

Chapter 3

The Future: New Directions of Singapore Chinese Language Teaching

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Entering the twenty-first Century, the rate of globalisation speeds up with the advent of the knowledge economy era fuelled by information. The world is developing to become a multilingual environment, and more countries have realised the advantages of mastering multiple languages in a highly competitive globalised environment. To survive in an open economy, Singaporeans need to master multiple languages to maintain a high level of competitiveness. It is a proficiency that ought to be possessed not only by a small section of the population.

Singapore has been implementing bilingual education since Independence in 1965. Bilingual education has become a cornerstone of Singapore's education system. English connects her people with the global economy, while Chinese language keeps Chinese Singaporeans rooted in their cultural heritage and strengthens their sense of identity. Moreover, with the rise of China and India, learning mother tongue languages (MTLs) will gain increasing relevance and provide students with a competitive edge (Ministry of Education 2011: 10). Thus, bilingual Singaporeans will be able to communicate with the East and West and to relate with communities of the associated cultures, as well as establish a stronger cultural identity of their own.

The language environment in Singapore has evolved over the past 20 years. According to the survey conducted on the home language environment of students by the Ministry of Education (2004, 2011), there is an increase in ethnic Chinese families adopting English as the most frequently used home language while families using both English and Chinese are increasing as well. In other words, Singaporeans are becoming increasingly bilingual. However, at the same time, the survey shows that the adoption of Chinese as the most frequently used language is still prevalent. The home language background of Chinese Singaporean students has shown multiple characteristics. Chinese Language teachers have to teach classes with students of increasingly varied levels of proficiency in Chinese language and

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cultural backgrounds. Chinese Language classrooms have become ‘differentiated classrooms’. These classrooms may have students from China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Malaysia who have higher Chinese proficiency levels and students from other Asian countries and local Malay and Indian students who are learning Chinese language. In such cases, the proficiency levels of students learning Chinese can be expected to be much varied. Having students of different cultures, language backgrounds and ages in the Chinese Language classrooms brings about a tremendous challenge for the curriculum design and teaching of Chinese Language.

Singapore’s Mother Tongue Curriculum and New Teaching Situation

With the trend of an evolving language and culture diversification in the local and global environment, the Ministry of Education convened the Mother Tongue Languages Review Committee (MTLRC) led by the Director-General of Education in January 2010. The MTLRC was tasked to evaluate the evolving language trends and the impact on the teaching and learning of MTLs in Singapore. The Review was to propose appropriate strategies for MTL teaching and learning, given Singapore’s unique context in the Twenty-first Century.

In Singapore, MTL teaching is more than just a question of language teaching; it shapes the core of a nation’s language policy. To adapt to the rapid changes in the sociolinguistic environment, Singapore has conducted reviews on mother tongue curriculum and pedagogy periodically since the implementation of the New Education System in the late 1970s following the Goh Keng Swee Report (1978). Since then, there are another four reviews and each round of review and the ensuing reform are driven by reports published by review committees. These committees involved political leaders, university professors, school principals, front-line teachers, parents, community representatives and Ministry officers. The committees analysed the then current and future development of Singapore MTL teaching and proposed key recommendations. After the publication of each report, the Ministry of Education would start re-organising the curriculum and re-designing of pedagogy, followed by the writing of new instructional materials, conducting experimental teachings and vetting instructional materials according to feedback from teachers and students. A new set of instructional materials would be released beginning in the following years progressively. Thus, it took at least two years of planning and experimental teaching to develop new instructional materials from the publication of each report.

The *Nurturing Active Learners and Proficient Users – 2010 MTL Review Committee Report* (hereafter, the Report; Ministry of Education 2011) is the latest report on MTL curriculum and pedagogy reform. The recommendations proposed in the Report will impact primary and secondary schools’ Chinese Language curriculum and pedagogy for the years 2014–2022. Before writing the Report, the Ministry of Education conducted a survey in 2010 on the home language of primary

Table 3.1 Home language of Singapore Primary 6 students

Language spoken at home	Percent (%)
CL only and CL mostly	37
EL and CL just as frequently	25
EL only and EL mostly	38

Source: Ministry of Education (2011: Annex B, Table B1)

Table 3.2 Importance of and interest in learning Chinese language

	Primary 6 (%)	Secondary 4 (%)
Believed it was important to study Chinese	95	87
Enjoyed Chinese lessons in school	90	76
Liked learning Chinese	88	69

Source: Ministry of Education (2011: Annex B, Table B2)

school, secondary school and junior college students from three ethnic groups (N=9543). The survey clearly shows that the home language environment of ethnic Chinese families has multiple characteristics. Table 3.1 summarises the home language environment of Primary 6 ethnic Chinese students in Singapore.

Compared to the situation over the past 20 years, the percentages of families who adopted English as the most frequently used home language rose from 20 % in 1992 to 38 % in 2010 (Ministry of Education 1992, 2011; Cheah 2001).

The MTLRC also conducted a survey on Primary 6 and Secondary 4 students. According to the survey results, Chinese was deemed an important subject by a great majority of students. Students of younger ages also enjoyed learning mother tongue more (Table 3.2).

Both Primary 6 and Secondary 4 levels are the last year of the primary and secondary education, respectively. Results collected from the study are able to present the attitudes and thoughts from students who have completed the Chinese language curriculum of the two education phases. The survey also found that home language influenced students' attitudes and proficiency in MTL. Fewer students from English-speaking homes were found to like learning MTL (Ministry of Education 2011: 95). It was also found that Chinese Language B students, taking the syllabus catered for students with difficulties in learning Chinese, were predominantly English-speaking and have less positive attitudes. A majority of them lacked confidence in speaking Chinese. For these reasons, the next round of Chinese Language curriculum and pedagogy reform needs to place great emphasis on these important factors that will influence the teaching effectiveness of Chinese in the near future.

The MTLRC also made study trips to Australia, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, India, Malaysia and the USA and interviewed educators, experts with extensive experience teaching in multilingual environments and students to understand their

language teaching progress and to pick up learning points in preparation for the next round of pedagogical reform. It was observed that even in those societies where students are native speakers constantly exposed to an environment where the dominant mother tongue is used extensively in everyday life, there is continued investment in making language learning relevant. Experts from these countries believed that the most effective way of learning is to communicate in real-life scenarios using the language, regardless of whether the learner is in a MTL-dominated or multilingual environment. The main direction of the current language teaching is to let students apply what they have learned (Ministry of Education 2011: 12–13).

With the understanding of the local language context and making reference to language teaching experiences in various countries, the MTLRC presented the Report in February 2011, proposing a new direction for the MTL curriculum. The MTLRC outlined three broad objectives in the teaching and learning of MTLs: communication, culture and connection (Ministry of Education 2011: 13). There are three reasons behind the objectives. Firstly, it is an advantage to be proficient in both MTL and English language. Singaporeans will have a competitive edge if they can communicate with people across the world in English language and MTLs. Secondly, learning MTLs enables the students to understand and develop their unique identity through a deeper appreciation of culture, literature and history. Thirdly, being proficient in MTLs enables students to connect with communities across Asia and the people who speak their language or share their culture (Ministry of Education 2011: 36–37).

To achieve these objectives, there is the need to help students in using Chinese language as a living language. The core recommendation of the Report is to provide learning opportunities for students to practise what they have learned, allow students to enjoy learning Chinese language and enable them to master the language. There is a significant difference between this ideology and the ideology of past Chinese Language curricula that mainly emphasise the training of language skills and transmission of cultural values. The ultimate objective of this round of Chinese Language curriculum and pedagogy reform is to make Chinese language a living language that students use to communicate effectively in a variety of real-life settings. As such, the Report proposes that Chinese Language curriculum should be relevant to the everyday life of students and also incorporate their interest into learning. The learning of Chinese language needs to be aligned with the language standards of students. The teaching of Chinese language needs also to promote learning through assessment while changing the mindset that learning is for good grades. It further needs to improve students' oral proficiency. Furthermore, the teaching of Chinese Language has to make good use of information technology (IT) to promote the development of self-directed learning.

The Report rightly makes recommendations that are aligned with the current language teaching philosophy. However, to implement the recommendations proposed by the Report or, rather, to achieve the expected outcomes for this round of Chinese Language curriculum and pedagogy reform, curriculum planners need to approach it from four aspects: (1) teaching philosophy, (2) curriculum planning and development, (3) teaching and instructional materials and (4) teaching assessment.

It is especially important to ensure that students from different language backgrounds and learning abilities are able to enjoy and love learning Chinese language and to master the language well. We now turn to elaborate these four aspects of this round of curriculum and pedagogy reform.

Teaching Philosophy

To cope with the multiple characteristics of Chinese language learners in Singapore's primary and secondary schools, it is important to first achieve equity in educational provisions. A subtle difference between equity and equality is that equity does not refer to teaching students the same curriculum content at the same pace or to having students take examination papers of the same standards but, rather, to provide students with opportunities to learn Chinese language as effectively as possible and to attain as high a standard as possible with due considerations for their abilities and learning needs.

Bilingualism is the cornerstone of Singapore's education policy. However, from the perspective of language learning, it is unrealistic to demand all Singaporean students to achieve the same proficiency level in two languages. According to the research conducted by comparative linguist W. Mackey (1987), none of the countries which implemented bilingual education have totally succeeded, and none of the bilingual societies will demand every citizen to master two languages. In consideration of the difference in learning abilities, language teaching needs to cater to the needs of students from different language backgrounds and with learning abilities.

As shown in the data provided earlier on, ethnic Chinese families in Singapore have shown diverse patterns in language use at home. Different language environments provide children with different opportunities to get into contact with Chinese language and culture. Some children are able to learn the language well, others attain average language proficiency, while some had below-average language proficiency. This is an inevitable situation in an environment with diverse patterns of home language use. From the viewpoint of equity in education, Singapore's Chinese Language curriculum should provide opportunities for students from different language backgrounds to learn and master the language to varied degrees of proficiency. Students should be encouraged to learn the language and reach the highest level of language they are capable of attainment. Chinese Language curriculum then should not demand students to attain a language proficiency level that is beyond their reach, nor should it limit their development.

To allow students from different language backgrounds, abilities and interest levels to enjoy learning and using Chinese, Chinese Language curriculum planners must work creatively and adopt differentiated instruction for different students to ensure that all can perform their best and achieve the highest proficiency level they are capable of. The curriculum should have different language requirements for different types of students. In this way, students stronger in the language need not

learn Chinese at a proficiency level that is below their capabilities to accommodate weaker students and be restricted from achieving more. Nor do weaker students need to adapt to the high proficiency levels of other more proficient students and end up struggling in learning and facing long-term setbacks or failures, resulting in them developing a distaste for their own language and culture. It is only through allowing each particular student to learn Chinese language in an environment that suits their developmental needs that we can best achieve the principle of equity in education and ensure that students learn the language actively and become proficient users.

Curriculum Planning and Development

When designing the curriculum goals and curriculum standards, the central consideration for curriculum planners should be to let students study the Chinese Language curriculum they are capable of excelling in and build their communicative proficiency in the course of learning. Besides, in view of the Singapore's language policy which specifies that Chinese is a compulsory MTL for all ethnic Chinese students and there is an increasing trend of non-Chinese students learning Chinese as a second language, there is a need to modify the curriculum to cater to the learning needs of students from diverse language backgrounds and abilities.

Planning To enable MTL teaching and learning to adopt differentiated instruction for students of different proficiency levels, the planning of the Chinese language curriculum needs to be flexible. This means that students should be allowed to opt for a Chinese language curriculum that best suits their abilities, needs and interest. The curriculum should also allow students to subsequently change the curriculum based on their performance. With the disparity in proficiency levels among Chinese language learners getting greater, it is more pressing to comprehensively cater to the learning needs of every student through effective Chinese language curriculum and teaching. The new phase of curriculum reform should be based on students' grasp of Chinese language, learning progress and their potential. In other words, every student should have the right to choose a Chinese Language curriculum that they can cope well with. In the process of schooling, if the student (including non-Chinese learners) demonstrates great interest and ability in learning the language, they should be allowed to advance to a higher level of Chinese language. Only when they are able to cope with curriculum standards will students want to learn and enjoy the learning of the language and become active learners.

To make the Chinese Language curriculum more flexible, one possible way would be to implement 'Subject Streaming' in Chinese Language teaching. Singapore's Chinese Language curriculum should adopt a 'multiple syllabuses' development model. For the majority of students with an average proficiency level, the goal of learning could be to communicate effectively using Chinese language and to be equipped with the skills to read general materials and local news in the language. They should also have an adequate knowledge in Chinese culture. For

this group of learners, the Chinese Language curriculum should first develop the students' oral abilities, so that their reading skills can be built upon a strong oral foundation. Students should be exposed to news articles of different topics. It is important to cultivate students' reading skills in reading articles related to mass media that are highly relevant to their everyday life. This will allow students to feel the relationship between their everyday life and the learning of Chinese. The curriculum should also introduce and let students gain an understanding of Chinese culture and history. This group of students should also learn basic skills of translation between English and Chinese and practical writings to equip them with basic written and communication skills.

For students with higher Chinese proficiency level and ability, the goal of learning could be to communicate fluently and develop higher-order thinking skills using Chinese language, read and appreciate Chinese literary works, express insights using Chinese language and have a more in-depth knowledge of Chinese culture. They should also have an adequate knowledge of modern China. For this group of learners, the focus of the Chinese Language curriculum should be on the reading and appreciation of works with great literary value, reading of editorials and commentaries of local newspapers as well as reading of overseas Chinese articles at higher levels, translating between Chinese and English and writing of various styles and genres. The curriculum should also encourage students to write composition (including digital writing) based on their personal interests to build a good foundation in their language abilities. Besides, the curriculum should increase their knowledge in Chinese culture and history and introduce the sociology, politics and economy of China to students of higher levels to cultivate their global awareness.

At the other end of Chinese language proficiency, for students with difficulties in learning Chinese language due to their home language background, the goal of learning should be to communicate using Chinese in everyday life, read Chinese information relevant to everyday life, fill in forms, draft short practical writings and have a basic understanding of Chinese culture. For this group of learners, the Chinese Language curriculum should start by improving their oral proficiency and then move gradually to teaching them skills to read local news and other authentic materials that they may encounter in their everyday life after attaining a relatively fluent level of expressing themselves in Chinese. Subsequently, students could learn how to draft and write simple practical writings based on their reading foundation. Chinese teachers could introduce the basic knowledge and core values of Chinese culture to this group of students using English and help them fit into Chinese communities more comfortably.

For non-Chinese Chinese language learners, the goal of learning could be to allow students to carry out simple conversations using Chinese and develop their interest in Chinese culture. For this group of learners, the Chinese Language curriculum should only require students to be able to converse in daily lives, interact with Chinese language users verbally and express their own thoughts in Chinese. At the same time, the curriculum should let students appreciate Chinese characters through the learning of Chinese calligraphy and develop their interest in Chinese culture by introducing them to the culture and the arts of China through English.

Home language had an important influence on students' attitudes in MLTs and their abilities to master MTLs (Ministry of Education 2011). Thus, for the new round of Chinese Language curriculum reform, parents should participate in the selection of their child's curriculum. They should select a suitable curriculum with considerations from the teacher's proposal on curriculum goals, contents, requirements and assessment and make their choice according to their child's interest and abilities. If parents have a clear understanding that their child can read, understand and cope with a particular Chinese Language curriculum, they would provide the most important support and thereby encourage their child to learn the language well, resulting in their child's change of attitude towards Chinese language and culture.

The main purpose of the proposed 'Subject Streaming' is to provide every child with the most suitable Chinese Language curriculum most equitable to their individual language abilities. The provision of Chinese Language curriculum to a student will work according to his ability in learning Chinese language instead of other less relevant or even irrelevant factors. With more diverse groups of learners, it is an important move to adopt a more flexible way to deal with Chinese Language curriculum. Only through providing a flexible curriculum can we ensure that students with different backgrounds each takes what he needs. We should encourage each student to learn Chinese language to 'as high a level as he is able to' (Ministry of Education 2011: 37). By doing so, we can achieve the ultimate goal of the new MTL curriculum reform, that is, to nurture 'active learners and proficient users' of MTL.

Development Out of the three broad objectives in the teaching and learning of MTL as proposed by the Review Committee, namely, communication, culture and connection, the first (culture) and the third (connection) are related to Chinese culture. Thus, the curriculum framework should necessarily include cultural contents.

Due to the limited curriculum time, it is not possible to subdivide Chinese Language curriculum into subjects like Chinese Literature or History of China. However, it is possible to make use of school-based curriculum hours to systematically introduce students to Chinese culture and history by allocating a fixed proportion of the Chinese Language curriculum time to be used for such purposes. In the local context, instead of a detailed study, school-based curriculum only needs to introduce students to the essence of the Chinese culture and history and elements that are of contemporary significance. The current primary and secondary Chinese language lessons have allocated time for school-based curriculum, which is 20–30 % for primary and 10–15 % for secondary schools. I would propose the new primary school-based curriculum to stay status quo and that of secondary to increase to 20 % of the overall secondary Chinese Language curriculum.

To cater to the needs of learners from different backgrounds, school-based curriculum should be divided into two categories, compulsory modules and elective modules. Compulsory modules introduce Chinese culture through narrative stories or new media to develop students' interests in their own ethnic culture. Elective modules further divide Chinese culture into smaller segments, such as appreciation of Chinese folk music, Chinese technology, Chinese movies, Chinese nursery rhyme

and Chinese customs, etc. These are for deepening the students' understanding of various facets of the Chinese culture. There should not be examinations in such school-based curriculum. Students can be asked to submit assignments for progress evaluation and process monitoring. The assignments could be done through self-directed exploratory and interesting ways, like reports on special topics, interest writings, or webpage creations which the students are capable of creating. With good curriculum planning and proper teacher guidance, school-based curriculum is able to enhance the students' language proficiency and cultural knowledge. At the same time, students can develop their critical thinking and problem-solving skills which are much needed in the present-day knowledge-based economy.

In short, Singapore's Chinese Language curriculum should build on students' language proficiency through centralised curriculum development to ensure that the majority of the students are able to communicate meaningfully using Chinese. For students with exceptionally strong abilities, they should later be able to match scholars from China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. The students' cultural literacy should also be further improved through school-based curriculum. Chinese Language curriculum should not be a content-based curriculum but has a focus on developing language abilities. As long as the students have the ability and interest, they will be able to study a higher-level Chinese Language curriculum commensurate to their abilities and means. With such a curriculum framework, regardless of the specific curriculum the students study, they should be able to reach the highest proficiency level they are capable of. However, flexibility in switching curriculum should be provided, in case of student needs. To qualify for a switch from one curriculum to another, students should take relevant language proficiency test before they are allowed to do so.

Teaching and Instructional Materials

Teaching includes teaching activities and teaching methods. For teaching activities, Chinese teaching needs to be closely related to the life experiences of students. Chinese teaching needs to make use of resources from everyday life to set scenarios to promote the use of language through the scenarios. For teaching methods, Chinese Language teachers need to understand that current students live in an era which information is extensive and the development of information technology is widespread. Chinese teaching needs to keep up with the times by making use of education information technology as an important teaching tool and leveraging on students' familiarity with ICT to promote learning (Chin 2011).

Activities Contemporary language teaching focuses on a learner-centred approach (Tarone and Yule 1999), emphasising the development of students' self-directed learning abilities. Increasingly, scholars from the field of language teaching believe that effective language learning should enable students to practise what they have learned. Language knowledge and skills taught in classrooms have to be consolidated

and reinforced through application of the language in real-life situations (Benson 2001; Nunan 1988; Tarone and Yule 1999).

Chinese language teaching needs to be related to the everyday activities of students and used to create real-life or semi-real-life scenarios. This is to encourage students to use Chinese language for the input, processing and output. By means of this, students will learn how to apply the language in everyday life. For example, teachers can assign students to conduct interviews using Chinese language at train stations to collect public views on train services. Students are to use Chinese language to consolidate the views collected and present their findings in Chinese. Teachers can also let primary school students to use mobile devices like smart-phones or tablets to capture interesting images from places, notices, landmarks or scenes. They can further work on the captured images and share their presentations with peers, teachers or parents using Chinese language. Combining activities with language learning can stimulate curiosity of students, prompting them to take note of things happening in their everyday life and thus cultivating their social responsibility. They are also able to express their views in Chinese language and this helps to develop their creativity and critical thinking. By means of such activities, students will gain the experience of active learning and develop their self-directed learning ability, hence becoming a proficient language user. Using everyday resources to learn Chinese language is relevant to the present Chinese teaching needs of Singapore. It is also one of the main directions of the contemporary international language teaching.

Methods The Report proposes to use ICT to strengthen Chinese teaching. With the current advanced state of technology in Singapore, it is more than possible to completely capitalise the use of ICT in Chinese language teaching. Since the 1990s, Singapore has been promoting the effective use of ICT in teaching with detailed planning and scale. To date, Singapore has three Master Plans for ICT in Education, and ICT has been fully incorporated in all curriculum subjects at every class level. With the implementation of the Intelligent Nation (iN2015) blueprint published in 2007, 90 % of businesses and homes will have access to the Internet network by the end of 2015, and thereafter the learning model that combines classroom learning with everyday practices through the use of ICT will be even easier to implement. Singapore's Chinese language teaching should make full use of the ICT infrastructure provided by the government to develop the use of ICT-mediated teaching and learning. Considering that the students are 'ICT natives', the use of ICT-mediated teaching methods will engage the students' familiarity with ICT and therefore stimulate their interest in learning the language through ICT-related activities. Substantial studies done by scholars and researchers in the field of ICT-mediated language teaching and learning found that the use of ICT has enhanced the language performance of students (including students at the primary, secondary and college levels), facilitated knowledge construction and improved students' attitudes towards the target language (Chin et al. 2015; Liou and Lee 2013; Tay et al. 2013; Wen et al 2011; Wong et al 2010, 2009).

In terms of Chinese language learning, there are many ways the ICT can do to assist and enhance learning. The ICT can help students in characters recognition. Students can learn to input Chinese characters using ICT and achieve a balance between character writing and character typing. Moreover, the ability to use ICT to explore and search for information as well as communicate and exchange information with people in the virtual world has become a prominent ability of students in the twenty-first century (Lan 2013, 2014). Tapping on these abilities in Chinese learning will integrate the learning of Chinese language with the boundless cyber world. ICT-mediated learning can provide Singaporean students with the experience that is closest to their everyday life and hence stimulates their learning interest, resulting in their using of the language naturally.

In terms of teaching, ICT is able to assist Chinese language teachers in many ways. Some of the main aspects are listed as follows:

A. Provide teaching diagnostic:

1. Diagnose students' oral proficiency and provide suggestions for teaching according to the results.
2. Analyse students' oral proficiency and assist students to improve on their oral proficiency.
3. Diagnose students' reading proficiency and provide suggestions for improving reading proficiency.
4. Detect students' language mistakes in essays and provide suggestions for correction.

B. Promote self-directed learning:

1. Provide essay writing guidance, assist students to plan essay structure and form sentences and increase their interest in writing.
2. Adopt pedagogical approaches that are closely related to the students' everyday lives, such as inquiry-based learning, seamless learning and self-directed learning, prompting students to use the language in real-life situations.

C. Create virtual interactive situations:

Students learn and use Chinese language in virtual reality to strengthen their confidence and ability in communicating with others using the appropriate language under a particular situation.

D. Build a localised web-based oral and written corpus:

The corpus is able to provide authentic localised corpus as a reference for Chinese Language curriculum planning, instructional materials design, teaching design and language assessment. A good example of this is the Chinese corpus constructed by Singapore Centre for Chinese Language. It is a dynamic corpus which provides authentic corpus for professionals in the area of Chinese as a second language education, including curriculum specialists and teachers. The corpus has been built to assist such professionals in curriculum development, instructional materials design, classroom teaching and language assessment.

Instructional Materials

As mentioned earlier, Singaporean students who are learning Chinese language come from different language backgrounds, and it is very natural for students to have different interests and needs according to differences in their home backgrounds and life experiences. Thus, Chinese language instructional materials could no longer follow the traditional way of one size fits all in terms of standard and content with the simplistic hope that every student is able to learn the language well. Future Chinese language instructional materials should be differentiated materials that are student centred and developed based on students' different backgrounds, needs and interests. The differences in these instructional materials should be reflected in their themes, contents, genres, strategies, assignments and practices, so as to closely fit the uniqueness of students in learning the language. Besides using professionally written passages or articles in the conventional textbook, Chinese language instructional materials should make use of the tremendous amount of real-time materials such as daily newspapers, weekly magazines, advertisements, brochures, entertainment news and product manuals, etc. These materials are closely related to the everyday life of students and are able to stimulate their learning interest. Student-centred instructional materials can maintain students' learning interests in the long run and increase their involvement in classroom activities (Pu and Guo 2005). The advent of the Internet opens up a whole new world of information that adds variety and quantity to the learning materials. The Internet will be an increasingly important source of materials for Chinese language instruction.

Using authentic materials as part of Chinese language instructional materials moves away from the notion of 'using articles to convey ethics' that was the guiding principle of a few sets of Chinese instructional materials in the previous century. Those instructional contents are often not closely related to the life experiences of the students (Chin et al. 2008), whereas the proposed ones will be richer in content, and the learning of Chinese language will become livelier and meaningful. In short, we need to minimise the gap between instructional materials and the information obtained in real-life situations, so as to enable the students to learn with interest and realise the value of learning the materials. As there should be good connection between language learning and everyday life, Chinese language instructional materials should develop the language proficiency of students and raise their cultural awareness. Materials should also progressively increase the students' confidence in using Chinese language beyond the classroom and reinforce their identity of being a Chinese.

Teaching Assessment

Since the beginning of the Twenty-first Century, many scholars advocate that we need to place greater emphasis on the professional competence of assessments of teachers in the process of developing students' potentials. Such assessment is

customised for the learning subject to ensure every student has a chance of receiving quality education (Beare 2001; Yang 2001; Lim 2000).

With the introduction of differentiated lessons in the curriculum, future Chinese language teaching needs to emphasise on formative assessment to enhance teachers' understanding of students' performance. Formative assessment allows teachers to understand the students' learning progress and enable better guidance. Chinese language curriculum should emphasise the strategies of assessment for learning (or formative assessment) and align this with the overall goal of promoting proficient users (Ministry of Education 2011).

Since the 1990s, formative assessment has been playing an important role in assessing the students' learning performance. Formative assessment refers to assessment conducted in the process of teaching activities 'to constantly understand the situation of the activities, and to make timely adjustment to improve their quality' (Wang 2001: 42). Formative assessment conducts cumulative assessment on the learning process and promotes understanding of the situations of students and their grasp of the lesson contents. Such assessment also finds out the reasons why students fail to comprehend certain contents and allows teachers to adopt remedial measures to change their teaching. In addition to reviewing the teaching effectiveness, formative assessment is also able to develop students' ability in self-assessment and peer assessment. This prompts them to adjust their learning strategies and progress and thereby improve their metacognitive ability. Chinese Language teachers will then be able to understand the potential of every student through observing their performance in the learning process and to propose suggestions based on observations. This will also assist parents to choose the Chinese Language curriculum that is most suitable for their children in the next phase of their education.

Through formative assessments, Chinese Language teachers will be able to objectively determine the actual language proficiency of the students and justly provide useful suggestions on the appropriate learning direction. It should become an important teaching assessment mode in the next round of Chinese Language curriculum and pedagogy reform.

Notwithstanding the importance of formative assessment, the role of summative assessment is not to be neglected in the next stage of curriculum reform. Summative assessment helps teachers to assess students' language proficiency level prior to selecting or changing the curriculum that the students would like to study. Such assessment could also provide teachers with useful and objective baseline linguistic information of each group of students so as to prepare suitable school-based curriculum.

The author would like to suggest that summative assessment can be divided into two components, namely, language proficiency test and project work (PW). The language proficiency test serves to test students' competency in reading and writing. PW, which requires students to work with each other and orally present the results of their work, serves to assess mainly the students' oral competency and interactive skills. Different PW can be assigned to students of different subject streams with the requirements cater to the language abilities of students in each stream. The means of the PW can be inquiry based and the theme of the PW should

be selected from students' daily lives. The use of PW as one of the components of summative assessment is closely aligned with the main objective of the Report, i.e. to apply the language in everyday life. The author believes that only by combination of language proficiency test and PW can a student's language ability be objectively and comprehensively assessed.

Conclusion

The aim of Singapore's Chinese Language curriculum and pedagogy reform in the Report is in line with current international trends in language teaching. To fully achieve the aim of 'nurturing active learners and proficient users' as proposed by the curriculum reform committee, Singapore has to develop differentiated Chinese Language curriculum (including school-based curriculum) according to students' language proficiency and learning needs, with the minimum requirements that students are to achieve basic language proficiency. Singapore's Chinese language teaching also needs to develop students' ability in the application of language in everyday life, and this is its main objective. Thus, Chinese language teaching needs to emphasise the practical aspects of the language. Under the guiding notion of learning for using, part of the Chinese language instructional materials will have to be relevant to the students' everyday life. Learning activities will focus on conversation in Chinese language (Mandarin) and problem-solving in real-life scenarios. In view of the fact that the language learners come from diverse backgrounds, the Chinese Language curriculum will need to allow every student to learn according to their own pace and provide timely encouragement and guidance. Thus, formative assessment will become an important tool in language learning.

'Nurturing active learners and proficient users' is a new direction of Singapore's Chinese Language curriculum and pedagogy, and it is proposed due to our diverse language environments and the global trends of language teaching. It proposes a challenging yet optimistic aspiration for the next 6–10 years of Chinese Language curriculum and pedagogy development. Whether this aspiration will be actualised and sustained depends on whether we have done in-depth analysis of the different curricular aspects. If we could adopt the notion of 'differentiated curriculum', we will be able to provide all students with a suitable Chinese Language curriculum and develop them to the best of their abilities. They will also be able to gain knowledge using Chinese language, understand Chinese culture and history and communicate effectively with Chinese communities locally as well as abroad.

As long as every student read a Chinese Language curriculum that is suitable to their own learning ability, the learning process will be an enjoyable one, and they will get to experience the joy of success. Chinese Language curriculum that is rooted in everyday life will also help to increase students' language ability in applying the language and strengthen their confidence in using the language. Singapore's Chinese language teaching needs to let students enjoy their learning. It is only when students participate in active learning that they will love learning, be willing to learn

and apply what they have learned. Active learning is a process, while becoming proficient users is an end result. Once the philosophy of nurturing active learners and proficient users is realised, Chinese language will become a language that students use in everyday life, and the learning of it will no longer be a problem.

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