

Hey, you look Chinese, we have a class for people like you

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(The title is a callback to [this article from a few months ago](#).) A member of my extended family grew up near the city of [Nanaimo, Canada](#). While it's true that she's ethnically Chinese, it's also true that she's a fourth generation Canadian. The community is overwhelmingly English-speaking, and English is her first language. She grew up going to an English-language school, she watched English-language television, spoke English with her friends and family, and probably dreamed dreams in English. Yet when the family moved to Vancouver when she was a child (I don't know the exact age, so let's say eight years old), the school district automatically enrolled her in English as a Second Language, presumably based on her Chinese last name and the fact that [Mandarin and Cantonese are the mother tongues in 30% of Vancouver homes](#). Since she was only eight years old, she didn't know that the school had tagged her as a non-native English speaker. She cheerfully went to her special class for an hour each day, enjoying her time with a new teacher and new classmates. It wasn't for a long time (I don't know exactly, so let's say six months) that she realized, "Wait a second, this is the class for people who don't speak English well!" Once the mistake was recognized, it wasn't long before she was transferred back to the regular class.

Though I'm kind of surprised the school district (and the class teacher) never figured out that her English was native, or, failing that, that her English was plenty good enough that she didn't need the class any more.

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