

## **Critical Gifted Education Programming Issues and Constraints in Education Systems**

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### **Introduction**

Many of the models of education in countries with a history of colonial rule are borrowed from the west, some of which might be ineffective or questionable. But the local situations also contribute to their incomplete or superficial adoptions of practices originating from the west. In this paper, the critical constraints concerning gifted education are presented not only as relevant to all societies, but as particularly problematic in a society which education has developed irregularly. Gifted education programming involves two main variables, that of identification and provision. But these are always entangled in several important issues at the very foundation of educational systems. These issues are: the incongruity between policy and theoretical development, the philosophical controversy on equity and excellence in education, and the nature of teacher competency. In the second part of the paper, the circumstances of Hong Kong will be used as illustrations of these issues.

### **Theories of Giftedness and Educational Provision**

#### ***Conventional and Contemporary Views on Giftedness***

For identification purposes, the conventional psychometric approach to giftedness is widely adopted in educational systems. But the use of standardized intelligence tests is questionable if they are the major differentiation instruments, as they assume that intelligence is a static trait within the individual which is "measurable" as a test score. For it is also argued that what is measured is ability cultivated by enriched experiences in higher socio-economic milieu (Freeman, 1993). Also, skills measured such as those in the Weschler-Revised Intelligence test are closely related to academic skills, which are more valued by middle class standards. If gifted educational policies are only conceived in terms of catering to higher academic performance, this will condone underservice to individuals with other

high potentials which are also viewed as gifted according to recent theoretical conceptualizations.

As a quick overview will show, recent developments point to two lines of thought on giftedness: (a) recognition of the domain specific nature of giftedness and (b) the preference of a comprehensive multifaceted approach to giftedness. One publication to name notable is Howard Gardner's "Multiple Intelligences" (1993) following "Frames of Mind" (1993), which refutes the existence of a unitary measure of intelligence to replace it with the "modality- (or domain-) specific" nature of intelligence. That giftedness is modality-specific has also been the commonly accepted view at the Council of Europe's workshop on the "Education of the Gifted in Europe" (van Boxtel, 1992) and in Sternberg's conception (Sternberg & Lubart, 1993). With regard to the elaborations of giftedness as a construct of complexities, a number of burgeoning models are available. One is the re-emergence of "creativity", proposed as one element in the "three-ring model" of Renzulli (1977), in Sternberg and Lubart's (1991, 1993) "multivariate investment approach to creative giftedness", in McCleod and Cropley (1989), and in the viewpoints

expressed at the Council of Europe's workshop (van Boxtel, 1992). A renewed interest on the nature and definition of creativity has characterized the present field. Furthermore, the quality of intrinsic "motivation" or commitment has been emphasized in various theories on giftedness, such as Renzulli (1977), Sternberg and Lubart (1991, 1993), and Monks (1991, cited in Span, 1992). A new development is seen in the increasing attention paid to social and environmental variables (Gardner, 1993; Sternberg & Lubart, 1993; van Boxtel, 1992). Then, there is an attempt to synthesize the construct of "metacognition" in the literature on giftedness, as in the "triachic theory" (Sternberg, 1985) and others (Span, 1992; Borkowski & Peck, 1986). Both of which suggest some re-integrative trends in the fields of giftedness and cognitive psychology. Cropley (1993) has provided a comprehensive definition by concluding from the literature that "pure" giftedness involves creativity (or divergent thinking) and knowledge (or convergent thinking or measured intelligence), as well as motivational, personal, social characteristics and communication skills.

### ***Implications on Identification and Programming***

What instruments of identification are used reflect not only the adopted theoretical model of the government, but also the mentality concerning education. It would be easier to formulate policy to impress the public by merely modifying ready-made instruments. Also, with no far sightedness, the provision for gifted education would be conceived as an isolated entity, not in conjunction with the whole long-term plan of education or special needs education, nor with the activities of teacher education.

The recent theoretical developments have suggested alternative practices in assessments. In opposition to assessments under decontextualized conditions as typically found in intelligence testing, Gardner (1993) has suggested a comprehensive approach, which includes human developmental perspective, symbol-system perspective, conception of multiple intelligences, creativity, and learning in context. Lastly, differential assessment has to be based on an interactive conception, that competence resides at the intersection of the individual's capacities, the domain's structure and the evaluative roles of institutions (Gardner, 1993). Without relating to assessment directly, Sternberg

and Lubart's (1993) integrative model of creative giftedness has similar multidimensional implications upon identification procedures.

McLeod and Cropley(1989) have stressed explicitly the use of multi-criteria in identification procedures, which include standardized tests (on achievement, intelligence), personality tests, nomination ratings and current biographics profiles of products. These authors are also against the emphasis of "efficiency" in identification, with nomination serving the gatekeeping function of program quota. Instead, exhausting all possibilities and including all able children at the risk of a number of false positives. Renzulli's (1984) "Revolving door model" of identification is considered to be an example of non-gatekeeping approach, allowing students to move in and out of the program (McLeod & Cropley, 1989). The most important aspect of such an approach is that identification is regarded as an ongoing process. Other suggestions on identification emphasize the relevance of the procedures to the specific programs that are provided such as advanced mathematics or other disciplines (Gallagher, & Kirk 1989; Shore, Cornell, Robinson, & Ward, 1991). This approach is justified on the

grounds that giftedness is manifested in a specific domain. The evaluation of performance would then invoke expert judgement of real life endeavors. Facilitating the emergence of giftedness from "potential giftedness" is a critical issue related to identification and educational provisioning. In fact, as Sternberg and Lubart (1993) have commented, the presence of creative giftedness is rare because complex optimum interactions of the six resources (intellectual processes, knowledge, intellectual style, personality, motivation, and environmental context) are involved. This message points to the inherent "paradox" in identification.

On the one hand, identification has to rely on products or performance; on the other, the aim of identification is to find individuals with hidden gifts or potentials, who will benefit from gifted educational programs for the manifestations of their gifts.

### **Reconceptualization of Social Principles in Gifted/Special Education**

#### ***Social Contexts of Excellence***

The relationship between gifted education and the rest of the educational system is often exposed by

sporadic political pressures. The spasms of interest in gifted education have been closely related to the national crises of reconstruction, as evident in the case of U.S.A., certain eastern European countries and some socialist countries in Asia.

Yet, some critics would see the provision of gifted education a revival of "elitism". Proponents of gifted education have resorted to arguments that polarize gifted education and special education such as gifted children deserve special funding similar to disabled groups, or arguments that stress nationalistic supremacy against mediocrity, that some form of "supernormal" education is required beside "normal" education for all. Whether these arguments are justified requires more careful scrutiny. Giftedness is said to be a social construct (Sapon-Shevin, 1987a) and so is disability (Oliver, 1988; Fulcher, 1989). The definition of giftedness or disability is closely bound by social values of the time. Recent theorization on giftedness described earlier has pointed to the importance of social variables. From this social perspective, Sapon-Shevin (1987a) has criticized the double standards on what is appropriate (or inappropriate) educational situations for gifted students

and other students.

It seems that how concepts on achieving equity and excellence are presumably conceived in policy terms has to be examined first. Certain concepts once translated into policies might be far from the original intention.

### ***Individualization and Child-Centred Education***

The most important concept utilized in the field of educating special children in the west is "individualization of instruction". Sisk (1987) suggested that the term "least restrictive environment" in the U. S. Public Law 94-142 is applicable to gifted education. The least restrictive environment is taken to mean that students are enabled to develop their potentials maximally in appropriate learning environments.

One can say that the central concept behind special (gifted included) education is the "child-centred approach" to education which should be applicable to all children as well. The recent discussions on gifted education provision are dominated by technicalities of setting, which however cannot be divorced from the humanistic and "normal" developmental concerns. In whatever setting of education, the development of the

"whole" child is a major factor in program implementation.

A quality program would by nature ensure efficient learning, develop higher levels of thinking, develop expertise in the preferred knowledge discipline, encourage creativity, and promote psychosocial well-being. In short, a child-centred program can only be interpreted in terms of individualization for quality education. Also, these aims and effects on learning and development are desirable for all children, regardless of their current levels of intellectual or academic functioning.

### ***Social Principles and Quality in Education***

The recent multivariate and social construct views of giftedness discredit the trait conception of giftedness. In other words, the "nurture" of gifts rather than its "nature" is recognized to be the "legitimate" task of educators. That is why "equity" to have potential gifts nurtured is a central concern for educators.

"Equity" of educational opportunities would mean equal chance to have "quality education". However, to adapt to individual needs and styles, program variability has to be made available.

These two new principles on "equity to quality" and "respect for individual differences" are seldom simultaneously entertained in most educational systems. The attainment of these principles in programming is under certain constraints, including the availability of adequate funding, the nature of competency in teachers and educational administrators.

Gifted education programming is often set up because of unsatisfactory conditions in the existing popular system. The curriculum of comprehensive schooling is usually designed for the "hypothetical average" students with a fixed term of compulsory study. It is unacceptable to regard the existing system as suitable for the majority of students, while the gifted should be identified for special provisions.

Rather than adopting the conventional procedure of "identification of individuals then exclusive programming", one should think of "improvement of programming then evaluation of program effects". In other words, the identification should be on the factors (in the educational system and subsystems) that are productive and counter-productive to the development of giftedness. This suggestion is in fact consonant with the alternative view of psychoeducational assessment, that is,

the instructional environment is an important variable to be considered for any educational intervention (Ysseldyke and Christenson, 1987). At the policy level, the assessment implies the overall evaluation of the quality of the whole educational system. Such outlook affirms the importance of the "inclusive" view of "gifted education" (i.e., quality education). Sapon-Shevin (1992) suggested that educational problems can neither be solved by improving nor eliminating gifted programs, nor by reverting to undifferentiated education, but by "the creation of school programs that meet individual needs within the context of heterogeneity". To materialize Sapon-Shevin's (1992) suggestion is never easy in a system where categorization of students is the adopted mechanism. Also, the structure and content of school programs are dependent upon the governmental/societal attitude towards investment in education.

### **Teacher Competency and the Teaching Profession**

#### ***Debates on Separate Training of Competency***

The suggestion of a separate subsystem of gifted education involves the issue of

teacher competency. Competencies of gifted education teachers at the Master level might include: knowledge of the nature and needs of gifted; skills in developing higher cognitive thinking abilities, creative thinking abilities; ability to develop learning materials; ability to use individual teaching strategies, ability to counsel gifted students and their parents; ability to carry out action research, such as those suggested in Sisk (1987). But all of these competencies are relevant to teachers in general, regardless of whether their students are identified as gifted or not. Personal characteristics of successful teachers working with gifted students, such as outstanding ego strength, sensitivity to others' feelings, above average intellectual abilities, responsibility for one's actions as described by Lindsey (1980) are equally desirable in all teachers.

The issue of deskilling general classroom teachers has been consistently decried in reaction to separate programming efforts. As Sapon-Shevin's study (1990) suggested, the increase in gifted programs may contribute to teachers' restrictive perceptions of their responsibilities. In such light, this has to be analysed in the broader picture of

structure and content of teacher education.

A more fundamental issue, that of professional status, has to be reconciled. Whether the profession of teaching is highly valued in a society can be somehow reflected in the status of institutions for teacher preparation.

### ***The Knowledge Base of Teaching and Expertise Development***

An inherent contradiction exists in the business of teacher education, that teacher education has a function in professional standard-setting, but that it cannot enable all teachers to become "teachers of the gifted" or "gifted educators themselves"!

One can at least begin the examination of teacher education from three directions. First, one can proceed from the studies of knowledge domains in teacher education instead of the separate discussions of gifted teacher characteristics. Second, contingent upon the profession of teaching is regarded as a kind of gift too, teaching expertise can be discussed in terms of the theoretical frameworks on giftedness. The last aspect that I would pose for consideration is quality teacher education.

Reynolds' (1992) synthesis of various

conceptions of the content of teacher education is of much help to the present analysis. Four domains of understanding and personality characteristics constitute the conceptual framework proposed by Reynolds (1992). The first domain is general subjects/liberal arts which consists of basic skills and orientations to knowledge finding. The second domain is content which is based on the definition by Kennedy (1990), as teachers' knowledge and beliefs of the subject matter they teach. The third domain is general principles of teaching and learning (general pedagogy) which are not restricted by specific subject matter. The fourth domain is content-specific pedagogy, which according to Reynolds (1992), contextualizes each of the other domains. Understandings in the four domains occur along a continuum between domain-general and domain-specific understandings. The former kinds comprise abstract theoretical concepts that are not affected by contextual changes. Domain-specific understandings are contextualized and personalized knowledge derived from practice. An important process is the reflection of experiences by teachers which constructs contextualized principles of practice falling

along the continuum between domain-specific and domain-general understandings. In addition to being competent in the four domains of understandings, certain personality characteristics are essential for the role of teaching. These are moral/ethical standards (such as honesty, intellectual freedom, equity, respect) and temperament/personality traits (such as warmth, flexibility, sensitivity, self-confidence).

The Gardner (1983) framework of multiple intelligences can be related to these domains and characteristics. It is seen that teacher competency requires a number of intelligences for both the breadth and depth of the profession: the intelligence in at least one subject content and its specific pedagogy (logical-mathematical intelligence, linguistic intelligence, etc.), interpersonal intelligence and intrapersonal intelligence. Interpersonal intelligence is implied in the domain of general pedagogy. Intrapersonal intelligence is essential for the development of expertise by means of reflection on experiences and transformation of experiences. In Sternberg and Lubart's (1992) theory in cognitive psychology, creative people use several metacognitive or "insight"



processes. The exercise of insight corresponds to the various aspects that have been commonly identified on the nature of expertise in teaching.

I would stress that quality education of our students depends on the availability of expert (quality) teachers. Whether training can enable more novice teachers to become expert teachers is the main question. A large number of recent writings on innovations in teacher education programs in North America (e.g., Zeichner, & Liston, 1987; Schon, 1987) emphasize opportunity-structuring for the reflection of teaching practice and the generation of reflexive practice. However, solely requiring professional development among teachers without the concomitant changes at other levels of the system (such as the direction of educational policy, social status of teachers) will not bring significant improvement to professional morales or educational quality. Thus, the recent call for reflectiveness should be similarly applied to the macrolevels of the educational system. But any educational system needs to be studied in terms of its specific characteristics and histories before appropriate changes could be made. The macro levels of an educational system will be illustrated with

the aid of the Hong Kong case.

### **Summary**

In the first section, several aspects have been discussed to pinpoint the two concerns of identification and provision in gifted education. Firstly, the most recent multifaceted view and social construct view of giftedness would suggest an inclusive identification procedure and a focus on the social environmental variable in the development of gifted potentials. Secondly, gifted education has to be considered together with the total special education and general education continuum, and different kinds of provision are suggested to be inherently consonant in terms of the educational ideal of child-centred education.

Moreover, the aims in gifted education and the expected qualities of the teacher of the gifted are regarded as equally applicable to all children and teachers. Thirdly, the seeming conflict between equity and excellence could be dispelled, the argument for gifted education could be justifiable as advocating for "quality education for all". Lastly, that quality education is dependent on quality teachers is suggested; expertise of teaching and

notions on reflectiveness in teacher education are elaborated. Next, we shall turn to the case of Hong Kong the education system of which is rived with contradictions.

## **The Case Of Hong Kong**

### ***Introduction***

In an important review "A Perspective on Education in Hong Kong" by an international educationist panel chaired by Llewellyn, there is one comment that "the gifted child is comparatively well provided for" (Hong Kong Government, 1982, p.79). But proposals on gifted education were only formulated 8 years later in the Education Commission Report No. 4 (Hong Kong Government, 1990). (1) The reason for this apparent time discrepancy is that the academically able have always enjoyed advantages even without the explicit categorized provision for giftedness. To analyse the recent policy of gifted education, one needs to familiarize oneself with the characteristics in the educational system.

In the following, I will give a concise presentation of the structure and mechanism of the Hong Kong educational system, then I will highlight

the issues already raised in the first part of this paper within the specific context of Hong Kong.

### ***Education Structure and Admission Mechanism***

In Hong Kong, education has been initiated by largely private efforts, such as the missionaries, ever since the British colony was established in the mid 19th century. At present most schools are run by voluntary agencies which receive subsidized funding from the government. Although teaching the same curriculum, schools vary greatly in quality due to historical reasons. The prestige schools are often those with longer histories of establishment and an upper middle-class value orientation. Such schools used to hold their own admission tests and interviews to select the most promising students.

Free and compulsory education was legally mandated at the primary level (6 years) in 1971, and up to the junior secondary level (3 years) in 1979. The primary one admission scheme introduced in the 80's and the secondary school places allocation system introduced in the late 70's to replace the competitive secondary school admission examination, have greatly

changed the process of student selection. Primary schools, under the primary one admission scheme, are divided according to school districts, and primary students are allocated by means of a three-stage process of parental preference, school discretion and computerized random matching (Luk, 1990). The secondary school places allocation system is based on internal school assessments of primary five and six students and scaled by a centrally administered aptitude test, on the basis of which all primary 6 students are divided into five bands of academic ability level. Allocation of students to secondary schools is randomized within each band, and parental preference is also taken into consideration (Luk, 1990). Prestige secondary schools still continue to receive the "better" students of bands one and two, but the range of academic ability is greater than in the past when admission was limited to the top 5 to 10 per cent of students. After secondary three, most students who want to continue senior secondary schooling are allocated through another junior secondary education assessment which is based on internal school results. Public examinations are the major screening mechanisms for selecting students to the

limited number of places in post secondary and tertiary education. The Hong Kong Examinations Authority, a statutory body, is responsible for the administration of the two public examinations and other examinations in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination marks the end of secondary five education. Those who are successful with the HKCEE and aspire to higher education would study for two more years, at the end of which comes the Advanced Level Examination. Previously, about 5 percent of the post-secondary candidates were able to gain access to the local universities. Since 1989, the government has been committed to the increase of first degree places in the institutions funded by the University and Polytechnic Grants Committee (UPGC).

### ***Curriculum, Learning Environment and Instructional Language***

A highly academic curriculum predominates in the school system as the majority of the secondary schools are grammar (academic) schools. Although the Education Department would like to introduce some practical subjects into the junior secondary curriculum, this has not been welcome

by educators and parents. In the words of Luk (1990), the compulsory junior secondary education of Hong Kong "continues to wear the aspect of an elitist academic school" (p. 368). In secondary four, the students are streamed into the arts or science stream, the latter being the more prestigious option. To prepare for the public examination, the senior secondary education tracks students in a narrowly academic curriculum.

Classes in the primary and junior secondary schools usually consist of 40 students. The exception is in a small number of primary schools which have adopted the "activity approach" from Britain instead of the traditional "chalk and talk" approach, these schools have 35 students in a class. Most of the primary schools operate two sessions, morning session and afternoon sessions, with different groups of staff and students. This is an unsatisfactory continuation of the post-war educational structure when school buildings were in scarce supply. The Education Commission Report No.4 (1990) introduced a policy of mixed mode primary school, whereby primary one to four would operate bsessionally, but primary five and six would become

full-day school. Due to difficulties in the physical settings of the older schools and the implications on demotion and working hours, this policy has been strongly objected by primary school principals and later shelved.

Another peculiar phenomenon is different instructional languages are adopted in the secondary schools. The Anglo-Chinese schools, which constitute the majority of the secondary schools, supposedly use English as the language of instruction; while Chinese is the instructional language in the Chinese-Middle schools. This phenomenon is due to the higher social status of english, the language of the elite, which is recognized as the key to higher education and respectable profession. Most teachers in Anglo-Chinese schools are more comfortable with oral presentation in the local Chinese dialect, even though English texts are used and examinations are written in English. This state of affairs called "mixed code" in the instructional language has long been discredited by the Education Department; however, mixed code schools are not strictly required to adopt Chinese as instructional language since parental opposition is very strong.

### ***Professional Preparation of Teachers***

A marked variation is present in the academic qualification and professional preparation among teachers engaged in the different school levels. According to the Education Commission Report No. 5 (Hong Kong Government, 1992), in 1991, about 73 per cent of secondary teachers are university graduates, and 57 per cent of the secondary teachers who have obtained post-degree professional training are recognized degree holders. Professional secondary teachers training consists of one-year full time and two-year part-time inservice programs. All teaching posts in the primary schools are non-university degree posts. In 1991, about 85 per cent of the primary teachers have obtained teacher's certificate in the Colleges of Education, 1 per cent of whom are also recognized degree holders (Hong Kong Government, 1992). In 1992, in the Education Commission Report No.5, a policy to upgrade the academic qualification of primary teachers by means of in-service was proposed; the salary scale of the primary teachers with degree would also be adjusted. Subsequently in 1994, two consortiums of institutions set up long distance degree programs for these primary teachers.

As kindergarten is not under the compulsory education provision, the quality of programs is highly variable. The majority of kindergarten teachers forms the least academically qualified group; the salary scale of whom is also unregulated, dependent on the individual kindergarten administration. Professional training of the local kindergarten teachers ranges from two-year full-time to twelve-week part-time courses (Luk, 1990).

### ***Recent Policies on Special (Gifted) Educational Provisions***

In the Education Commission Report No. 4 (Hong Kong Government, 1990), a chapter is devoted to the educational provisions for special needs. Along with a section on students with learning difficulties, gifted children identification plans and a proposal on educational enhancements are outlined in 6 pages of the report.

### ***Definition Adopted***

For reference, the Education Commission adopted the definition of giftedness in the Marland's (1972) report to the Congress of the United States. Under this early conceptualization, gifted children are those with achievement or

potential in any of the following areas:

1. a high level of measured intelligence;
2. specific academic aptitude in a subject area;
3. creative thinking;
4. superior talent in visual and performing arts;
5. natural leadership of peers;
6. psychometric ability.

On the premise that there are other informal and formal avenues for the development of performing arts and sports, but no specific provision in Hong Kong for the academically gifted, the proposed provision is concentrated on the academically gifted who demonstrate one or more of the first three categories of characteristics.

### ***Summary of the Proposal***

Instead of setting up special schools for gifted students, the development of school-based programs and supplementary out-of-school programs has been proposed. The rationale is that gifted children, less able children and the schools would benefit from the heterogeneous mix of students learning from one and another. The nature of

the programs has not been definitely decided. The Education Commission in 1990 suggested several possibilities: grouping of gifted students in a particular program; acceleration (such as early entry, grade-skipping); extended curriculum (additional subject matter); and extra-curricular program. Further research into overseas experience in programming has been suggested.

Two tasks are required before the development of school-based programs. First, an identification process has to be initiated through teachers' nomination and then confirmed by intelligence and achievement assessment by educational psychologists. Second, a pilot project on school-based gifted programs will be tested. The pilot project will be started in 1994, 120 primary two to primary four students will be involved in the first year. In the second year, an additional 120 primary students will participate in the project; in the third year, the project will be extended to the secondary level.

### ***Subsequent Actions***

In 1992, a Charity group donated a sum of \$1.6 million to the Education Department for a research project on giftedness. The research fund has been granted to a project of Norming "Torrance's

Tests of Creativity" by a university research team. A resource centre for teachers will be established by the end of 1994. Some officials of the the Education Department have been sent abroad to study gifted education teachers training.

### **Issues for Discussion**

The major shortcoming of the policy is its skeletal nature. Although identification and program structure have been mentioned, not much research into the matters has been evidenced. The macro aspects of program aims have not been discussed, while only the technicalities of the pilot project have been detailed.

I will discuss this policy in the context of existing educational situations according to: (a) local constraints; (b) the principles of "equity", "excellence" and "quality".

### ***Local Systemic Constraints***

What the Education Commission has offered, by adopting only three of Marland's (1972) criteria in program consideration, is a narrow conception of giftedness. This can be interpreted as a result of the constraints in (a) the existing

mentality, (b) curriculum orientation and (c) administration.

The mentality of the society in general is highly instrumental; the aim of education is to get into prestige schools with English as the instructional medium, and to pass the public examinations with flying colors. Such a mentality has not only constrained gifted education in a narrow interpretation, but also allowed the government to avoid the larger philosophical issues. As described above, the curriculum of the secondary schools is strongly academic. We have seen that the curriculum is enclosed in a pyramidal school structure after secondary three, the end point of which come the competitive examination processes.

The adopted policy-definition is a conventional, not an interactive dynamic view of giftedness. Earlier psychometric conceptions are obviously governing the decision of the Education Commission. The first two criteria can be easily measured in conventional achievement and intelligence tests, and can sit well with the societal mentality and narrow academic curriculum. Although creativity can be supposedly be measured by means of psychometric tests on divergent thinking, creativity may be contradictory to the local curriculum and

examination mechanism which promote convergent thinking (subject knowledge) rather than divergent thinking.

Despite the fact that there are many theories of creativity, creativity could best be observed in innovation in a domain (such as, the choreography of dance, the theory of cancer development, etc.). Also, creativity, like intellectual abilities, is sensitive to environmental stimulation and frustration. Barriers to creativity found in the classroom (Bean, 1992) are often the prevailing practices in Hong Kong's classrooms. These barriers are exemplified in such values: "the what" of curriculum is favored over learning process; conformity is valued rather the individuality; judgment rather than acceptance is important; industriousness is rewarded than free-thinking; order is preferred to spontaneity; dependence on extrinsic motivation rather than intrinsic motivation (Bean, 1992). Thus, the identification of giftedness by teacher nomination would exclude many potential gifted children whose expression of creativity might have already been suppressed by their schooling experiences.

Criticisms should be directed at the inherent constraints in the education administrative system, which have militated against a thorough investigation

into the implications of gifted education (or any other major policy). The historical and political background of the colony has been a factor contribution to the half-hearted governmental commitment to education development. Consequently, policy-making has often developed out of incomplete borrowing of models, compromises with vested interests than of long-term planning.

The Hong Kong education administrative system itself is an extremely cumbersome structure. The establishment of the overall coordinating body of Education Commission in 1984 has been an attempt to improve the process of policy making. However, the policy on gifted education and other policies proposed in the same report could lead one to conclude that the coordination has not been too satisfactory. Inadequacies in the policy on gifted education are found with regard to the issues of programming and teacher preparation. There has not been any analysis of the existing schooling and curricular situations and how they may relate to the programming for the gifted. In real classroom teaching situations, teachers would be most concerned with temporal and physical resources for any new policy. For example,



how may a teacher cater for the needs of 10 gifted primary student of various grade levels in a typical half-day school which has no spare rooms for independent or small group study (i.e., resource room program), and no spare time for after-school activities (i.e., extra-curricular program)?

There is some vague mentioning of construction curriculum material for the gifted by the Curriculum Development Institute and the use of attainment target level in the Education Commission Report No. 4 (Hong Kong Government, 1990). Although nothing concrete has so far come out of these suggestions, the assumption is that the curriculum content for gifted students could be centrally directed, ignoring the necessary curriculum developing role of teachers to be involved. Earlier in this paper, I have pointed out that quality teachers are the key ingredient for gifted (or quality) education. A more serious discussion on teacher preparation should have been included in the Education Commission's gifted education policy. This shortcoming is reflective of the inherent weakness in policy planning in hong Kong, which was pointed out by the international visiting panel in 1982, that despite a move towards "participatory governance" in

planning, "the technocratic planning techniques still being employed continue to cause problem" (Hong Kong Government, 1982, p. 17). Furthermore, such shortcoming is indicative of the lack of understanding of the crucial concept in programming for special needs, which is "individualization". Individualized instruction is essentially a "diagnostic-prescriptive" approach to teaching which would demand a high degree of expert knowledge and flexibility on the teacher's part.

### ***Unresolved Contraventions of Equity, Quality and Excellence***

How does the new policy measure up with philosophical principles? It seems that the policy of gifted education could be possibly a form of "revised elitism". The compulsory education system has upset an originally elitist educational tradition, increasing heterogeneity in the secondary students that a prestige school would rather not tolerate. There have often been comments by gifted education advocates that gifted children learn best with peers of equal ability than with peers of lower ability. Yet, in the Education Commission Report No. 4 (Hong Kong Government, 1990), the rationale is that students at whatever

ability level need to be helped to develop their potentials. The possible accusation of elitism has thus been avoided with such an all-serving declaration.

Yet, first of all, we must question whether there are less than ideal learning conditions on the whole which prevent students (gifted or otherwise) from developing their potentials. This inquiry is necessary if gifted education is interpreted in the wider sense of "quality education for all". "Equity of access" to 9 years of education has not guaranteed "equity to quality". The large class size of 40 students would certainly induce teacher-centred than individualized approach. Another serious problem is the central allocation system which implicitly categorizes students as well as schools, from band one to band five. It has been concern that students allocated to band four and band five schools or prevocational schools would develop a sense of failure even before proving themselves in subsequent studies. Then the most problematic is the historical legacy of English as the language of the elite. Many teachers and numerous students who are not proficient in English need to use English language as the instructional medium, resulting in

ineffective language as the instructional medium, resulting in ineffective teaching and poor learning outcome.

Educational excellence can be taken as the ideal as well as the manifested effect. However, unresolved tension between the ideal of excellence and egalitarian goal often full educational decisions to either extremes. Yet, both viewpoints can be compatible with each other in Schaefer's (1990) philosophical insight regarding the relationship between the two. The connection is that excellence comes after the achievement of equality, while equality is perfected only through excellence. In other words, the increase of opportunities for the many will ultimately increase the possibilities to opportunities for the many will ultimately increase the possibilities to achieve excellence. To acquire some practical insights, one may turn to the suggestions proposed in two recent reports on excellence in the U. S., which look into fundamental issues of the system. "Action for Excellence", the report by the Task Force on Education for Economic Growth (1983) calls for the mobilization of resources in each state to develop action plans to improve schools. The call for the partnership of business in marshalling the resources

needed in quality education is the most significant suggestion in this report. "Barriers to Excellence: Our Children at Risk" by the National Coalition of Advocacy for Students (1985) questions the assumption that past educational reforms have entirely solved the problems of equity in education and meeting diverse student needs. The present failures in educating children adequately (thus preventing them from achieving excellence) are attributed to more fundamental issues: inflexibilities of school structure, narrow curriculum, rigidities of school bureaucracies, and lack of additional resources. It seems Hong Kong educational system, which has already been described, has many similar flaws to be redressed in regard to the above criticisms by NCAS (1985).

To round up the discussion so far, both the gifted education policy and the existing education system have not satisfied the principles of equity or quality, with little effort to achieve "equity to quality (excellence)". What needs to be conceived is a proposal with an aim of working towards excellence for all in the whole education system, from administration to classroom level. And the evaluation of excellence should be on the quality of school experiences for

all, rather than the number of students identified as gifted.

### ***Proposal with a Macro Concern***

Given the above discussion and analysis, some general principles are suggested for policy-reconstruction: (1) Do not be distracted by the superficial dichotomy between gifted education and general education. (2) Base planning on commitment to both equity and excellence. (3) Look into previously initiated policies that may be improved upon for fundamental changes of the system and related to visions of "gifted (quality)" education programming. The first two items have been derived from the general discussion in the first part and the in-depth analysis in the second part, and will not be further explicated. The last item is an attempt to relate to current situations. The policies which pertain to teacher professionalization, curriculum change, educational structure and orientation, will be discussed in the following.

### ***Teacher Professionalization as the Basic Step***

As suggested before, teacher quality is the most critical component in promoting educational excellence, whether

in isolated gifted programs or in the compulsory education programs. However, the situations of school teachers' professionalization (secondary, primary, and kindergarten levels) as discussed in the previous section, are far from satisfactory even within the existing policy boundaries.

Professionalization is manifested in two aspects: professional knowledge and career advancement. The former confers "expert power" to the professionals, while the latter confers attractiveness to the profession. The recognition of the importance of professional knowledge in teaching is firstly effected through policy and administration, usually through licensing based on completion of teacher-training. Secondly, it is a matter of continuing professional education which is conducted within the schools or higher institutions. Thirdly, a system of progressive certification of expertise might be necessitated to sustain continuing professional education. Fourthly, the general academic level of the professionals must be acceptable and comparable to other professions of similar salary scale. Then, professionalization also requires suitable incentives such as remuneration, responsibility and rank, all of which undergird the career

prospect of the profession.

In light of the above tenets, some practical measures are suggested to address the present state of affairs in the minimum professional training of secondary and primary school teachers:

1. The present situation allows a good proportion of secondary school teachers without professional qualification to teach. And there has been a decrease in the enrollment of full-time (secondary) teacher education training. Thus, the measure must be targeted at graduates who are recruited as secondary school teachers. A new regulation must compel these new teachers to in-service teacher education training of two years starting from the first year of their teaching. School administration's cooperation is needed to implement this regulation by giving less teaching loads to the teachers under training.

2. Long-time practising secondary school teachers who refuse to undergo teacher education training might have to be tolerated in the current situation until their retirement. But measures can also be taken to prevent the perpetuation of the trend, such as a less attractive salary increment for those teachers who have not acquired professional qualif

-cation after 4 years of service.

3. Although opportunities to bachelor degrees have been opened to practising primary school teachers through part-time and long distance programs in an expedient effort from the government, the different salary scale has been criticized as stigmatizing the Bachelor in Education degree as a second-class degree. The situation must be evaluated according to whether the diverse B. Ed. programs have incorporated a solid liberal education component apart from the education component. The move to strengthen the general knowledge component is in line with the recent thinking on reforming teacher education, such as those suggested in the national reports of the U.S.A. (see Meade, 1986). It is therefore suggested that a special committee under the Education Commission be established to oversee the curriculum content of these B. Ed. programs. Equitable salary scale should be considered by the government if the evaluation results show that the quality of the B. Ed. programs are academically adequate.

4. Professional knowledge of giftedness as a higher level of pedagogical knowledge must be considered as part of a continuous

scheme for professional development in serving different needs and in different disciplines (e.g., students' reading problems, CAI in mathematics education, ESL). As suggested in the first part of the article, teaching expertise includes a complex of several domains of knowledge, subject knowledge, content-related pedagogy, general pedagogy and also certain personality characteristics. The expansion of the breadth and depth of these areas is precisely the kind of professional development for teaching gifted students.

This can be offered through a higher certificate for primary school teachers by the restructured Institute of Education (3) as proposed in the Education Commission Report No. 5 (1992). For secondary school teachers, a higher certificate on giftedness can be similarly offered by the two universities. To function in a career incentive system, these higher certificates should be recognized for promotion and salary increment. The higher certificate can also function within a cumulative credit system towards degrees, which is particularly appropriate for professionals who cannot afford the time for long programs.

### ***Teachers in Curriculum Change***

Professionalization of teaching would imply a stronger role of teachers in curriculum change. In past efforts of the curriculum redesign by the government, difficulties arose at the stage of implementation. Reasons for teachers' unreadiness to implement changes are many: too heavy existing workload, failure to comprehend the meaning of the changes, and lack of commitment to something externally imposed. Professional knowledge development is not divorced from opportunities to test that knowledge in instructional content and methods. School-based curriculum design is something that the Education Department has promoted for some time, but not with much vigor as one would like. With a new concern for the development of gifted potentials, school-based curriculum design should be revitalized. These school-based curriculum should be programs which are characterized by flexibility in instructional style, and with an emphasis on creative thinking. This new responsibility in curriculum design could be conceived in conjunction with the higher certification process, whereby practice and knowledge are meaningfully integrated.

### ***Indirect Tackling of Structural Problems***

Certain external conditions such as rigid grade structures, large class size, strong examination orientation are major obstacles to improvement of educational experiences. It is impossible to eliminate these entrenched structures and orientation overnight, however, this unhealthy learning climate could be modified through other changes. Funding must be increased to build more schools and employ more teachers to cut down the class size. With smaller class size and professionalization of teaching, chances are that individual learning needs will be more readily accommodated such that potentials will not be undiscovered or suppressed.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has not concentrated on gifted education programming in isolation, but mainly on the inherent constraints that undermine the educational quality of the whole system. Such an emphasis is based on the philosophical consideration of "equity to quality education". The case of Hong Kong has served to show that a policy on gifted education

conceived in isolation from the existing educational situations would only become an appendage that does not address systemic problems. The interest in giftedness has a predominant psychometric root which may therefore cause some restriction of focus in the consideration of gifted education. However, the dimension of enculturation is discussed as the legitimate concern for education policy-makers.

It is tempting for a developing society to emulate what is available in the west, such as compulsory education, different categorical provision of special needs education. The establishment of similar structures of education is a superficial imitation if problems undercutting the perfection of educational opportunities are disregarded. Identification procedures couched in an "efficient" mentality to screen out children who do not fit into a narrow conception of giftedness are suspect of moral irresponsibility, in a society which has chosen compulsory education for all. One obvious (but often neglected) route to educational improvement is the process of teacher professionalization. Teacher professionalization ensures the growth of teaching expertise through which students' potential gifts could be

led to light. And the ultimate implication of teacher professionalization is power-sharing with the administration system.

### **Notes**

- (1) The Education Commission was formed in 1984 with the responsibility of education policy formulation and overall coordination of education at all levels.
- (2) The Curriculum Development Institute was a body established consequent to the proposal of the Education Commission Report No. 4 (1990) for curriculum development.
- (3) The four colleges of education for training primary school teachers will merge in 1994 to form the Institute of Education upon the recommendation of the Education Commission Report No. 5 (1992).

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