

Hong Kong Council of Social Service
Network on Ethnic Minorities Services

Comment on the Consultation Paper on Developing a
“Supplementary Guide to the Chinese Language Curriculum for
Non-Chinese Speaking Students”

Equal education opportunities for EM students does not only mean by offering school places for them in the education system, but by providing full support and access to them and facilitate them to truly benefit from the system.

Many EM children and youth who live in Hong Kong have long been experiencing difficulties in their studies. This has also deprived them from obtaining further education opportunities and getting employment here. Learning Chinese in school is one of the major problems faced by these students. Concerned NGOs and the EM organizations have suggested that standardized Chinese language curriculum for non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students should be developed so as to meet their learning need.

In response to the matter, the Curriculum Development Council of Education Bureau released a consultation paper on the “Supplementary Guide to the Chinese Language Curriculum for Non-Chinese Speaking Students” in January 2008. The Council welcomes the effort of the Bureau, yet we view that the Guide cannot address the Chinese language education need of the EM students entirely. Our major comments are as follows:

1) The Consultation Period should be extended so as to include more views from the EM community

The introduction of this Supplementary Guide would definitely bring influence to all NCS students. Yet, EDB has just held one briefing session for the concerned NGOs / EM organizations so far while the English version of the full consultation paper is only available at later stage. Many EM students and their parents are not aware of the matter. It is suggested that the consultation period should be extended and some more public consultation sessions should be arranged so as to include more views from the EM community.

2) EM students need an “Alternative Chinese Language Curriculum” but not just a “Supplement Guide to the existing Chinese Language Curriculum”.

Chinese is actually a very difficult language to learn. And even those EM students are born in Hong Kong, we cannot expect that they can learn Chinese as those local students do, as they are lacking the Chinese language environment at home. They are still learning Chinese as a second language. Therefore, NGOs always request for an “Alternative Chinese Language Curriculum” for EM students. The “Supplementary Guide to the Chinese Language Curriculum for Non-Chinese Speaking Students” is only providing a reference to schools on how to teach NCS students so that these students can eventually fit in the existing Chinese curriculum.

We understand that the Government is providing additional resources to support EM students to adjust to school life and schools are also working very hard to help their EM students to learn Chinese. We still cannot deny the fact that not all EM students can successfully fit in the existing Chinese curriculum. Therefore, we would like to reiterate that an “Alternative Chinese Language Curriculum” for EM students is the only possible way to help them. Such alternative curriculum should focus more on preparing the students to use Chinese in their daily living and work life in Hong Kong. Moreover, the curriculum should also be bridged with a tailor-made public examination which can be accredited by universities and employers.

3) The Guide is providing choices to schools but not the students.

As illustrated in the Consultation Paper, schools will have the flexibility to opt to use different curriculum approaches in teaching NCS students Chinese. Again, this is providing choices to schools on how to handle these students but not choices for the students, especially those EM students. Since the competency in Chinese Language is different from student to student, it is inevitable that approach IV will be the only possible one to be used.

4) Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the Different Curriculum Approaches

We welcome EDB’s plan on launching various research and development projects to help NCS students to learn Chinese. We further would recommend EDB to conduct a longitudinal study on the impact of using different approaches

and identify effective ways in helping NCS students. Moreover, more information on EDB's initiatives on helping NSD students should be released to the concerned parties and they should also be invited to give on-going feedback on these programmes so as to ensure the education need of EM students is being addressed properly.

5) Government has to develop comprehensive policy on how to better include EM students in the education system and fully utilize their potentials.

We appreciate the effort of Education Bureau and concerned schools in helping EM students to adjust to the existing education system. In the long run, there should be a comprehensive review on the education need of EM students in Hong Kong. And specific education policy should be developed to address their special need. EM students are with different talents. We must understand them more and find better ways to fully utilize their potentials.