

**DEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM & INSTRUCTION**

**TLS 4029: HONOURS PROJECT II**

***Shifting the Focus from Curriculum to Instruction –  
Chinese Teacher’s Conceptualization of Using  
Culturally Responsive Pedagogy for Teaching Ethnic  
Minority Students in Hong Kong***

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## **INTRODUCTION:**

Although a large portion of the school-aged population in Hong Kong remains to be Han Chinese, the education sector has been witnessing an increase in the number of students from ethnically diverse backgrounds in local classrooms (Chang, 2018). These students, who are often referred to as ethnic minorities (EM), come from a wide array of ethnic backgrounds including Filipino, Indian, Indonesian, Nepalese, Pakistani and Thai, and make up around 8% of the total population (Census and Statistics Department, 2016). Given such a diverse mix of students entering the predominantly Chinese schools of Hong Kong, there, initially, were concerns as to how local schools would rise up to the countless challenges that accompany such diversity. Among other reasons, this owes to the persistent concerns regarding high dropout rates among ethnic minority students, due to racism and low learning motivation in schools, as well as negative attitudes towards learning Cantonese as ethnic minority students' diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds make it difficult to master it under a predominately Chinese schooling system (Bhowmik & Kennedy, 2017; Bhowmik, Kennedy & Hue, 2018; Gu & Patkin, 2013). However, over the past decade, research stemming from this area has repeatedly proved that local schools can certainly succeed in catering for their diverse learners, and if anything, adopting the notion of culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) is a rather effective way of doing so. While these studies were successful in paving the way for schools to understand the importance of culturally responsive practices at the whole-school level, there was little emphasis on the use of CRP at the individual-subject level, despite the fact that the Chinese Language subject has since long been the biggest hurdle facing EM students locally.

According to the NGO, Unison (2011), the teaching and learning of Chinese strikes as being the most consequential problem facing ethnic minority education in Hong Kong because there is no official curriculum for teaching Chinese as a second language to ethnic minority students. Due to this aforementioned lack of a curriculum, and the fact that EM students do not possess the linguistic repertoire for learning Chinese through the mainstream curriculum, schools are often given extra government funding to develop their own school-based curriculum to teach Chinese to these students (Education Bureau, 2017). However, the extent to which these curriculums and funding are able to help these students gain a competitive edge in Hong Kong is alarming, because even after completing 12 years of schooling in Hong Kong, 70% of EM students graduate with merely Primary 2-level proficiency in Chinese, limiting not only their higher education but also future employment opportunities (Unison, 2018).

In an attempt to diminish these disadvantageous effects of Chinese Language learning on ethnic minority students, different stakeholders have been petitioning for a standardized *Chinese as a Second Language* curriculum that takes into account the needs of second language EM learners and informs Chinese teachers on the practices that they can adopt to teach the language to teach these students more effectively (Unison 2016). In response, the Education Bureau (EDB) released not a curriculum, but a *Chinese as Second Language* framework that teachers can refer to (Education Bureau, 2017). Apart from failing to address the root of the problem, which was the lack of a standardized curriculum, this framework has been criticized for not being comprehensible enough and thus, it has put pressure on Chinese teachers to navigate their own way towards catering for the needs of their diverse second language learners.

As it appears that this framework has shifted the responsibility of teaching Chinese to ethnic minority students upon the shoulders of Chinese teachers, this study aims to find out how these teachers are taking up the challenge of teaching Chinese to their diverse ethnic minority students. As mentioned earlier, given the fact that an extensive pool of local literature deems CRP to be highly effective in the Hong Kong context, the researcher is especially interested in finding out to how ethnically Chinese teachers conceptualize the notions of CRP and to what extent their Chinese teaching practices are informed by it. Upon examining these two questions, this study will investigate how teachers' conceptualization and current practices might be related to one another. Thus, forming the three research questions of this study which are presented below.

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS:**

- RQ1) What are the current patterns of CRP practice in teaching Chinese Language to ethnic minority students in local schools?
- RQ2) What are Chinese teachers' conceptual understandings of CRP?
- RQ3) Is there a relationship between the current practice and teacher's conceptualization?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW:**

### ***Defining Culturally Responsive Pedagogy***

This paper adopts culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) as its major theoretical framework. Culturally responsive pedagogy can be defined as a student-centered pedagogy that recognizes the importance of integrating student's unique cultural backgrounds, experiences and knowledge into all aspects of the teaching and learning experience (Ladson-Billings, 1994). It asserts that culture is central to learning, and by making their teaching practices respectful, relevant and responsive to the cultures of their diverse students, teachers can promote academic achievement among students of minority groups who vary in culture, learning styles and various other characteristics (Chapman-Novakofski, Diaz-Rios, Muzaffar, & Meline, 2000; Gollnick & Chinn, 2006; Howe & Lisi, 2014, p.112). In essence, the goal of this pedagogy is to create a classroom culture in which students are welcomed, supported and provided with the best opportunities to learn through teacher's active consideration of their cultural assets (Richards, Brown, & Forde, 2007). With this notion of in mind, CRP has recently been grouped with other similar approaches, like *funds of knowledge* which bridges students' experience at home to the classrooms where teachers help students represent their cultural resources (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). It also comes under the bigger umbrella of "asset-based pedagogies" which puts great emphasis on positioning students' cultures as practices to value in the classroom (Paris & Alim, 2014).

### ***The Characteristics of Culturally Responsive Teachers and Teaching***

According to Brown (2007), teachers who aspire to implement this pedagogy in their own classrooms should go through a process of developing the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to be a culturally responsive teacher. In an attempt to summarize these traits, Gay (2002) identified 5 key characteristics that teachers must possess in order to make their teaching culturally responsive:

#### ***1. A culturally diverse knowledge base***

In order to become culturally responsive, it is crucial that teachers begin by acquiring the necessary explicit cultural knowledge that is needed to meet the various educational needs of their ethnically diverse students. Among others, (i) the cultural values, (ii) traditions, (iii) learning needs and (iv) contributions of different ethnic groups have important implications on student's classroom experiences, and by having a deeper understanding of these four components of culture, teachers can add multicultural content to their teaching and recognize the needs of their ethnically diverse students in the classrooms.

#### ***2. The ability to design culturally relevant curricula***

Apart from having a knowledge base, teachers who are culturally responsive possess the ability to design culturally relevant curricula. Although they do not have design a special curriculum for their ethnically diverse students from scratch, they can go about doing so through making changes to the existing curricula by determining its multicultural strengths and weaknesses. Through doing cultural analyses of curriculum documents and instructional materials endorsed by their educational ministries, teachers can identify how to revise these materials in order to better represent cultural diversity in their classrooms.

3. *Demonstration of cultural caring and building a learning community*

Teachers who are culturally responsive also demonstrate the ability to make their classroom climates more conducive to the learning of their ethnically diverse students by incorporating pedagogical actions that show their care towards the student's cultural assets. One such action is by using cultural scaffolding, a strategy in which student's own cultures and experiences are used by the teacher to expand their knowledge in the classroom. Teachers can also make their care explicit to these students by believing in their potentials and accepting the responsibility of facilitating these potentials without neglecting their cultural identities. By becoming partners in their student's learning, teachers can build receptive learning communities.

4. *The ability to build effective cross-cultural communications*

Culturally responsive teachers also possess what is known as multicultural communication competency, which refers to the ability to effectively communicate with students of diverse backgrounds. Since different ethnic groups differ in their task engagement patterns and communication styles, it is vital for teachers to learn to decode them in their classroom practices. While these patterns and styles may be regarded as inappropriate in the mainstream culture of a particular education system, culturally responsive teachers are able to understand that these styles are a result of the student's cultural socialization and thus need to be understood to decipher student's abilities and needs in the classroom.

5. *Delivery of culturally responsive instruction*

Lastly, culturally responsive teachers make CRP a part of their teaching philosophy and utilize it in their day-to-day teaching practices. They constantly strive to match their instructional techniques to the learning needs of their multicultural students and attempt to develop a rich repository of instructional examples that they can use in teaching students from diverse backgrounds on a daily basis.

***Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in the Hong Kong Context***

In the literature that concerns ethnic minority issues in Hong Kong specifically, a recurrent pattern of scholars turning to the notions of culturally responsive pedagogy is observed (Chong, 2005; Hue, 2012). From these works, it can be deduced that researchers see a pressing need for CRP to be implemented in local classrooms where ethnic diversity is on the rise.

Among others, Hue and Kennedy (2012) stress the importance of CRP because they found that local teachers often struggle to conceptualize a rationale for dealing with cultural diversity. For one, this is because teachers express that the current model of cultural harmony in Hong Kong schooling is “too Chinese” and puts so much emphasis on the acculturation of ethnically diverse students into the dominant Chinese culture, that it leaves little room for teachers to appreciate the diversity they bring to the classrooms. Although a sad reality, such comments reveal that the mainstream curriculum is built upon the orthodox notion of *cultural deficiency* which is commonly critiqued for its beliefs that students of non-dominant backgrounds need to be acculturated into the mainstream culture in order to thrive, often by neglecting their own (Solorzano, 1997). On the other hand, Chinese teachers also struggle because practices of EM students differ greatly from those of Chinese students, which often leads to teacher’s misinterpretations of certain social behaviors that may be regarded as normal in the student’s own culture but not in that of the Chinese culture. Because of these differences in cultures, it is also reported that teachers often feel as though they are surrounded by a myriad of different ethnic learning styles that they find difficult to address. The fact that local teachers group students’ learning styles according to their ethnicity, instead of individuality, reflects how *ethnic learning styles*, which is another outdated model of cultural responsiveness, still subsist among Hong Kong teachers. Apart from asserting a rather frozen understanding of culture, the *ethnic learning styles* model has been criticized for homogenizing students in the classroom by believing that all students from a particular ethnic group possess the same learning styles despite their individual differences (Pang, 2017; Park, 2000). Lastly, it was found that teachers struggle to motivate their EM students because these students hold the belief that the chances for them to excel in education are rather low in Hong Kong because of the lack of their Chinese language abilities. In response to these struggles, the researchers pushed for a culturally responsive approach to dealing with diversity in Hong Kong.

In later works, the effectiveness of CRP in Hong Kong started becoming more apparent. For instance, Hue and Kennedy (2014) found that teachers who used CRP in their classrooms were able to help their demotivated EM students to realize their academic and employment aspirations by understanding the cultural reasons behind EM student’s lack of interest in completing their studies in Hong Kong. CRP also allowed teachers to become more sensitive and empathetic towards the cultural differences of their students by trying to see the world through their cultural perspectives before misinterpreting their behaviors. It also allowed teachers to appreciate the different cultural backgrounds and diversity that these students brought to the classroom and motivated them to incorporate, rather than shun their diverse cultures at school (Chang, 2017).

Looking forward, these studies undoubtedly marked a positive milestone towards the incorporation of CRP in Hong Kong and laid the foundation for this approach to be utilized in Hong Kong. However, if a change is to be seen in the Chinese language situation for ethnic minority students in Hong Kong, more research that focuses on the use of CRP at the subject-level is needed.



## **METHODOLOGY:**

### ***Participants & Sampling Method***

Through the use of snowball sampling, in particular the social connections and networks of the researcher, 15 participants, including primary and secondary pre-service and in-service teachers who have experiences in teaching Chinese Language to ethnic minority students in Hong Kong, were invited to fill in the online questionnaire of this study, among whom, three were selected for an in-depth semi-structured interview in the later stage of the study. This particular sampling method was chosen because purposive samples are deemed most appropriate for studies that are focused on a particular segment of a target population (Daniel, 2011). Since this study was aimed at finding out the patterns and conceptualization of a very specific group of teachers i.e. Chinese teachers that teach ethnic minority students, this sampling method allowed the researcher to ensure that the participants recruited fit into this criterion.

### ***Research Design***

In terms of the research method, both quantitative and qualitative methods were adopted in this study.

To address the first research question (RQ1), the quantitative method was used, and an English-Chinese online survey questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was administered in early January to find out the participant's current practices of using CRP in their classrooms. The questionnaire was developed based on the characteristics of CRP as identified by Gay (2002), which was previously introduced in the literature review. By using the Likert frequency scale, the extent to which participant's teaching practices are informed by these characteristics were sought. This frequency scale also allowed for identification of the CRP characteristics that participants practice more than others.

To address the second and third research questions (RQ2 and RQ3), a qualitative method was used and three participants from the survey stage were invited for a more in-depth semi-structured interview in mid-March. These semi-structured interviews, which were audio-recorded upon participants' agreement, aimed at finding out the participant's conceptualization of CRP and its relationship to their current practices of teaching Chinese to ethnic minority students (see Appendix 2). The reason why this particular instrument was used for these two research questions owes to the fact that these questions are more open-ended in nature, and semi-structured interviews allowed the participants to provide their insights more freely, while allowing the researcher to probe and expand the participant's responses (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Since semi-structured interviews allow for flexibility, they also allowed participants to raise issues that the researcher did not consider prior to the interviews.



### ***Data Analysis Method***

As for the data analysis of the survey, the raw data was run through a spreadsheet and summarized by manually inputting how many participants selected a certain degree of frequency on the Likert scale for each of the CRP characteristic. After this, the mean of all items was calculated. Upon doing so, the distributions were automatically presented in bar charts on the spreadsheet, showing clearly which CRP characteristics participants practiced more in their teaching and which ones they did not.

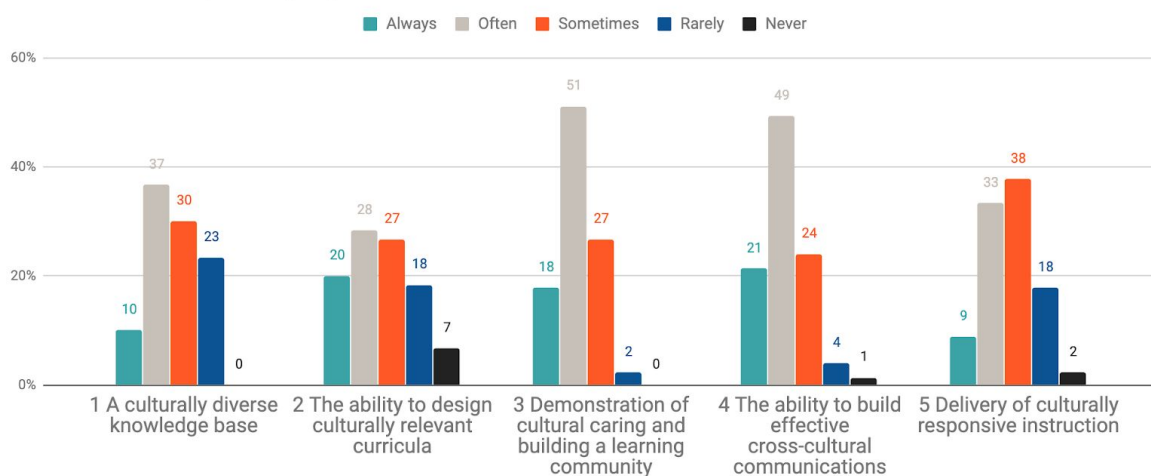
For the semi-structured interview responses, on the other hand, all the raw data from the audio recordings were first transcribed and proofread. After which, this transcribed data was coded with labels categorizing it into different themes as they emerge (Charmaz, 2006, p.43). According to Lapan, Quartaroli, and Riemer (2012), coding data in such way allows the researcher to conceptually group and identify patterns in the data. It also provided a possibility of leading the researcher to stop and ask analytical questions when there could be any unforeseen conclusions.

## **FINDINGS:**

### ***Survey Questionnaire***

From the responses of the survey questionnaire which was aimed at finding out Chinese teachers' current practices of using culturally-responsive pedagogy when teaching their ethnic minority students, it becomes apparent that certain CRP characteristics were more practiced by the respondents than others. As it is visible on Chart 1, the CRP characteristics of having a culturally-diverse knowledge base, demonstration of cultural caring and building a learning community as well as the ability to build effective cross-cultural communications stand as the most often practiced ones among the respondents. The ability to design culturally relevant curricula and delivery of culturally responsive instruction, on the other hand, are only sometimes, if not never, practiced.

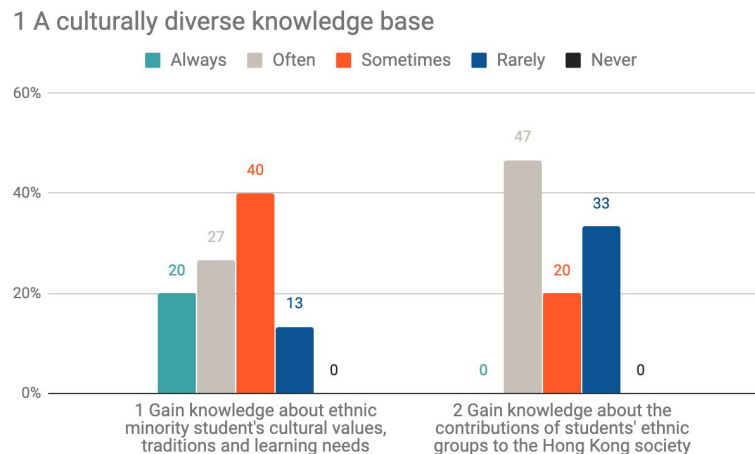
**Mean of Frequency by CRP Characteristics**



*Figure 1: Average of Frequency by CRP Characteristics*

### A culturally diverse knowledge base:

If the CRP trait of developing a culturally diverse knowledge base is considered in particular, it can be seen on Figure 2 that the practice of seeking to gain knowledge about their ethnic minority student's cultural values, traditions and learning needs was practiced only sometimes by 40% of the teacher participants. However, when it comes to gaining knowledge about the contributions of students' ethnic groups to the Hong Kong society, nearly half of the respondents mentioned that they did this often. Interestingly, 33% of the them also expressed that this was rarely done in their teaching.

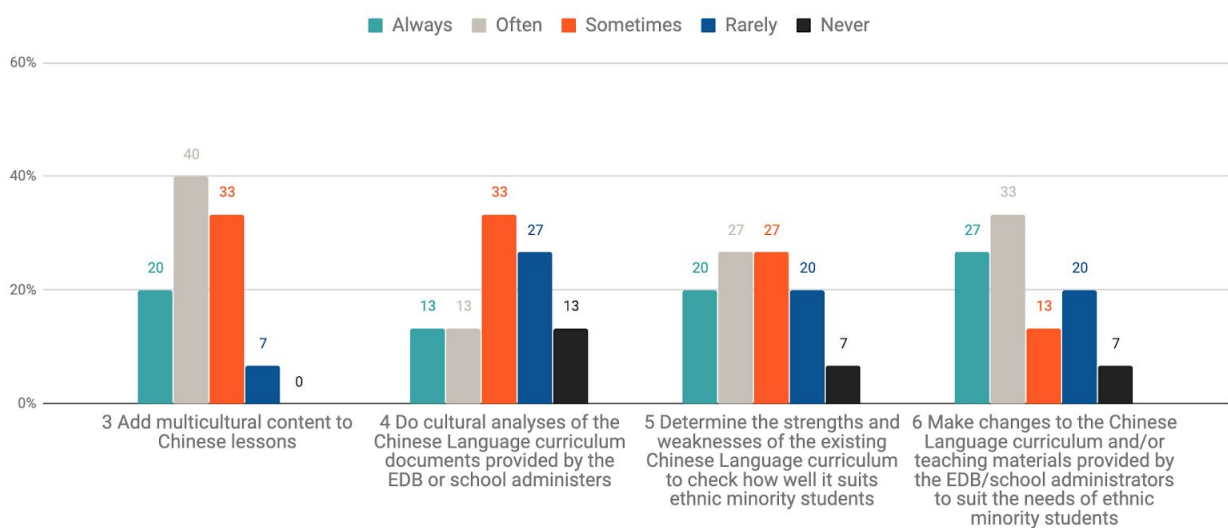


*Figure 2: A culturally diverse knowledge base*

### The ability to design culturally-relevant curricula:

As for the trait of being able to design culturally relevant curricula, around 40% of the respondents responded that the practice of adding multicultural content to their Chinese lessons was performed often. However, when it comes to doing cultural analyses of Chinese Language curriculum documents provided by the EDB or school administrators, teachers who sometimes or rarely did so were among the highest, accounting for 33% and 27% respectively. A similar trend is observed in the practice of determining the strengths and weaknesses of the existing Chinese Language curriculum to check how well it suits ethnic minority students as 27% of the teachers did so often or sometimes. Having mentioned that, teachers who reported that they often made changes to the Chinese Language curriculum and/or teaching materials provided by the EDB/school administrators to suit the needs of ethnic minority students were the highest at 33%.

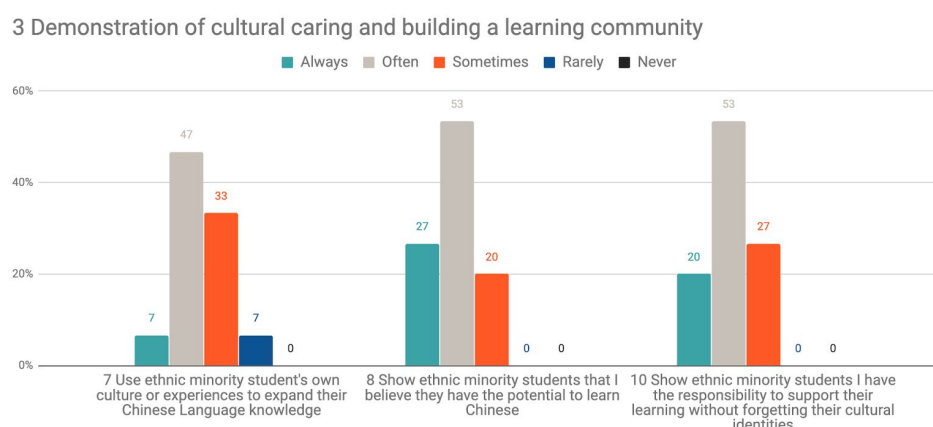
2 The ability to design culturally relevant curricula



*Figure 3: The ability to design culturally relevant*

### Demonstration of cultural caring and building a learning community:

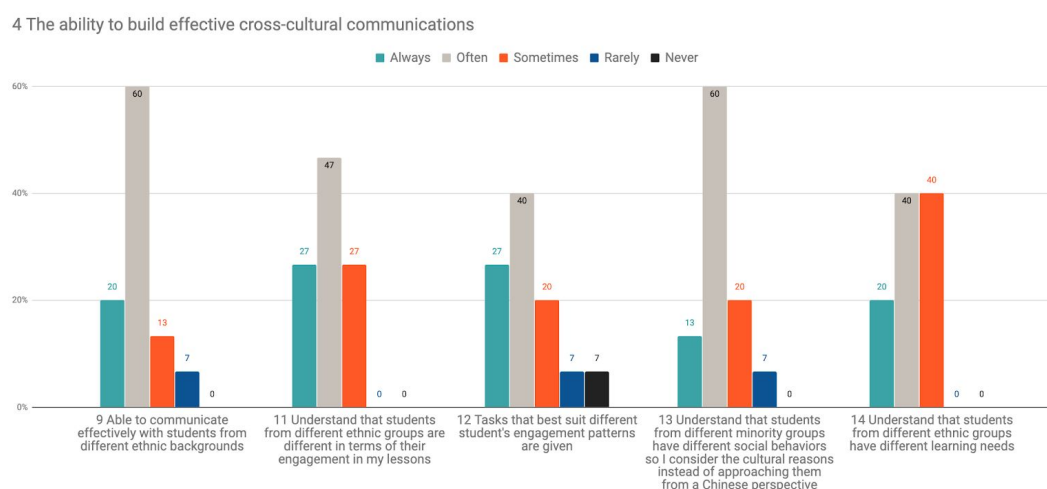
If light is shed on their trait of demonstrating cultural caring and building learning communities, the data on Figure 4 shows that practices relating to this aspect of cultural responsiveness were a frequent occurrence in local teachers' teaching of Chinese to ethnic minority students. This is evident on Figure 4 as nearly half of the respondents reported that they often used their ethnic minority student's own culture and experiences to expand their Chinese language knowledge. More than half of them also agreed that they often showed their ethnic minority students that they believed in their potential to learn Chinese and had the responsibility to support their learning without forgetting their cultural identities.



*Figure 4: Demonstration of cultural caring and building a learning community*

### The ability to build effective cross-cultural communications:

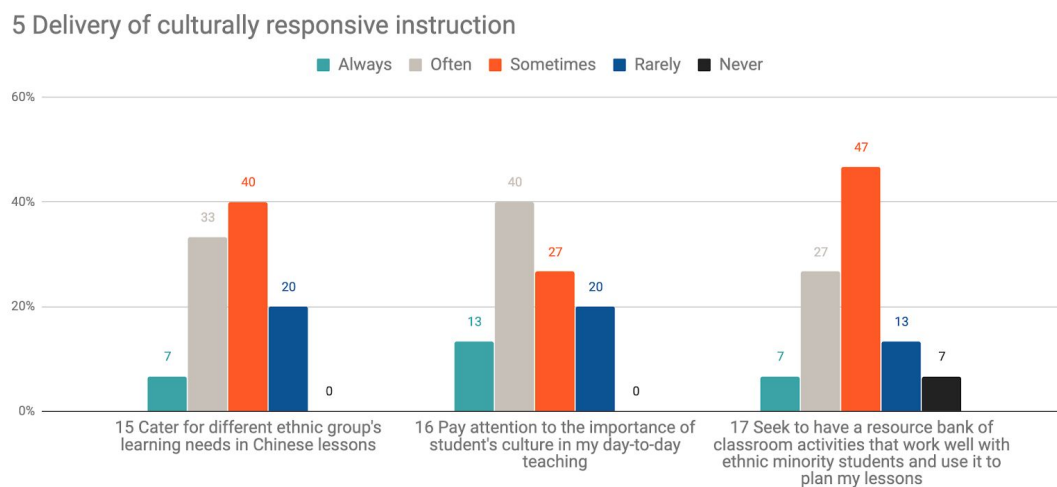
Figure 5 shows respondents' practices with regards to the culturally-responsive trait of having effective cross-cultural communications. When asked if they are able to communicate with their ethnically diverse students effectively, 60% of the teachers agreed that they were able to do so often. In addition to this, 60% of the respondents also stated that they understand that students from different minority groups have different social behaviors so they often consider the cultural reasons instead of approaching them from a Chinese perspective. However, when it came to understanding learning needs, 40% of the respondents said that they often understood that students from different ethnic backgrounds have different learning needs and an equal amount said that they only understood this sometimes.



*Figure 5: The ability to build effective cross-cultural communications*

### Delivery of culturally responsive instruction:

As for the characteristic of delivering culturally responsive instruction, Figure 6 shows that most of the respondents sometimes catered for different ethnic group's learning needs in Chinese lessons. Although 40% of the respondents mentioned that they paid attention to the importance of student's culture in their day-to-day teaching, less than 30% of them often sought to have a resource bank of classroom activities that work well with their ethnically diverse students.



*Figure 6: Delivery of culturally responsive instruction*



### ***Interview Responses:***

The responses from the semi-structured interviews which were aimed at (i) finding out Chinese teachers' conceptualization of CRP and (ii) whether there is a relationship between their conceptualization and current practices also generated some interesting findings which are presented below.

When asked to describe a successful experience of incorporating students' cultural backgrounds into their Chinese lessons, there was a recurrent pattern of respondents talking about lessons where they allowed students to become the agents of cultural knowledge through sharing about their own cultures as well as appreciating those of other classmates' using Chinese. They also mentioned that lessons where they allocated time for students to share their own cultural elements instead of only teaching them about Chinese ones were what they deemed to be successful incorporation of students' cultural backgrounds into Chinese lessons.

As for the question relating to the challenges that they face when trying to incorporate students' cultural backgrounds in their teaching of Chinese, almost all the respondents talked about challenges relating to students' negative feelings and attitudes towards learning Chinese. Mentions of challenges with regards to the high stakes nature of Hong Kong schools and education system as well as teachers' workload lowering the chances to incorporate culture in their teaching were also eminent. There were also remarks about how the incorporation of culture in lessons meant sacrificing syllabus content that needs to be covered before the GCSE public exam. The respondents also mentioned that their own language capacity stood as the most important cultural element limiting their teaching of Chinese to ethnically diverse students. The respondents stated that more knowledge about linguistic differences between Chinese and students' mother tongues could prove to be helpful in teaching students. However, not knowing about their students' mother tongues and linguistic systems stood as a challenge for them, especially when teaching reading and writing.

On the other hand, when asked what role they thought ethnic minority students' cultural backgrounds play in their Chinese lesson-planning process, two out of three respondents mentioned that culture did not play an important role as they believed that most of their students are born in Hong Kong and therefore, do not seem to be close to their cultural roots. As for the other respondent, culture played the role of making students feel respected, creating a harmonious learning environment and strengthening relationships between herself and the students. She also mentioned that culture was especially important when introducing students to Chinese festivals or traditions as that is the only time when students can talk about their own culture in Chinese lessons.

As for the question asking them what they were taught about the ways in which they should teach ethnic minority students based on their teacher training programs or experiences over the years, all the respondents agreed that their teacher training courses did not equip them with any special skills for teaching students of diverse ethnic backgrounds. As for support in schools, they reported that they often used their own instincts to plan lessons and figure out how to teach ethnic minority students by themselves. One respondent mentioned that she got support from a university which helped her in teaching her students to a great extent.

Towards the end of the interview when they were posed with the question of how they thought they could improve their overall teaching of Chinese to ethnic minority students in the future, respondents expressed the desire to make students learn Chinese in more fun and contextualized ways. One respondent also talked about hoping to spend more time in looking for theories and methods of teaching English as a second language (ESL) and adapt it in her teaching of Chinese.

## **DISCUSSION:**

While the findings of the survey questionnaire revealed local teachers' current practices of using CRP in their teaching of Chinese Language to ethnic minority students, the interview responses paved the way for understanding how they conceptualized this notion. Upon considering the responses from these two sources, it then became clear that Chinese teachers often struggle with conceptualizing CRP and culture at large, which not only affects their perceptions of CRP, but also their practices of using it in their teaching. In this sense, it can be said that the findings of this study brought forward the struggles that Chinese teachers face when conceptualizing CRP and how these struggles play a part in informing their current practices of using it with ethnic minority students.

## **1. Misconceptions about CRP**

### **1.1 Linking CRP to surface-level cultural elements**

First, the findings show how Chinese teachers struggle with conceptualizing and practicing CRP because of the many misconceptions they have about using culture in the teaching and learning of Chinese to ethnic minority students. Fundamentally, it appears as though they have blurred, if not at all any, understandings of what CRP is and how culture can be used to bring about fruitful learning outcomes for ethnically-diverse students. Among others, the following quote from the semi-structured interview shows how a teacher respondent linked the use of culture and culturally responsive practices to merely surface-level elements of culture, reflecting blurred understandings of the notion.

*“No appropriate materials [were] available so I used the classic story of Cinderella [and] included some Chinese cultural elements into it. Then, [I] guided students to pinpoint the Chinese cultural elements in this story... After that, I asked them to write a similar story about with their own cultural elements and then share it with their classmates and me.”*

While this quote shows that Chinese teachers value students’ cultural backgrounds and have a desire to learn about them through their students’ in-class sharing, it also brings forward the harsh reality that they are only using culture for rather surface-level motives, such as for appreciating students’ cultural elements and practices. While these could be important, knowing about students’ surface-level cultural elements do not necessarily equip teachers with solid cultural information that they can use to improve their teaching of Chinese. Most importantly, this is because it does not allow teachers to understand how their students’ cultures shape their learning needs, and how they can use this information to cater for these needs in their Chinese lessons (Gay, 2002). According to Hammond (2014), teachers sometimes misinterpret what it means to be culturally responsive because they see being appreciative of students’ diversity as a means to an end, without realizing that being culturally responsive is not limited to gaining surface-level understandings of the students’ cultures, but includes using these elements for bringing about academic achievement among their students. With this explanation in mind, it can be said that Chinese teachers’ low frequency in practicing the CRP characteristic of “delivering culturally responsive instruction”, especially catering to different learning needs of students from different cultures owes to this misconception. Because teachers hold the belief that students’ culture can only give them information about surface-level cultural elements and practices, they do not use culture to understand and cater for their ethnically diverse students’ learning needs.

Apart from the aforementioned misconception, the quote also reflects the use of culture in Hong Kong classrooms is still based on an acculturation model (Hue & Kennedy, 2012). As it becomes evident from the quote itself, the teacher participants’ definition of successful “culturally responsive lesson” was one where she first taught Chinese cultural elements, and then ask students to share theirs. If anything, this statement reflects how the Chinese culture is seen as the primary source of knowledge in Chinese classrooms while the culture of students remains to be secondary.

## ***1.2 Separating CRP from the school-based curriculum***

The fact that local Chinese teachers separate the use of culture from their school-based curriculum also reflects their blurred conceptualizations of CRP. The following quote is reflective of how misconceptions about the role of culture in the teaching and learning process leads to low culturally responsive practices among Chinese teachers in Hong Kong.

*“There is also the Form 5 GCSE examination. Even though schools agree that those [cultural] strategies are good, HK is still very exam-oriented so we need to find a balance... We only have 35-40 minutes per lesson. Teachers need to cover everything...There is not enough time.”*

In order to maximize academic achievement among students of ethnically diverse backgrounds, culturally responsive practices should be woven into the curriculum and adopted in the day to day teaching practices of teachers (Gay, 2002). In addition to this, taking students’ culture into consideration when designing curricula for ethnically-diverse students allows teachers to reflect on how the diversity in their classroom can be utilized to bring maximum achievements (Gay, 2018). However, the above quote shows that local Chinese teachers think incorporating students’ cultures in their school-based curriculum is time consuming as it is something unrelated to the content covered in the GCSE public examination. Apart from showing that teachers see culture as something that is to be covered only once in a while in Chinese lessons, this statement also indicates that culture is segregated from the Chinese language school-based curriculums in Hong Kong schools. As local teachers do not appear to see the vitality of culture in bringing about academic achievement among ethnic minority students, they are unable to design curricula that is culturally relevant and responsive. This explanation is in line with the survey responses which indicate local Chinese teachers’ low frequency in the CRP characteristics of “designing culturally-relevant curricula” and “delivering culturally responsive instruction”.

### ***1.3 Relying on students as the only source of cultural knowledge***

*“I like talking to students. Students are the best resource for the cultural knowledge that I should have.”*

Although making students the agents of their teachers’ cultural knowledge base is seemingly a good practice that allows for effective and caring cross cultural communications among teachers and students, it seems that local Chinese teachers are relying too much on their students when it comes to incorporating culture in their classrooms. According to Gay (2002), teachers who want to be culturally responsive should proactively engage in practices that equip them to become aware of how their students’ cultural assets can contribute to making teaching and learning more fruitful. However, it seems as though local teachers are acting as passive agents who rely on students to give them knowledge about their cultures, without seeking to proactively do so on their own. In light of this, it can be said that the reason why local teachers frequently practiced the culturally responsive characteristics of “demonstrating cultural caring and building learning communities” as well as “having effective cross cultural communications” owe to their passion in learning from their students. Having said that, such over-reliance comes with a cost as teachers do not actively seek to find out information that can help them develop culturally relevant curricula and deliver culturally responsive instruction in their classrooms.

## **2. Prioritizing students' feelings towards learning Chinese**

In addition to Chinese teachers' misconceptions about CRP, the findings of this study indicate that ethnic minority students' emotional struggles in learning Chinese also prevent their teachers from incorporating culture in their classrooms.

*"I don't think I can think about including culture [in my teaching]. They don't know why they need to learn Chinese... Chinese is too difficult for some of them. Also, we are not teaching Chinese in context so discipline becomes an issue. Apart from this, they don't have high incentive in learning Chinese. These are the biggest issues."*

As a matter of fact, ethnic minority students in Hong Kong have low motivation when it comes to learning Chinese as they do not see themselves excelling in it under a schooling system that leaves them with nothing more than primary-level Chinese language qualifications. According to Kennedy (2012), local teachers often have to address issues of emotional distress which their ethnic minority students feel under the current Chinese language learning situation. Based on this previous study and the above quote, it becomes clear that local teachers, especially those who teach Chinese to ethnic minority students, have an immense pressure to eliminate their students' negative feelings towards Chinese. Since they come in contact with these students every day, most of their efforts go in making their students regain confidence in learning Chinese instead of worrying about bigger notions like CRP. Therefore, it can be said local Chinese teachers frequently practice the CRP characteristic of "demonstrating cultural caring and building learning a community" because of the aforementioned emotional barriers of their students.



### 3. Structural constraints

#### 3.1 High stakes nature of HK schools & teachers' workload

*"If a teacher only works in a school, they will be very narrow-minded. Teachers are very busy. They have ECA, admin work and also teaching. There is no time to reflect on their own teaching."*

*"If the school says they are exam-oriented, teachers have to follow, and then there is the school administrators and the principals' mindset... How they see it is important, too."*

The above quotes show that there are also some structural challenges related to the high-stakes nature of the Hong Kong schooling system and teachers' workload, which gradually lower teachers' chances of incorporating culture in their teaching. The teacher participants expressed that while they wanted to attempt to improve on their teaching with more cultural elements, they could not do so as they wished. They thought that if the administrators in schools emphasized focusing on high stakes exams, they could not afford to allocate time for promoting more culturally responsive education. This echoes with how teachers generally have the misconception that such pedagogical practices contradict with lesson time or content that they needed to cover.

#### 3.2 Teachers' linguistic capacity, students' mother tongue and the CSL framework

In terms of other structural challenges, this study shows how Chinese teachers see their inadequate knowledge about students' mother tongues and linguistic systems as a challenge to their teaching of Chinese to ethnic minority students.

*"I wish I knew their mother tongue. Then, I could compare their linguistic systems with Chinese and teach grammar in a better way."*

As language is an important element of culture, the teacher participants repeatedly expressed a desire to know more about their students' mother tongues and linguistic systems so as to be better equipped in teaching their language learners. Although it would be convenient to blame teachers for not seeking to gain such knowledge themselves, it should be noted that there might be a large number of mother tongues in a single classroom, making it impossible for teachers to know about all. In light of this, it seems as though such information should be provided in the official curriculum documents from the government. As a matter of fact, the EDB has very comprehensible English and Chinese curriculum guides for mainstream schools (Curriculum Development Council, 2004). As opposed to the Chinese language framework for teaching Chinese as a Second Language, these curriculum guides are informed by theories of second language acquisition and provides teachers with ample resources for teaching their students effectively. If anything, this reinforces the need for an official Chinese as a Second Language curriculum so that teachers who work with ethnic minority students can also enjoy the support and resources from the government, instead of seeking to gain them on their own with the existing framework.

#### **4. Confusion in defining students' culture**

*“Even though they are Pakistani[s], they are not very Pakistani-like. Even their parents speak to them in English so [culture] is not that important to me.”*

*“They remember things better when its about their own culture but aren't very affected by it because they were born in Hong Kong.”*

The above quotes reflect that teachers also struggle when incorporating students' culture in their classrooms because they cannot rationalize whether or not it is important to their teaching of Chinese to ethnic minority students. As it is evident from the quotes, most of these students are third culture kids who were born and raised in Hong Kong. Because of this, teachers tend to think that they are distant from their cultural roots, and therefore not affected by it. This struggle is reflective of the previously mentioned cultural deficiency model under which teachers see students as “lacking” culture and need to be acculturated, usually in the dominant culture. This echoes with the idea that local Chinese teachers see the local culture as a primary source of culture knowledge, while those of their students are secondary.

#### **5. Lack of training and relevant skills**

Apart from struggling to define students' cultures, local Chinese teachers also lack the training and skills that are needed to become a culturally responsive educator.

*“I didn't have much support from the school. [I] didn't learn much about it from my university education either. [There were] no instructions or guidelines. I just use my instincts to figure out how to teach them.”*

This quote undoubtedly shows that local teacher training programs fall short in preparing Chinese teachers to teach ethnically diverse students. Apart from this, teachers do not receive much support from the schools, and have to navigate their own ways to teach their ethnically diverse students. With this in mind, it can be said that teachers' low frequency of making changes to the curriculum and delivering culturally responsive instruction owes to their limited skills and expertise during their teaching training. This also shows that teachers alone cannot be blamed for their limited CRP practices as they were not properly supported and trained in this area.

## **IMPLICATIONS:**

Since local Chinese teachers have been found to struggle with conceptualizing CRP and face countless hurdles when trying to incorporate culture into their teaching, this study certainly has implications for the current Chinese language learning situation for ethnic minority students in Hong Kong.

Given the fact that teachers hold many misconceptions about CRP which limit them from incorporating culture beyond the surface level in classrooms, more needs to be done to improve teachers' understanding of the notion. Among others, professional development courses and workshops focusing on CRP can be organized for in-service teachers so that they can better understand what it means to be culturally-responsive and how they can eliminate hurdles that limit them from using culture in their classrooms. These workshops should especially emphasize how teachers can practice the CRP characteristics of designing culturally-relevant curricula and deliver culturally-responsive instruction as these have been found to be the weaknesses of local teachers. Apart from teachers, school administrators, principals and parents should also be introduced to this notion as only joint efforts in recognizing the importance of culture can bring about a larger pedagogical change in the system.

As for the future, the notion of CRP should be included as part of Chinese Language Education university programs in Hong Kong so that all prospective teachers of the Chinese Language subject can be made aware of the importance of culture in teaching ethnically diverse students. This will also ensure that they are sufficiently equipped in case they are employed in a school where they have to teach ethnic minority students. Introducing a mandatory credit-bearing course about CRP in the undergraduate study level or making CRP courses a graduation requirement for prospective teachers are two more practical ways in which we can assure that local teachers possess the relevant training and skills for working with diverse students.

Since this study has reaffirmed that the EDB's framework for teaching Chinese as a Second Language does, indeed, fall short in informing teachers about how they can better teach their students, more needs to be done to make it more extensive and turn it into a formal curriculum document. Just as it is done with curriculum guides of other subjects, theories related to second language acquisition and repositories of teaching and learning activities that work well with students of diverse backgrounds can be included in the curriculum so that teachers are better supported and guided on how they can use culture to enhance the teaching and learning experiences of Chinese for ethnic minority students.

## **LIMITATIONS:**

This study certainly had its limitations, and representativeness stands as the main one. There was a very low response rate on the survey questionnaire, not only because it was difficult to find respondents who fit in the extremely specific criterion of this study, but also because the survey questionnaire was initially only administered in English, and all of the target respondents were Chinese teachers who might not have felt comfortable in filling out an academic questionnaire in English. Although this language barrier was later eliminated by changing the questionnaire into a Chinese-English one, and more Chinese teachers showed interest in participating, other factors such as the busy schedule of teachers and teachers refraining from responding to a questionnaire targeting their own practices arose during the data collection process, leading to the relatively small sample size, in light of which, this study cannot completely represent the practices and conceptualizations of all Chinese teachers in Hong Kong.

Apart from representativeness, issues of bias and subjectivity also stand as key limitations to this study, and this largely owes to the fact that the researcher hails from an ethnic minority background herself and had indirect connections to some of the participants, leading to a possible influence on how they responded to the survey and interview questions. As the respondents were aware of the researcher's ethno-linguistic background, they might have interfered with participants' process of reflecting the truth and vital information about their experiences of teaching ethnic minority students in order to appeal to the researcher or avoid discourteousness (Gergen, 1997).

## **CONCLUSION:**

In conclusion, this study shows that despite its repeated success in proving to be beneficial for students of diverse cultural backgrounds in both international and local classroom contexts, the notion of culturally responsive pedagogy is not being extensively practiced in the teaching of Chinese to ethnic minority students in Hong Kong. Although local Chinese teachers appear to want the best for their learners, they cannot be culturally responsive because of the many misconceptions and structural limitations holding them back from integrating students' cultural assets in their daily teaching practices. In light of this, it becomes apparent that there is a long way to go for Hong Kong if improvements in the Chinese Language learning situation for ethnic minority students are wished to be made. Although Chinese teachers have the passion and heart for making their students enjoy learning Chinese, more structural changes, especially in the aspect of curriculum design, need to be made so that Chinese teachers are better supported, instead left alone, in the efforts to maximize ethnic minority students' opportunities for mastering the national language of the city they call home.

*(Word Count: 7196)*

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**Shifting the Focus from Curriculum to Instruction – Chinese Teacher's Conceptualization of Using Culturally Responsive Pedagogy for Teaching Ethnic Minority Students in Hong Kong**  
**Survey Questionnaire**

英文全名: Full Name: \_\_\_\_\_ 性別: Gender: \_\_\_\_\_ 年齡: Age: \_\_\_\_\_

族裔: Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_ 電郵地址: Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

請問閣下有多少教授少數族裔學生學生漢語的經驗? How long have you been teaching Chinese Language to ethnic minority students?

**你在教授少數族裔學生中國語文科時，採用以下方式的頻率：**

**Please indicate the extent to which you adopt these practices in your teaching of Chinese Language to ethnic minority students:**

	永不 Never	很少 Rarely	有時 Sometimes	通常 Usually	經常 Always
1. 了解關於少數族裔學生的文化價值觀、傳統和學習方式 Gain knowledge about ethnic minority student's cultural values, traditions and learning needs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. 了解少數族裔學生所屬民族對香港社會的貢獻 Gain knowledge about the contributions of students' ethnic groups to the Hong Kong society	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. 於中文科課堂中加入多元文化內容 Add multicultural content to Chinese lessons	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. 對教育局或學校管理人員提供的中文科課程文件進行文化分析 Do cultural analyses of the Chinese Language curriculum documents provided by the EDB or school administrators	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. 整合現有中文科課程的優點及缺點，以分析課程與少數民族學生是否合適 Determine the strengths and weaknesses of the existing Chinese Language curriculum to check how well it suits ethnic minority students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	永不 Never	很少 Rarely	有時 Sometimes	通常 Usually	經常 Always
6. 改變教育局或學校行政人員提供的中文課程和/或教材，以配合少數族裔學生的需要 Make changes to the Chinese Language curriculum and/or teaching materials provided by the EDB/school administrators to suit the needs of ethnic minority students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. 利用少數族裔學生本身的文化或經驗來擴展他們的漢語知識 Use ethnic minority student's own culture or experiences to expand their Chinese Language knowledge	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8. 向少數族裔學生展示教師認為他們有學習中文的潛力 Show ethnic minority students that I believe they have the potential to learn Chinese	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9. 能夠與來自不同種族背景的學生進行有效溝通 Able to communicate effectively with students from different ethnic backgrounds	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10. 向少數民族學生展示教師有責任在支持他們的學習的同時，考慮他們不同的文化身份 Show ethnic minority students I have the responsibility to support their learning without forgetting their cultural identities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11. 明白來自不同民族的學生在參與我的課程方面有所不同 Understand that students from different ethnic groups are different in terms of their engagement in my lessons	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12. 進行適合不同學生參與的課堂 Tasks that best suit different student's engagement patterns are given	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	永不 Never	很少 Rarely	有時 Sometimes	通常 Usually	經常 Always
13. 考慮到來自不同民族背景的學生有不同的社會行為，故考量各行為的文化原因，而不單從自己的文化角度來看待他們 Understand that students from different minority groups have different social behaviors so I consider the cultural reasons instead of approaching them from a Chinese perspective	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
14. 了解不同種族的學生有不同的學習方式 Understand that students from different ethnic groups have different learning needs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
15. 在中文科課程中迎合不同民族的學習風格 Cater for different ethnic group's learning needs in Chinese lessons	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
16. 在我的日常教學中注意學生所屬文化的重要性 Pay attention to the importance of student's culture in my day to day teaching	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
17. 整合一個與少數族裔學生所適用的課堂活動資源庫，並用它來準備我的課堂 Seek to have a resource bank of classroom activities that work well with ethnic minority students and use it to plan my lessons	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

1. 請問你如何形容你對少數民族學生的教學經歷？（選填）

In your own words, how would you describe your experience of teaching ethnic minority students? (Optional)

2. 請試描述一次曾考慮學生文化制定中文科課堂教學成功經驗？（選填） Can you describe a successful experience of including student's culture in your Chinese lesson? (Optional)

3. 請問你可否參加一個有關您教學的簡短電話面試？ Would you be available to participate in a short phone interview about your teaching? \*

☐ 可以 Yes

☐ 不可以 No

**Semi-Structured Interview Protocol**

Date	
Location	
Time Start	
Time End	

**Personal Information:**

Name:

Years of experience teaching EM students:

Level of students taught:

**Questions:**

1. Can you describe a successful experience of incorporating students' cultural backgrounds into your Chinese lesson?
2. What are some of the challenges that you face when trying to incorporate students' cultural background in their learning of Chinese?
3. What factors do you think ethnic minority students' cultural backgrounds play in your school's Chinese lesson planning process?
4. From your own experiences (either during your teacher training or teaching experience over the years), what were you taught about the ways in which you should teach EM students?
5. How do you think you can improve your overall teaching of Chinese with ethnic minority students in the future?

## APPENDIX 3

CRP Characteristics	Items	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1 A culturally diverse knowledge base	1 Gain knowledge about ethnic minority student's cultural values, traditions and learning needs	20%	27%	40%	13%	0%
	2 Gain knowledge about the contributions of students' ethnic groups to the Hong Kong society	0%	47%	20%	33%	0%
	Characteristic Mean	10%	37%	30%	23%	0%

2 The ability to design culturally relevant curricula	3 Add multicultural content to Chinese lessons	20%	40%	33%	7%	0%
	4 Do cultural analyses of the Chinese Language curriculum documents provided by the EDB or school administrators	13%	13%	33%	27%	13%
	5 Determine the strengths and weaknesses of the existing Chinese Language curriculum to check how well it suits ethnic minority students	20%	27%	27%	20%	7%
	6 Make changes to the Chinese Language curriculum and/or teaching materials provided by the EDB/school administrators to suit the needs of ethnic minority students	27%	33%	13%	20%	7%
	Characteristic Mean	20%	28%	27%	18%	7%

CRP Characteristics	Items	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
3 Demonstration of cultural caring and building a learning community	7 Use ethnic minority student's own culture or experiences to expand their Chinese Language knowledge	7%	47%	33%	7%	0%
	8 Show ethnic minority students that I believe they have the potential to learn Chinese	27%	53%	20%	0%	0%
	10 Show ethnic minority students I have the responsibility to support their learning without forgetting their cultural identities	20%	53%	27%	0%	0%
	Characteristic Mean	18%	51%	27%	2%	0%



4 The ability to build effective cross-cultural communications	9 Able to communicate effectively with students from different ethnic backgrounds	20%	60%	13%	7%	0%
	11 Understand that students from different ethnic groups are different in terms of their engagement in my lessons	27%	47%	27%	0%	0%
	12 Tasks that best suit different student's engagement patterns are given	27%	40%	20%	7%	7%
	13 Understand that students from different minority groups have different social behaviors so I consider the cultural reasons instead of approaching them from a Chinese perspective	13%	60%	20%	7%	0%
	14 Understand that students from different ethnic groups have different learning needs	20%	40%	40%	0%	0%
	Characteristic Mean	21%	49%	24%	4%	1%

CRP Characteristics	Items	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
5 Delivery of culturally responsive instruction	15 Cater for different ethnic group's learning needs in Chinese lessons	7%	33%	40%	20%	0%
	16 Pay attention to the importance of student's culture in my day to day teaching	13%	40%	27%	20%	0%
	17 Seek to have a resource bank of classroom activities that work well with ethnic minority students and use it to plan my lessons	7%	27%	47%	13%	7%
	Characteristic Mean	9%	33%	38%	18%	2%