



Inclusive despite difference

Ho Kwan teaches at a secondary school in Caroline Hill. He specializes in sport and his students come from all over the world.

YHK What are the nationalities of your students?

Ho Kwan Australia, France, India, mainland China, Nepal, the Philippines, Spain, the UK, the US – my students come from all of those countries and they all get along well with each other. They range from 11 to 18 years old, both boys and girls. About 20% have recently arrived in Hong Kong from mainland China. I see no signs of discrimination or racism in our school, despite all the cultural differences.

YHK What language are lessons given in?

Ho Kwan That depends on the class. Some are taught in Chinese, but there are English-medium classes too and those are usually for the non-Chinese speakers. However, this has never been a school designated specifically for students from ethnic minority communities. We get our mix of students because news about the school is passed on by word of mouth. Our school is mainly Chinese medium of instruction.

YHK Do your students speak Cantonese?

Ho Kwan They tell me that they never had the chance to learn Cantonese when they were young, even though some were born in Hong Kong. The Nepalese students in particular find it very difficult to learn Cantonese in my experience. Maybe weak Cantonese is the result of little contact with Chinese people, inside or outside the classroom. However, the Indian, Filipino and western youngsters can usually speak Cantonese, but they find Chinese a difficult language to write well.

YHK Which exams do your non-Chinese students do? The public Hong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE), GCSE or the International Baccalaureate (IB)?

Ho Kwan For Chinese Language they take GCSE. In other subjects they take HKDSE, just like everyone else. Our school provides them with extra classes in Chinese that focus on writing because we think that will be most useful when they join the workforce. These classes begin in Secondary 3 and 5 but don't lead to exams.

YHK There tends to be a higher drop-out rate among non-Chinese students in some Hong Kong schools. Is that true of your school?

Ho Kwan Normally our students stay till they reach Secondary 6. But it is true that, because of family, financial or personal development problems, maybe 50% of them will go to work after Secondary 6, unlike our Chinese students, who go on to further studies. The main hurdles that they all face are acquiring language skills and finding good jobs. University entrance is also very difficult, but there are signs of improvement. Some universities here now accept GCE 'A' Level results for matriculation purposes instead of the local HKDSE results, so these young people are getting a better chance than in the past.

YHK Does your school have other ways of helping them overcome these hurdles?

Ho Kwan We try to provide some society-oriented programmes that give students more experience of being an integrated member of Hong Kong's society. For example, we take them to visit elderly people who



live alone and encourage them to speak Cantonese during the visits. They can learn a lot from listening to the elderly people and it helps them make sense of how Hong Kong works and how they are connected to it.

YHK Do you think Hong Kong is an inclusive city?

Ho Kwan Generally, I'd say Hong Kong is an inclusive place but in education somehow I think we can do better. I cover the subject of national identity in my lessons and although most of them think of themselves as Hongkongers,

many still find it difficult to fit in with the typical fast-paced Hong Kong lifestyle with all its pressures and deadlines.

Also, even though they have always lived here, some local people still think of them as foreigners because they do not look Chinese. But some of these so called- "foreigners" were born and raised here. Some of their families have been here for more than 100 years. We locals should acknowledge that this city is not exclusively Chinese and welcome its diversity. ■



Ho Kwan was a participant in a Federation leadership programme before he became a teacher.



Not born biased

Children are not born with prejudiced attitudes or stereotypes. They learn values and beliefs from their family, peers, teachers and the media through a process of socialization and reinforcement. Children get their first hint of what prejudice really means from language, from certain powerful words loaded with emotional impact.

Parents teach prejudice directly through reinforcement but children often learn their parents' attitudes by simple observation. Towards adolescence, peer groups take over in the transmission of social norms although their attitudes often match those of a child's parents. When peer groups and parents hold different values, the peer group's values become increasingly important.

The media are also a tremendously important source of social learning about prejudice. Members of socially disadvantaged groups are typically under- or mis-represented on TV, in advertisements and in popular movies. However, agents of socialization, be they family, friends, teachers or the media, can also be powerful forces in teaching values that counter prejudice and bigotry.

Read more

Allport, GW. The Nature of Prejudice. Addison-Wesley Pub Co 1954.
Bandura, A. Social learning theory. Prentice Hall, 1977.