

EdUHK Forum on Inclusive and Equitable Education for All in Hong Kong

Briefing Paper No. 3

The Education University of Hong Kong

30th November 2016



Summary

Minority language students face a number of challenges from the current education system. Whilst the number of minority language students, including South Asians (e.g. Pakistani, Nepalese and Indian) and Southeast Asians (e.g. Filipino, Thai, Indonesian) attending school full-time in Hong Kong has increased since 1997, the number of schools offering English as a medium of instruction has reduced.

Many minority language students attend government schools where Cantonese is the medium of instruction or attend schools (formerly known as “designated” schools) where they are streamed into English-medium of instruction classes. Provision for learning Cantonese as a second language at such schools is often limited. This places minority language students at a disadvantage when applying for jobs and higher education (academic and vocational) in Hong Kong.

This forum series was developed by the EdUHK as a way for stakeholders to meet to discuss how education can be improved for minority language students and the role of the University as the trainer of many of Hong Kong’s teachers.

This series of Briefing Papers presents the findings of these Forums.

Inclusive and Equitable Education for All in Hong Kong: Briefing Papers Series
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The role of the Education University of Hong Kong to enhance teacher education and cultural sensitivity

Introduction

This Forum is the third in an ongoing series on Inclusive and Equitable Education for All in Hong Kong organised by the UNESCO Chair in TVET and Lifelong Learning with the Centre for Governance and Citizenship. The forum was hosted by the Education University of Hong Kong on 30 November 2016.

The first Forum was held in October 2015, which identified a number of priority areas in education for minority language students in Hong Kong. One area was the role of the EdUHK in enhancing pre-service and in-service teachers' cultural sensitivity and competence in handling classes of students with diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. The second Forum in May 2016 continued dialogue on issues raised by the first Forum, and focused upon the specific theme of raising awareness of multiculturalism and diversity through teacher education programmes at EdUHK.

This third forum explored examples of good teaching methods that have had success in the classroom and received positive feedback from minority language students. The aim from this forum was to lead to development of ideas as to how the University can improve our teacher education programmes, particularly for teachers of minority language students.

The Forum brought together fourteen relevant stakeholders and specialists, from the Education University of Hong Kong, along with members from minority and concern groups.

The Forum began with a keynote presentation by Mr Chura Bahadur Thapa (Yuen Long Minorities Parent's Concern Group).

Background

Key issues in education for minority students in Hong Kong

Minority language students face a number of challenges from the current education system, including access and language barriers. Whilst the number of minority language students, including South Asians (e.g. Pakistani, Nepalese and Indian) and Southeast Asians (e.g. Filipino, Thai, Indonesian) attending school full-time in Hong Kong has increased since 1997, the number of schools offering English as a medium of instruction has reduced.

Many minority language students who do not have the socioeconomic means to attend private international schools instead attend government schools where Cantonese is the medium of instruction or attend schools (formerly known as "designated" schools) where they are streamed into English-speaking classes with other minority language students. Provisions for learning Cantonese as a

second language at such schools are often limited, with lack of curriculum support and educational resources. Many students sit alternative assessments such as GCSE and GCE Chinese, which do not equate to local Chinese proficiency requirements. This places minority language students at a disadvantage when applying for jobs and higher education (academic and vocational) in Hong Kong, which frequently require a high level of proficiency in spoken Cantonese and written Chinese.

Despite the introduction of the “Chinese Language Curriculum Second Language Learning Framework” by the Education Bureau in 2014, there are still concerns over how this framework will be implemented and the lack of a corresponding examination that is accepted by tertiary institutions. Aside from Chinese language proficiency, there are also concerns that minority language students are further disadvantaged by institutional factors, such as streaming, which often prevents interaction with Chinese students.

Outcomes

Key areas of consensus centered around the importance of using culturally relevant pedagogy in the classroom.

Areas of consensus amongst the group discussion at this third Forum included a discussion over learning Cantonese as a second language. The use of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy, the student-teacher relationship formed and the importance of parental support were other areas the group agreed upon. The forum concluded with a discussion on teaching strategies that could be implemented, which included contextualizing learning for students, creating meaningful extracurricular activities, particularly for learning Cantonese and recognizing that teachers may need to ‘unlearn’. Furthermore, developing an attitude of respect amongst teachers, and encouraging reflection was seen to be important by all forum attendees. Lastly, building supportive conditions for students and teachers was touched upon, along with the need to empower the community and parents.

This report begins with key points from Mr Chura Bahadur Thapa’s keynote presentation, before moving on to key areas of consensus amongst participants.

Keynote presentation

Mr Chura Bahadur Thapa (Yuen Long Minorities Parent's Concern Group)

Key points:

- Culturally relevant pedagogy is crucial to use in a class with minority language students, by using the students' cultural practices as learning materials, instead of uniform textbooks. This could include using different multimedia resources when teaching. For instance, even if students are watching a Nepalese movie, they can still learn English, whilst keeping students interested and engaged. Teachers can draw upon the knowledge and background of students in this way.
- Teachers should try to understand the different identities of students, whilst communicating the benefits of learning. Doing so can boost self-efficacy and confidence in students. Similarly, understanding at risk students is important as some may come from broken families.
- Drawing upon his research, Mr Thapa highlighted that simply because minority language students are in an English medium class, does not mean they are proficient in English. Teachers of the same nationality and language to students are ideal, however if there are teaching assistants with the same background to students this can equally help. Ultimately, being equipped with cultural knowledge and having a strong understanding of the background and language abilities of students is key for educators of minority language students.
- Some teachers report that group work may be better than giving out a lot of homework.
- Typically if students are not doing well, they can get labelled by teachers. Mr Thapa however cited teachers who even when their students had low self confidence and referred to themselves as "low level", banned them from using this phrase, instead saying they just do not know *how* to learn yet.
- Teachers should appreciate that during communication with parents, some parents may be involved less due to other issues, such as work constraints. Teachers could instead initiate meeting parents, as they may be shy.
- Scolding and punishment do not work in a class with minority language students.
- The idea of 'remaining silent' in classrooms might be difficult for minority language students, especially South Asians.

Key areas of consensus

Teaching practice

Culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy

Participants at the forum strongly emphasized the importance of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy in Hong Kong schools. Ms Phyllis Cheung felt that the Education Bureau views ethnic minority students as a homogenous group, which Mr Jan Gube agreed with, stating that cultural diversity is not taken into account fully when designing education policies. Dr Miron Bhowmik further emphasised the importance of not stereotyping ethnic minority students.

Utilising culturally relevant pedagogy and tailoring learning was highlighted in Chura Bahadur Thapa's introduction and echoed by Kunal Narwani. Mr Narwani reflected upon his time as a student at Delia Memorial School Broadway, where he felt the teachers understood a lot about his cultural background and took the time to learn more about each individual student.

Ms Suet Ching further echoed the need to adapt teaching methodology to students. In her role as a volunteer teacher with refugee and minority language students, she found that using singing and body movements helped students to learn. She was keen to learn more teaching methods to help the students learn Cantonese and other skills.

The student-teacher relationship

Kunal Narwani argued that the strength and quality of the student-teacher relationship is the most important. As such, Khristayle Tan referred to teachers who were encouraging and communicated individually with each student. Professor Bob Adamson cited a study examining how novice teachers become advanced. When many teachers begin their teaching careers, their knowledge is more disjointed, whereas mature teachers have their own philosophy of teaching. What unified such mature teachers was their knowledge of students, further emphasizing the importance of developing the student-teacher relationship. Building off the experiences of such teachers is particularly crucial for minority language students, according to Kunal Narwani.

Parental support

The degree of continuity between school and the home environment was discussed.

Dr Maria Manzon pointed out that ethnic minority parents are marginalised within the educational system. Ben Bernandez agreed, stating that many parents are concerned about their child's learning, but teachers have difficulty communicating with parents, partially because of language barriers. Ms Phyllis Cheung pointed out that schools should try to take into account the fact that

parents are often not able to help with their child's homework, as they may be unable to understand the instructions in Cantonese.

Dr Shahid Karim further echoed the importance of parental support in learning and the need to look at strategies for motivating parents to engage with their child's learning. Ms Phyllis Cheung pointed out that schools should try to take into account the fact that parents are often not able to help with their child's homework, as they may be unable to understand the instructions in Cantonese.

Dr Maria Manzon discussed research showing that continuity between the home and school environment contributes to student engagement, which then influences student achievement. She argued that it is important to assess how we can activate the capabilities of parents, and how schools can have an enabling environment to cater to the diverse needs of students.

Dr Manzon cited a secondary school in Singapore with small classes sizes, where teachers were enthusiastic to enable students to achieve, and parental engagement was much higher in this school.

Learning Chinese as a second language

Medium of instruction for the current curriculum was discussed throughout the forum. Forum participants agreed that the current framework; the Chinese Language Curriculum Second Language Learning Framework, however remains simply a framework.

Concerns over the current framework include too much of a focus upon language skills for exams, including reading and writing in Cantonese. Ben Bernandez and Kunal Narwani both believed that schools in Hong Kong placed less focus upon speaking and the importance of practicing in the student's social world.

Khristayle Tan concurred that her previous experience of teachers encouraging students to speak Cantonese outside the school environment was key to improvement. Dr Dani Wang agreed with this whereby many students had reported learning Cantonese was very difficult and akin to learning two languages, particularly in how the oral form and written form varied. She argued that practice of Cantonese was essential. Further concerns were expressed by Ms Phyllis Cheung who argued that parents needed more choice over medium of instruction for their children.

Many participants agreed that there was a lot of pressure on schools to pass the HKDSE, otherwise they faced being closed down. Professor Bob Adamson cited a study in which parents in Hong Kong were asked what they thought about education, to which they replied they thought that teachers should focus on discipline rather than content. Forum attendees agreed this focus on achievements and exams were at a cost to ethnic minority students.

There were however success stories of learning Cantonese, such as from Chura Bahadur Thapa who cited his cousin who had passed the HKCEE and went on to become a police officer. Looking forward, Dr Zhang Qi commented on the benefit of smaller classes when learning Chinese and the importance of

tailoring Chinese as a second language learning to individual students. Grouping students to learn more about their learning differences can be useful, with extra care and support given to those of lower proficiency, whilst the more proficient students can act as teaching assistants.

What works/practical tips:

- **Teachers developing and utilizing relevant cultural pedagogy**
- **Develop attitude of respect amongst teachers.** The actions or words that demonstrate respect were discussed amongst the group. All agreed that a respectful teacher should emphasize commonalities amongst students of different backgrounds, whilst respecting differences, should understand each student's learning needs, find out what motivates each student, appreciate the strengths and weaknesses of each student, be open-minded and listen. Similarly, teachers in Hong Kong should focus on all students rather than focusing on weaker students. The consensus amongst forum participants was that teachers must move towards respect for ethnic minority students, rather than solely tolerance.
- **Celebrate diversity.** Building upon respect, schools must view diversity as a resource to be capitalized upon. How this can be instrumentalized is important, particularly examining what multicultural teaching competencies mean to Hong Kong teachers.
- **Understanding that teachers may need to 'unlearn'.** Given that teachers themselves learn through their own personal experiences and previous teachers, teachers need to understand that they may 'unlearn' their teaching methods. Indeed, future teachers may need to observe, understand and adapt different pedagogies to their classrooms.
- **Acknowledge that the nature of education is changing.** Khristayle Tan mentioned the importance of students being prepared for their future, and as Professor Bob Adamson highlighted, rapid developments in the 21st century mean that students are not being trained for the variety of jobs they may have in the future. How we can fully identify 21st century competences needs to be fully explored.
- **Contextualising learning.** Instead of enforcing the idea of memorization, teachers should bring out what can be used in real life, particularly in language learning in Hong Kong.
- **Encouraging reflection.** This could be done through initiatives such as a staff learning day, where a learning community is created for teachers to share their experiences in teaching ethnic minority students.
- **Create meaningful extracurricular activities.** Activities which combine a meaningful social purpose and language learning could be initiated. For instance, visits to the elderly could be combined with

teaching context relevant Cantonese words beforehand. This therefore encourages more language practice in the social world.

- **Empowering the community and parents.** Community education is important to break stereotypes surrounding ethnic minority students. The Boston Public Schools Parent University was cited as a way to empower parents in their child's education.
- **Building supportive conditions for students and teachers together.** This includes increasing interaction between different students with different cultural backgrounds and promoting practices towards understanding each other. Such initiatives would help the welfare of students and their ability to deal with future challenges, emphasizing further the need for culturally responsive teachers.

Conclusion

This Forum provided key areas of consensus amongst stakeholders on teacher education, which can be taken by the Education University of Hong Kong to continue to improve education for minority language students. It also explored teaching methods for minority language students, concluding with specific suggestions that could be implemented within both teacher education programmes and schools with ethnic minority students.

Contact details:

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Appendix One: Forum programme

Third Forum on Inclusive and Equitable Education for All in Hong Kong

Experiences in teaching methods to enhance the learning process for Minority Language Students

The Education University of Hong Kong
Wednesday 30th November 2016. 9:00am-12:45pm

PROGRAMME

08:45 – 09:15am	Arrival
09:15am	Introduction Professor Bob Adamson, EdUHK a) Purpose of Forum: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To consider the role of the Education University of Hong Kong to enhance teacher education in terms of handling and cultural diversity; and• To explore the teaching methods with development of plans and actions
9:20am	Background and scene setting Mr Chura Bahadur Thapa (Yuen Long Minorities Parent's Concern Group)
9.30am	Discussion Session One What are the successful teaching strategies for minority language students?
11:00am- 11:30am	Short Break
11:30-12:30pm	Discussion Session Two Exploration of experiences and key issues in further detail
12:30pm	Summary and consensus for actions/plans
12:45pm	Way forward. Thanks to participants (Professor Bob Adamson). End Forum.

Appendix Two: Forum attendees

Professor Bob Adamson (EdUHK)
Ms Phyllis Cheung (UNISON)
Ms Lucinda Pike (EdUHK)
Mr Chura Bahadur Thapa (Yuen Long Minorities Parent's Concern Group)
Ms Suet Ching Lee (EdUHK)
Dr Dani Wang (THEi)
Dr Shahid Karim (EdUHK)
Dr Miron Bhowmik (EdUHK)
Mr Kunal Narwani (EdUHK)
Mr Jan Gube
Ms Khristayle Tan (EdUHK/Section Juan)
Dr Zhang Qi (EdUHK)
Dr Maria Manzon (EdUHK)
Mr Ben Bernandez (Section Juan)