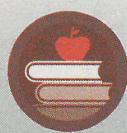


face off



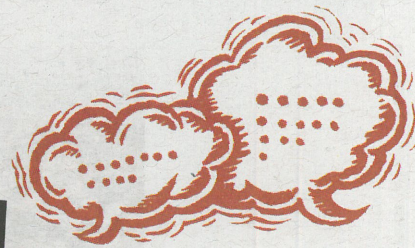
HK today



Education

Each our two teenagers will debate a hot topic. **This week**

Should Putonghua be used as the medium of instruction in Chinese lessons?



**Joshua Lee, 17,
Sha Tin College**

In recent years, the central government has begun plans to expand their economic and political influence around the world. International trade initiatives such as the “One Belt, One Road” project and reforms to turn the yuan into a global trading currency, mean China will become more integrated in the world economy than ever before.

Hong Kong’s position puts us at a key advantage during this change. The local economy acts as a super connector, linking China with the rest of the world.

But for us to take advantage of this opportunity, there are key language barriers that need to be overcome. Hongkongers’ proficiency in Putonghua is still poor, with Putonghua speakers making up only 1.4 per cent of the population. This could impact our workforce’s ability to work and communicate with mainland businesses as they become more prevalent. Our inability to speak Putonghua may reduce our competitiveness and see business relocate to other cities such as Shanghai or Singapore.

In order to prepare ourselves for the changes happening in China and enhance our competitiveness, we need to have a workforce that can communicate effectively in Putonghua. By changing our educational system to use Putonghua as the primary medium of teaching in Chinese lessons, we can prepare our students for the future.

Some worry that this could lead to the decline and eventual extinction of Cantonese usage in Hong Kong, a serious threat to local culture. But changing the medium of Chinese teaching does not mean the death of our dialect. If adequate measures are put in place to protect Cantonese and its use in everyday life, the dialect can co-exist with Putonghua and the many other languages spoken in Hong Kong.

For more on the One Belt, One Road initiative, turn to pages 6 and 7



**Naz Iraj, 17,
St Margaret’s Girls’ College**

Hongkongers using Putonghua may enhance the emotional ties between the people and their motherland, but it does not mean we should start using the language as the medium of instruction in Chinese lessons. Hong Kong has always been a Cantonese dominant region, with Cantonese as its mother tongue. As Beijing tries to push its way into Hong Kong, teaching students – the future of Hong Kong – China’s spoken language seems only logical. However, we are an international and multicultural city.

Besides ethnic minority students, local students who speak mostly Cantonese in everyday life will be affected. It’s true that you can write what you say in Putonghua, but it doesn’t make learning Chinese any easier. If you want to explain and make students understand the language system of standardised modern Chinese, then it is obviously better to choose a language that students are more familiar with. It’s not as if Cantonese speakers are going to learn to write Chinese any better if they are taught in Putonghua.

Moreover, using Putonghua will be equally troublesome for teachers. The majority of teachers are from Hong Kong and, therefore, Cantonese speakers. These teachers would have to take extra time to understand the lesson content themselves before delivering it to students. Yes, they can take Putonghua courses, but to teach it is another issue.

Furthermore, there is no concrete evidence that using Putonghua to teach Chinese can effectively improve students’ language proficiency. Of course, evidence from the mainland should not be considered, as Putonghua is their mother tongue.

Lastly, Cantonese is not only the city’s language, but also is a platform that differentiates Hong Kong from China as a cultural and political distinction of Hong Kong from the rest of the mainland.

Therefore, Hong Kong cannot afford the death of Cantonese, and Putonghua should not be used as a medium of instruction in Chinese lessons.

