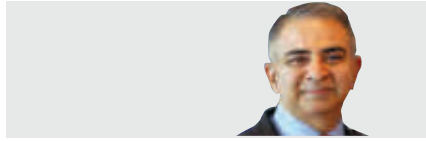


Fluency in Chinese is crucial to future of ethnic minority children

In her latest Policy Address, the chief executive said: “To encourage non-Chinese-speaking students’ parents to send their children to local kindergartens, starting from the 2017-18 school year, the Education Bureau has been providing additional subsidies for kindergartens under the Kindergarten Education Scheme, admitting non-Chinese-speaking children. What is more important, however, is to assess the effectiveness of this initiative and make adjustments as appropriate, in the hope that language will no longer be a barrier for non-Chinese-speakers to integrate into the local community and enter the job market.”

The chief executive must be commended for her astute long-term vision and her understanding of the need for better evaluation, oversight and accountability at the kindergarten level so as to prevent the oft-reported exclusion of the underserved non-Chinese-speaking children from access to equal language learning opportunities in an inclusive schooling environment. This need to assess the impact and efficacy is most critical, given the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region government’s stated goal of providing 15 years of free schooling



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to all eligible children of Hong Kong via its Free Quality Kindergarten Education Scheme of 2017-18. Thus the EDB subsidized local schools with the expectation that they could give children the necessary academic, emotional, physical and mental nurturing, irrespective of their socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds.

The Audit Commission issued in March a scathing report on the lackadaisical attitude of the concerned educational institutions toward educating Hong Kong’s underserved ethnic minority children, highlighting the need to enhance teaching Chinese to non-Chinese-speaking students because the failure to do so would lead to their further educational marginalization and victimization, with serious consequences later in the workplace in Hong Kong, where Chinese remains by far the most widely spoken local language.

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immersion. Cultural immersion, while being the bridge between diversity and inclusion, is inseparably intertwined with equity, as not only does it facilitate the introduction of different people to one another, it also conveniences their integration and acceptance of each other. It helps them realize that not only can they understand each other, but they can also celebrate their similarities and rejoice in each other’s uniqueness. The quintessence of the government’s 15 years’ free-schooling facilities is, among other things, to strive for equity as a first step toward social harmony and economic advancement

When the chief executive indicated the need for better evaluation, oversight and accountability of the kindergarten education program, it was indicative of her resolve to ensure maximum efficacy and impact of the government’s wonderfully inclusive and equal learning opportunities initiative. After six and a half years of providing language based academic relief to Hong Kong’s academically isolated non-Chinese-speaking children, Integrated Brilliant Education is in absolute agreement with the chief executive’s sentiments — prevention is indeed better than the cure

Adopting a positive, solution-oriented,

equity-based interventionist approach at the kindergarten level is the wisest way forward — that of pre-emptively strengthening the roots, rather than wasting time, effort and energy trying to remedy the symptoms later, such as the difficult entry into the job market, underemployment, intergenerational poverty, and the inability to integrate into Hong Kong’s social fabric or failure to maximize one’s potential due to the resultant diminished opportunities. In the real world, competence in the language could be a great equalizer. Our non-Chinese-speaking children are being doubly handicapped, owing to the educationists failing to facilitate their proper assimilation of both Chinese language and culture. We must not fail them!

To borrow a quote from Nobel laureate and polymath Rabindranath Tagore: “Let us unite, not in spite of our differences, but through them. For differences can never be wiped away, and life would be so much the poorer without them. Let all human races keep their own personalities, and yet come together, not in a uniformity that is dead, but in a unity that is living.”

The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.