



Chinese for Non Native-Chinese Speakers

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A relatively small but growing percentage of Hong Kong's population is made up of ethnic minorities. Many of them have problems learning Chinese within the local education system whose teachers often struggle to cope with Non Native-Chinese-speaking (NNCS) students amid a class of fluent speakers. This puts them at a disadvantage in society since they will not have equity of access to further education and career opportunities without good Chinese.

To prevent marginalization, NNCS citizens have to acquire basic competence in reading and writing Chinese. Since 2008, the Faculty of Education's Centre for the Advancement of Chinese Language Education and Research (CACLER) has been working to enhance the professional capacity of language teachers and to boost the Chinese proficiency of the NNCS students in kindergartens, primary and secondary schools.

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With the Hong Kong Government's support, the Faculty has conducted various university-school partnership research projects and teacher training programmes. The aim of those projects is to find equity-based and imaginative ways to enhance Chinese language teaching and make it more interesting and achievable for NNCS learners. They include innovative teacher training programmes called '**PROS**', which

provide teachers with four essential elements: “**p**rofessional and development talk”, “**r**eflection and workshop”, “**o**bserving and coaching”, and “**s**haring the practice”. This represents vigorous knowledge exchange and collaboration between university and schools, employing classroom-based research projects for effective pedagogy.

The PROS approach has already trained a total of 500 teachers from 30 kindergartens, 11 primary and 30 secondary schools. The experience for many of the teachers has been a liberation from the isolation of their classrooms and a welcome entry into a collaborative environment for collegial learning.

As the development and research projects continue, it has become clear that while literacy is important for social inclusion, the Chinese language aspect is not the only factor to be considered – there is also the bigger cultural picture. In order to motivate ethnic minorities to learn the language, they must feel that they belong, or can at least fit in, to the culture in which they live. The role of girls from some South East Asian societies is down-played. They are intelligent and diligent, but under normal circumstances they simply do not have the opportunities to integrate with the outside world and Hong Kong people. Experiential learning and multicultural service learning have therefore become important strategies of social inclusion.

With the support of the Social Inclusion Fund at HKU, efforts are being undertaken to improve the academic aspirations of NNCS students by inviting them to visit the university to enhance their understanding of tertiary education. HKU students have been given the important role of mentoring them. As a result, some have started thinking seriously -- perhaps for the first time -- that higher education, and a professional career, might be within their reach.

Cheung Wai-ming is Associate Professor in the Division of Chinese Language and Literature with particular expertise in Chinese Language education, phenomenography and school-based curriculum development. She is a main driver in several large-scale research projects to enhancing pedagogy for Non-Chinese speaking students and for the schoolteachers who educate them.