinese Language

The Three Core Subjects

The three subjects of Chinese, English and Mathematics have been core subjects in Hong Kong for a long period. To cater to the needs of NCS students in learning Chinese, the school developed a school-based Chinese language programme with the cooperation of the

University of Hong Kong. The discussion on teaching and learning Chinese is elaborated upon in Chapter 5.

Regarding another core subject (ie, English), because students were typically proficient in this subject, the school also incorporated an international curriculum (eg, GCE/IGCSE and the BBC Pronunciation Resources Pack) into regular English lessons, so that students who were more proficient could also attain other internationally recognised qualifications other than HKDSE. Moreover, the teachers organised various courses, programmes and competitions (eg, Writing Enhancement Course, Debating Course, Drama Training and Performance as well as the Interhouse English Quiz Contest) to help the students excel. A student team was trained as English ambassadors to assist with various English activities and programmes as well as to promote reading to students from neighbouring primary schools. English-Speaking Day, an English-speaking café and English Week which includes a series of activities and competitions were also established to create a pleasant and joyful learning environment for both Chinese and NCS students.

For Mathematics, English was adopted as the medium of instruction for NCS students. To cater to their needs, the school purchased a large quantity of English mathematics books to encourage self-learning. A number of mathematics games from different countries were introduced, and game competitions (including games such as Sudoku and Rummikub) were organised to arouse student interest in learning mathematics and to enhance their logical thinking.

New Core Subject: Liberal Studies

Liberal Studies is a new core subject under the new academic structure. A large proportion of the curriculum emphasises the critical judgment of current issues in Hong Kong as well as the historical development of mainland China. The two critical modules ‘Hong Kong Today’ and

‘Modern China’ (of all six modules) address numerous historical and current issues pertaining to Hong Kong and China. The Liberal Studies teachers (T4 and T6) indicated that the lack of knowledge in Chinese culture affected student learning for this subject, because students were required to explore the issues from different perspectives, including from economic, social, cultural, political and environmental perspectives. NCS students experienced difficulties in understanding the background and nature of the issues concerning the origins of Chinese culture and social practices. Local students typically performed better compared with NCS students in the HKDSE examination, because they were more familiar with the current issues of Hong Kong and mainland China.

The teachers (T4 and T6) also indicated that for the ‘Hong Kong Today’ module, NCS students from other countries may not be concerned with issues concerning Hong Kong which was regarded only as their temporary home, and they also had poor knowledge regarding mainland China, where most of them had never been. When discussing current issues, especially those related to both Hong Kong and mainland China (eg, should live chickens resent from mainland China to Hong Kong after detecting H5N9 virus in the farms in China) and to political development (eg, Occupy Central and elections), NCS students encountered many difficulties in understanding the historical background, and often confused the two places. ‘Modern China’ was considered the most difficult module of the subject for NCS students, because it was related to Chinese history and traditions. Another module, ‘Personal Growth’, involved life values which differed completely from those practised in their home country. For example, women still held an extremely low social status in some South Asian countries, and planned marriages involving young girls was still commonplace. Students may experience difficulties criticising certain social phenomena from a broader perspective.

Regarding helping NCS students excel in Liberal Studies, the teachers (T4 & T6) indicated that it was not easy to help them understand the background and impacts of current issues. Teachers had to connect the issues to their own experiences (eg, McDonald's was commonly used as a scenario for case studies as most NCS students would dine out in McDonald's Restaurant), so that students could easily express certain opinions. Students were typically more willing to attempt to or to participate in activities if the topics involved international issues (eg, the ice-bucket challenge) or were closely related to their daily experiences. More than 10% of the teaching materials used in Liberal Studies in this school mainly covered global issues to help the students understand current international affairs. Local and international news were shown regularly during assemblies. When teaching the 'Modern China' module, teachers had to modify the content by simplifying expressions of affectation for the motherland. One teacher (T6) mentioned that teachers could only expect the students to 'know more' about China rather than to 'love' China, unlike certain Hongkongers, who may be proud of the motherland because of China's rapid economic development in the past ten years. Many schools have arranged a study tour to mainland China to provide an authentic experience for their students. For reasons of national security, many Indians and Pakistanis were said to be undergo a relatively strict investigation process to obtain a Chinese visa. The NCS students born outside of Hong Kong could not even attain a travel certificate to China for the school's yearly educational field trip because of their race and/or religion. The school had to contact the legal department in China to resolve this issue. Therefore, the NCS students did not have considerable knowledge regarding China, despite its geographical proximity to Hong Kong. Two teachers (T6 and T7) stated that the Hong Kong government or the EDB was responsible for assisting all NCS students in gaining entry to China for the study tour.

The observed Liberal Studies lesson was well prepared, with clear objectives and an appropriate focus. The two teachers (T4 and the supporting teacher) deliberately chose examples and news from South Asian countries to teach NCS students to write arguments and counterarguments for the topic of 'Economic Globalisation'. The teachers' explanations were systematic and clear, and English was used proficiently as the medium of instruction. The teachers were also friendly and supportive. They had a good rapport with the students, and could establish a harmonious learning atmosphere, where students felt comfortable expressing their views. Good classroom interactions were found between the teachers and students in the observed lesson. Appropriate tasks were also assigned to consolidate student learning. The students were well behaved, and they exhibited a positive learning attitude. In addition, they followed the teachers' instructions adequately, although when opportunities were presented, they showed little confidence in expressing their ideas. To help the students excel further, their critical thinking and independent learning skills were also promoted. During the discussion after my observation of the lesson, the teachers (T4 and other teachers) stated that although the students were active in class and group discussions, they still experienced difficulties elaborating their responses and expressing further examples and exercising critical judgment. The teachers (T4 and other teachers) indicated that it was also difficult for NCS students to comprehend the questions and define the key words. One teacher (T4) expressed concern that because Liberal Studies was one of the four core subjects in the senior secondary curriculum, a fail in this subject would affect their opportunities for further study in university. Therefore, the government was recommended to provide further support to NCS students in learning this subject, not only in learning the Chinese language.

Other Subjects

Apart from offering a range of traditional subjects, the school curriculum was complemented with a wider variety of co-curricular activities, Other Learning Experiences and Applied

Learning courses. To cater to the students from different cultural and educational backgrounds, English was used as the main medium of instruction for NCS students. When asking the teachers why they adopted English—in actuality, also a second language for NCS students—as the medium of instruction, the teachers (T2, T3 and T6) explained that NCS students were typically proficient in English and learned more effectively in English than in Chinese, because most of them used English more often in daily life. However, one teacher (T3) added that it was still difficult for NCS students to obtain good results in certain subjects when more logical thinking was required. Moreover, most NCS students were mainly proficient in speaking and listening in English, and thus, their participation in the lesson was usually good because they could communicate fluently in English. However, their writing skills in representing ideas logically required improvement. Therefore, many NCS students had poor mathematics skills because higher-order thinking is required. In the HKDSE examination, all of the subjects not only involve facts (ie, the lowest level of knowledge) but also include numerous higher-order concepts and theories. Attaining good results is thus not an easy task.

Akin to most mainstream schools which offer the four core subjects and other traditional elective subjects (eg, Biology, Chemistry and Economics), the case study school also offered two additional languages subjects (Urdu and Japanese) to meet the needs of certain NCS students in helping them learn their mother tongue of Urdu, or in helping them prepare for a future career by teaching them Japanese. The school was planning to offer another language subject (ie, French) beginning in the 2014/15 academic year to cater to the needs of a number of NCS students who were from former French colonies. In addition, the students could choose their electives from a number of Applied Learning programmes which were mainly practical subjects (eg, Fundamental Cosmetology and Aviation Studies) which could facilitate the search for future employment for certain NCS students.

4.1.3 Public Examination and Future Prospects for Graduates

Regarding the performance of NCS students of the school in the 2013 HKDSE examination, the career master stated that the percentage of passes in English Language was higher than the average performance in Hong Kong, that the results for Mathematics were below average, and that those for Liberal Studies were close to the average performance. A few NCS students in the school could continue their studies through higher diploma and Associate degree courses in IVE or universities, because the minimum entrance requirement was only five passes in any subjects. He recalled that a Vietnamese student who was presently studying ‘Medical Care’ in IVE had successfully overcome many obstacles to learning both English and Chinese after studying in Hong Kong for 3 years starting from Secondary 3. Although certain students would have liked to join other practical or career-related programmes in postsecondary institutes, their options were limited because most of these programmes were taught in Chinese.

The interviewed 4 groups (Groups E, F, G & H) comprising secondary 6 students sat the 2014 HKDSE examination. Most of them (16 of 19 students) indicated that they wished to continue their study in a university in Hong Kong. Most of them (also 16 of 19 students) stated that they would remain in Hong Kong once they grew up.

Table 6: Intention of S6 students to Further Studies and Stay in HK

Student	Sex	Nationality*	Length of Stay (years)	Wish to study in University in HK? (Y/N)	Will stay in HK or return home
EP1	F	N	7	Y	HK
EP2	M	P	10	Y	HK

EP3	M	P	Born in HK	Y	HK
EP4	M	P	17	Y	HK
EP5	M	C	2	Y	HK
FP1	F	N	Born in HK	Y	HK
FP2	F	N	6	N	HK
FP3	F	N	6	Y	HK
FP4	F	N	2	Y	HK
FP5	F	N	2	Y	HK
FP6	F	N	16	Y	HK
GP1	M	F	Born in HK	Y	Either
GP2	M	C	4	N	Home
GP3	F	N	3	Y	HK
GP4	F	N	Born in HK	N	Overseas
GP5	F	P	4	Y	HK
GP6	F	P	3	Y	HK
HP1	F	N	4	Y	HK
HP2	M	N	Born in HK	Y	HK

* N: Nepalese P: Pakistani F: Filipino C: Chinese

The percentage of passes for all students in the case study school for different subjects in the HKDSE examination in 2014 is listed in Table 7.

Table 7: HKDSE examination Results in 2014

<u>Subject</u>	<u>Passing %</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Passing %</u>
	<u>School/HK</u>		<u>School/HK</u>

Chinese Language	30% /80.1%	Biology	9.1% /88.9%
English Language	78% /77.7%	Travel and Hospitality	22.7% /67.5%
Mathematics	17.2% /79.7%	Visual Art	31.6% /83.6%
Liberal Studies	33.3% /87.5%	Urdu	100% /83.3%
Information and Communication Technology	10%/ 77.2%	Business, Accounting and Financial Studies	10% /88.7%
Chemistry	0% /87.1%	Japanese	0% /88%

Students' performance in the GCSE examination was extremely positive, because 75% of the students attained a Grade A, and the remaining 25% received a Grade B.

Table 8: Further Studies and Careers of S6 graduates in 2014

<u>The further studies and careers of S6 graduates in 2013/14:</u>	<u>No of students</u>
Degree course in local University:	1
Associate degree/Higher Diploma courses in local University:	4
Full-time Training programmes in post-secondary colleges/IVE	10
Overseas studies	0
Get a full-time job	6
Others	47
Total	68

The career master added that more than half of graduates sought employment. Many of them would be employed waiting and bartending in Western restaurants because they could communicate in English with foreign clientele. Certain NCS boys worked on a construction site as shovel controllers (ie, 剗車 and 紮鐵) which provided a higher salary but was not a popular occupation for local people. Certain NCS girls expressed the desire to become flight attendants, and they applied for an Applied Learning course on the airline industry in senior secondary. The Applied Learning course was an elective subject under the new academic structure. It aimed to enable students to understand fundamental theories and concepts through application and practice, and to help them develop their generic skills in authentic contexts (EDB 2014). Students did not need to take the HKDSE examination for this subject; instead, they were awarded an ‘Attained’ or ‘Attained with Distinction’ which were equivalent to Levels 2 and 3, respectively, in the HKDSE examination upon course completion. The courses were more practical and job-related, and students were assessed using continuous evaluations, instead of a single examination. The courses were developed and conducted by the course providers which were post-secondary institutions and extra mural of local universities. The lack of Chinese proficiency restricted these students’ career path, thereby limiting their employment prospects to junior posts in companies or to performing manual labour on construction sites. Although a few of them could secure a post as uniformed personnel (eg, police and customs officers), they felt inferior after the uniforms were taken away. The career master recalled the third NCS policeman in Hong Kong, who reported through the mass media that he had experienced racial discrimination even after becoming a policeman. He stated that he had to check suspects’ identity at work, but he himself was made suspect, because other police officers would check his profile when he was not in uniform after work.

The school principal stated that more departments in the school collaborated to explore career paths for NCS students. In Other Learning Experience lessons, teachers always informed students regarding the diverse roads to further study and job opportunities, and helped them explore their future prospects based on their personality and interest. Alumni were invited to share their experiences with students during lessons. Moreover, the school had run a program with a solicitors' firm to offer opportunities to NCS students to work in the firm during the summer. Eventually, the firm employed two students because of their good performance. Moreover, although the school is said to have attempted to offer a range of Applied Learning courses to senior form students, so that they could secure more career pathways, the choice was limited to a few courses in the service industry because most of the Applied Learning courses were taught in Cantonese. The principal recommended that the EDB provide more support to NCS secondary students, including offering more Applied Learning courses in English.

A majority of the students interviewed claimed that they wished to study in a university in Hong Kong and to remain there once they grow up. The entrance requirement for obtaining '3322'⁸ in the four core subjects for a degree programme in university has become a major obstacle for NCS students because they could not pass the Chinese language test, and also typically exhibited weaknesses in Mathematics and Liberal Studies. Although certain universities have recently claimed that they accept GCSE results in the Chinese language as equivalent to HKDSE results, the students had to attain excellent results in other subjects to secure a place in university.

⁸ According to the entrance requirements for undergraduate programmes as stated on the Webpage of the HK Examination and Assessment Authority, students taking the HKDSE must attain a minimum of Level 3 for the Chinese language and English as well as Level 2 for Mathematics and Liberal Studies (ie, '3322') to meet the minimum requirements to apply for 4-year undergraduate programmes offered by institutions funded by the University Grants Committee.

4.1.4 Discussion

Regarding student performance in the HKDSE examination, students in the case study school were found to have performed well in English Language and Urdu (the passing percentages in these subjects were higher compared with the overall percentage in Hong Kong). Apart from English Language and Urdu, Liberal Studies was the best subject amongst all of them. However, student performance in most subjects was unsatisfactory. Because no NCS student sat the HKDSE examination for Chinese Language, the passing percentage for this subject revealed that only 30% of local students passed this subject. Therefore, it is evident that it was impossible for most NCS students to attain Level 3 results in the HKDSE Chinese Language examination. The HKDSE examination in Hong Kong was in actuality a considerable obstacle for student entrance to university.

The number of EM students attaining a higher level of education is disproportionately low compared with the majority population of local ethnic Chinese (Equal Opportunities Commission 2011).

The situation was exacerbated when the new academic structure commenced in 2009, because it was more difficult for NCS students to obtain their first public examination certificate by attaining a pass in the HKDSE examination than in the HKCE examination in the old academic structure. In the past, many students who could not get very good results in the HKCE examination could still find a job or further study high certificate/diploma courses in post-secondary colleges with a pale pass of the certificate. A certain degree of acceptance and recognition could be obtained after completing Secondary 5. At present, all students were pushed to take part in the more difficult HKDSE examination after completing Secondary 6. Even local Chinese students were unable to catch up with it and chose to continue studies in other countries after completing the junior secondary.

Admissions Requirement for Tertiary Education

In the past, NCS students were not eager to study in universities in Hong Kong, because most of them would return to their own countries for marriage purposes when they grew up. However, more NCS students have recently been hoping to enter university in Hong Kong because they intend to remain in Hong Kong to secure a better standard of living. In this school, more NCS students hoped to enter university, so that they could secure a better career in the future. A number of the students interviewed claimed that this was also the reason their parents brought them to Hong Kong, because their own countries were relatively less developed by comparison.

However, certain teachers (T1, T6 and T7) expressed concern that major challenges awaited them because the basic entry requirement for local universities was to attain 3322 levels in the four core subjects (ie, Level 3 in both Chinese Language and English Language, and Level 2 in both Mathematics and Liberal Studies) in the HKDSE examination which was too difficult for them. First, 2 teachers (T1 and T7) stated that it is almost impossible for NCS students to attain a Level 3 result in Chinese Language. Even many local students found this task difficult. (The percentage of day school candidates obtaining a Level 3 or above in 2014 was only 51.8%). Two teachers (T1 and T7) suggested that another set of examination papers for Chinese Language could be used specifically for second-language learners for the HKDSE examination. In the past, an easier ‘syllabus A’ examination paper was available for English Language for some students to choose from, so that they could obtain a full certificate⁹ in the HKCE examination. In the popular and highly recognised IB Diploma examination, students can presently choose the easier Chinese Language paper for second-language learners. Therefore, using an easier paper for second-language learners can

⁹ A full certificate in the HKCE examination referred to passing in five subjects, including the Chinese language, English language, and mathematics in the examination.

be considered a more realistic and caring approach to catering to the needs of different learners.

To help the NCS students meet university admission requirements, all senior secondary students in the school were required to study the GCSE Chinese Language curriculum for the public examination, because it was ‘accepted’ as meeting the minimum entrance requirements for Chinese Language. Two teachers (T1 and T6) stated that although NCS students do attain a pass in the GCSE examination, it was still difficult to secure a place in university because a number of universities did not actually consider GCSE results to be equivalent to the HKDSE results, because the GCSE in Chinese Language was too easy (equal only to the Primary 4 standard). More capable students were encouraged to sit the more advanced GCE A Level examination which includes a degree of Chinese literacy. NCS students could even choose to study for the local HKDSE examination, but only one student chose sit in for it in the following year.

Securing a place in university is highly competitive, especially for popular subjects. Although certain NCS students may meet the entrance requirement, they might be unable to take a degree course in a local university. According to the annual report published by the HKEAA, the total number of candidates who sat the 2014 HKDSE examination was 78,400. The number of candidates with the best scores in the five subjects, with core subjects at 3322 or better, was approximately 26,000. Candidates who scored less than 20 grade points (eg, obtaining Level 4 in all five subjects) were still unable to secure a place in public-funded and self-financed degree programmes. Instead, they had to apply for sub-degree programmes, such as an associate degree, or higher diploma programmes which were equivalent to approximately 50% of degree programmes, and may present few opportunities for transferring to the second year of degree programmes. The number of places for tertiary education was highly insufficient in meeting the needs of both local and NCS students.

Applied Learning Programmes

Moreover, many NCS students were eager to choose an Applied Learning programme, because their electives which offered a wide range of practical courses provided more opportunities for NCS students to experience different vocational fields, including Creative Studies, Media and Communication, Service and Engineering. The Applied Learning programme which emphasised more hands-on training was highly suitable for NCS students who were more active and outgoing. However, Cantonese was the main medium of instruction for many other subjects, and hence, limited opportunities for NCS students to enrol in those subjects. The EDB could organise more English classes for the Applied Learning programme to meet the increasing needs of NCS students. Nevertheless, the EDB plans to offer two new Applied Learning programmes for the practical use of the Chinese language for NCS students in the 2014/15 academic year. Students who were awarded ‘Attained’ or ‘Attained with Distinction’ would be deemed to have performed at a level comparable to an HKDSE Level 2 or Level 3, respectively, or above (EDB 2014). Because the ‘Attained with Distinction’ result in this Applied Learning programme was recognised as a Level 3 standard in the HKDSE examination under the qualification framework, universities could regard this as meeting the entry requirement of Level 3 in the Chinese Language paper.

Liberal Studies

This new core subject under the new academic structure aimed to develop students’ critical thinking skills, and enhance their social awareness through the study of a wide range of issues. However, the subject generated many concerns and arguments for students and teachers. The curriculum comprises six modules, and they were not independent fields of knowledge, but were interrelated. Students were expected to apply the perspectives developed in one area in

the other areas as well. The ability to integrate knowledge across the six modules was deemed critical. Even local students were concerned that they might not be able to attain good results in this subject. NCS students faced additional challenges, because most of them, especially the new arrivals, lacked knowledge on the history and culture of both Hong Kong and China. The case study school was exerting itself to ensure that this approach became more feasible by emphasising the topics and issues which students were more familiar with, and helping them enhance their understanding on China through study tours. Although the percentage of passes for Liberal Studies was only 33.3% in the school, it was the best-scored subject in the HKDSE, other than English Language and Urdu.

Efforts of Multiethnic Schools over the Past 10 Years

The SSB of the case study school was a non-profit making organisation which has provided a wide range of social services to needy persons in the community over the past few decades. The school was awarded ‘Outstanding School in Caring School Award Scheme 2014’. The EDB also nominated the school as the ‘First Professional Development School’ to provide support to other schools admitting NCS students. Although many NCS students could not continue their studies in university because they could not meet the 3322 entrance requirement in the HKDSE examination, increasingly more NCS students were able to continue studying in a number of other programmes in day schools after completing their secondary education. According to a recent thematic report, the school attendance rates of ethnic minorities has increased over the past 10 years. Specifically, the rates in the age groups of 17–18 years and 19–24 years has increased significantly, from 65.9% and 13.4% in 2001 to 76.2% and 32.8% in 2011, respectively (Thematic Report: Ethnic Minorities 2011). This means that multiethnic schools have made commendable efforts to maximise their opportunities for education advancement over the past 10 years.

Although the NCS students of various ages who are arriving in Hong Kong begin learning Chinese at the same level, they can set their own targets in learning Chinese (ie, obtaining level 3 or above in the HKDSE for those born in Hong Kong and those who are highly interested in learning the Chinese language and culture, and a distinction in GCSE may be fine for late arrivals or transient residents). In the case study school, amongst the 19 Secondary 6 students, 5 of them were born in Hong Kong, 4 students have resided in Hong Kong for over 15 years, one resided in Hong Kong 10 years ago, 6 students have resided in Hong Kong for 4 to 6 years, and the remaining 3 students have only been in Hong Kong for less than 2 years. Therefore, a more focused strategy for catering to the learning needs of NCS students at different stages could be developed. Overall, the opportunities for NCS students to gain access to tertiary education under the new academic system are limited because they cannot meet the Level 3 requirement in the subject of Chinese Language.

Banks (2007) presented five interrelated dimensions for multicultural education when ‘curriculum design’ was one of the key dimensions. Bennett (2003) proposed four similar dimensions for multicultural education, and ‘curriculum reform’ was included. In a multicultural school, the content of the curriculum and whether diversity was consistently included in the topics must be considered. For the case study school, elements of cultural diversity were integrated into most of the subjects in the curriculum. Other than the school-based Chinese language curriculum, the remaining three core subjects and other cultural subjects also included elements of cultural diversity in the curriculum. For example, sports in different countries and cultures were introduced in physical-exercise lessons; heroes or famous persons from different nations were introduced in religious studies lessons to share positive values and attitudes, and music from different countries was also introduced in music lessons. Overall, the school provided a broad and student-oriented multicultural curriculum to cater to the diverse needs of its students. This helped broaden the student knowledge base and

to foster comprehensive development. Apart from offering a good range of subjects, the school curriculum was adequately complemented by a rich variety of co-curricular activities, other learning experiences and Applied Learning courses. Student learning was enriched and extended through a wide range of opportunities for participation in activities, trips and community service.

To cater to the different cultural and educational backgrounds of the students, English was used as the main medium of instruction. A good range of measures had been implemented to address learner diversity by the case study school. Ample resources had been deployed, ability-grouping had been adopted and Chinese learning was organised into split and small groups based on Chinese competency. Commendable efforts were made by the teachers in developing school-based Chinese language curriculum materials and assessments for catering to these students' needs. When selecting teaching materials and designing worksheets, especially those supporting language learning, teachers considered the students' cultural background and ability. The smallness of the class provided a supportive environment for enhanced class interactions, and a more varied pedagogy and learning activities were adopted to meet the needs of the more active NCS students. To support the disadvantaged students, different forms of tutorial classes were suitably organised for certain subjects. To enhance the potential of the more able learners, the school encouraged students to enter competitions and participate in various types of activities.

Job Market for NCS Graduates

The government bears the responsibility of educating children in Hong Kong. If quality education and training is provided to NCS students to help them develop their full potential, they could be valuable assets of society, instead of a burden. The government foresees that because of the low birth rate, the proportion of elderly people in Hong Kong will increase

significantly over the next 20 years. The percentage of working residents will drop to an extremely low percentage, and the ratio of the working population to elderly people has been estimated to drop from 5 to below 2. This means that less than 2 working adults are required to support one elderly person. (Economic Analysis Division Nov 2013) Because NCS parents tend to have more children, these children comprise the new generation who are meant to help Hong Kong progress. Therefore, their education must be considered with care and in a non-discriminatory manner, and planning by the EDB is required. Career and life planning should also be discussed for NCS students. They should not be restricted to accepting low-skill positions because of their ethnicity and lower Chinese proficiency. Employers could be educated to provide equal employment opportunities for NCS students if written Chinese is not a requirement for the position. More schools could also employ NCS assistants and teachers in offices to liaise with NCS parents and provide support to NCS students. A number of NCS social workers could also be trained in addressing issues pertaining to adaptation for NCS people. Because the job requirement in recruitment advertisements for nearly all managerial posts is a university degree, non-degree holders do not have an opportunity for even an interview. More managerial posts, especially in industries in which NCS students excel (eg, restaurants, airlines and engineering) should be offered after they accumulate more work experience in an industry.

4.2 Learning Chinese Language

4.2.1 Diverse Language Support Needs

What was the major challenge for the school in helping NCS students learn Chinese language? Several teachers (T1, T2, T6 and T7) stated that the greatest challenge for the school was catering to the considerable diversity in learning. Regarding listening and speaking, they said that NCS students born in Hong Kong or those who have studied in local primary schools could speak and listen in Cantonese fluently, whereas recent arrivals to Hong Kong could not.

Their length of stay in Hong Kong varied substantially, and has resulted in a considerable degree of diversity in NCS students' Chinese proficiency. Many NCS students had even arrived to Hong Kong in the middle of an academic year, leading to additional challenges for teachers.

The ability to read and write in Chinese was weak for nearly all NCS students to a considerable extent. Irrespective of the length of studying the Chinese language in the local school, their ability in writing and reading was overall relatively weak. According to 2 teachers' (T1 and T7) observations, although certain students in the school had received 6 years of education in a local primary school, they were not up to the Secondary 1 level in their Chinese ability for the school entrance evaluation. A teacher (T1) recalled that a Secondary 1 student who was assessed at only the Primary 4 level in an assessment told him that he had failed every test in Chinese when he was in primary school. This was because these NCS students had not received substantial language support at home because they had spoken in their mother tongue there. They fell further behind when the Chinese language content was switched to a more difficult stage in Primary 4, and were unable to catch up because the school or family did not provide additional support.

In the focus-group interviews, approximately half of the students interviewed claimed that they could speak and listen in Cantonese well, and approximately one-fifth claimed spoke Cantonese poorly. Less than one-third of students claimed that they could read and write well in Chinese, whereas some of them claimed that they were poor at writing. When examining the length of stay in Hong Kong, a relatively large number of students who had stayed in Hong Kong for more than 7 years stated that they were good or even excellent at speaking, listening, reading and writing in Chinese. However, a few students who have stayed in Hong Kong for less than 4 years indicated that they were proficient in Chinese. Excluding Student BP1, EP5 and GP2, all of whom were Chinese, a Colombian student (AP3) claimed that she

was good at speaking and listening; a Vietnamese student (AP1) and a Pakistani student (BP3) claimed that they were proficient in all four aspects; and a Filipino student (AP2) claimed that she was good at listening, reading and writing.

Table 9: Chinese competency in Speaking, Listening, Reading and Writing (in the order of length of stay)

Student	Nationality*	Length of Stay (year)	Speaking	Listening	Reading	Writing
BP1	C	0.25	VG	VG	Fair	Fair
AP3	Co	0.75	Good	Good	Fair	Fair
BP2	F	1	Poor	Poor	Poor	Poor
AP1	V	2	Good	Good	Good	Good
BP3	P	2	VG	Good	Good	Good
CP4	P	2	Fair	Fair	Fair	Poor
EP5	C	2	Good	Good	Fair	Fair
FP4	N	2	Fair	Good	Good	Good
FP5	N	2	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair
CP3	P	3	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair
GP6	P	3	Poor	Fair	Fair	Fair
AP2	F	4	Fair	Good	Good	Good
GP2	C	4	VG	Good	Good	Good
GP5	P	4	Poor	Fair	Fair	Poor
HP1	N	4	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair
CP5	N	5	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair
FP2	N	6	Fair	Fair	Poor	Poor
FP3	N	6	Poor	Fair	Fair	Fair

BP5	N	7	VG	Good	VG	Good
EP1	N	7	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair
DP2	N	10	Poor	Poor	Poor	Poor
EP2	P	10	Good	VG	Fair	Fair
BP6	P	16	Fair	Good	Good	VG
FP6	N	16	Good	VG	VG	Good
EP4	P	17	VG	VG	Good	Good
AP4	P	BORN IN HK	Good	Fair	Fair	Fair
AP5	P	BORN IN HK	VG	Good	Good	Good
AP6	P	BORN IN HK	VG	Good	Good	Good
BP4	T	BORN IN HK	Fair	Fair	Fair	Good
DP1	F	BORN IN HK	Good	Good	Fair	Poor
DP3	P	BORN IN HK	VG	VG	Good	Good
DP4	P	BORN IN HK	Good	VG	Fair	Poor
EP3	P	BORN IN HK	Good	Good	Fair	Fair
FP1	N	BORN IN HK	Good	Good	Fair	Fair
GP1	F	BORN IN HK	Fair	Good	Fair	Poor
GP4	N	BORN IN HK	Poor	Fair	Poor	Poor
HP2	N	BORN IN HK	VG	VG	Good	Good

* C: Chinese Co: Colombiana F: Filipino N: Nepalese P: Pakistani T: Thai V: Vietnamese

A number of newly arrived students may not really understand their Chinese language ability. During a discussion with a Pakistani boy (EP4) who believed he was proficient at reading and writing, he stated that he could easily write a 100-character Chinese essay. Although this was a difficult task for many NCS students, it was a facile task for many local students, even in

primary school. Therefore, the NCS students who believe they can meet the requirements of the school may not know that they are still far behind the standard local Chinese curriculum.

To cater to their learning diversity, the school adopted cross-level grouping to minimise learning diversity. In Chinese language lessons, the classes at the Secondary 2 and Secondary 3 levels as well as those for Secondary 4 and Secondary 5 students were divided into seven smaller classes. This means that NCS students might have Chinese lessons with students who are in another form. With similar abilities and a smaller class, teachers could provide enhanced language support to students. Moreover, a certain percentage of English was used to assist with teaching in the Chinese language lessons; 70% in English in the class for new arrivals, 70% in Cantonese in the class with students holding a basic understanding of Chinese, and 100% Cantonese for the more able class which included NCS students born in Hong Kong and those who have received their primary education in Hong Kong. Moreover, an evaluation was another major concern of NCS students because Chinese Language was a core subject in Hong Kong. The NCS students in the school could choose to sit a different public examination for Chinese Language according to their ability: GCSE (equal to Primary 3–Primary 4 standards), the GCE AS level (equal to the Primary 6 standard), the GCE A level (equal to the Secondary 2–Secondary 3 standards) and Chinese literature (eg, famous essays written by 孔乙己 or 老舍 are included in the syllabus) or even HKDSE examinations. Because local universities bestow equal recognition to the GCE A level as it does for the GCSE, all NCS students were advised to attain GCSE qualifications before considering whether to attempt a more difficult examination. A set of school-based teaching materials for the GCSE examination had been designed to help beginners learn more useful vocabularies, so that they could form sentences later on. After passing the GCSE examination, another set of materials designed by Hong Kong University was adopted for preparing students for the more advanced GCE AL examination. The result of the GCSE examination has been

satisfactory in the past (approximately 98% in current year). A few NCS students sat for the GCE AL examination, all of whom passed. However, in the past 10 years, only one Secondary 5 Pakistani girl (who was born in Hong Kong) had chosen to sit the DSE examination in the coming year. This was because NCS students found the HKDSE examination too difficult.

A majority of teachers (T1, T2, T4, T6 and T7) indicated that the key solution for managing the learning diversity for NCS students was to provide more resources, including financial and human resources. The school could then organise more remedial groups and employ more well-trained teachers to support the students. Although the government had provided additional financial resources, and certain tertiary institutions have recently begun offering related training courses for teachers, 2 teachers (T1 and T7) believed that the problem could not be resolved within a short period of time.

4.2.2 Difficulties and Strategies in Learning Chinese

Why is the Chinese language so difficult for NCS students? According to 3 teachers' (T1, T2 and T7) observations, NCS students encountered three major difficulties encountered in learning Chinese.

The first difficulty concerned inaccurate pronunciations in Cantonese. Students could not pronounce the words in the correct tones, resulting in a different message. If they could not communicate effectively, or if they experienced embarrassment when committing pronunciation mistakes (eg, when 你是「誰」 is pronounced as 你是「水」, as mentioned by T1), they would lose motivation and the confidence to make further attempts and learn. A number of the NCS students interviewed claimed that it was extremely confusing because many Chinese words had similar or identical pronunciations. To solve this problem, the Cantonese tones were taught in school. Teaching NCS students the six tones could help them

manage Cantonese pronunciations effectively. In the observed lesson, the teacher who had been trained to teach Chinese as a second language emphasised the correct tones of the key vocabularies in the text, and corrected the students' pronunciation mistakes immediately whenever they were made. Repetition and reading aloud were usually used for correcting and helping them practise their pronunciation. Students could identify the correct pronunciation of any new vocabulary from dictionaries. This helped enhance their self-learning ability in the long term.

The second difficulty concerned writing Chinese characters. Many students claimed that it was difficult for them to understand and remember Chinese characters because of the excessive number of strokes and because they were not phonetic. Many Chinese characters were extremely confusing because they looked similar to others, and many of them had identical pronunciations or were relatively similar. They would forget words easily if they were not commonly used. Moreover, adding further to their confusion were the differences in spoken and written Chinese (eg, '你地' and '你們'). Therefore, NCS students who could speak Cantonese fluently still had weaknesses in written Chinese. The two language systems were interdependent, but concurrently conflicting. Writing more was key to improving writing. Although students tend to 'draw' characters, 1 teacher (T1) stated that it was acceptable and occasionally essential because certain Chinese characters were originally derived from pictures (eg, pictographs). Chinese teachers would help students remember the Chinese characters based on their original pictures or by splitting them into components (eg, the character 休 is a combination of 'person' and 'wood', which resembles a person resting under a tree [T2]). Therefore, teaching the correct stroke order of writing Chinese characters was also critical. Teaching the radicals and components of Chinese characters were crucial because this could help students recall a word in a systematic and meaningful manner. Overall, practice was said to be the key strategy for improving reading and writing skills.

The third difficulty involved the lack of understanding regarding Chinese culture. The Chinese language curriculum in Hong Kong contained many elements of Chinese culture (eg, idioms, poems, traditions and festivals). Although certain NCS students were born in Hong Kong, they were not familiar with many Chinese customs because they did not celebrate Chinese festivals (eg, the Mid-autumn festival and Chinese New Year) at home. Chinese customs were usually inherited at home. One teacher (T1) said that the NCS students had asked him why Chinese people had to celebrate Tuen Ng Festival to commemorate Qu Yuan, who committed suicide, and should thus be viewed instead as erroneous behaviour. Many Chinese customs contained various legends with hidden values (eg, loyalty to the ruler and religious beliefs). Therefore, NCS students performed considerably poorer compared with local students in areas regarding Chinese culture. To help NCS students learn Chinese culture, the school organised many cultural activities every year (eg, visiting the flower market and writing Fai Chun during Chinese New Year). Moreover, a considerable amount of Chinese Literature (eg, Chinese poems and books of songs) originate from Chinese culture. Because the subject was too difficult for NCS students, Chinese literature was not taught in this school. Two teachers (T1 and T7) even argued that it was unreasonable to push non-Chinese students to learn Chinese literature in the school. Therefore, Chinese Literature was not included as a subject in the Chinese language curriculum.

In addition, spoken Chinese (Cantonese) and written Chinese were relatively different. Even local students might experience difficulties switching from Cantonese to written Chinese. NCS students had to manage the two language systems simultaneously because they had to use Cantonese for daily communication and written Chinese for school work.

The observed Chinese language lesson was well prepared. The teacher had a good command of the subject. Her explanation was systematic and clear, and her relationship with the students was good, with well-established classroom routines. The teacher presented examples

effectively whenever they could enhance students' understanding. The teacher divided the tasks appropriately into smaller components, and monitored the students' learning progress closely. Sufficient interactions occurred between the teacher and students. The teacher-provided feedback and support was able to facilitate their learning. The students were well behaved, attentive and motivated. They exhibited interest and eagerness to learn the subject. They were actively engaged in the lessons, as evidenced through their responses to the teacher's questions and their engagement in learning tasks. They could follow the teacher's instructions, and certain students could provide a strong response to the teacher's questions. However, others often offered simple answers in the form of single words or short phrases when they were called upon. Their communication skills and confidence in using Cantonese can be enhanced further.

4.2.3 Did the NCS Students Enjoy Learning Chinese

Students could learn better if they are motivated. If students are interested in a subject, or if they find that a subject is important to them, they would have a higher motivation to learn. Most of the students interviewed claimed that learning Chinese was crucial, especially speaking and listening in Chinese. The majority claimed that reading and writing were also critical. They said that improving their Chinese proficiency could help them communicate with locals in daily life (eg, reading the menu in a restaurant) and to make friends with local ethnic Chinese. Because most of them expressed a preference to remain in Hong Kong when they grow up, they had to learn Chinese well to secure a place in university and to obtain more job opportunities in the future.

Although most of the students interviewed claimed that Chinese was difficult to learn, 90% stated that they were interested in learning Chinese because it was 'full of fun'. Many students stated the following: 'Chinese words sound interesting,' 'It is fun to learn new words,' 'Our Chinese class is fun' and 'I like Chinese lessons.' When asking them whether

they enjoyed the Chinese lessons in the school, approximately 83% of the students said that they enjoyed them because the language was interesting. Moreover, the ‘teachers’ were another critical reason they enjoyed the Chinese language lessons. Many of them indicated that the teachers were extremely nice, helpful and often played games with them. They said that the teachers would teach them Chinese stories, songs and myths. They also communicated happily with each other in Cantonese during the lessons. This evidenced that the teachers had successfully aroused the students’ motivation and interest in learning Chinese. A few of the students suggested that the teachers could arrange more fun activities or outings for them. A few students who displayed a considerable degree of motivation in improving their Chinese language standard expected their teachers to ask them to read more Chinese books or newspapers, and to teach them how to use a Chinese dictionary. A few students expressed hope that they could be placed in the same class with local students, so that they could have more opportunities to practise Cantonese.

A Secondary 6 Pakistani student said that he preferred studying with a majority of Chinese students, which taught him to ‘know the Chinese environment’. He enjoyed school life because ‘There’s a very good learning atmosphere.’

Another Secondary 6 Nepalese expressed interest in learning Chinese because ‘It would help with studies, and is fun to learn.’ She enjoyed Chinese lessons because ‘The teacher shows Chinese stories, song and myths.’ Therefore, she preferred studying with more Chinese students, which helped her ‘learn Chinese culture and habits more easily.’ ‘Chinese people showed interest in my country, instead of discriminating [against its people].’

To facilitate student learning, the teachers adopted a number of strategies for arousing student interest in learning. Rhymed passages (韻文) are chiefly used because they are more interesting and easy to be read and memorise for students. In the lesson, the teacher introduced

key Chinese terminologies and invited students to read aloud together. After learning the pronunciation and meaning of the characters, the teacher would teach them the stroke order by introducing their radicals and components. The correct stroke order and tone were emphasised. To stimulate student interest, common words were chosen for the Chinese characters, and they were closely related to the students' daily experiences. Short sentences were then taught when the students had learned a certain number of key vocabularies. Elements of Chinese culture were spontaneously included in the content of the passages.

Moreover, multimedia tools were commonly used for assisting with teaching, and more classroom activities were arranged to create an enjoyable learning atmosphere. The teacher would encourage NCS students to use Cantonese as much as possible during the lessons. Creative dictation was provided once per week, with marks awarded for each correct word, instead of deducting marks for incorrect words. A Buddy Reading award scheme was designed to encourage students to read more Chinese books. Because NCS students were typically more active, a wide range of activities (eg, a calligraphy competition, slogan design, lantern riddles, a discussion forum, essay-writing, student ambassadors, meetings with writers and school news reporting) were organised for students to learn the Chinese language in a more interactive and meaningful manner. Homework support was also provided to junior form students for the 10th lesson every day.

4.2.4 Learning Chinese as Well as their Local Counterparts

When teachers were asked whether they thought the NCS students could reach the same standard as the local students in the Chinese language, they mentioned that few NCS students born in Hong Kong could perform as well as local students in this respect. 'There are not many Lee Kwan Ngar [a famous Indian news reporter on television who is proficient in

Chinese] in Hong Kong' (T7). If more able NCS students were included in classes with local students, they might be able to learn Chinese better and more quickly. However, they still could not catch up in the other subjects taught in Chinese because the language became an obstacle for learning the other subjects, because of the numerous difficult subject terminologies and concepts in secondary school. If English was used as the medium of instruction in other subjects, the local students in the school would definitely have been affected, because they did not excel in learning English. The choice regarding the medium of instruction for the mixed class would have been difficult to determine. Therefore, the school had to separate local students and NCS students into separate classes, so that the most suitable medium of instruction could be employed. In this regard, the school's Chinese language environment might not suffice for NCS students because they have not had the opportunity to practise Chinese with their Chinese classmates. Some NCS students even refused to speak Cantonese after the lesson or outside the classroom because they were not required to. It was because their friends were mainly NCS students who could understand or preferred to communicate in their home language or English and thus talking in home language or English was more comfortable than talking in the less proficient Chinese language. To provide more opportunities for NCS students to practise, the teachers often encouraged the students to speak in Cantonese during morning assemblies, recess and school activities.

Although many of them expected to learn only basic Chinese, a number of students expressed the desire to study the local Chinese curriculum if they could manage it. A few NCS students believed that the Chinese taught in school was too easy for them because they had begun learning Chinese in primary school. Thus, they expected to learn more advanced Chinese. However, when asked whether they had the confidence to study the HKDSE syllabus, all of them expressed a lack of confidence in attaining a pass because it was a difficult examination

for NCS students. Although they were able to learn a more difficult curriculum, the HKDSE examination was still very difficult for them. The GCSE syllabus learned in the school was only equivalent to primary 3 to 4 level and thus could be too easy for the NCS students born in Hong Kong. But the level of HKDSE curriculum for secondary 6 students is very high and it is big hurdle for them to jump over.

One teacher (T7) said that the design of the HKDSE paper does not fundamentally favour NCS students because Classical Chinese is included in the reading comprehension paper. Chinese students are reasonably expected to learn Classical Chinese because of its importance in Chinese culture. However, there was no reason to ask the NCS students to learn Classical Chinese because they did not need to use it in daily life. Moreover, NCS students could not attain any marks to these questions.

To help the NCS students learn Chinese effectively, many people believed that the EDB should offer them a ‘Chinese as a second language curriculum’. The Chinese language teacher (T1) in the school indicated that the curriculum should be designed according to student ability, not the student’s age or level of learning. Therefore, the curriculum should be compartmentalised into many small stages in accordance with the diversified ability of NCS students.

Having been invited by the EDB as a PDS for NCS students, the school had to support three schools which had also admitted NCS students. Teaching and assessment materials had been provided to these schools according to their students’ ability. Regular meetings had been held in which teaching strategies were shared amongst teachers. Because only one secondary PDS and two primary PDSs were available in Hong Kong, the school had received calls from certain schools, including mainstream schools, requesting learning and assessment materials and the sharing of teaching strategies over the years. Certain teachers in mainstream schools

had expressed their urgent need in pedagogy and teaching materials because an increasing number of NCS students have recently begun choosing to study in mainstream schools.

4.2.5 Discussion

Based on the findings, the NCS students faced three major challenges: the correct pronunciation in speaking, writing Chinese characters and lacking an understanding of Chinese culture. When the NCS students were asked of their major challenge in learning Chinese, most of those who had arrived to Hong Kong not long before stated that ‘pronunciation’ was the major challenge, but those who had resided in Hong Kong for longer periods said that ‘writing Chinese characters’ was the greatest challenge. Only the teachers suggested the challenge of ‘understanding Chinese culture’. These three challenges were three gradual obstacles that NCS students were required to overcome in learning Chinese (ie, learning the correct pronunciation was the first hurdle, then writing Chinese characters, and finally, understanding Chinese culture).

Difficulties in Pronunciation

Regarding speaking, Cantonese was used, and its six major tones (two rising, two falling, and two level tones) made many words sound similar, but changed the meaning completely. Mispronunciations might provoke laughter, and late learners might find pronunciation extremely challenging. New NCS arrivals, especially teenagers who begin learning Cantonese shortly after, might feel embarrassed when committing an error in pronunciation and being misunderstood (eg, ‘I love [愛] you’ was pronounced as ‘I hurt [害] you’), or certain expressions contained a derogative implication, instead of a commendatory or neutral conveyance. This uncomfortable experience hindered them from practising and communicating with others in Cantonese. This presented not only as a barrier to learning to speak, but to listening, reading and writing properly in Chinese as well. Therefore, to cater to

the needs of the new NCS teenagers, special strategies for enhancing their spoken Cantonese had to be designed. In addition, a supportive learning atmosphere had to be established, and an attitude had to be fostered in their peers for tolerating each other's mistakes and accepting corrections.

Although the NCS children born in Hong Kong or those who had resided in Hong Kong for many years seemed to speak Cantonese as fluently as the local students, their expressions were limited to daily communication. In more formal communications (eg, in meetings and conferences), the NCS students might have an insufficient number of expressions to draw from for arguments and for analysing their viewpoints. Therefore, speaking involved not only correct pronunciations but also the ability to express ideas in a persuasive manner. During discussions with NCS students who could speak Cantonese fluently, although their pronunciation was accurate, they were found to be talking in extremely simplistic phrases which did not suffice for in-depth communication and discussions of critical issues pertaining to Hong Kong society, especially as this ability will become increasingly critical in many types of employment in the future. A richer language environment was certainly helpful for enhancing their language proficiency. If more local students were admitted in multiethnic schools, this would certainly facilitate learning for NCS students. Although the local and NCS students would be placed in separate classes, they could attend mixed classes for certain non-academic lessons (eg, Physical Exercise, Music and Arts lessons) and play together in extracurricular activities.

Difficulties in Writing

This second challenge was mainly mentioned by those who spoke Cantonese fluently. Perhaps because teachers expected them to improve, as they themselves believed, their Chinese language skills should be improved by progressing from speaking to writing after

learning Chinese for a relatively longer period. Although the NCS born Hongkongers could speak Cantonese, they found written Chinese to still be considerably more difficult because Cantonese is not usually used for writing because it is informal. For example, when one says, ‘Can we have lunch together?’, in speech it reads, ‘我地一齊食飯好唔好?’, but the written form is ‘我們一起吃飯好嗎?’. The words ‘we’, ‘can’ and ‘together’ differ when speaking and writing. This means that another grammar system for written Chinese had to be learned. In many cases, the two language systems are interdependent, but simultaneously in conflict. Therefore, many students might use informal Cantonese by accident when writing formal essays.

In addition to grammar, writing a Chinese character was difficult for the NCS students. Unlike English which contains 26 alphabets written only from left to right, the written form of Chinese is extremely complex because each character is composed of a 2D ideograph that can be drawn from top to bottom (eg, the character for ‘book’ [書]) from left to right (eg, the character for ‘do’ [做]) or from outer to inner (eg, the character for ‘garden’ [園]). Recalling the shape of a vast number of Chinese characters requires considerable time and practice. Millions of unfamiliar characters are composed of numerous single characters in a text. In addition, NCS students have not grasped the concepts of the strokes, stroke order and components of the Chinese characters. From the perspective of NCS students, writing is occasionally akin to drawing pictures. They may easily perceive Chinese characters as individual images (EDB 2008). Moreover, many Chinese characters look extremely similar to one another, and are pronounced identically or in a relatively similar manner. Numerous Chinese characters in Cantonese contain many long and short strokes that are difficult to write (eg, many commonly used words contain more than 20 strokes each, such as praise [讚], hospital [醫] and test [驗]). Writing the characters correctly is not easy, and forming a complete sentence is even more difficult. The challenge is even greater when feelings must be

expressed and arguments made in some types of essays. Furthermore, grammar should be learned so that students can form compound words and sentences from individual Chinese characters, but Chinese grammar (eg, word order) also poses learning difficulties for NCS students (EDB 2008).

Late NCS arrivals experience considerable hardship and confusion in learning both spoken and written Chinese concurrently. Although they must learn how to speak and listen to Cantonese for daily communication, it is unrealistic to expect late NCS arrivals to write and read long Chinese essays or more profound passages with passion. Even NCS students learning Chinese for a longer period can write only an essay comprising approximately 100 characters. Therefore, NCS students can learn applied writing for daily use (eg, writing simple letters, emails and application forms). Teaching classical and Chinese poems is not recommended because it was too difficult for NCS students, and is no longer commonly used.

Lack of Understanding of Chinese Culture

The third challenge (ie, knowledge of Chinese culture) was expressed by the teachers, not the NCS students. The students were apparently unaware of the importance of Chinese culture in learning the Chinese language. Without studying culture, foreign language instruction is inaccurate and incomplete (Peck 1998), or is ‘a lifeless endeavour’ (Sellami 2000). Students cannot truly master the language until they have a strong command of the cultural contexts in which the language occurs (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project 1996). When language is used in connection with our behavior, the cultural elements influencing the behavior convey crucial messages (eg, visiting the flower market during Chinese New Year is believed to bring luck for the whole year and enjoying dim sum and Chinese tea with grandparents on Sundays shows love and care to elderly).

Moreover, many idioms that are used daily include mention of Chinese history and traditions. The NCS students found them difficult because they did not celebrate Chinese festivals or customs at home which is a critical space for cultural learning. This challenge might be overcome when third- or future-generation NCS Hongkongers are completely absorbed into Chinese culture, thus becoming a part of their lives.

Effectiveness of Strategies Adopted by the School

Professor Ki (2012) reported that NCS students typically found that the Chinese language was difficult and the lessons were boring, and thus, they were not interested in learning Chinese. However, many of the students interviewed said that they enjoyed Chinese lessons because they were fun. This multiethnic school was found to have invested considerable effort into helping NCS students develop to their peak potential by catering to their needs and abilities. The school had designed a unique school-based Chinese curriculum to cater to their needs and characteristics, with the support of experts from local universities and the EDB. Many collaborative lesson-planning sessions, lesson observations and discussions have been conducted over the last few years to plan, implement and review the curriculum so that it would suit their students' needs. Teachers made commendable efforts in developing the school-based curriculum materials and assessments. When selecting teaching materials and designing worksheets, especially those supporting language learning, the teachers considered the students' cultural background and ability. Rhymed passages were mainly used to arouse student interest and motivation to learn. Key Chinese terminologies were selected appropriately and explained for increasing the number of useful vocabulary words. A good range of measures including the ample deployment of resources, the adoption of ability grouping and small- and split-class Chinese language sessions had been implemented to address learner diversity. The smallness of the class provided a supportive environment for

enhanced class interactions. To enhance the potential of the more able learners, the school encouraged students to enter competitions and to sit the GCE A Level examination.

During lessons, teachers exhibited good skills in facilitating learning, and provided sufficient opportunities for students to demonstrate their learning through application and interactions, using the appropriate resources and attempts to form connections with the students' daily experiences. The teachers were friendly, responsible and enthusiastic. Their rapport with students was good, and included a sense of mutual respect, contributing to a positive and favourable learning environment. Students were typically candid, friendly and respectful. Most of them exhibited interest in learning and were eager to participate in class activities. The students also learned to respect and appreciate each other.

Regarding helping NCS students grasp the correct pronunciations when speaking, one key strategy adopted in Chinese lessons involves teaching the six tones of Cantonese. Repetition and reading aloud were frequently used for reinforcement. The teachers immediately corrected the errors made by the students in a supportive manner. Tones are not taught in mainstream schools, where most students are Chinese, and can thus acquire the pronunciation naturally through daily conversations. Local students can learn the pronunciation of a new vocabulary character if a simplified character of the same pronunciation is provided. Therefore, many Chinese language teachers do not receive any training in teaching Cantonese tones because the students are all first-language learners. Moreover, the stroke order and structure of Chinese characters comprising radicals and components were taught to help students recognise and write Chinese words more effectively. To help students understand more of Chinese culture, the school has organised many cultural activities and outings every year to introduce Chinese festivals and customs to the NCS students, and has thus also provided a more authentic experience. Furthermore, the elements of Chinese culture were

included spontaneously in the teaching materials, and a wide range of cultural activities were organised during Chinese festivals to enhance learning interest and effectiveness.

The school has also provided diversified learning experiences after school, and has organised a wide range of activities (eg, poetry readings, calligraphy, riddles, debates, slogan designing, storytelling and culture ambassadors) for helping students understand and experience Chinese culture and for developing their potential. Reading was also a key school-promoted strategy for enhancing Chinese language proficiency. The school had adopted a whole-school approach to fostering a reading culture with a reasonable variety of reading activities organised, including the ‘Whole-school Reading Scheme’, ‘Morning Reading Scheme’, ‘Online Reading Scheme’, ‘Buddy Reading Scheme’ and ‘Library Hunt’.

Overall, the multiethnic school had been effective in developing the school-based Chinese language curriculum to suit the diverse needs of the NCS students. The school had developed a progressive and appropriate curriculum that provided pleasurable, meaningful and productive language learning experiences for students. The teachers had adopted effective strategies and pedagogies in the classroom. The experience accumulated by the teachers in the past 10 years was valuable, and could be used for sharing sessions with other schools.

Although a few students who were interviewed suggested that the teachers could arrange additional fun activities or outings for them, and they expected more exercises and oral practice with teachers and ethnically Chinese locals in Cantonese, overall the school exhibited a strong awareness of the students’ support needs which have been appropriately addressed through a range of effective strategies.

Separate Set of Chinese Language Papers for Second-Language Learners

The government should review the current education policy, and determine whether sufficient and equal opportunities are available for EM students to continue their studies (Hong Kong Christian Service 2005). Most local schools use Chinese as the medium of instruction. ‘EM students who were less proficient in Chinese not only performed unsatisfactorily in Chinese language but also other subjects, which resulted in their overall low academic attainment’ (Equal Opportunities Commission 2011). It was recommended that, similar to the previous ‘syllabus A’ HKCE examination in English Language, a ‘syllabus A’ HKDSE examination in Chinese Language could be provided for second-language learners. Even the well-known IB curriculum offers another set of language examination papers for second-language learners. The main difference could involve cultural elements and Classical Chinese being excluded from the syllabus, but the remaining sections being retained. This means the paper would not be ‘easier’, but more accurately reflect the ability of second-language learners in all respects, except on cultural knowledge pertaining to the Chinese language. One teacher (T7) in the school said that ‘it is reasonable to ask local students to study the Chinese poems of Li Pak¹⁰, but there is no point expecting a NCS student to recite Chinese poems.’

However, ‘the Education Bureau expressed strong reservation about the proposal of developing an alternative Chinese curriculum for the NCS students as they expected could only meet with low recognition’ (Equal Opportunities Commission 2011, p. 11). I believed that ‘low recognition’ was an unnecessary concern because it was certainly more acceptable by the universities compared with the GCSE examination. ‘There was a huge gap between the level of GCSE Chinese and the local mainstream Chinese curriculum. There is a strong body of opinion that an alternative Chinese curriculum should be developed for NCS students to more accurately and fairly reflect their Chinese proficiency for education and employment

¹⁰ Li Pak was a very famous Chinese poet in Tong Dynasty in China.

purposes’ (Equal Opportunities Commission 2011, p. 7). The EDB was considered to be overly idealistic, and that their assessment was based on the unrealistic assumption that ‘one curriculum for all’ was nondiscriminatory. The EDB even stated that ‘there are an encouraging 67% and 31% of NCS students reaching Level 2 and Level 3 or above respectively in the Chinese Language paper in the HKDSE examination’ (Speech by Cherry Tse on May 3, 2014). However, most NCS students sat only the GCSE Chinese Language examination. The ‘encouraging result’ was actually obtained by only a small proportion of the more capable NCS students in Hong Kong.

4.3 Cultural Integration versus Cultural Segregation

4.3.1 Culturally Diverse School Environment

Two teachers (T6 and T7) said that the mission of the sponsoring body was ‘to help people in need,’ and therefore, they had to satisfy the needs of NCS students by providing them with a joyful and meaningful learning experience and by establishing mutual respect in the school. The NCS students in the school were respectively from over 15 countries, each with its own culture and characteristics. Most of them were from Pakistan, Nepal, the Philippines and India. According to a teacher’s (T6) observation, Pakistanis were strictly bound by their religion in their behaviours and what they could eat. Because the Philippines is near Hong Kong, Filipinos were more familiar with the culture in Hong Kong. The Nepalese students were more obedient and quiet compared with Pakistani students because some of their parents or grandparents had been soldiers in Hong Kong, and were thus more self-disciplined. Female Pakistani students could not be too active, and therefore, they did not like boys watching them during Physical Exercise lessons. NCS students born in Hong Kong were also bound by their own culture (eg, clothing, food, festivals and religion) because of their parents’ expectations. Certain girls might accept an arranged marriage when they are in senior secondary, and they might have to return to their home country for marriage purposes. A few

of them return to Hong Kong and continue their studies afterwards. However, certain NCS students, especially those in the upper form, have been assimilated into Hong Kong culture, and have become more lax with respect to the rules of their home country. The rules and punishment system in the school was similar to those in mainstream schools, except that the students were allowed to adhere to the dress code according to their respective cultures (eg, wearing a headscarf). Overall, students liked attending school, and therefore, the attendance rate was good.

Teachers in the case study school did not agree that NCS students in multiethnic schools were being segregated. Instead, they said that if the students were concentrated in certain schools, the resources could be used more effectively.

In this multiethnic school which has admitted a large number of NCS students for many years, most teachers were well trained to cater to the needs of the students. Moreover, the teachers had a well-developed positive attitude towards NCS students, including understanding their characteristics and cultures. For example, NCS students were typically more responsive and participate actively in class activities (eg, games and competitions).

Although certain teachers agreed that it was fair to allow NCS students to study in mainstream schools if they preferred to, they said that it was unsuitable for NCS students who did not possess a certain level of Chinese language proficiency to study in mainstream schools. Certain mainstream schools which have recently admitted a few NCS students have approached the school for assistance and advice. They found the challenges difficult to resolve because the resources in the mainstream schools were limited to the extent that they could not have an additional teacher teach one or two NCS students separately in small groups. Teacher training in multicultural education was also urgently needed, because the teachers did not have the experience and pedagogy necessary to teach NCS students. Three

teachers (T1, T5 and T6) expressed concern that the small number of NCS students in mainstream schools might be ignored because teachers usually tend to cater to the needs of the majority.

When asked which challenges mainstream teachers encountered when increasingly more NCS students chose to study there, 4 teachers (T1, T2, T5 and T6) said that NCS students might easily be mistaken as lazy or naughty. Certain NCS students lacked endurance because they did not have clear objectives for their studies and future. They occasionally lost focus easily, especially when traditional teachers adopted lecturing as the main teaching method. These teachers might find it difficult to motivate NCS students to learn. Assigning homework was another major challenge for mainstream teachers because NCS students were not keen to do homework. Most parents cannot be expected to push their children to exert themselves, especially when the child is a female Pakistani student who is generally not expected to receive higher education in order to find a job. Mainstream teachers occasionally did not understand or became accustomed to students' enthusiasm in activities, and misunderstood this as them interrupting the lessons.

Can NCS students born in Hong Kong learn in an identical manner as do the local students in mainstream schools? The teachers believed that only a few of them were capable of this. Although a mainstream school could provide a richer Chinese language environment, it would be limited to daily conversations, and would not considerably facilitate improvements in reading and writing skills for the examination. NCS students might not be able to attain good results, because reading and writing usually comprise 70% of the total marks. Certain NCS students in the school who had received 6 years of education in a local primary school were not up to the Secondary 1 level in their assessment of Chinese ability. (One student who was assessed at the Primary 4 level said that he had failed only the Chinese Language section on every test in primary school). The main reason was that they had insufficient opportunities

to use the language outside the classroom because they used their mother tongue at home. If NCS students were placed in mainstream schools, where only the local Chinese language curriculum is adopted, they would probably be left behind, and can learn only as much as they would be able to on their own. Not only was the Chinese Language paper difficult for them, other subjects would also be affected if they studied in the Chinese-medium mainstream schools, where most subjects are taught in Cantonese, and all school activities are organised in Chinese. If they are unable to catch up, they might lose interest in learning, and might even experience discipline problems.

The teachers thought that it was more ideal for multiethnic schools to help newly arriving NCS students because they had more experience identifying the abilities and needs of NCS students at different learning stages. In the case study school, most teachers had received sufficient training and had experience teaching NCS students. When 1 teacher (T6) mentioned the first NCS student to be admitted from Saudi Arabia for the following academic year, the teacher said that ‘all our teachers are prepared to face the new challenge...’, and that ‘we could do better to give these students a good start.’ The teachers remembered that it had been a major challenge for them to switch from Chinese to English as the medium of instruction when the school began to admit NCS students (eg, sitting the ILS examination to attain the qualifications to teach in English and preparing another set of teaching and learning materials in English). By contrast, mainstream teachers required time and effort to adjust when only a few NCS students entered their schools.

NCS students born in Hong Kong or those who had started their pre-primary education there have been presented with the option of studying in a mainstream or multiethnic school. However, in a similar manner regarding SEN students in mainstream schools, the government should provide further support to NCS students if only a few of them are studying in a

mainstream school because they might be isolated or discriminated against by local students or even teachers in their school.

When students were asked whether they would choose the current multiethnic school or a mainstream school if they could choose again, most of them responded that they preferred the current school. The main reasons were that they preferred having more friends there, and that the teachers were extremely nice. They also expressed concern that the Chinese language curriculum in mainstream schools would be too difficult for them.

4.3.2 Student Friendships in the School

According to 5 teachers (T1, T2, T5, T6 and T7), the relationships between local students and NCS students were typically fine because students of different nationalities could get along well with each other. They occasionally played together, typically playing ball games. However, the relationship between NCS students and ethnically Chinese local students was said to be harmonious because they did not have much contact with each other. In certain classes where only a few NCS students were from the same ethnic background, the students would play with local Chinese students or those from other ethnic backgrounds. Depending on the background and personality of the NCS students, a number of them may have more local Chinese friends. NCS students tend to get along with friends from the same country. Students of the same ethnic group and of the same sex usually played together. Arguments were uncommon amongst students from different ethnic origins. By comparison, NCS students were more active and more willing to make friends with local Chinese students. However, local Chinese students might not be so willing to communicate with NCS students because of the language barrier. Students of the same origin might occasionally have had an argument because they usually had more contact with each other.

On campus, NCS students and local students were usually in two groups. Pakistanis comprised the majority of NCS students, and they played in a group when Vietnamese or Filipino students formed a minority group. Boys and girls were usually in two different groups. Interactions amongst NCS students from different nations were more frequent compared with those between local students and NCS students. This was mainly due to the language barrier because the language systems of certain South Asian countries share few commonalities, but Cantonese was a completely different language system for them. Moreover, NCS students from different minority groups can use English as a common language for communication, but local Chinese students in the school typically had relative weaknesses in English. Furthermore, more Chinese students have recently arrived from mainland China, and they might be unable to communicate in either Cantonese or English. Helping this increasingly new group of students would present another challenge for the school.

Nearly all of the NCS students interviewed said that they enjoyed life in this school because of the good learning environment as well as nice friends and teachers. Only a few of them claimed they did not enjoy the school life because the school days were too long and too much homework was assigned. Over 60% of NCS students interviewed stated a preference for studying in a school with more NCS students because they could get along and understand each other easily, and they could communicate in their home language. A number of them preferred studying in a school with a majority of Chinese students because they wanted to improve and practise their Chinese. Two-thirds of students interviewed responded that it was crucial to make friends with local students because they could learn Chinese and Chinese culture. More than 50% of students claimed that making friends with Chinese students was difficult because of the language barrier. A few of them responded that they felt uncomfortable talking to Chinese students because certain Chinese students appeared

unapproachable.

A Secondary 4 British student said that he preferred studying with NCS students because 'it's easy to understand each other.' He sensed difficulty making friends with Chinese schoolmates because 'lots of them don't speak English and I don't speak Chinese.' However, he appreciated that in the school 'everyone respects each other and the different religions', and added, 'I respect everyone and they respect me as well.'

The local students agreed that they knew more about other cultures because they studied in this school. Cultural Week was well organized, and they could learn more about other cultures. Mixing local students with NCS students in certain lessons was acceptable because the students could learn more about each other. The local students said that the relationship between local and NCS students was fine because they did not have much contact with them, and therefore, there was no reason to argue. Certain local students would make friends with NCS students who spoke Cantonese. They would play basketball together, but their contact was limited to 'playing' on the basketball court. Chinese students would not go out with NCS students or talk to them over the phone. It was difficult for them to develop friendships with them because of the language barrier and their religious beliefs (eg, many NCS students were Muslim, who thus could not eat pork, and consequently, they could not have lunch together in many restaurants other than McDonalds). Certain local Chinese students thought that it was impossible for local and NCS students to be really good friends because they were 'not in the same world.' In their view, NCS students were more accustomed to their own culture, and occasionally did not adapt to Chinese culture. Certain local Chinese students indicated that they could not accept the bad habits of many NCS students (eg, spitting and being bad-tempered and dirty). They had absolutely no contact with NCS female students because they understood that this was taboo for most of them.

A Secondary 6 Pakistani student and her sister who had resided in Hong Kong for 4 years said that making friends with Chinese schoolmates was difficult because ‘I don’t know how to speak Chinese.’ She said she was not interested in making friends with them for the following reason: ‘If we do something wrong, then school will punish us, but if the same thing occurs with Chinese, the school does not say anything to them.’ When NCS teenagers arrive in Hong Kong, it appears that they face more difficulties making friends with local students.

4.3.3 Strategies for Developing an Inclusive Environment

Schools in Hong Kong are required to devise a 3-year development plan as well as an annual plan addressing a number of key concerns for each year, so that each school can advance in a clear direction and design appropriate strategies for achieving its objectives. According to the case study school’s 3-year development plan for 2011–14 and the annual year plan for the 2013/14 academic year, the school’s development for the year focused on the following three major objectives:

- (a) Develop the school into a local international school;
- (b) Enhance teacher professionalism and help students develop to their full potential; and
- (c) Enhance students’ positive values and devise vigorous life plans.

Major Concern A

To develop the school into a local international school, the school adopted the following strategies to promote a caring and multicultural school environment for students:

- Adopted a whole-school approach to promote a caring school environment;
- Decorated the school campus with slogans from different countries;

- Organised cultural activities in school to promote sports, festivals, clothes and foods of ethnic minority groups;
- Included students from different ethnic backgrounds in the Student Union so that they could share their views;
- Invited the organisations of different minority groups to provide services to the school;
- Employed NCS teaching assistants to provide support to students;
- Had the tuck shop provide foods suitable for each student;
- Established a parent's resource room to provide useful information to parents;
- Encouraged students to participate in social services to eliminate the stereotypes regarding ethnic minorities in the community; and
- Provided a platform for students from different countries to introduce their home countries to others.

The school has also organised the following activities for the community and even China to promote the school to potential students and parents:

- Collaborated with five nongovernmental organisations to offer an Interactive English Programme and a Chinese Programme on Fridays and Saturdays for primary school students in Tuen Mun;
- Organised an interactive English class on alternative Wednesdays for P1 to P6 students in a community centre in Tuen Mun;
- Organised a number of afterschool Chinese language classes for primary school students in a few estates in Tuen Mun;

- Prepared promotional display boards and leaflets for people in a nearby district;
- Held seminars for newly arriving families, and invited the participants to enrol in English classes;
- Introduced the school and the Chinese class on the Nepalese's website Hknepal.com;
- Organised Chinese language classes and School Information Day for Filipino students and their parents in churches on Saturdays, and introduced the school's mission and curriculum on School Information Day; and
- Visited primary schools in Guangdong Province to promote the school.

Major Concern B

To enhance teachers' professionalism so that more focused support in learning and personal growth can be provided to students, the school encouraged teachers to participate in professional development programmes provided by the EDB and other tertiary institutions. According to the 2013 school report, the school employed 39 teachers, 59% of whom had been teaching for over 10 years, 26% of whom had been teaching for 5 to 9 years and only 15% of whom had been teaching for less than 5 years. All of them had received teacher training; 98% were degree holders, of whom 41% had obtained a Master's or Doctorate degree. In addition, 22% of the teachers had completed the training programme for catering to students with special educational needs. The percentage was considerably higher than the training target (10%-15%) set by the EDB. The teachers actively participated in various professional development programmes organised by the EDB and other authorities. The total number of training hours was 2,255 hr in the 2013/14 academic year. Moreover, external links (eg, school networks and professional partnerships with a tertiary institution) had been utilized for supporting staff development, curriculum development and learning and teaching

for certain subjects, including Chinese Language, English Language and Liberal Studies. A number of experts and scholars from tertiary institutions have conducted lesson observations, followed by sharing their professional experiences in the lesson, to enhance the teachers' professional development.

To help the students develop to their full potential, the school encouraged them to participate in various types of events and competitions:

- Regular exchange programmes and study tours (eg, study tour to Guangzhou for students to enhance their understanding of China);
- Distance-teaching and -sharing were arranged through partnerships with schools in other countries;
- Noted individuals were invited to share their experiences with students;
- Various programmes promoting national education (eg, a flag-raising ceremony on National Day and subject-based topics on the China educational program);
- A mentorship programme jointly organised by nongovernmental organisations and state departments to provide quality mentorship-training courses to youths;
- A Leaders Training Course organised for potential leaders in each class at Period 10 (an additional lesson) to strengthen their abilities and foster team spirit;
- Afterschool Care Scheme run by the Community Care Fund involving needy students participating in afterschool musical activities provided by schools or other organisations;
- Various Uniform groups (including St. John, Girl Guide and Cadet) for students to develop to their full potential;
- A Student Union election for all students to vote for members of the Student Union; and

- An interhouse cricket competition for students belonging to different houses to participate collectively in various competitions.

Table 10 lists the awards obtained by the students in public events for the 2013/14 academic year:

Table 10: Awards obtained by the students in 2013/14

Month	Organising Body	Award	No of Students
May 2014	EDB and Community Youth Club	Respectful and Virtuous Teens Election 2014	2
Mar 2014	Home Affairs Department	Harmony Scholarship 2013/14	6
Feb 2014	HK Unison Limited	Outstanding Progress Award on Chinese Language Learning for Ethnic Minority Students	2
Jan 2014	Wiseman Education	Outstanding Achievement Award	6
Jan 2014	The HK Federation of Youth Groups	Hong Kong English Public Speaking contest 2014	1
Jan 2014	Committee on the Promotion of the Civic Education	The Award of the Politest Student	2

Dec 2013	The HK Institute of Education	The 8 th Speaking Contest for HK Students	1 First Runner-up 1 Honorable Mention 8 Certificate of Merit
Dec 2013	HK Schools Music and Speech Association	65 th HK Schools Speech Festival	1 Champion, 1 First Runner-up 3 Second Runner-up
Dec 2013	The Boys' and Girls' Clubs Association of HK	Outstanding Participation in W I Cheung Scholarship Scheme 2013	2
Dec 2013	A.S. Watson Group	HK Student Sports Award 2013-14	1
Oct 2013	Rev. Joseph Carra Memorial Fund Ltd	Rev. Joseph Carra Memorial Education Grants	1
Oct 2013	Law's Charitable Foundation	Applied Learning Scholarship	2
Sept 2013	Windshield Charitable Foundation Social	Newly Arrival Students	1

	Services	Award Scheme 2013	
Jun 2013	EDB and Other Companies	The 32 nd Shell/Island JC Scholarship for the Disable	3

Major Concern C

To enhance the students' positive values and help them devise an effective life plan, the school has organised the following series of school activities inside and outside the classroom for students:

- Moral Education and Religious Studies lessons emphasised 'caring'. Current social issues is discussed for the promotion of positive values;
- Students learned to engage in reflection in prayers and 'one-minute silence' sessions during assemblies;
- Provides relevant support services and care to students with special educational needs, as well as individual guidance to targeted students to correct inappropriate habits;
- Holds 1-min silence and reflection sessions during morning assemblies and weekly assemblies for students to engage in self-reflection. Teachers also share information in the assemblies as well;
- A national flag-raising ceremony is held once per month for national education;
- A proverb for the month is posted on campus and explained by teachers in class;
- The Best Student Election is held so that all students and teachers can vote for the most polite students;

- Songs are played and sharing sessions held during recess and lunch hour to display encouragement and care to graduating students;
- Team-Building Training activities are organised for Secondary 3 students;
- Greeting card design competitions are held to encourage students to design a card for their parents in which they express their gratitude and love;
- The teachers as well as social workers have designed various programmes, including goal-setting and -sharing programmes, to help the students understand themselves and enhance their self-esteem as well as their ability to overcome adversity;
- To help graduates continue their study in tertiary education, the school has liaised with a postsecondary institute under the same school-sponsoring body to identify further educational opportunities for students through training, including certificate, diploma and associate-degree programmes;
- Specific teachers help students devise their study and career plans according to their interests and skillsets through aptitude tests and workshops;
- Various companies are invited to give speeches where they introduce the characteristics of their respective industry. Different career-related activities, including experiential programmes and visits, have been organised;
- A cultural centre was established in the school to provide career guidance to NCS students. More information related to different job industries is provided;
- The data of graduates are maintained systematically for follow-ups and as a reference for later graduates;

- Raffle tickets issued by school-sponsoring bodies are sold for fundraising purposes for needy persons in the community;
- The ‘I Can Fly’ educational programme was organised by Cathay Pacific Airways for students interested in a career in aviation; and
- The Hong Kong Police Force (Yuen Long District) provides regular training and activities to help students understand policing as a career.

Two teachers (T5 and T6) said that certain cultural activities were organised every year to help students understand each other. Cultural Week was well organised for promoting cultural integration. NCS students had to set up stalls to introduce aspects of their culture (eg, food and games) to other students. Most of the interviewed students said that they enjoyed the activity substantially, and hoped that the school could arrange additional similar activities. Moreover, a year-round game, the School Cup, includes over 10 types of activities in which students of different ethnic groups cooperate to win the prize. Ball games for class/house competition provide opportunities for students, especially boys, to play together. In addition, the Moral and Civil Education section of the school has utilised a programme designed by the Chinese University of Hong Kong to create a ‘second-home feeling’ for NCS students. In Moral Education lessons, the teacher mainly employs PATH programmes, and includes cultural elements when designing the curriculum (eg, students are asked to draw their national flag and emblems, and introduce them to other students). For the Student Union elections, nominated students are required to form teams which must include members of at least two nationalities. Regarding religious beliefs, the school had to achieve a greater balance between the Catholic religion of the school and the different religions (eg, Islam) of the NCS students. The teachers had to focus on life and value education, instead of religious education. One teacher (T6) said that ‘when increasingly NCS students who were Muslims

entered the school after 2000, the school started thinking about whether we should teach them the Catholic religion. A separate microwave was provided to Muslim students because certain foods are strictly prohibited by their religion. Later, when more Filipino students who were Catholic were admitted, the school was able to strike a greater balance between the Catholic religion and others. At present, the students do respect our religion when we draw the cross although they don't follow. To maintain the Catholic vision of the school, approximately 15 min of morning assembly is dedicated to singing hymns and reading the bible. However, Catholic mass and a speech delivered by a priest are no longer arranged. In the following year, spiritual education and life education will be emphasised further in Moral Education classes to increase the elements of the Catholic vision.

A Secondary 4 Pakistani student said, 'Our religion is being respected in the school. We can still follow our culture.' Another Pakistani student in the same group added, 'Religion is accepted in the school, and we can enjoy our festivals.' A Nepalese student stated, 'Everyone respects everyone here.'

A teacher (T7) said that the school had just established the first NCS CAS corps because the CAS mission (ie, strict discipline for oneself and for others) was congruent with the school's mission of inculcating a strong sense of responsibility in students, fostering self-discipline and strengthening their moral values. The school operates on the belief that NCS students require more discipline-training because they occasionally do not understand how to follow rules because they were raised in rural areas, instead of in cities. CAS provides a wide range of training programmes (eg, rescue skills, hiking and open examinations) for cadets to obtain medals in. Communication arose naturally amongst children when more opportunities of interaction were provided. Problems in language use and cultural respect were not commonplace. A teacher (T7) stated that students communicated well with each other in these programmes. The Cadet Corps developed quickly and became a popular programme for NCS

students in the school.

Two teachers (T5 and T6) stated that a Cultural Integration Centre had been established in the school. Certain teachers were assigned to provide support, especially in career planning, to students from different ethnic groups. Certain companies from different industries were invited to give career talks to the students, so that they could enhance their understanding of the nature of different careers and prospects. They added that the school always liaised with different nongovernmental organisations to organise a wide range of activities and competitions for NCS students. To help the students develop to their full potential, the school encouraged them to participate in various competitions and events in the 2013/14 academic year. Students received prizes, and their self-confidence was enhanced. The school found that certain NCS students excelled and interested in sports and music, and hence, a basketball team was formed to provide them with training, and the school organised a number of music and cultural courses.

Other measures for providing care and support to students and their families included the following (Annual School Plan 2013/14):

- Sunshine Teachers: One teacher was allocated to each Secondary 1 and Secondary 2 student to provide greater care and support to younger students;
- Homework Tutorial Class is run by the School Support Association to help Secondary 1 and Secondary 2 students complete their homework and enhance their language ability every Monday, Thursday after school and on Saturdays;
- Hand-in-hand Friendship group: A Big Brother and Sister scheme in the school that helps new arrivals as well as students with special educational needs develop self-confidence and self-understanding;

- The Catholic Committee has organised home visits to students' homes with elderly and/or disabled members to show that they care and to purchase daily necessities (\$600 allocated per family) for them;
- A Cultural Experience Day and workshop were organised for students. Casual-Wear Day was held at Christmas, where students could wear their national costume to school;
- The Integration Resources Centre in the school provides various resources, including intelligence games, to students during lunch hour, with senior form students on duty;
- A Hong Kong Chinese Storytelling Competition for NCS students was held in Yuen Long Theatre;
- The Jockey Club SMILE Project run by the Hong Kong Institute of Education provides school support services, including on-site support for teachers and staff development programmes, and holds talks for parents regarding the management of children with ADHD and intellectual disabilities;
- Understanding Your Community was a field-trip event to Hong Kong Wetland Park that was organised for all Secondary 1 students; and
- Two Pakistani alumni were recruited as assistants in activities held on Saturdays.

A Secondary 4 Pakistani said, 'I enjoy every day because all the teachers are very nice. The school values us.' She preferred studying in a school with more NCS students because 'it is more comfortable for communicating.' She experienced difficulty making friends with Chinese schoolmates because 'I don't feel comfortable talking to them. I can learn Chinese better with non-Chinese students because it's more comfortable.'

4.3.4 Discussion

Tiedt and Tiedt (1999) recommended four approaches for promoting multicultural education:

- (a) Utilise students' cultural background: Ask students to introduce their own country and culture so that they can feel proud of them and have more opportunities to participate in class and reduce misunderstandings;
- (b) Provide more opportunities for teacher–student interactions;
- (c) Showcase different cultures and festivals regularly to enhance understanding; and
- (d) Modify the content of the teaching materials to reduce bias and promote strengths and characteristics.

Overall, the school recognised the challenges and opportunities impacting its development. It was aiming to develop into a local international school as well as promote a professional learning community that shared their good practices with other schools in the district. The school was characterised by its cultural diversity and prided itself in its cultural harmony. It treasured the unique and valuable opportunities for students to obtain daily exposure to different cultural aspects. In addition, students from different cultural backgrounds experienced joy and celebrated events together, accepted each other and respected each other's culture. Slogans in different languages as well as brief introductions to the cultures of different countries were found in the school campus. The school also enabled students to explore their interests and aptitudes which facilitated their career planning. A good range of visits, talks and career-related experiences are provided for students of different cultural backgrounds. Having recently become a local international school, the school can widen its students' international perspectives and provide both a Chinese and English environment for them. The school organises a number of English and Chinese classes, seminars, visits to primary schools in the district, the community and even around China to promote the school

to NCS parents and students. The school has successfully attracted NCS students from various countries, and more local parents are willing to put their children in the school. Students can learn more effectively and efficiently when they can learn alongside local students and students from different countries.

Overall, the students enjoyed school life and their relationship with their peers, especially if they were from the same country and were of the same gender. Teachers were typically committed to catering to the students' various growth needs. Essential virtues were instilled in students including developing a sense of responsibility, self-discipline and moral values.

When asked about cultural integration and harmony in the school, most teachers and students indicated that they had a strong presence because arguments are uncommon between NCS and local students, and certain NCS students talk to and play with local Chinese students in Cantonese. However, I found that the NCS students and local students could only be 'friends' instead of 'close friends' because of numerous barriers. First, although many NCS students could speak and listen in Cantonese, they could not express in-depth feelings and emotions in the language. Therefore, whenever they felt upset or angry, they would discuss their feelings only with their NCS friends in their own language. Second, although the NCS students and local students played together, they were only 'playing' the game without occasional verbal communication. Third, NCS students did not dine out with local students, and many NCS students were vegetarians or Muslims, who do not eat pork. Finally, it was highly unlikely for NCS girls to make friends with Chinese boys because of the restrictions in their culture and religion.

This phenomenon will continue for some years until third- or fourth-generation-born Hongkongers can integrate completely into the community. Because friendship is critical to

youngsters in their growth, this can explain why nearly all NCS students preferred studying in the multiethnic school, where they could have more NCS friends.

A third-generation Secondary 1 student whose grandfather and father were born in Hong Kong said that she had no difficulty making friends with Chinese schoolmates because she was proficient in Chinese, although writing remained difficult for her. She chose to study in the multiethnic school because ‘we can use our own language’ and school life is ‘very fun’.

A range of whole-school support measures were organised by the case study school in the 2013/14 academic year, such as ‘Sunshine Teacher’, where one teacher was allocated to each Secondary 1 and Secondary 2 student to provide greater care and support to younger students. An inclusive school environment was established for students from different cultures (eg, through Hand-in-hand Friendship groups where a group of students in senior form would build a peer network with new arrivals to help them develop self-confidence and self-understanding.

What did NCS parents consider when choosing a school for their children? Most parents, especially new arrivals, do not have considerable knowledge of the academic structure in Hong Kong. They usually choose schools recommended by their friends and relatives. Their other concerns include the location (whether it is near home), religion (Islam is better) and school fees (many NCS parents prefer free schools). The students interviewed reported additional factors including whether they had friends and relatives in the school and whether there was a simpler Chinese curriculum. The parents trusted the school overall, but they held a strong belief that teachers—not the parents—were responsible for the children’s schoolwork. Unlike local parents, NCS parents did not have the cultural backing to push their children to work hard, especially in asking that their daughters study hard. They cared more for the conduct and academic performance of their sons. Moreover, many NCS mothers were

uneducated and unable to help their children with schoolwork, especially for subjects taught in Chinese. Because of the language barrier, they seldom participated in school activities, and liaised only with NCS assistants who could speak their home language.

More NCS parents, especially the new generation who has been influenced by the local culture, have recently shown a preference for mainstream schools over multiethnic schools. This is because they had suffered from limited job opportunities because of a poor Chinese standard and poor academic performance. They believed that their children could obtain a better Chinese standard in mainstream schools. Certain NCS parents were also affected by the mass media which emphasised the case of discrimination regarding the allocation of NCS students in multiethnic schools. They therefore sent their children to mainstream schools to seek out equal education opportunities which they believed would increase their likelihood of entering university and their employment prospects. The intake of NCS students in multiethnic schools was dropping, but the number of NCS students in the mainstream school was increasing. By contrast, many local parents did not like placing their children in multiethnic schools because they thought that their children's academic performance would be affected when studying alongside a large number of NCS students. When a large number of vacancies recently became available in many mainstream schools, most local parents did not place their children in them. To attract more local students, the school has recently expended considerable effort into promoting itself as a local international school, and has emphasised its richer English environment and multicultural learning atmosphere. With a favourable English learning environment established on campus, certain local parents were successfully attracted because they liked the English environment, and hoped that their children could have friends from different countries.

Based on the achievements of the case study school in helping the students, in addition to the student feedback, I concluded that the multiethnic school was working towards 'cultural

pluralism', instead of 'cultural suppression'. The school understands the needs of NCS students, and has devised a clear developmental path with three specific major concerns. Teachers were committed to catering to students' language support needs in Chinese, as well as in Urdu, French and Japanese. They were nice and cared for the students. The school embraced differences and capitalised on cultural diversity to promote value education and to enrich students' life-wide learning experiences. By contrast, the students learned to respect and appreciate each other. Various growth needs and cultural harmony have been achieved effectively to date in this school. Conditions related to segregation had emerged because of the decline in local student intake in schools. 'It was not uncommon that when the intake of English-medium students in a school increased, Chinese parents tended to avoid sending their children there or even chose to pull them out; hence, the school would be unable to provide an environment conducive to learning Chinese' (Equal Opportunities Commission 2011, p. 7). If more local students could be attracted to study alongside NCS students, then integration in a multicultural school environment might occur. Moreover, the government should provide sufficient information and advice to NCS parents regarding the differences between mainstream and multiethnic schools. Because parents are given a choice between mainstream or multiethnic schools, the segregation argument regarding multiethnic schools is inappropriate.

The Case of Student P

Student P was a Secondary 6 boy who arrived to Hong Kong when he was 2 months of age. He studied in a primary school in Hong Kong from Primary 1 to Primary 3 before returning to Pakistan for Primary 4 to Primary 6 because his parents wanted him to learn Urdu. Three years later, he returned to Hong Kong and studied in Secondary 1 in this school. He said that he had forgotten nearly all of the Chinese he had learnt before returning to Hong Kong. With his hard work and the help of his teachers, he attained a first in the form every year. He said

that except for Chinese, all the other subjects were relatively easy for him. Once more he was able to communicate with people confidently in Cantonese. He also felt proud that he could read Chinese newspapers and write essays composed of approximately 50 to 60 Chinese characters. He has received grade A in the GCSE Chinese Language examination, and he is currently preparing for the GCE A level Chinese examination which he found to be not too difficult. Last year the school recommended him for a scholarship award because of his substantial progress.

His mother was a housewife caring for him and four younger brothers and sisters. He wanted to study in university, and earned money to support his family.

Friends and teachers in the school were nice to him. He knew a number of local Chinese students because he played basketball with them. He liked playing with local Chinese students because he could practise his Cantonese with them. However, when he felt unhappy, he would talk to his NCS friends. If he could choose again, he would still choose a multiethnic school because he could have friends with the same ethnic background to share the difficulties experienced.

This was one encouraging case in the school. Student P was a mature and polite boy. In a manner similar to many NCS students, Student P was from a family with many children. He did not attend kindergarten. He had to return to Pakistan to study his home language and culture, so that he could choose to live and work in Pakistan someday. When he returned to Hong Kong in Secondary 1, he had to learn Chinese from the beginning. Because Student P was the eldest son in the family, he wished to have a good career in the future so that he could support his family. Therefore, he worked hard in learning Chinese and other subjects with the support of his teachers. Although the path to success was long and difficult, he said he had

many friends with the same ethnic background to listen to him. Therefore, he replied firmly that he would choose the multiethnic school if he had the opportunity to choose again.

Overall, the multiethnic school was effective in providing different support measures and a multicultural environment for NCS students. However, the number of Chinese students has been declining in the past few years because of the labeling effect of discrimination. The school had devised a good plan for rebranding itself into a local international school which has recently helped enhance its attractiveness and competitiveness for attracting more local students. Moreover, the school has organised a number of exchange programmes and visits with other external organisations to provide further opportunities for understanding between local and NCS students. The multiethnic school still plays a critical role in rebranding itself into a local international school which is a good direction for the school's future. The school has successfully changed the mindset of certain local parents: Viewing the NCS students as an asset—instead of as a burden—of the school and considering the increase in the number of local students.



Chapter 5: Conclusion

Ethnic minorities had become a part of Hong Kong when it was a British colony in the nineteenth century. The number of ethnic minorities continued to increase because of marriages and family unions. They chose to settle in Hong Kong when it was returned to China in 1997. In the last few decades, the import of foreign labour for construction has also attracted a large number of unskilled workers from South Asia to remain in Hong Kong. These new arrivals tend to place their children in local schools to receive free education. Therefore, studying Chinese is compulsory in the local curriculum. Most non-Chinese-speaking (NCS) students study in multiethnic schools, where a simplified school-based curriculum catering to the needs of their students has been developed. These multiethnic schools used to be called ‘designated schools’ which were selected by the government to admit a larger number of NCS students. The government has provided financial support to these schools to provide additional support to NCS students in the last 10 years. Concentrating NCS students in multiethnic schools has been argued to constitute a form of discrimination, and in 2013 the ‘designated schools’ label was officially dropped to eliminate the labelling effect. Afterwards, more NCS students began studying in mainstream schools. Concurrently, with a decline in the local birth rate, more mainstream schools became willing to admit NCS students to avoid school closures. These mainstream schools mainly admitted students from lower bands, and the Chinese language was typically adopted as the medium of instruction for nearly all subjects.

A multiethnic school which was labelled a designated school in the past was chosen as the case study school to investigate the following four questions:

1. What were the major challenges facing NCS students in learning Chinese?

2. How did the multiethnic school help NCS students overcome their difficulties in learning Chinese?
3. How did the multiethnic school develop a suitable environment for the promotion of multicultural integration and harmony in the school?
4. Was cultural segregation or cultural pluralism prevalent in the multiethnic school?

5.1 The major challenges encountered by NCS students in learning Chinese

Pronunciation

When the NCS students in the case study school were asked what major challenges they faced in learning Chinese, most of those who had arrived to Hong Kong not too long ago indicated that ‘pronunciation’ was their greatest challenge. One can easily understand how critical the spoken language is to new arrivals for communicating with locals in daily life. In Cantonese, the six tones (ie, two rising, two falling, and two level tones) render many words to sound similar. Mispronunciations not only result in awkward sounds but can also cause misunderstandings. Because the secondary students in the case study school were teenagers who are more eager to gain the acceptance of their peers, the laughter and embarrassment provoked from mispronunciations could be highly stressful to them. In addition, it is difficult to grasp Cantonese with accuracy because it usually includes slang, jargon and a number of colloquial phrases which may not be considered standard language in daily conversations.

Moreover, NCS students face considerable long-term obstacles in becoming proficient in in-depth communication and engaging in formal discussions with others. Although NCS children who are born in Hong Kong or have lived there for many years can speak Cantonese

fluently, their expressions are limited to daily communication. They rely on slang more than they use the more formal language of the workplace. In more formal communication (eg, discussions and debates), NCS students may not have sufficient expressions at their disposal to argue and analyse viewpoints. It is certainly a disadvantage if they cannot engage in in-depth communication and discussions regarding critical issues in formal situations, especially in the workplace in the future.

Writing Characters

For NCS students born in Hong Kong or those who have resided there for a longer period, they said that ‘writing’ was the greatest challenge for them. They might have no difficulty communicating with locals because they can speak Cantonese fluently. ‘Writing’ to many local students entails composing a persuasive essay with elegant sentences and a strong structure, but to NCS students, this task involves simply ‘writing Chinese characters’. They said that they had to ‘draw’ the characters which are composed of a 2D ideograph, perhaps from left to right, from top to bottom and from the outer to inner, with long and short strokes, curves, hooks and dots. Moreover, many words look similar, but the meanings differ completely. The formation of compound words, sentences with the correct grammatical structure and paragraphs with a logical sequence and flow are major challenges for them. Moreover, written Chinese differs to an extent from spoken Chinese. These two language systems are interdependent, but simultaneously in conflict. The NCS students may confuse characters easily and use spoken colloquial language in writing.

Culture

Whereas the NCS students mentioned these two challenges, the teachers indicated the other challenges they faced in learning Chinese. The first was a lack of understanding regarding Chinese culture. ‘Students cannot truly master the language until they have also mastered the

cultural contexts in which the language occurs' (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project 1996). Students may not be aware of the importance of cultural elements in learning Chinese. Two teachers (T1 and T7) said that commonly used idioms and other 'adjectives' (eg, slang) in the Chinese language contained historical and customs references. Without knowledge of Chinese culture, using these idioms and slang correctly is difficult, and misunderstandings result.

Learner Diversity

Learners' differences in Chinese proficiency were said to be the greatest challenge for the school. The NCS students may not be able to learn effectively if teachers must cater to the needs of all the students in the classroom. The major differences in learning result from the difference between currently attending and newly arriving NCS students throughout the year, in addition to their various abilities and attitudes towards learning the new language. The newly arrived NCS students would widen the learning difference gap in the classroom when they are placed together with other NCS students who are at varying stages. In the case study school, the length of stay in Hong Kong varied considerably and caused substantial diversity in Chinese proficiency for NCS students. The NCS students born in Hong Kong or those who have studied in local primary school could speak fluently and listen in Cantonese, but those who had arrived in Hong Kong not long ago could not speak and listen in Cantonese.

Regarding reading and writing, new arrivals, despite studying in a secondary school, have to begin learning to read and write in Chinese from the beginning. It is very difficult for them to meet the requirements for the Secondary 6 Chinese standard when they graduate from school. For NCS students born in Hong Kong or those who have completed the local curriculum in primary school, only a few of them claimed that they could read and write well. Many of them still exhibited weaknesses in reading and writing. Two teachers (T1 and T7) explained

that although certain students in the school had received 6 years education in a local primary school, they were only up to a P3 or P4 level when they entered the school. This was because NCS students did not receive substantial language support at home because they speak in their mother tongue there. They fell behind after P4 when the content for the Chinese Language subject was becoming increasingly difficult, and they could not catch up because the school and/or family did not provide additional support.

Nevertheless, a few NCS Secondary 6 students who were born in Hong Kong stated that the Chinese curriculum in the school was too easy for them. However, when they were further asked why they had not chosen the local curriculum, they said that the HKDSE examination was too difficult.

The Chinese language has become increasingly important since Hong Kong's return to China in 1997. The NCS students must attain Chinese proficiency to a certain degree to communicate with people, study and work in the future. In the case study school, most students said that they would remain in Hong Kong in the future, and expressed hope that they could continue their studies in a local university and find a good job after graduation. A number of the interviewed students claimed that this was also why their parents brought them to Hong Kong, because their own countries were relatively less developed compared with Hong Kong. Although different paths for further study are available to those who leave secondary school in Hong Kong, the entrance requirements usually include a pass in a public Chinese language examination. Under the new academic structure that commenced in 2009, it is more difficult for NCS students to obtain their first public examination certificate by obtaining a pass in the HKDSE compared with the HKCE examination in the old academic structure. In the past, many less able students could aim for five passes in the HKCE examination before seeking employment or take high certificate/diploma courses in a postsecondary college. A certain degree of acceptance and recognition can be obtained after

completing Secondary 5. At present, all students are pushed to sit the more difficult HKDSE examination, although ‘one examination determines one’s future’ after completing Secondary 6. To continue studying in a postsecondary college, a minimum of Level 2 in five subjects including Chinese Language is required (22222). To continue one’s study in a local university, the entry requirements are Level 3 in Chinese Language and English Language and Level 2 in Mathematics and Liberal Studies (3322). Chinese Language is a core subject, and a fail eliminates the opportunity for further study. Even many local Chinese students have failed in the past few years, and the subject has been called a ‘deathly’ paper. (The percentage of day school candidates obtaining Level 3 or above in 2014 was only 51.8%). For NCS students who want to remain in Hong Kong, learning Chinese is crucial because they know that with an improved Chinese proficiency they will have better career opportunities in the future. Therefore, helping NCS students improve their Chinese proficiency was a critical mission of the school.

5.2 Strategies adopted by the multiethnic school in helping NCS students overcome their difficulties in learning Chinese

Curriculum and Assessment

In the past 10 years, the multiethnic school has developed the school-based Chinese language curriculum to suit the various needs of its NCS students. A range of external resources are used for supporting the development of the school, its staff and students (eg, a partnership with an expert team from the local university and the Education Bureau (EDB) to support Chinese language curriculum development). The co-planning of lessons for the curriculum, the designing of teaching and assessment materials for the topics as well as discussions and reflections of the pedagogy for open lessons are conducted periodically. School-based

curriculum materials and assessments have been developed according to the students' cultural background and ability.

All NCS students are encouraged to study the GCSE Chinese language curriculum for the public examination because it is 'accepted' as meeting the minimum entrance requirements for the Chinese language by local universities. The GCSE examination has been excellent in the past (approximately 98% this year). A few NCS students sat the GCE AL examination, all of whom passed it. The more capable students are encouraged to also sit the more advanced GCE A Level examination. NCS students can even choose to study the HKDSE examination, but rarely do they actually sit the examination. The teachers said that although NCS students attain a pass in the GCSE examination, it is still difficult to secure a place in university because certain universities do not actually consider GCSE results to be equivalent to HKDSE results because Chinese Language in the GCSE is too easy (only equivalent to the Primary 4 standard).

Cross-level grouping

With a large number of NCS students with varying Chinese language proficiency, the schools adopt a cross-level grouping approach which involves students of different forms being grouped together based on their Chinese proficiency to minimise differences between learners. Classes for Secondary 2 and Secondary 3 as well as for Secondary 4 and Secondary 5 students are divided into seven smaller classes. With a similar ability and smaller class, the teachers can provide better language support to the students. A percentage of English is used to assist with teaching in Chinese language lessons; 70% in English for the class with new arrivals, 70% in Cantonese for the class with students who have a basic understanding of Chinese, and 100% in Cantonese for the class with more able students which includes NCS students born in Hong Kong and those who have received their primary education there.

Teaching tones

Because many newly arrived NCS students said that pronunciation was their major challenge in learning Chinese, the multiethnic school helped improve their speaking and listening skills by teaching them the various tones of Cantonese. A correct pronunciation is critical for helping NCS students communicate effectively with locals in daily life, and progresses towards integrating them into the community as soon as possible. This strategy is helpful because the mispronunciation may result in embarrassment and misunderstandings, in addition to reducing the confidence in using the language.

Teaching radicals

To improve the students' writing skills, the teaching of radicals and components as well as an emphasis on the stroke order of Chinese characters could help them recall and understand the meaning of a large number of related vocabulary words. Conducting a wide range of cultural activities for NCS students inside and outside the classroom could also improve their understanding of Chinese traditions, and in turn enhance their reading and writing skills.

Other pedagogies

The pedagogy adopted by teachers in the classroom for new language learners is also crucial. The pedagogy includes connecting unfamiliar characters to familiar ones, thereby linking that which is known to unknown characters, and relying considerably on repetition and summaries throughout each lesson and the use of visual aids (eg, images and audiovisual materials, the use of body language, facial expressions and gestures and arranging various learning tasks for students with varying ability). Teachers provided immediate feedback during lessons.

To cater to the learners' differences, especially in relation to the more active and participatory learning style of most NCS students, a key teaching strategy typically adopted is providing opportunities for different learners to respond to questions or contribute ideas in the lesson. The teachers monitor the students' progress closely and adopt a wider range of teaching strategies devised for maximising their potential. The school employed a number of NCS teaching assistants to help the children learn in their own language.

Cultural activities

Students cannot truly master the language until they have also mastered the cultural contexts in which the language occurs (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project 1996). To communicate with others successfully, language must be 'associated with other culturally appropriate behavior.' In Chinese culture, the phrasing of a young individual when addressing an elderly person is usually more polite. For example, when expressing gratitude and making requests, the wordings and tones are typically more formal. Therefore, without an awareness in Chinese culture, incorrect characters may be used in addressing someone depending on the person and/or context. Reaching such an advanced Chinese language standard in HKDSE or a certain level of formal communication is an impossible goal for NCS students. To help students understand more of Chinese culture, the multicultural school organises many cultural activities so that NCS students can be introduced to Chinese festivals and customs. Elements of Chinese culture are included in the teaching materials.

Student responses towards the strategies adopted by the school were positive. Most students said that they enjoyed the Chinese language lessons substantially. They also stated that the lessons were fun, and that the teachers were nice and helpful. Only a few of them indicated that the Chinese language curriculum was too easy for them. A few students stated that they did not have many opportunities to interact with the local students.

Overall, a good range of measures have been implemented to address differences between learners. Ample resources have been deployed, ability-grouping adopted and small- and split-class Chinese teaching provided for students of varying Chinese competency. Teachers have made commendable efforts in developing school-based Chinese language curriculum materials and assessments to cater to student needs. When selecting teaching materials and designing worksheets, especially those supporting language learning, teachers consider the students' cultural background and ability. The smallness of the class provides a supportive environment for enhanced class interactions, and a more varied pedagogy and learning activities have been adopted to meet the needs of the more active NCS students. To support the less able students, different forms of tutorial classes are appropriately organised for certain subjects. To enhance the potential of the more able learners, the school encourages students to enter competitions and participate in various types of activities.

Development into a local international school

When learning a new language, students should certainly be presented with the opportunity to use the language in interactions and meaningful activities. Therefore, multiethnic schools must provide more opportunities for their NCS students to learn and grow with other Chinese-speaking students, with a view to exposing NCS students to Chinese through learning activities outside the school and interactions with their Chinese-speaking peers (EDB 2008). The school was aware of the limitation regarding the decreasing number of local students because more local parents were reluctant to send their children to multiethnic schools. To attract more local students, the school has recently begun to redesign itself into a local international school. The school organises a number of English and Chinese classes, seminars, visits to primary schools in the district, the community and even around China to promote the school to NCS parents and students. The school has successfully attracted NCS students from various countries (NCS students have arrived from over 15 countries), and

more local parents are willing to choose for their children. (The number of local Secondary 1 students has increased from 0% in 2010/11 to 50% in 2013/14.) Once the school has been successfully developed into a local international school for students from many nations, more local parents will be eager to send their children to multiethnic schools, at which time the number of local students will increase, and the opportunities for practising the language with local students will be maximised. Students can learn more effectively and efficiently when they can learn alongside local students.

5.3 Promoting multicultural integration and harmony in the multiethnic school

Cultural integration would not occur in the absence of cultural interaction. Students moving to live in a new environment experience a degree of psychological discomfort. They may feel lonely and frustrated because they may be experiencing learning problems and in establishing relationships. Even their uniforms and hairstyles as well as their eating habits are strange to the locals. Young people whose language and culture differ from those of the dominant group often struggle to form and sustain a clear self-identity (Sonia 2008). They need to engage with their friends in their own language. Multiethnic schools are where NCS students can feel free to chat with friends in their home language, so that they can overcome any transitional trauma. NCS students from different South Asian countries can easily become friends because they can communicate in English, and parts of their mother tongue share similarities. Moreover, they have similar experiences to share and can support each other, such as having left their motherland, having been born outside their motherland or being treated unfairly in daily life.

However, making friends with local students is not easy. The language barrier is a major problem in developing friendships with local students, because mutual communication is critical to making friends. Therefore, Chinese proficiency and cultural integration are

interrelated. To be able to make friends with local students, the NCS students should communicate effectively in Chinese. A better Chinese proficiency leads to improved communication and understanding. Cultural differences present another barrier. In a survey conducted by the Chinese University of Hong Kong (2004), over half of the respondents had (a) heard that non-Chinese people are dirty or smelly (64.9%), (b) failed to secure employment despite being more qualified and competent compared with a Chinese person (58.8%) and (c) certain Chinese people opted to stand rather than sit next to them in public transport or public spaces (55.3%; CUHK Social Work Department 2004).

When the students and teachers were asked of the relationship amongst students from different countries, they answered that the relationships were fine and harmonious. Students from various nations could get along well because they occasionally play together. However, one finding showed that the relationship between NCS students and local Chinese students was harmonious because they did not have a considerable degree of contact with each other. They neither eat with NCS students because of different eating habits, nor do they chat with them over the phone because of the language barrier. Students from the same country may occasionally have an argument because they usually have more contact with each other. Argument amongst students from different ethnic backgrounds are rare.

According to the teachers' observations, both NCS and local students tend to get along with friends who share the same background. Pakistanis comprise the majority of NCS students and play together in a group, whereas Vietnamese and Filipino students comprise the minority in another group. Boys and girls are usually separated in two groups. NCS students and local students are usually in split groups. Interactions amongst NCS students from different nations are more frequent than those between local students and NCS students, because the language systems of certain South Asian countries have a few common characteristics, and English can also be used as a common language. The local Chinese

students may be unwilling to communicate with NCS students because of the language barrier because they typically exhibit weaknesses in English and Cantonese because of the difficulties. Conversely, NCS students are more active and more willing to make friends with local Chinese students. Depending on their Chinese proficiency and personality, certain NCS students may have more local Chinese friends.

Nearly all of the interviewed NCS students said that they enjoyed life in this school because of the good learning environment as well as because they had nice friends and teachers. A large number of NCS students preferred studying in this school because they could talk to more NCS students in their home language or in English. A number of them preferred studying in a school with a majority of Chinese students because they wanted to improve and practise their Chinese. Only a few of them claimed that they did not enjoy the school life because the school days were too long and they were assigned too much homework. Many NCS students claimed that making friends with Chinese students was difficult because they could not communicate with each other. This was because many NCS students could not speak Cantonese fluently, whereas many Chinese students could not speak English. A few of them responded that they did not feel comfortable talking to Chinese students because certain Chinese students appeared unapproachable. By contrast, certain local Chinese students indicated that it is highly unlikely for local and NCS students to be really good friends because they are 'not in the same world'. In their view, NCS students are more accustomed to their own culture, and occasionally do not adapt to Chinese culture. Certain ethnically Chinese locals indicated that they cannot accept the bad habits of many NCS students (eg, spitting, a bad temper, and being dirty).

Everyone needs friends. To promote cultural understanding, we would be limited in our efforts until we form relationships (friendships). Friendships must be developed naturally when presented with opportunities for interaction. Therefore, the case study school organises

various types of activities and programmes to provide opportunities for NCS and local students to play and work together. A number of activities and competitions have been organised for students of different ethnic groups to collaborate to reach a common goal. The school promotes life education by organising various cross-cultural activities through different subjects and clubs. Certain cultural activities are organised for promoting cultural integration and harmony (eg, the yearly held Cultural Week, during which NCS students set up stalls to introduce their culture to other students). Most students said that they enjoyed Cultural Week considerably. The school also established the first NCS CAS corps for NCS students. A wide range of training programmes (eg, rescue skills, hiking and open examinations) has been arranged so that cadets can obtain medals. Increasingly more NCS students have been participating in this uniform group since its establishment.

Upon reviewing the students' performance and their development needs, I found that essential virtues were instilled in the students to help them develop a sense of responsibility, self-discipline and moral values. The school provides suitably preventive, developmental and remedial programmes. The Moral and Civil Education section of the school has organised programmes to create a 'second-home feeling' for NCS students inside and outside the classroom. Although this is a Catholic school, the religious beliefs of the NCS students were respected. The religious teachers typically focus on life and value education, instead of religious education, to achieve a balance between the Catholic religion of the school and the different religions (eg, Islam) of the NCS students. Catholic mass and speeches delivered by priests are no longer arranged. To maintain the Catholic vision of the school, approximately 15 minutes is dedicated to singing hymns and reading the bible during morning assembly, and the NCS students have learned to show respect in religious activities. Certain NCS students said that everyone respects their religion in school because they can still follow their culture and celebrate their festivals.

A Cultural Integration Centre was established in the school to provide support, especially in career planning, to students from different ethnic groups. Guidance is provided progressively to better prepare students for their future. Certain companies from different industries are also invited to give career talks to the students so that they can enhance their understanding on different careers and prospects.

Overall, the case study school is characterised by its cultural diversity, and it prides itself in its experience supporting Chinese language learning for NCS students. The school recognises the challenges and opportunities impacting its development. It is attempting to develop a professional learning community by sharing its experiences with other schools which admit NCS students. It promotes cultural harmony and the school as a local international school. Teachers are typically committed to catering to students' various growth-related needs. Students learn to respect and appreciate each other. Most of them display interest in learning and are eager to participate in class activities. They typically have good communication skills in English, enjoy school life and have a positive relationship with their peers.

5.4 Cultural segregation vs cultural pluralism in the multiethnic school

Bennett (2003) presented three possible outcomes when different cultures come into contact: cultural assimilation, cultural pluralism and cultural suppression. Cultural assimilation is 'a process in which people of diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds come to interact, free of constraints, in the life of the larger community.' In this case, all students in a school are taught in the same manner. Consequently, the members of an ethnic group must relinquish their original culture, and are absorbed into the core culture in the host society. The ethnic minorities bear the responsibility of adapting to the core culture once they choose to immigrate to another country. However, the ethnic minority group may lose its original culture after a few generations because of this nationalism.

Cultural suppression is at the other end of the spectrum, and involves ethnic minority groups being separated from the host society. The minority culture is considered inferior and unable to merge the core culture. The ethnic minority group, in a similar manner to the cultural assimilation case, also loses its original characteristics, but is still rejected by the core culture. Eventually, the core culture and the minority culture become mutually exclusive, and the minority group becomes isolated and neglected by the local country.

By contrast, cultural pluralism is said to be the ideal form because it is a process of compromise characterised by mutual appreciation and respect between two or more cultural groups. Members of different ethnic groups are permitted to retain many of their cultural traditions (eg, language, religion and food preferences) to contribute to the beauty and strength of the whole composition of society. However, cultural pluralism has been argued to be dangerous to society because it highlights ethnic group identity which may lead to intergroup antagonism.

Mission of the school-sponsoring body

The school sponsoring body (SSB), grounded in the Christian values of ‘Love in the service of Hope’, aims to provide ‘caring and quality education services’ to people, and especially help the underprivileged and disabled by providing a truly inclusive education environment. Special attention is directed to ‘the needs and aspirations of the underprivileged, the LAST, the LEAST and the LOST within the community.’ The case study school has developed morally, intellectually, physically, socially, aesthetically and spiritually students. It has upheld its strong mission and commitment to ‘ensure children equal opportunities for education’ for nearly 40 years. Throughout the years, the case study school has always admitted students from lowest bands as well as those from the less privileged classes in Hong Kong. When opportunities for further study were extremely limited in the 1980s, the schools were being

run as technical/prevocational schools which provided various practical subjects to help youngsters prepare for a career after completing Secondary 5. When the technical industry in Hong Kong declined after the 1990s, the schools continued to offer quality education to students in the lowest bands. When learning assistance for NCS students was urgently required in the 21 century, the school assumed responsibility by rebranding itself as a multiethnic school. In the past 10 years, the school has been investing considerable effort to providing quality education to these students.

Segregation versus Integration in the Multiethnic School

A voice has recently been arguing that the concentration of NCS students in multiethnic schools constitutes a form of cultural suppression of NCS students. ‘There is a view that the policy of allowing multiethnic schools for EM was itself discriminatory because it reinforced segregation rather than encouraged integration’ (Equal Opportunities Commission 2011, p. 7). The Commission advised that NCS students not be isolated in multiethnic schools which are schools with a poorer intake and lower banding. They should be allowed to receive the same type of education provided to local students in mainstream schools.

When parents began labeling multiethnic schools as schools for lower achievers and also blamed them as being responsible for exercising a form of segregation targeting NCS students, the government did not defend these multiethnic schools by acknowledging their contributions to this group of students and to the community. Instead, the government issued a prompt and simple response with the immediate removal of the label ‘designated schools’, and this action implied that multiethnic schools were discriminating against NCS students. This was not only unfair to multiethnic schools, the action affected their intake as well because the NCS students began switching to mainstream schools, and local students became more reluctant to attend these multiethnic schools. How could these multiethnic schools

survive when they had to compete with ordinary grammar schools in the coming years when the number of Secondary 1 students was dropping dramatically? Moreover, this resulted in a waste of resources because teachers in the multiethnic schools were well trained, and the teaching materials were well prepared. Consequently, NCS students become an experiment for most mainstream schools which are not yet prepared to practise applying strategies for multicultural education.

Teachers in the case study school did not agree that segregation of NCS students was occurring in multiethnic schools. By contrast, the case study school has been successful in providing a pluralistic learning environment for NCS students since 2006. The multiethnic schools have accumulated experience in providing ‘focus support’ to the learning and teaching of NCS students. They have designed a school-based curriculum specifically for NCS students, and have developed effective pedagogies for maximising their potential. This valuable experience resulted from the cumulative efforts of a group of devoted teachers who had developed positive attitudes towards NCS students, including caring for their sense of belonging and future aspirations. Further opportunities were provided to students to share and celebrate their different cultures inside and outside the classroom, and to explore further paths for their studies and future career. The NCS students in the case study school also claimed that they enjoyed studying in this multiethnic school because the teachers were nice and they could make many friends from the same country with whom they could share their happiness and difficulties. They also appreciated that their religious beliefs were being respected in this Catholic school. Therefore, complaining that it is discriminatory to place NCS students in multiethnic schools is not a substantive argument.

Furthermore, NCS parents are not required to enrol their children in multiethnic schools, but it is instead their choice to do so. Since 2004, NCS students have been allowed to choose to study in multiethnic or mainstream schools. Many NCS parents still choose to place their

children in multiethnic schools because they prefer having them engage with other NCS students from their home country. They also ‘choose’ to study in the school with adopt the Chinese language curriculum because they consider it to be more suitable for their children. Although certain mainstream schools refuse to admit NCS students because of their inadequate ability in the Chinese language, NCS students can be allocated to mainstream schools through the central allocation system should the parents choose a mainstream school. Moreover, a number of mainstream schools have recently become more eager to admit NCS students because the number of local students is declining rapidly. NCS parents who wish to place their children in a mainstream school have the right and opportunity to do so. Therefore, the argument that NCS students are segregated in multiethnic schools is inappropriate.

People may argue that NCS parents are searching for English-medium schools for their children, but these schools are usually full, and hence, parents have to choose a multiethnic school which also uses English as the medium of instruction. Thus, parents are forced into choosing a multiethnic school, instead of a mainstream school. In actuality, all government and aided primary schools in Hong Kong are Chinese-medium schools. The English-medium primary schools are mainly international schools and direct subsidy schools, where school fees must be paid. Upon being elevated to a secondary school, only certain ‘Band One’ schools which meet the criteria set by the EDB can adopt English as the medium of instruction for all classes or only a few. These English-medium schools are extremely popular, and therefore, only the Band One students may be able to secure a place in the first round of central allocation. A vacancy for a new arrival in the middle of the year is rare. Even many local students do not have the opportunity to study in these English-medium schools if they are not in the top 33% in student rankings. Therefore, multiethnic schools provide another opportunity for students who can learn better in English. In the focus-group interviews, 3 students (BP1, EP5 and GP2) were second-generation Chinese emigrants from other

countries, and hence, they had chosen to study in a multiethnic school because they were used to learning in English. Two of them would not study in a university in Hong Kong and planned to return to their home countries in the future. The remaining student said that he would remain in Hong Kong, and therefore, he wanted to learn Chinese in this school.

Overall, the multiethnic school ascribes importance to the students' holistic development. The school considers it its mission to extend the students' potential. The school has been investing considerable effort into providing a well-designed curriculum for NCS students, including a Chinese language curriculum designed specifically to suit their needs, by using English as the medium of instruction for other subjects, by adopting different teaching strategies to enhance learning effectiveness and by providing training to teachers so that they can understand the learning needs of NCS students. Support has been sought through various appropriate, external links to foster teachers' professional growth and to cater to the students' different development needs. The teachers have a good understanding regarding the school's strengths, challenges and required improvements, and they have developed good working relationships with the students. They are active, supportive and concerned with how the students' learning and growth needs are being catered to. Multifarious activities (eg, visits and extracurricular activities) are organised for enriching the students' life-wide learning experiences. These activities suit their interests and needs. Since the establishment of the first NCS CAS corps, more students are becoming actively engaged in community services, and their sense of responsibility can be enhanced. The students are presented with further opportunities to acquire various learning experiences and to participate actively in the learning process. They can learn more from each other through these activities. Their needs have been identified, and cultural harmony has been achieved. A wide range of measures has been adopted effectively to cultivate positive values and attitudes in the students. Therefore, cultural pluralism may be applied in many multiethnic schools instead of cultural suppression, because students from

different backgrounds can retain their cultural traditions in these schools and receive mutual respect.

5.5 NCS students in mainstream schools

Because many local parents are unwilling to send their children to multiethnic schools, thereby limiting opportunities for NCS students to interact with their local counterparts, can the NCS students benefit most if they study in mainstream schools? Although the purpose of this thesis is not to investigate the multicultural education provided by mainstream schools, certain findings in this study render them warranting discussion.

In Hong Kong, nearly all local secondary schools follow the mainstream Chinese language curriculum developed by the EDB to prepare students to sit for the public examination which determines if they can advance to university. Under the new academic structure which commenced in 2009, the Chinese curriculum for secondary students has become more difficult because knowledge of Chinese culture and literature (eg, poems and Classical Chinese) is required. The attainment of Level 3 in the HKDSE is a difficult barrier to meeting university entrance requirements. Learning Chinese thus becomes a major challenge for NCS students in secondary schools.

The misunderstanding regarding the occurrence of segregation against ethnic minorities has motivated a number of NCS parents to send their children to mainstream schools. This choice is based on an ideal but misguided belief because NCS students cannot automatically become proficient in Chinese by being immersed into a mainstream school. This may occur only when students were born in Hong Kong or have been studying there since early childhood. Family support for these students should also be sufficiently strong to provide a richer Chinese language environment. 'English-medium students faced great challenges in learning

Chinese due to the lack of support from their families' (Equal Opportunities Commission 2011, p.4). However, it remains relatively difficult for many NCS students, when once to senior secondary, to cope with increasingly difficult concepts in their studies when they are taught in a second language. For the newly arriving NCS students, especially those who arrived to Hong Kong as teenagers, it is difficult for them to study the local Chinese curriculum because their Chinese learning is delayed.

According to Banks (1997), multicultural education provides equal opportunities for students from different backgrounds to obtain knowledge and skills, with an understanding of their own cultural characteristics and the culture of other places, so that they can be worldly.

The Race Discrimination Ordinance (2009) states that regardless of individual gender, race or disabilities, students are entitled the rights to enjoy equal access to education. Are equal learning opportunities more crucial than learning effectiveness for NCS students? Under the Integration education policy for SEN students, only those who do not have severe learning difficulties can study in mainstream schools. Students with severe disabilities should study in special schools which could provide a suitable curriculum and support to cater to their learning needs. The rationale of equal learning opportunities is in ensuring that all children have the opportunity to develop to their full potential. Therefore, careful consideration of a suitable environment where children can develop their potential is of greater importance. Whether to study in a mainstream or multiethnic school depends on individual needs because the consideration of the students' advantages should hold most weight. It also depends on whether they start learning in kindergarten, primary or secondary school. A language should be learned as early as possible in life. Late NCS learners exhibiting weaknesses in Chinese should not be integrated into the mainstream curriculum. The EDB should provide greater flexibility for NCS students in choosing to study in a multiethnic or mainstream school based on their Chinese language ability.

Segregation versus assimilation in mainstream schools

Whether mainstream schools are prepared to provide support to NCS students should be considered so that the segregation of NCS students does not occur there. Although certain NCS students born in Hong Kong or those who have resided in Hong Kong for a long period are more willing and prepared to be ‘assimilated’ by the local culture, late NCS arrivals may be segregated in mainstream schools when they cannot communicate effectively and cannot benefit from school activities and the curriculum which was designed for the majority of local Chinese students. Mainstream schools must consider the needs of the majority local students first, and the small number of NCS students are expected to fit into the system on their own. Cultural assimilation is typically expected in mainstream schools because of insufficient resources and teacher training for catering to the needs of a small group of students. Under the conditions of cultural assimilation, the values and lifestyles of the minority culture are supplanted by those of the core society because the core society regards the minority culture as inferior and dangerous, and therefore, tends to reject it. NCS students in mainstream schools must eventually be absorbed into Chinese culture which is the core culture in Hong Kong.

If the Hong Kong government tends to ‘assimilate’ NCS students in mainstream schools, it must still ensure that these schools are prepared to provide quality education to these students. An inclusive and racially harmonious learning environment is fundamental to the delivery of quality and equitable education services, the success of which depends on the awareness and sensitivity of school principals and teachers (Equal Opportunities Commission 2011).

Are mainstream schools prepared?

Although a richer Chinese language environment can be provided, NCS students may not learn as well compared with the local students in mainstream schools until the following factors are addressed:

The first factor concerns the readiness of NCS students. Their Chinese proficiency in mainstream schools must be better because they can study the more advanced local Chinese language curriculum with the majority. NCS students born in Hong Kong and/or those who have learned Chinese for a longer period may be able to accomplish this. These NCS students are typically proficient in speaking and listening, and are better prepared to communicate and cooperate with local students in various types of schools activities. Moreover, they are better prepared for assimilation into the core culture because they are not considerably attached or bound by their own. To increase the readiness of NCS students, helping them obtain a basic ability in speaking and listening Cantonese as early as possible is essential. Schools could provide tutorials and oral-practice classes outside school hours.

Other than Chinese proficiency, NCS students should be prepared to face relatively greater difficulties in making friends with local students. They may have to determine whether to abandon their original culture, including their dress codes and eating habits, to be immersed in the host culture, or to insist on retaining their original culture, but become isolated because their schoolmates reject or do not welcome their lifestyle. NCS girls were occasionally bound by their religion not to have contact with boys, and then had to progress to a considerably greater challenge when studying in mainstream schools.

The second factor concerns the readiness of the local students. Chinese peers should be educated to respect and appreciate other cultures. They should be friendly and unprejudiced towards ethnic minorities. At minimum, they should be willing to tolerate the ‘unusual behaviors’ or ‘learning styles’ of NCS students. They should not laugh at NCS students when

they commit pronunciation errors, and they should not isolate NCS students during group work or class activities. Promoting a harmonious learning environment by providing opportunities for mutual understanding is also a responsibility of mainstream schools. A classroom climate of acceptance is related to increased student achievement, especially amongst minorities in the classroom. Bennett (2003) indicated that regarding increasing the readiness of local students, schools play a critical role in promoting cultural harmony through various activities inside and outside the classroom for both NCS students and local students to understand each other. A greater number of opportunities provided further enhances mutual understanding.

Even a local student who was interviewed said that he seldom had contact with NCS students. He thought that they were more accustomed to their own culture and occasionally do not adapt to Chinese culture. He worried that NCS students would be isolated if they were studying in mainstream schools. Another local student who was interviewed said that although he played basketball with a few NCS students, it was difficult to become good friends with them because of the language barrier and religious beliefs. The examples he mentioned were that local students could not talk on the phone with NCS students because of the language barrier, and NCS students could dine out only at McDonalds, but not other restaurants where they might mistakenly eat food with forbidden ingredients. He added that certain NCS students were bad-tempered and dirty, and concluded that local Chinese students and NCS students were ‘not in the same world.’

The third factor concerns the provision of support measures by the school. A wider range of support should be provided by schools to cater to the needs of NCS students with respect to the lack of homework support, their weaknesses in Chinese, identity recognition, culture shock or career planning, and others. Although the schools could utilise the special funding provided by the EDB to organise various programmes for the students, the early identification

of needs and the determination of proper support measures are not easy tasks for mainstream schools. Although many South Asian students are academically weak in many subjects, the schools could also adopt student development as an objective. Not only should the schools provide more tutorial classes for language or homework support, they have the responsibility to allocate funding towards highlighting their students' character-building (eg, improving their sense of responsibility and self-esteem). Academic achievement and self-esteem are related. When students learn to assume responsibilities, they become punctual, can execute pre-lesson preparation tasks, are prepared for each lesson, hand in homework on time, and so on. Although the case study school provided considerable support to the students, a few of the interviewed students still stated that they hoped the school could provide halal food, could allow them to wear a 'nose ring' and recognise their holidays so that they can celebrate their festivals as well. Satisfying the psychological needs of NCS students was challenging.

The last factor concerns the readiness of the teachers. In mainstream classrooms which include a large number of local Chinese students, teachers tend to have lower expectations for particular racial or ethnic groups which are based on negative racial and/or ethnic prejudice (Bennett 2003). Teachers are often unaware of their own prejudices; they may hence be unaware of their lower expectations for certain students. Teachers' expectations for South Asian students must be raised. Students require encouragement and support so that they can regain confidence and develop interests in areas of learning in which they seem to be accustomed to failure. Expecting students with low motivation not to cause disruptions was only a basic requirement. Teachers could progressively raise their expectations. They must check whether students have achieved the standards the teacher has set out for them, and teachers must devise ways to help students achieve the learning objectives. Teachers commonly view students' difference as deficiencies (Sonia 2008, p. 170). This may have a negative effect on their learning. Many teachers claim that they consider all students to be

equal. Although this appears to be fair, this ‘nondiscriminatory’ attitude may result in failure to accept differences, and may lead to expecting the NCS students to be ‘melted in a pot’. In a U.S. Supreme Court case, the court ruled that although a school must provide Chinese-speaking students the same teachers, instructions and materials as the other English-speaking students, the Chinese-speaking students could not benefit from the instruction provided in English. ‘Equal is not the same’ because treating everyone in the same manner does not necessarily lead to equality. Accepting differences instead of denying them or making them invisible is what is called a ‘salad bowl’ (Sonia 2008). Therefore, teachers require guidelines to help them observe and interpret culturally different behaviors to prevent making blanket assumptions (Bennett 2003).

Moreover, Chinese language teachers should be trained on how to teach second-language learners effectively. These teachers are mainly first-language learners, and therefore, do not understand the difficulties experienced by NCS students when learning Chinese. They must utilize different pedagogies effectively to increase their students’ learning motivation and help them overcome any shy or uncomfortable feelings in learning. As the school had been a professional development school (PDS), the Chinese teacher (T1) said that he occasionally received enquiries from teachers in mainstream schools regarding methodologies for teaching NCS students. He expressed concern that the teachers in mainstream schools were not yet prepared to teach NCS students effectively.

Assimilation versus pluralism in mainstream schools

If all of these factors are addressed in the preparation plan by mainstream schools, the government must still consider whether cultural assimilation or cultural pluralism should be adopted in Hong Kong, especially because Hong Kong is a famous cosmopolitan city worldwide. The NCS students present increasing challenges for mainstream schools because

their experience supporting the special needs of NCS students is limited. The change may present new challenges to the existing school culture (eg, in curriculum design and pedagogy in the classroom). Simply expecting NCS students to become assimilated into the mainstream culture may result in conflict and prejudice, as well as unequal opportunities (eg, answering teachers' questions in lessons or being able to participate in school clubs and activities).

The government has noted that when studying together with a large group of local students, NCS students would be able to acquire the language in a rich language environment. The government aimed to encourage NCS parents to send their children to schools with an immersive Chinese language environment (EDB 2008). In actuality, this might improve only their speaking and listening abilities if the NCS students are eager to learn and communicate with local students frequently. Those who are shy and quiet, however, may feel lonely because they cannot make friends with local students. Hong Kong Unison claimed that certain NCS students who possessed a stronger command of the Chinese language, despite being accepted into mainstream schools, had to withdraw from them eventually because they would fail in many subjects which were taught in Chinese.

Cultural diversity presents both challenges and opportunities. The Canadian government encourages various cultures and ethnic groups to share their cultural expression and values with other Canadians, thereby contributing to a richer life for its peoples. The government operates based on the notion that people from different countries can bring with them every major world religion and language and provide all citizens with a considerable variety of human experiences. The Canadian government regards this as a heritage to treasure, and believes that Canada would be poorer if assimilation programmes were adopted which forced its citizens to forsake and forget the cultures they have brought to the country (Trudeau 1971).

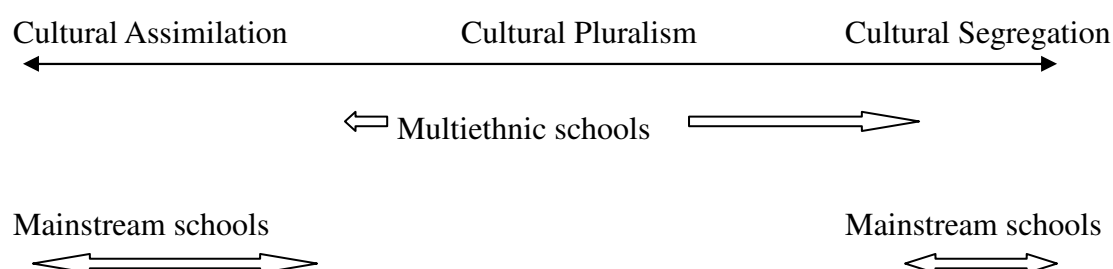
Irrespective of whether minority groups should work hard to strive for survival in a new country, many governments tend to adopt segregation or assimilation policies in addressing multicultural education because the majority populations in such countries are not required to make many changes. In pluralistic countries, the government promotes multicultural education, and students learn how to understand and respect different cultures and put them into practice.

It is a dilemma for most NCS parents in having to choose to use the majority language at home. It represents a denial of their identity and culture when they are forced to prioritise one over the other for their children's education. In actuality, parents can choose that their children receive outside support for learning the majority language (eg, additional lessons, television programmes, friends and neighbours). Many NCS immigrants are from underprivileged and disadvantaged areas, and they might need to learn the majority language to secure advantages and employment. Learning the majority language implies a change of life because employment in Hong Kong may require a higher competence in Chinese. However, families could ensure that their children are competent in Chinese while simultaneously retaining their minority language. One language does not need to be removed for another to improve (Collin 2007). Therefore, if the majority language is used at home instead of the minority language, the family identity and culture of minority families may be lost. Therefore, ensuring fluency in the majority language while retaining the minority language is the ideal choice for NCS families. People residing in a pluralistic country may even argue as to why only minority children are required to learn the core language in a multicultural city. Local children could also be encouraged to learn a minority language if the education system is equal and fair as well as multicultural. Multicultural education begins with the education of the majority but is a form of education that is required for both the majority and minority (Jang and Kim 2012). It is also a form of education that allows both

multicultural and non-multicultural families to remove their cultural biases and stereotypes, and recognise and acknowledge the diversity that arises from differences in income, gender, religion and especially nationality and race.

Roles of Multiethnic and Mainstream schools

Along a spectrum, with cultural assimilation at one end and cultural suppression at the other, the multiethnic school in the case study fell mainly in between by promoting cultural pluralism. Ethnic minority students could retain their own traditions and adopt many aspects of the core culture, whereas local students could respect and appreciate ethnic diversity. Perhaps certain multiethnic schools which could admit only a few local students have a tendency towards cultural segregation because NCS students have limited contact with local students. In most mainstream schools, cultural assimilation is adopted because they tend to assimilate a small number of NCS students into the core culture. Cultural segregation may occur in these mainstream schools which are not yet prepared to provide support to NCS students.



Therefore, if cultural pluralism is considered to present the ideal conditions for multicultural education, multicultural education should be promoted in all schools. Under cultural pluralism, minority groups can retain their own culture and customs (eg, language, religion and traditions) and simultaneously appreciate, accept and try out activities related to other cultures. By contrast, the core society can also respect, appreciate and experience different

cultures. In many multiethnic schools, local students and even teachers have opportunities to learn and use minority languages because they are commonly used by NCS students in school. The festivals of ethnic minorities could be celebrated in schools. Mainstream schools may require further time to become adequately prepared for these challenges and opportunities. When the mainstream schools are prepared to admit third- or later-generation NCS students, cultural pluralism may emerge there. Most multiethnic schools have accumulated considerable experience in supporting NCS students. They could form partnership with mainstream schools to provide support (eg, sharing teaching materials, arranging lesson observations and organising professional training programmes for teachers in mainstream schools).

Multiethnic schools could focus on admitting newly arriving NCS students. The major problem for new arrivals is learning Chinese. Learning a new language is not easy and requires time. New learners must undergo several stages when learning to speak a new language: They may initially be oblivious to the majority language, and may be able to communicate only with nonverbal expressions. After a short period, they may learn to use single words or simple phrases in regular and/or essential daily matters. After 1 to 2 years, they may speak, but usually in a limited manner, and may commit grammatical errors. After a longer period, they can communicate effectively in daily activities, although occasional errors may be made. Only at this stage can the students interact freely and confidently with native Chinese speakers, and have achieved a basic speaking and listening competency. However, despite learning Cantonese for many years, they may still be unable to use the language correctly to fully express their thoughts when addressing more complex situation or facing unfamiliar settings. In oral examinations or speech competitions, even local students may not be able to speak persuasively if they are not deliberately trained by teachers. Achieving Chinese competency in reading and writing requires considerably more time. Newly arriving

students could establish their own objectives over the long course of learning Chinese, according to their duration of stay in Hong Kong and their interests and expectations regarding the Chinese language. Therefore, a more focused strategy could be developed to cater to the learning needs of NCS students who are at different stages because of their arrival to Hong Kong at different ages. Another problem for NCS students involves cultural integration. Culture shock may occur because new students may be concerned that they are being discriminated against, and they may feel alone, isolated, frustrated and unable to adapt to the new environment. When studying together with many NCS students from the same country in a multiethnic school, NCS students may overcome the stressful adaptation period easily. Therefore, multiethnic schools are more suitable for students and families that are eager to establish a close bond with people of the same origin.

5.6 The role of government in providing quality learning opportunity for NCS students

As Hong Kong is a cosmopolitan city with a wide range of foreign workers, the government has the responsibility to provide quality public education to their children. The government should support and encourage the various cultures and ethnic groups to share their cultural expression and values with local people, thereby contributing to a variety of human experience and richer life for everyone in the country.

5.6.1 A Critique of the Misconceptions of Policy Makers

On the whole, in response to the allegations of segregating NCS students in designated schools, the government had shown a number of misconceptions:

Misconception 1: It was discriminatory to place NCS students in multiethnic schools

The government admitted tacitly that it was discriminatory to place NCS students in multiethnic schools by removing the “designated school” label. The Equal Commission

even reported in the papers that “it was discriminating to segregate the NCS student in the designated schools”. Many NCS parents thus start putting their children in the mainstream schools which may not be prepared to admit the NCS students. The government undermines all the hard work done by the multiethnic schools to support the NCS students, in the past ten years. This will undermine the ability of the designated schools to accomplish its mission and core responsibilities in supporting the NCS students in learning. All the teachers in the case study school did not agree that NCS students in multiethnic schools were being segregated. They understood the difficulties faced by the students and had built good rapport with them. They all strongly urged the government to provide more resources, including financial and human resources to cater for the learner diversity of NCS students in both multiethnic schools and mainstream schools. They all doubted that even NCS students born in Hong Kong were unable to perform as well as local students and hence putting them in the mainstream schools could not automatically solve the problem.

Misconception 2: NCS students will become proficient in Chinese by being immersed into a mainstream school

The government believes that the NCS students will automatically become proficient in Chinese by being immersed into a mainstream school because of rich Chinese language environment. A very heavy burden was then put to the mainstream schools which have not yet prepared to take up the challenges and mission. However, NCS students may not benefit from the extremely difficult Chinese language curriculum. Besides, they may not have sufficient interaction with local students if they are not accepted by the local students. Therefore could the NCS students have more opportunities to access to Chinese language and become more proficient in Chinese is still uncertain.

Misconception 3: NCS students face great challenges in learning Chinese is due to the lack of

support in their families.

The government believes that NCS students face great challenges in learning Chinese because of the lack of family support, especially lack of Chinese language environment in their families. With this belief, the government has put the NCS parents in a dilemma whether to supervise their children to complete the homework and to talk to their children in Cantonese or in home language at home. Actually, most NCS parents have the strong intention to retain their language and culture at home. It is unreasonable to expect the NCS parents, to act like many Chinese parents, to push their children to work hard and to practice other languages at home. It is incorrect to comment that there is a lack of family support of the NCS students as the measurement of family support in different culture is not the same.

Misconception 4: Providing immersion programmes at kindergarten level for the NCS students could solve the problem

The government considers that providing immersion programmes for the NCS students at the earliest possible stage, preferably at the kindergarten level is vital to effective learning. Most NCS parents are then encouraged to put their young children in the local kindergartens. Cultural assimilation in kindergarten could be adopted when the NCS children are molded like local Chinese during early childhood. However, the challenges faced by the kindergartens may have been under-estimated as the linguistic and psychological development is very important in early childhood. It could be a kind of child abuse and neglect if the basic psychological needs could not be satisfied due to language barrier. To what extent kindergartens could provide the “right” learning and teaching environment for the whole person development of NCS students must be carefully considered.

Misconception 5: “Equal” is treating everyone in the same manner

The government considers “equal” as treating everyone in the same manner (Nedha 2011) by providing the same school, the same teachers, the same curriculum and learning materials. As educators, we need to understand the differences between equity and equality. Equality means all students are provided with exactly the same type of educational experiences. However, it may not result in fairness to some students who have certain disadvantages. Equity states that everyone has different needs and requirements and should be treated accordingly (Nedha 2011). So Equity is more important as it aims to provide students with “what they need” in order to be successful in learning. Different treatment will then be given to students to offset the disadvantages faced by certain students. Regarding the education of NCS students in Hong Kong, ensuring that all the NCS students receive the same learning experience in mainstream schools regardless of their ability to study the local curriculum (especially the local Chinese language curriculum) is equal without equity. The exclusive use of the core language in the classroom provided ‘equal treatment’ without equity to the NCS students who could not understand the language (Bennett 2003). Studying in the same types of schools, taught by the same teachers, provisions for same curriculum and textbooks for all students do not provide equal educational opportunity for the NCS students if they could not benefit from the arrangement (Wong and Fong 2006). It is even unfair as it appeared to favor the local Chinese students over the NCS students. The government considered immersing the NCS students into mainstream schools as the ideal solution, and insists that no alternative Chinese language curriculum would be provided. This ‘solution’ presents a lose–lose situation because many NCS students who are not prepared to study in a mainstream school are mismatched because such schools are unprepared to admit NCS students, and more problems may arise in the future. Other than equal access, the government should simultaneously make use of a wider range of strategies and remedies to ensure equity and fairness in the mainstream schools.

Thorough consideration is needed

It is obvious that the government intends to adopt assimilation policy to the NCS students. However, carefully consideration is needed to decide whether cultural assimilation or cultural pluralism should be adopted in Hong Kong, especially because Hong Kong is a famous cosmopolitan city worldwide. Although cultural assimilation is generally expected by leaders of different countries (Bennett 2003), simply expecting NCS students to become assimilated into the mainstream culture may result in conflict and prejudice, as well as unequal opportunities. More importantly, it must be the choice of the NCS parents or students to decide whether they want to be assimilated in the host country or not. Assimilation would naturally occur when ethnic groups have low identification with their original culture, but identify highly with the core culture (Berry 1992). So if female NCS students enjoyed the higher level of social status in Hong Kong and decided not to return to their home country, they would choose to be assimilated in local community naturally. This may occur easily in ethnic minority emigrants who are born and raised in the host country, and therefore, consider the host country their own home.

Cultural pluralism should always be the ideal form of multicultural education on the whole because it is a process of compromise characterised by mutual appreciation and respect between two or more cultural groups (Bennett 2003). Ethnic minorities could retain many of their cultural traditions to contribute to the beauty and strength of the whole composition of society. Although it is not easy to promote cultural pluralist as many local people may feel dangerous with the highlight of ethnic group identity, the government could educate the people to accept and understand the “diversity” of different people (Glazer 1999) at the beginning stage. When local people are more ready to appreciate different cultures, cultural pluralism may occur in the Hong Kong in future.

In the meantime, the government has an essential role to play to help the NCS students develop their full potential. There is a need to bring together policy, curriculum and pedagogy in a real attempt to ensure that the NCS students would not become “losers” (Kennedy 2012). In addition to offering financial support to schools based on the number of NCS students attending, the government should strengthen the support measures at individual level and school level, as well as policy level, to achieve cultural pluralism in the long run. At policy level, the government is recommended to devise an alternate Chinese language curriculum and assessment paper needs of NCS students. At school level, the government should provide more support to the teachers in mainstream schools as the number of NCS students is increasing rapidly in recent years. At individual level, the government is recommended to provide professional advice to the NCS parents and their children individually to help them find a suitable school to achieve their aspiration.

5.6.2 Alternative Qualification and Assessment for Chinese Language

NCS students are expected to acquire a suitable qualification in Chinese Language according to their abilities to facilitate their integration into the local community and foster their long-term development in Hong Kong (EDB 2011).

Because the Chinese language qualification determines whether NCS students can be admitted to university, a more alternative Chinese language qualification should be offered to these students, especially those who are late arrivals. The education reform presented five basic principles, one of which was the ‘No loser’ principle which states, ‘There should not be, at any stage of education, dead-end screening that blocks further learning opportunities ... and teaching without any discrimination’ (Education Commission 2000, p. 9).

Although universities accept alternative Chinese language qualifications are accepted, they must fulfill one of two specific conditions: (a) the student has learnt Chinese for less than 6

years while receiving primary and secondary education; or (b) the student has learnt Chinese for more than 6 years, but the curriculum was an adapted and simpler Chinese language curriculum. Under these specific circumstances, choosing to study in a mainstream secondary school or in a multiethnic school becomes a critical decision for further study in university. If the NCS student chooses to study in a mainstream secondary school with a formal Chinese language curriculum, he or she is ineligible to use an alternative Chinese language qualification when applying to universities. This means that the student must sit the HKDSE examination and obtain a minimum of Level 3 in Chinese Language, the likelihood of which is highly unlikely for most NCS students. This is the reason certain NCS students who can enter a mainstream secondary school leave and switch to a multiethnic school when they find that the Chinese language curriculum is too difficult for them.

The alternative Chinese language qualifications accepted by universities include the following:

GCE (A-Level) or GCE (AS-Level) examinations (must obtain Grade E or above); and

GCE (O-Level), GCSE or IGCSE (Certain universities accept Grade E, but others accept only Grade C or above.).

However, a number of universities emphasise that certain programmes, especially those that require a higher Chinese language proficiency (eg, a bachelor degree in Chinese Language and Chinese Medicine), do not accept applications for a waiver of the Chinese language requirement. They also highlight that waivers would be granted at the discretion of individual programmes and would be considered as individual cases. The reason is that although the students could pass or attain credits in these alternative examinations, their Chinese proficiency ranges only up to a level from Primary 4 to Primary 6.

For NCS students, the dilemma is whether the HKDSE Chinese Language paper is so difficult that nearly all of them cannot fulfil the ‘Level 3’ criteria, but the GCE Chinese Language paper is too easy, and therefore, are ‘not truly recognised’ by local universities. An alternative qualification with a standard between HKDSE and GCE Chinese Language may help address this problem. Certain people have suggested that NCS students sit the GCE A level examination to obtain greater recognition from universities. The multiethnic school also asks NCS students with a better Chinese standard to sit the GCE A level examination. Because the entrance requirement for an alternative Chinese language qualification is only a pass in the GCE examination, the school must ensure that all students have passed it. It is unnecessary to push all students to sit the GCE A level examination which includes difficult Chinese literary elements, but receives the same recognition as the GCE examination. The case study school suggested that another set of examination papers for Chinese Language could be available in HKDSE mainly for second-language learners. This could be similar to the previous ‘syllabus A’ HKCE examination in English Language. The main difference could be that cultural elements and Classical Chinese are excluded from the syllabus but, the remaining sections are preserved. This means that the paper is not ‘easier’, but more accurately reflects the ability of second-language learners in all respects, except for cultural knowledge related to the Chinese language. The well-known IB curriculum offers another set of language examination papers for second-language learners. However, the EDB has concluded that ‘one curriculum for all’ does not constitute a form of discrimination, and was also concerned that developing an alternative Chinese curriculum for NCS students would be greeted with low recognition (Equal Opportunities Commission 2011). Therefore, under the existing policy, schools are not permitted to adopt an alternative Chinese language curriculum with pre-established simpler contents and lower standards for their NCS students (EDB 2014).

Instead of designing another curriculum for NCS students, the EDB has developed a ‘Chinese Language Curriculum Second-Language Learning Framework’ with the aim of providing NCS students with a bridge to entering ‘mainstream’ Chinese language classes (EDB 2014). The rationale, according to the EDB, is to ensure ‘equal opportunities’ for all NCS students in learning Chinese as received by their Chinese-speaking counterparts, and also to create an inclusive learning environment in schools (EDB 2014). Although Banks (2007) emphasised ‘equal educational opportunities for all students’, his concepts of multicultural education suggested changing ‘the total school environment’, so that it reflects the diverse cultures and groups in society. Therefore, ‘equal education opportunities’ do not involve merely placing NCS students in mainstream schools. The school must make substantial changes in five dimensions, namely content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy and empowering school culture, to meet the needs of the students.

Moreover, Bennett (2003) placed greater emphasis on ‘developing students to their highest potential’. Could equal learning opportunities meet the needs and characteristics of every student, especially students from different cultures, and therefore, help them develop to their full potential? After conducting a case study, Bennett (2003) argued that the exclusive use of the core language in the classroom provided ‘equal treatment’ without equity to a child who could not understand the language. The language of instruction was unfair to him because all other subjects were taught in that language only. A court in the United States ruled that provisions for the same teachers, programs and textbooks in the same language for all students in the district did not provide equal educational opportunities when the native language of a sizeable number of students was not English. The ruling held that no equality of treatment exists merely by providing students with the same facilities, textbooks, teachers and curriculum; students who do not understand ‘English’ (ie, the language of the country) are effectively foreclosed from any meaningful education. A language minority child being

forced to change suddenly to a majority language curriculum is akin to pushing that child into the deep end of a swimming pool and expecting him or her to sink or swim (Colin 2007). Although certain children may initially splash around and learn to swim quickly, others may be in danger and may never try to swim again. Secondary students are older, and therefore, have to experience a more advanced curriculum, and they may need a more advanced language to cope with it.

The championing for the provision of equal opportunities for students to study in mainstream schools has recently led to similar ‘unfair’ situations for students as they face major challenges in learning Chinese and other subjects in mainstream Chinese-medium schools. The government evidently intended to assimilate NCS students into the local community under the guise of ‘equal education opportunities’.

Because on occasion students arrive from different regions throughout the academic year, learner diversity, including the diversity of first languages, of parental expectations, of learning abilities, of the length of stay in Hong Kong, and so on of these ethnic minority students must be catered to. Instead of providing one set of strategies for all NCS students, their needs and abilities must be carefully considered so that no one becomes a ‘loser’ after studying in Hong Kong.

In actuality, the main reason the argument of segregation in multiethnic schools is based on concerns NCS students being unable to achieve a high standard of Chinese in multiethnic schools, where the school-based curriculum has been simplified. It is highly unrealistic to believe that once NCS students can learn the local curriculum, they can reach the standard to sit the HKDSE examination and continue their studies in a university. If local universities were to recognise an alternative Chinese language qualification, NCS parents would feel free to send their children to multiethnic schools, where their children could learn Chinese happily

as well as all of the other subjects in English, and grow together with more friends with the same origin.

5.6.3 Support Measures for Mainstream Schools

The government is responsible for considering the needs of NCS students and for actively developing suitable policies for them. Because more NCS parents have recently been placing their children in mainstream schools, the government should provide financial funding and teacher training to mainstream schools which admit NCS students to ensure that a harmonious learning environment and quality education are provided to NCS students. Moreover, seminars and sharing workshops could be arranged to help mainstream teachers increase awareness regarding the needs of these students. Although the arrangement of PDSs since 2013 has provided a good platform and channel for schools to share their teaching experiences and teaching materials, the number of PDSs is lacking (only two primary schools and one secondary school) to meet their needs. Although the PDS in the case study is expected to provide support to three partner schools in the same district, many schools in other districts are eager to attend its ‘open lessons’ and talks. The Chinese language teachers also receive phone calls by teachers seeking advice regarding the teaching and learning of NCS students. The EDB could also identify more good teaching practices in mainstream schools which demonstrate how to cater to the needs of a small number of NCS students, and invite them to share their experiences with other mainstream schoolteachers.

Overall, to cope with the foreseeable challenge of the increasing number of NCS students in mainstream schools, the EDB must make sustained efforts to identify good pedagogical practices, especially those that reflect the effective use of pedagogy in the classroom for different subjects, especially Chinese Language, and share them with teachers in more mainstream schools. Moreover, the EDB must analyse the challenges facing teachers and

NCS students, and identify students' support needs and provide them with opportunities for further study.

Moreover, as increasingly more mainstream schools begin to admit a few NCS students, further research on the learning effectiveness of NCS students in mainstream schools could be conducted. Improved and holistic planning should be exercised by the government because more secondary schools have begun admitting more NCS students to avoid a school shutdown in the next 5 to 6 years, but they may refuse to admit them when the number of local Secondary 1 students increases gradually 6 year later. Mainstream schools should uphold as an objective the provision of quality education to NCS students, instead of utilising them as a means of survival because of the recent shortage of students.

5.6.4 Professional Advice and Finding Suitable Schools for NCS Students

In actuality, multiethnic schools still play a critical role in multicultural education, especially in helping newly arriving students learn Chinese. In response to the critical allegations of discrimination, the government removed the 'designated school' label in 2013, and the EDB emphasised that NCS parents could choose mainstream Chinese-medium schools for their children. In actuality, in an identical manner to local students, the parents have been able to choose a mainstream school for their children to study in since 2004. Why have NCS parents placed their children in the multiethnic school? Regarding the case study school, most NCS parents chose the school because that is where their relatives and friends were studying. A number of them indicated that the multiethnic school was more suitable for their children because the Chinese language curriculum is easier, and English is used as the medium of instruction. However, certain parents may have difficulty in choosing this school, and it is unfair to the parents if they do have inadequate information on the education system as well

as on the characteristics of schools. Most English-medium parents might lack the ability, information and support (Equal Opportunities Commission 2011), and choose a school recommended by their friends and relatives, or one that is located near their home. A 2006 survey conducted by the Hong Kong Christian Service showed that 95% of parents had a poor knowledge of the Hong Kong education system. They did not know how to choose a secondary school, and only demonstrated knowledge of the concept of ‘local schools’, but did not know the real differences amongst government, subsidised and private schools. Moreover, when NCS children are exposed to the Chinese learning environment easier, earlier and better integration the society can be facilitated. However, not all parents recognise this advantage. Many parents still lack information and face uncertainties when choosing local kindergartens schools. Hence, the government could also advise parents in placing their children in local kindergartens.

Regarding South Asian students born in Hong Kong, they learn these languages easily if they begin learning them in kindergarten or primary school. Once their parents have planned for a longer stay in Hong Kong or have devised an educational path for their children, they should allow their children to learn in traditional local schools. They do not need to place them in multiethnic schools. The children can, in a similar manner to other Hong Kong students, study in a kindergarten nearby and apply for a primary school through the allocation system. They can make friends easily when they are young. They will grow up with other local Chinese children, and may possibly encounter minor difficulties in learning language subjects and receiving support from and forming friendship with others.

If NCS parents and students have decided to relinquish their original culture, and they are well prepared (especially in language) to enter the mainstream education system, they could be advised to choose a mainstream school. More guidance could be provided to NCS parents in their choice between a multiethnic or mainstream school.

For children who arrive to Hong Kong and enter a class in the middle of primary or secondary study, multiethnic schools are undoubtedly the best place for them.

Because many people have recently been complaining that studying in multiethnic schools constitutes a form of discrimination against NCS students, more NCS parents have begun choosing mainstream schools for their children. A number of them may misunderstand that multiethnic schools are discriminatory against NCS students, and therefore, place their children in mainstream schools. It is irresponsible for the EDB to place the choice in a school solely on the parents without providing suitable support and guidance. Professional advice should be offered to parents so that they can find the most suitable school for their children because their interest is of paramount importance. The banding, the medium of instruction, the curriculum of the school and the number of NCS students attending should match the students' language proficiency, length of stay in Hong Kong, personal characteristics, future aspirations, and so on. Professional consideration and advice is required to assist parents in making the appropriate decision.

Moreover, new arrivals may be allocated by mainstream schools to classes based on their age or last stage of education in their home country. Certain students may be advised to study in a lower form, so that the learning content may be easier for them to follow. However, this arrangement is only convenient—not professional. If students are allocated to a class which is unsuitable to their learning ability, especially in the Chinese language, they may not be able to catch up with the Chinese language curriculum and concurrently lose interest in learning other subjects. If they must learn all other subjects in Chinese, they may become completely frustrated in learning. NCS students, who arrive to Hong Kong at different learning stages, face greater challenges if they study in mainstream schools because they cannot speak and listen in simple Cantonese. They may be segregated or marginalised even if they are studying alongside local Chinese students.

Therefore, the EDB, tertiary institutions and/or other nongovernmental organisations could arrange suitable tests and interviews for NCS students before their enrolment in Primary 1 and Secondary 1. The government could invite a team of experts to design test papers and questionnaires, and provide training to some educators or counselors to make good use of the instruments to support the parents' decision making. As the aim of the tests and interviews is to help the NCS parents find the most suitable school and even suitable class for their children, mutual trust and respect must be built so that the whole process is neither discriminating nor compelling. NCS specialists could be included in the professional team to carry out this important duty. A government section with a team of professionals, including teachers, social workers and even NCS assistants, could be established with this specific responsibility and mission to provide proper advice for the NCS parents in choosing the most suitable school for their children.

Apart from basic information on the schools (eg, the medium of instruction, curriculum and assessment as well as school ethos), more in-depth professional advice (eg, parents' expectations, any culture shock experienced and life planning) could be provided through parental workshops, enquiry hotlines and individual counseling. Parents and students can receive a complete explanation regarding the advantages and disadvantages of studying in a multiethnic school versus a local mainstream school.

The advantages of multiethnic schools (as showcased by the case study school) over mainstream schools include the following:

- (a) Many friends are from the home country;
- (b) A wide range of multicultural activities is organised throughout the year;
- (c) The school provides additional support measures (including afterschool homework support, NCS teaching assistants and trained teachers);

- (d) English is used as the medium of instruction for all subjects, except Chinese. (Although certain mainstream schools in the Band 1 category are also adopting English as the medium of instruction for all subjects, student placement in these schools is extremely competitive); and
- (e) The school-based Chinese curriculum and examinations can be chosen.

By contrast, the advantages of mainstream schools over multiethnic schools include the following:

- (a) Opportunities to study with more local Chinese students; and
- (b) Opportunities to study the local Chinese language curriculum and sit the HKDSE examination.

However, these two advantages could be disadvantages if NCS students are unprepared. First, NCS students must be interested in making friends with local Chinese students, and the Chinese students must be willing to accept the NCS students. Otherwise, isolation or bullying may occur. Second, NCS students should have a good Chinese standard not only in speaking and listening but also in reading and writing. Otherwise, they may be unable to catch up with the curriculum and pass the HKDSE examination.

NCS students with excellent Chinese proficiency (because they were born in Hong Kong or have resided there for a longer period) and have decided to remain and work in Hong Kong in the future may consider studying in a mainstream school, where they have more opportunities to learn the local Chinese language curriculum with local students. For NCS students who are new arrivals and have missed the earlier academic years of learning the Chinese language, they may face less pressure in academic work and social life if they study in multiethnic

schools, where English is typically adopted as the medium of instruction. They may then come to realize that multiethnic schools are more suitable for them.

NCS parents, especially those with children born in Hong Kong, should be provided with sufficient advice so that they can understand the advantages and disadvantages of studying in each type of school, because they could make a more informed choice because they have a better Chinese standard. Certain NCS students who may not know English or have poor English proficiency may adapt to the new environment easily in a multiethnic school because they can seek help from friends or assistants from their home country. If these students are concentrated in certain schools, resources and support could be provided efficiently and effectively. The government should also update parents with information regarding the Hong Kong education system and policies in their home language through seminars and information pamphlets (Hong Kong Christian Service 2006).

Overall, for newly arriving NCS students who are late learners of Chinese, multiethnic schools are the best place for them to learn Chinese in a systematic manner and pace. Having accumulating experience teaching NCS students for 10 years, multiethnic schools understand the learning difficulties experienced by NCS students, have mastered effective pedagogy in solving these difficulties and utilize directed teaching and learning materials.

5.7 Limitations and Way Forward

Although the government has provided a series of supportive initiatives (eg, the Initiation Programme, Induction Programme and Bridging Programme) to newly arriving NCS children over the past 10 years, in addition to offering financial support to schools based on the number of NCS students attending, the government could have achieved more in catering to the needs of NCS students, especially because nearly all of them are eager to study in a local

university. In response to allegations of segregating NCS students in designated schools, the government has considered immersing them into mainstream schools as the ideal solution, and insists that no alternative Chinese language curriculum would be provided. This ‘solution’ presents a lose–lose situation because many NCS students who are not prepared to study in a mainstream school are mismatched because such schools are unprepared to admit NCS students, and more problems may arise in the future.

5.7.1 Data Collection of Parents’ Views

Parental involvement in supporting students’ academic, moral and social development is critical. When parents help their children at home, the children usually perform better in school (Booth and Dunn 1996). However, South Asian parents typically have lower education, are economically less privileged, have a low degree of social participation in mainstream culture and have low involvement in their children’s education (Mohammad 2010). Because of cultural differences, parents may consider their child to have been treated unfairly. It is critical to help parents remain informed to help them understand the learning progress of their children and the policies of the school, so that they can make suitable decisions through various school–parent communications.

However, one argument posits that the absence of adequate and effective language support, an alternative Chinese curriculum or moderated Chinese language assessment criteria for English-medium students in mainstream schools has left certain parents with no option but to choose multiethnic schools which are considered uncondusive to integration and the effective learning of Chinese (Equal Opportunities Commission 2011).

Considering the cultural diversity in the school community and the associated diverse expectations, the case study school has attempted to maintain good communications with parents through various and effective channels, including bilingual school circulars, by

employing NCS assistants to liaise with the parents and organising training programmes and leisure activities for promoting mutual trust and understanding.

Although parents play a critical role in their children's learning, especially in the choice of schools, academic development, social development, and so on, it was not easy to collect data directly from the parents for my research. First, most South Asian parents are not keen to join school functions, and have scant contact with the school because of the language barrier. It is not realistic to note their ideas through the teachers or their children. Second, many NCS parents were unwilling to comment on the education policy because they were worried with the impact their opinions would have on their children and even other family members. Because of cultural differences, parents may consider their child to have been treated unfairly. The school has also relayed their concerns regarding the parents' worries and misunderstandings regarding the use of their personal data by a student researcher. In the future research, the EDB and/or other Institutions can investigate the expectations of NCS parents further (especially second or third-generation parents), and examine the provision of support in learning and growth to identify a more significant correlation between parental support and education achievement in multicultural education.

5.7.2 NCS Students in Mainstream Schools

Although I found that the case study school has been attempting to promote multicultural education for NCS students, and I also found that the students and teachers were concerned with the learning and teaching in mainstream schools, it is difficult to conclude that studying in a multiethnic school is better than studying in a mainstream school. To identify the actions mainstream schools have taken to cater to the learning needs of a small proportion of NCS students in their schools, research must be conducted that involves a certain number of mainstream schools that are willing to share their experiences, irrespective of whether they have been successful. The good practices and difficulties determined can be identified so that

suitable support and measures can be provided. Because the EDB has recently begun to provide considerable financial support to mainstream schools based on the headcount of NCS students, the EDB should assume the responsibility of investigating learning effectiveness and cultural adaptation for NCS students and the impact on local Chinese students as soon as possible. The government could conduct a large-scale study involving all mainstream schools which admit NCS students because the number of NCS students in mainstream schools has recently been increasing rapidly. To enhance reliability, a larger number of mainstream schools must be studied, and the government and/or institutions may be better equipped to conduct such a study.

5.7.3 Pre-primary Education for NCS Students

To determine whether mainstream schools are more suitable for NCS students born in Hong Kong, the receipt of pre-primary education in Hong Kong is also a key factor. Many English-medium students do not attend kindergarten which is disadvantageous to their adaptation to school life in terms of self-care and social skills as well as language and academic development (Equal Opportunities Commission 2011). Although pre-primary education is not free and is compulsory, most local parents send their children to kindergarten at the age of 2 to or 3 years. Therefore, most local Chinese students have obtained a certain level of Chinese and English proficiency, as well as basic calculation abilities before entering Primary 1. Certain NCS parents send their children to English kindergartens, where they do not need to learn Chinese. Other NCS parents do not send their children to a kindergarten because it is optional. ‘The slightly lower attendance rate for the 3–5 age group was mainly due to the low attendance rates of some Asians (other than Chinese) such as Indonesians, Filipinos, Pakistanis and Thais’ (Census and Statistics Department 2006, p. 41). These NCS students may thus miss the ideal period for learning and using Chinese at an earlier stage.

Without proper language support from schools or families, most NCS students are continuing to fall behind in the 6 years of primary schooling because most mainstream primary schools adopt Chinese as the medium of instruction. When they graduate to secondary schools, they cannot secure a place in English-medium secondary schools because they are highly limited and popular, although they would improve their learning if they could study in English-medium schools. Only Band 1 students who are at the top 33% in student rankings can enter English-medium secondary schools. Therefore, their choice is to study in a mainstream Chinese-medium secondary school or to choose a multiethnic secondary school which allows the use of English as a medium of instruction. The Equal Opportunities Commission (2011) has recommended that ‘the Education Bureau should provide immersion programmes for ethnic minorities students at the earliest possible stage, preferably at the kindergarten level’ (p. 6). It also recommended that the EDB encourage NCS parents to send their children to local kindergartens. It appears that the government is making a substantial attempt to assimilate NCS students into the Chinese community. Therefore, the government has decided to offer free kindergarten education in the long term, so that all parents can send their children to a kindergarten. Proper support and training must be provided to teachers in kindergartens to cultivate a harmonious learning environment as well as a rich Chinese language environment for all children. Future research on the effectiveness of kindergarten education in local schools for NCS students may be conducted.

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Questionnaire (For students)

Appendix A

Part A: Personal information:

Christian name: _____ Age: _____ Level: _____

1. What is your ethnic origin?
2. Were you born in Hong Kong?
3. How long have you been living in Hong Kong?
4. Why does your family come to Hong Kong?
5. Why do you choose to study in a designated school?
6. Do you wish to study in the universities in Hong Kong?
7. Will you stay in Hong Kong or go back to your home country when you grow up?

Part B: Learning of Chinese Language

1. What do you think of your ability in listening, speaking, reading and writing Chinese?

	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor
Speaking				
Listening				
Reading				
Writing				

2. Do you think learning Chinese is important? Why?

	Very important	Important	A little important	Not important
Speaking				
Listening				
Reading				
Writing				

3. Are you interested in learning Chinese? Why?
4. Do you enjoy the Chinese lessons at school?
5. What are the difficulties you have encountered in learning Chinese?
6. What could the school/teachers do to help you learn Chinese effectively?
7. In what way do you think the Chinese classmates could help you learn Chinese Language better?

Part C: Cultural harmony and integration in the school campus

1. Do you prefer to study in a designated school or a normal local school? Why?
2. Do you enjoy your school life in this school? Why or why not?
3. Are most of your friends at school non-Chinese or local Chinese students?
4. Do you feel important to make friends with Chinese schoolmates? Why or why not?
5. Do you feel difficult to make friends with Chinese schoolmates? Why or why not?
6. What could the school /teacher do to help you get along well with Chinese schoolmates?
7. Have you ever experienced any form of racial discrimination at school?

Lesson Observation Form

Appendix B

Date: _____ Duration: _____ minutes Medium of Instruction: _____

No. of students: (Local Chinese) _____ (NCS) _____ Total _____

Subject: _____ Level: _____ Class: _____

Topic: _____

Teaching modes used: lecturing ☐ questioning ☐ group discussion ☐ student presentation ☐ role play ☐ debate ☐ experiment ☐ IT (PPT, Video) ☐ other _____

1. Planning and Organisation of lesson	Very Good	Good	Generally acceptable	Could be improved
a. Build on students' prior knowledge/previous learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Use diversified strategies/well-designed activities to cater for different learning styles / needs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Draw on learners' daily-life experiences to stimulate learning interest	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Suited to students' ability/appropriate expectation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. Design follow-up classwork/homework to consolidate learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Observations:				
2. Teaching Process	Very Good	Good	Generally acceptable	Could be improved
a. Use of teaching resources to facilitate understanding	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

b. Clear communication and presentation skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Frequent and effective questioning to provoke thinking	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Provide individual support/adjust learning pace to cater for learner diversity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. Provide positive and timely feedback to facilitate improvement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Observations:				
3. Learning Atmosphere	Very Good	Good	Generally acceptable	Could be improved
a. Sustained motivation and interest in learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Teacher-student relationship and rapport	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Established classroom routines and discipline	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Appropriate and adequate praise and encouragement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. Opportunity for peer learning and encouragement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Observations:				
4. Learning Performance	Very Good	Good	Generally acceptable	Could be improved
a. Grasp learning content of the lesson	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Follow Teacher's instructions closely	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Engage in learning activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Apply learning in extended situations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. Independent learning (eg pre-lesson preparation, take notes etc)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Observations:				

Overall findings and recommendations of the lesson: