

City University of Hong Kong

**Dr. Alice Ming Lin CHONG**  
**Acceptance Speech**

Ladies and gentlemen, I am greatly honoured to be a recipient of a 2013 UGC Teaching Award!

Let me say it simply. This Award enables me to actualize my life goal! As a social gerontologist and educator, it has been my life goal to prepare young people for the challenges and opportunities associated with population ageing. I am truly grateful to the UGC for helping me achieve this goal.

You may wonder, what my teaching motivation is, what I have done to win this award, and what my future plans are? Let me tell you briefly.

Hong Kong is a one of the fast-aging societies in the world due to very high life expectancy and very low fertility rate. By the year 2030, one in every 4 people in Hong Kong will be 65 years old or older. Yet, students are not well prepared for this unprecedented societal change. Due to insufficient contacts with older relatives arising from the increase in nuclear families and the busy life style in Hong Kong, many young people tend to have negative perceptions about older people, seeing them as a potential burden to the family and to the society, and seeing their own old age as a time of suffering and lack of worth.

That is the reason why I designed and launched, among other initiatives, a Gateway Education (GE) course ‘Ageing Society: Hong Kong and Beyond’ at the City University of Hong Kong, with the aim to prepare students for individual and societal ageing. As a social gerontologist, I have conducted over 20 qualitative and quantitative studies relating to aging issues. I have also been a professional social worker serving older people for more than 7 years in the past. Based on this expertise, I realised that the most realistic and profound way to expose students to the issues of our ageing society is to create opportunities for them to engage elderly people in real

and direct conversations that would bring them together emotionally, spiritually and cognitively.

The result is a uniquely designed student-centred experiential learning activity, which I call the *Life Mentor Scheme* for students taking this course. In the Life Mentor Scheme, two students are partnered with an older person, aged 60 and above, who becomes their life mentor. These trios then engage in regular intergenerational contacts inside and outside of the classroom, sharing information and their life perspectives. To give purpose to the intergenerational contacts, students are asked to identify the most significant life events of their mentor and present these events creatively in a life story book. In the process, students engage on a journal of discovery in learning that helps them better understand their elders, and themselves.

Our effectiveness measures show that both older people and the students find the Life Mentor Scheme most rewarding and meaningful, and that it has strengthened their intergenerational understanding. While our focus is on students, also the Life Mentors report benefits. They achieve a sense of generativity [namely to contribute to other people] through sharing with students their life events and life wisdom. Moreover, they value their life story books as important documentations of their life. At the same time, the students gain an intimate and empathetic understanding of older people and old age through personal contacts, direct dialogue and reflective observation. They also acquire a learning approach that is active and discovery-oriented.

With the Award Grant, I can now scale up the Life Mentor Scheme and invite educators from all universities in Hong Kong to join hands with me to launch a similar scheme in their universities, so that more students can benefit! I now also have the resources to conduct a more intensive impact evaluation and to gather detailed evidence of student learning from the Life Mentor Scheme. This will allow *us*—please join me in this effort—to share our practice insights and research findings with the international community. For me, this is truly a dream come true.

May I take this opportunity to express my sincere appreciation to all those who have been encouraging and supporting me all these years! I would like to thank my colleagues and senior management at the City University of Hong Kong for their genuine advice and unfailing support! I am grateful to students who have been sincere

and direct in sharing with me their feedback on my teaching, so that I can continuously improve. Last but not the least, my heartfelt gratitude goes to my two children and my husband who are always there for me, who strongly support and encourage me! I can now proudly tell my mother, who at 78 years of age is my own Life Mentor, that I am recognized as an outstanding teacher, not only inside CityU, but also in the higher education sector in Hong Kong! Last not least, let me again thank the UGC, and the 2013 UGC Teaching Award Selection Panel for this wonderful opportunity!

Thank you all!