

Supplementary Notes 2

Catering for learner diversity in the senior secondary English classroom

*[Supplementary notes to Chapter 4.6 **Catering for Learner Diversity** in the English Language Curriculum and Assessment Guide (Secondary 4-6)(CDC & HKEAA, 2007), pp.101-103]*

Learner diversity is a challenge to the majority of teachers teaching English to senior secondary learners. To cater for learner diversity, different strategies can be adopted at the school, subject and classroom levels so that all learners can move forward along the learning continuum.

Some common strategies at the school level include streaming of learners according to their English abilities and arranging small/split class teaching for English lessons while those at the subject level include organising English remedial and enrichment lessons on top of the regular English lessons, adapting the English curriculum and setting different requirements for English tasks/assignments. However, these arrangements and planning will not have any substantial impact on learners unless effective strategies are used by teachers at the classroom level to address learners' varied abilities, interests and learning styles.

1. Varying the input and output

When engaging learners in English learning tasks, teachers can vary the input and output in response to learners' progress and learning styles in order to enhance their engagement as well as motivation, and ultimately, their learning effectiveness. It is important that learners in the same class are assigned the same task. Varying the input is providing learners with the same learning content but giving different support to help them complete the task. The support can be provided in the form of exercises but different learners may be given different types or amount of exercises. Varying the output is allowing learners to decide to what extent the task is accomplished. It is by no means lowering the expectations on some learners by assigning them fewer or simpler tasks. For example, teachers can assign all learners a core task followed by different extended activities which are designed with a multiple intelligence orientation. Learners are given autonomy in the choice of the extended activities in order to draw on individual learners' strengths and further stretch their potentials.

2. Varying questions in terms of language and cognitive demands

In order to sustain the motivation and interest in the learning process, learners need to be given opportunities to respond to questions which are reasonably challenging but yet within their grasp. To address the learning needs of learners in the senior secondary English classroom, teachers can use questions which vary in terms of language and cognitive demands to cater for learners'

different English proficiency levels and cognitive abilities. These questions refer to those used for daily interactions with learners in tackling learning tasks as well as those set in task sheets at different stages of learning. Teachers may make reference to the revised Bloom's Taxonomy in designing questions of different cognitive demands. For example, for English tasks which require learners to read one or more texts and solve a problem, questions involving lower cognitive abilities such as extracting explicitly stated information as well as higher cognitive abilities such as making connections among various sources may be set. On the contrary, questions that require higher order thinking processes such as justifying a decision and writing a personal reflection may be set as an optional activity to challenge learners to achieve deep learning and develop metacognitive capabilities. These learning activities typically entail fully operational mastery of the language, substantial world knowledge and a good command of language development strategies. However, it is crucial for teachers to provide support through strategic scaffolding such as paraphrasing the questions and giving quality feedback during the learning and teaching process to enable the weaker learners to tackle the more demanding questions.

3. Employing flexible grouping strategies

Types of grouping strategies include whole class, pair/group (e.g. homogeneous and heterogeneous) and individual. When adopting these strategies, teachers are advised to take into consideration learners' preferences and the nature of the tasks. Learners usually have their own preferences in terms of grouping. Some derive more satisfaction from individual work while others fare best with pair or group work. Teachers can also decide on the group configuration based on the nature of the tasks to bring about best results. For example, introducing new information/concepts and wrapping up the lesson to the whole class does not only save time but also establish a sense of community for learners. Individual activities like intensive reading, self-evaluation and note-taking can cater for individual learners' progress. Brainstorming and information gap or jigsaw activities, which are usually done in groups or pairs, can promote peer learning and enhance learners' engagement. Employing flexible grouping arrangements, together with well-designed activities and tasks, can cater for learners of different styles and stages of progress.

4. Providing timely feedback

As learners of different stages of progress and learning styles are expected to acquire knowledge and skills at their own pace, constant feedback, both verbal or written, should be given based on the performance and progress of individual learners to help them set their own learning goals and improve further. Examples of teacher and peer/self assessment forms, sample script with teacher's feedback and suggestions on how to provide feedback or comment on learners' writing are provided on pages 8-24 in Supplementary Notes 3A on Assessment *for* Learning.

A suggested teaching plan to cater for learner diversity

The following is a suggested lesson plan which exemplifies how the above strategies can be incorporated in the pre-writing activities to meet the diverse needs of learners in the senior secondary classroom.

The sample 80-minute lesson is designed to help the learners generate ideas from various perspectives for an argumentative essay. Prior to the lesson, the learners have been taught various discussion skills and strategies as well as the text structure and the language commonly used in an argumentative essay. In the lesson, the learners are provided with an opportunity to read, integrate and organise chunks of information from a variety of sources using graphic organisers, and to generate substantial arguments for/against an issue from various perspectives through discussion with learners of different levels of English proficiency. The example contains the following two sections:

Level:	S5
Number of students:	32
Number of lessons:	2 (a double lesson)
Duration:	80 minutes
Module:	Elderly Problems: Retirement Age (Learning English through Social Issues)
Lesson objectives:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To read, integrate and organise chunks of information from a variety of sources • To generate substantial arguments for / against an issue from various perspectives for an argumentative essay
Students' prior knowledge:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion skills and strategies • The format of an argumentative essay • The language used in writing an argumentative essay

Suggested duration	Activities	Learning styles (Appendix 1)	Grouping strategies (Appendix 2)	Remarks																																													
10 mins	The teacher plays the song 'Streets of London' and distributes the lyrics to the students. The teacher asks the students how the elderly are described in the lyrics. The teacher then asks the students to explain whether the descriptions resemble the life of the elderly in Hong Kong.	Musical, Linguistic	Whole class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This aims to help the students visualise in their minds the quality of life of some poor elderly people. 																																													
5 mins	The teacher shows the students some pictures and video clips featuring the life of the elderly who are retired and asks them to discuss with a partner what they feel about the life of these old people based on their observations.	Visual / spatial, Interpersonal	All Pair	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This aims to activate the students' schema on the life of the elderly who are retired. The pictures and video clips could present old people leading different lives. Some pictures could feature an old man scavenging through garbage while some could feature old people spending time happily with their grandchildren. 																																													
15 mins	<p>The teacher ranks the students according to their English Language results in the internal tests/examinations as follows:</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="331 1225 927 1457"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>1</th> <th>2</th> <th>3</th> <th>4</th> <th>5</th> <th>6</th> <th>7</th> <th>8</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <th>A</th> <td><input type="radio"/></td> </tr> <tr> <th>B</th> <td><input type="radio"/></td> </tr> <tr> <th>C</th> <td><input type="radio"/></td> </tr> <tr> <th>D</th> <td><input type="radio"/></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	A	<input type="radio"/>	B	<input type="radio"/>	C	<input type="radio"/>	D	<input type="radio"/>	Intrapersonal, Linguistic, Logical / mathematical	Individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This aims to prepare students of different levels of English proficiency for the upcoming discussion through reading a variety of texts and organising ideas coherently. The reading materials consist of newspaper articles, stories, survey reports as well as graphs and charts related to the issues concerning the retirement age. When choosing texts of different levels of difficulty, three factors determining the 																												
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	<p style="text-align: center;">25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32</p> <p>The teacher divides the class into groups of eight and assigns each group a different role. (A: Employers, B: Working parents in their late 50s, C: Children of the elderly, and D: Government officials) Each group is then provided with a set of reading texts related to their role and appropriate to their English proficiency. They are also given a discussion topic consisting of a set of questions requiring various levels of cognitive process (Appendices 3 & 4) and a graphic organiser to jot down their ideas in preparation for the discussion (Appendix 5).</p>			<p>text complexity, i.e. abstractness, organisation and information density (Appendix 4) should be taken into consideration.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The set of questions distributed to each group involves various levels of cognitive abilities so that all students are reasonably challenged. 																																
10 mins	<p>The teacher divides the class into groups of four as follows:</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="331 970 927 1169"> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">A</td> <td style="text-align: center;">○</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">B</td> <td style="text-align: center;">○</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">C</td> <td style="text-align: center;">○</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">D</td> <td style="text-align: center;">○</td> </tr> </table> <p>The four students in the group should conduct a discussion with reference to the set of questions provided.</p>	A	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	B	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	C	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	D	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Interpersonal	Group (homogeneous grouping)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This aims to help the students enrich their ideas on the topic by sharing their views with other group members taking the same role. Assigning students of similar ability in a group can help create a less threatening environment for the students to share their views, so that they can have more to share in the following discussion.
A	○	○	○	○	○	○	○																													
B	○	○	○	○	○	○	○																													
C	○	○	○	○	○	○	○																													
D	○	○	○	○	○	○	○																													

10 mins	<p>After the discussion, the teacher re-organises the grouping as follows:</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="331 292 929 488"> <tr> <td>A</td> <td>○</td> <td>○</td> <td>○</td> <td>○</td> <td>○</td> <td>○</td> <td>○</td> <td>○</td> </tr> <tr> <td>B</td> <td>○</td> <td>○</td> <td>○</td> <td>○</td> <td>○</td> <td>○</td> <td>○</td> <td>○</td> </tr> <tr> <td>C</td> <td>○</td> <td>○</td> <td>○</td> <td>○</td> <td>○</td> <td>○</td> <td>○</td> <td>○</td> </tr> <tr> <td>D</td> <td>○</td> <td>○</td> <td>○</td> <td>○</td> <td>○</td> <td>○</td> <td>○</td> <td>○</td> </tr> </table> <p>Building on the ideas in the previous discussion, the students conduct a discussion on the topic: “Should the retirement age be raised in Hong Kong?”</p> <p>Each student is given another graphic organiser (Appendix 6) to jot down the views and opinions of other group members in the discussion.</p>	A	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	B	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	C	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	D	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Interpersonal, Logical / mathematical	Group (heterogeneous grouping)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This aims to facilitate a more dynamic exchange of views on the topic among group members playing different roles. • While the mixed-ability grouping facilitates peer learning, the mix of roles in a group ensures that each student is able to make meaningful contribution to the discussion. • The graphic organiser can help the students organise their ideas for the final writing task.
A	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○																																
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C	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○																																
D	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○																																
20 mins	<p>The teacher invites the students playing the four assigned roles respectively to present their views while the rest of the class is required to take notes and address questions to the presenters.</p>	Linguistic, Intrapersonal	Individual Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This aims to provide an opportunity for the students to reflect on their discussion by listening to or challenging the ideas presented by their peers. They can also actively participate in the activity by taking notes and raising questions. 																																				

10 mins	The teacher summarises briefly the students' views with a graphic organiser. The students are assigned to produce an argumentative essay on the topic as the core task, and required to display the reflection of their learning experiences in this module in the form of their own choice as an extended activity. (e.g. design a poster to promote the care for the elderly and write a poem on elderly poverty)	Intrapersonal , Logical / mathematical	Whole class	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• This aims to provide an example of how the views from different parties can be organised and presented systematically.• The core task allows the teacher to assess how well the students achieve the intended learning outcomes while the extended activity draws on individual students' strengths and stretch their potential.
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Designing learning and teaching activities with a multiple intelligence orientation

The following presents an overview of different learning styles and the suggested learning and teaching activities suitable for various types of students.

Learning styles	Suitable for students who like	Suggested learning and teaching activities
Linguistic	Reading, writing, stories	Reading, writing, storytelling, discussions, dictogloss
Logical/mathematical	Solving puzzles, exploring patterns, reasoning and logic	Problem-solving, working with relationship, patterns and rules
Visual/spatial	Drawing, building, arts and crafts	drawing, designing, watching movies and videos, reading graphs and diagrams, producing comic strips
Musical	Singing, listening to music	Singing songs, chanting, appreciating poetry
Bodily/kinaesthetic	Moving around, manipulating objects, body language	Miming, expressing meanings with body language, watching drama, playing games
Interpersonal	Mixing with others, leading groups, understanding others, negotiating	Engaging in group work, debating, discussions, interviews
Intrapersonal	Working on their own, pursuing own interests	Working on individual projects, reflection
Naturalistic	Nature	Solving real-world problems, working in nature, exploring environmental issues

Employing flexible grouping strategies

The following summarises various grouping strategies, their advantages and disadvantages, as well as the tasks which work well with them.

Appendix 2

Grouping strategies	Advantages	Disadvantages	Works well with
WHOLE CLASS <i>The teacher gives instructions to the whole class.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Effective use of time and materials - Establishing common understandings and a sense of community for students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Possible disengagement of students for perceived lack of challenge or lack of success 	Introduction of concepts Pre-assessment Class sharing Demonstration/presentation
INDIVIDUAL <i>Students work on a variety of tasks individually based on their stage of progress and learning styles.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Progression at students' own pace 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Absence of peer tutoring - Limited language skills development 	Self-assessment Self-reflection Independent study Note-taking and summarising
PAIR/GROUP - (Heterogeneous grouping) <i>Students of varying abilities are gathered in the same group to work on a task.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promotion of peer tutoring and task engagement of all students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Time-consuming in assigning students of various abilities in a group, and designing learning tasks suitable for all students in the group 	Think, pair, share Information gap Peer editing and peer evaluation Researching Brainstorming Problem-solving
PAIR/GROUP - (Homogeneous grouping) <i>Students of similar abilities are gathered in the same group to work on a task.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Less intimidating to the less able students - Suitable for reading activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Difficulty in adjusting the pace of instruction - Limited opportunities for peer tutoring 	Cooperative learning assignments Group project Jigsaw activity

Varying questions in terms of cognitive demands

The following illustrates the different levels of cognitive abilities required in questions used for verbal interactions with students and set in task sheets at different stages of learning.

Remembering	<p>Recalling previously learnt information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Describe your observation of the lives of senior citizens in Hong Kong. ➤ List the employment figures for young graduates and the middle-aged. ➤ Identify the features of a resume with reference to a sample.
Understanding	<p>Explaining concepts or ideas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ *Summarise in your own words the governments' provision for health and welfare services. ➤ *What does the writer say about the extent to which the population in Hong Kong is ageing? ➤ *From the information available, provide a definition of 'nuclear family'. How does this affect the well-being of elderly parents?
Applying	<p>Using information in another familiar situation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Write a play based on your favourite fairy tale. ➤ Choose an Aesop fable and rewrite it from the perspective of one of the main characters. ➤ Role-play a job interview with a partner.
Analysing	<p>Breaking information into parts to explore understanding and relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ *Does ageing population do society more harm than good? ➤ How would you compare the qualities and expertise of younger and senior employees? ➤ Analyse the reasons for more and more students furthering their studies overseas.
Evaluating	<p>Justifying a decision</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Do you think the needs of the elderly are well taken care of by the government? ➤ *Evaluate the impact of retirement on one's physical and mental health. ➤ What is the ideal age mix of employees in an organisation?
Creating	<p>Generating new ideas, products or ways of viewing things</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ What measures would you recommend to deal with the problems associated with an ageing population? ➤ *What would happen to a family when the retired parents spend decades without income? ➤ Write a letter to the Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene Department suggesting alternative areas for scattering cremated ashes.

**adapted for use in the group discussion task in the example*

A sample text selected/adapted for the more able students

Text 1

Appendix 4

Annotations indicating the text complexity

Age is no barrier

It's a good job Sir Alex Ferguson is not manager of the Hong Kong government's football team, or he would have been forced to retire when he reached his 60th birthday. Instead, he has been free during the last decade to help Manchester United go on winning trophies, including the Champions League and three consecutive premierships titles.

Why does our society insist on consigning fit and well performers at the top of their game to the scrap heap? And should we continue to do so when the evidence all around us is that this is unnecessary and indeed socially and economically counterproductive? Even the increase of the retirement age to 60, when it came, needs to be compared to average life expectancy which now stands at about 79 for men and well over 80 for women. So our society is planning for the average person to spend 20 or more years being economically inactive.

From the perspective of the individual, the consequences of spending decades without income can be devastating. Gradually, savings accumulated over a working career of 40 years or so disappear which could leave the retiree in poverty or as a serious burden on his family (or the community at large). While the financial implications are serious enough, the effect on the morale of the person can be even greater. For most people, their job is an integral part of who they are. It helps define them, gives them a sense of purpose. The prospect of an enforced early retirement with inactivity often results in early death (the so-called "gold watch" syndrome).

With the deterioration of family values that seems to be an inevitable part of the switch from rural to urban living, the community now has a tendency to look to the government to provide support for the elderly. Where once it was common for three or four generations to live under one roof, now this is exceptional and the nuclear family has become the norm.

Governments everywhere are struggling to cope with the financial consequences of people hammering on the door for old-age pensions set high enough to support independent living. At this point, it is worth noting that, when old-age pensions were first introduced with 65 set at the qualifying age in Britain, the average life expectancy was considerably lower than this - somewhere in the mid-50s.

The argument for raising the retirement age to 65, or even scrapping it altogether, is overwhelming. Stuck in our present situation, we lend subtle support to the idea of dependency and subsidies. We should instead be encouraging self-sufficiency for as long as possible. Suffice to say, the conclusion is clear: the Hong Kong government should move the normal retirement age to 65 and make arrangements for early implementation.

Abstractness

The writer's view on the general retirement age in HK is implicitly stated.

Organisation

There is a lack of obvious signposts to facilitate understanding of the text.

Density of information

A large amount of information-carrying words and a wide range of complex sentence structures are used.

Source: adapted from 'Age is no barrier' by Mark Rowse, SCMP, 22 Feb 2010

Discussion

Owing to the growing elderly population now and beyond, there has been grave concern about active ageing and the retirement age. The prescribed retirement age for most civil servants in Hong Kong is 60 while most companies set the retirement age for their employees between 55 and 65. As **a working parent in your late 50s**, discuss with your peers whether the companies in Hong Kong should raise the retirement age. You may wish to consider:

- the impact of retirement on one's physical and mental health
- the definition of "nuclear family" and how this affects the well-being of elderly parents
- what would happen to a family when retired parents spend decades without income
- anything else that you think is important

Some sample texts selected/adapted for the less able students

Annotations indicating the text complexity

Text 1

2011 Figures at a Glance

Life Expectancy 2011	80.5* (Male) 86.7* (Female)
Projected Life Expectancy 2039	83.7 (Male) 90.1 (Female)

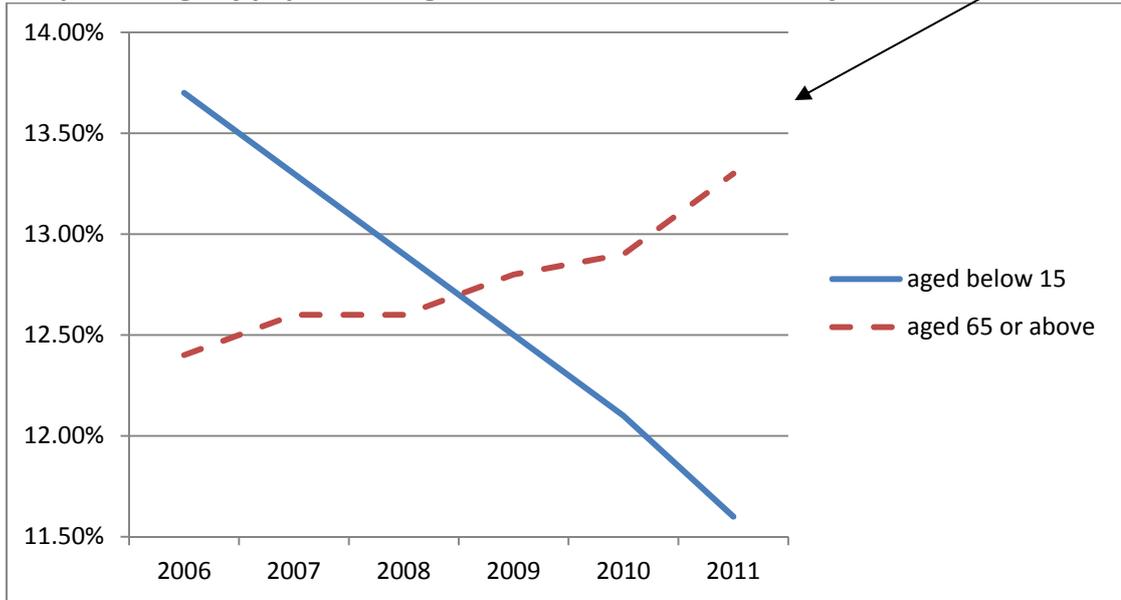
**Provisional figures*

Source: freely adapted from 2011 Government Yearbook

Abstractness
Factual information is provided in tabular form.

Text 2

The percentage of population aged below 15 and 65 or above from 2006 to 2011



Source: statistics taken from 2006-2011 Government Yearbooks

Organisation
The paragraphs are short and sub-headings are provided.

Text 3

Services provided by the Hong Kong SAR Government for the Elderly
The Government encourages and helps elderly people to lead active and healthy lives. It provides various community care and support services for them to continue living in their homes or familiar surroundings. A summary of the services provided by the Government for the elderly are as follows:

Community Care and Support Services

- The Government has been supporting 126 service teams and 61 day care centres or units for the elderly to provide support services to elders at home. It has also been supporting 210 elderly centres and a holiday centre for the elderly.

Senior Citizen Cards

- The Social Welfare Department (SWD) has issued more than 1.3 million Senior Citizen Cards to elderly persons in Hong Kong. With the cards, they may enjoy concessions, discounts and priority service provided by various companies, organisations and government departments.

Old Age Living Allowance

- The government launched an 'Old Age Living Allowance' to alleviate poverty. The Scheme provides the elderly who are eligible with \$2,200 a month to supplement their living expenses. Over 400,000 elderly people have benefited from the programme. It cost the Government an extra \$6.2 billion in the first year of its implementation.

Source: freely adapted from 2011 Government Yearbook

Density of information

The sentence structure is simple. Most sentences contain one piece of information.

Text 4

Couple's plight shines light on care for elderly

Lam Lin-oi lives with 85-year-old husband Ng Shiu-wing. Despite suffering from heart disease and gout, Ng Shiu-wing has to lift his wife in and out of the wheelchair several times a day. "He has to take care of me 24 hours a day. It's really hard for him," Lam said at their Cheung Sha Wan flat.

Since her stroke, Lam has been on a waiting list for day care services and a place in a home for the elderly. She knows she can get professional treatment at a public hospital, but she says it is too difficult for her to get there.

Lam is unlikely to get any home care service soon. The Family Welfare Society, which serves the Sham Shui Po district, budgets for 10 patients in the area and Lam will only be considered if someone drops out.

More than 20,000 people are in the queue for a place in homes. They face a 22-month wait to get into care and attention home while the waiting list for more intensive care in government-subsidised nursing homes is 40 months. The average wait for places at day care centres is seven months, although Lam has been on the list for nine.

Source: adapted from 'Couple's plight shines light on care for elderly' by Amy Nip, SCMP, 6 Oct. 2010

Discussion

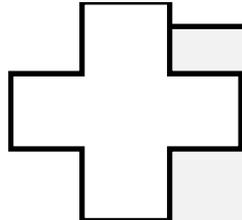
Owing to the growing elderly population now and beyond, there has been grave concern about active ageing and the retirement age. The prescribed retirement age for most civil servants in Hong Kong is 60 while most companies set the retirement age for their employees between 55 and 65. As **a government official**, discuss with your peers whether the companies in Hong Kong should raise the retirement age. You may wish to consider:

- the seriousness of the ageing population in Hong Kong
- the adequacy of the services provided for the elderly
- if ageing population does more harm than good to society
- anything else that you think is important

A sample graphic organiser for students taking the role of a working parent in his/her late 50s

Present ideas in support of / against raising the retirement age from the perspective of a working parent in his / her late 50s with the graphic organiser below, using the information from the given texts and your own knowledge of the issue as appropriate.

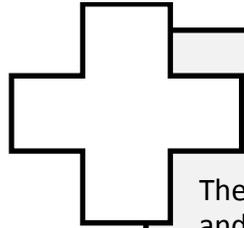
Should the retirement age be raised in Hong Kong?

	 <p>- Nuclear Family</p> <p>Definition:</p> <p>Impact on the well-being of elderly parents:</p>
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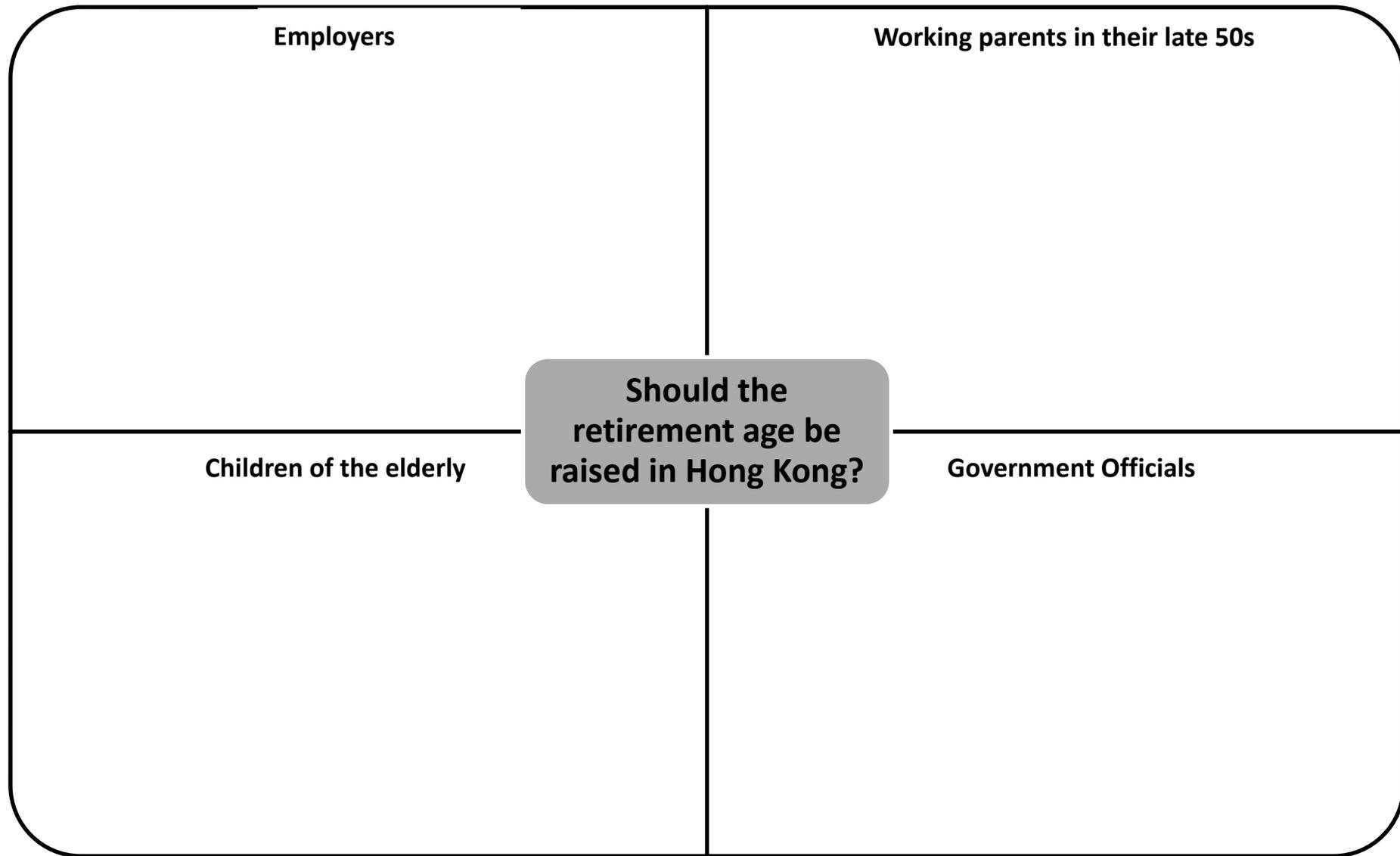
A sample graphic organiser for students taking the role of a government official

Present ideas in support of / against raising the retirement age from the perspective of a government official with the graphic organiser below, using the information from the given texts and your own knowledge of the issue as appropriate.

Should the retirement age be raised in Hong Kong?

 <p>The trend of population growth for the aged below 15 and 65 or above:</p> <p>The adequacy of the government's provision for the elderly:</p>	<p>Current government's provision for the elderly:</p> 
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A sample graphic organiser for the second discussion



References

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