Changing Political Scenario in Hong Kong and Its Impact on Education After July 1997

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Abstract:

Change is endemic to Hong Kong, particularly in the new era when the Chinese government overtakes the sovereignty from Britain after one-and-a-half centuries of colonial rule. According to the Sino-British Joint Agreement signed in 1984, Hong Kong people can live under ‘One Country, Two Systems’ for a period of fifty years. Both of the capitalist and communist systems have exerted influence in the formation of the new government for a period of fifty years. As education policy changes significantly under the purview of the Basic Law, traditional curricula are no longer adequate for the rapid changing political scenario. Politicians and educators are seeking new directions in shaping our education agenda. Civic education, which has never been important in the curriculum in the past, is gaining attention as people are finding ways of harmonizing nationalism, capitalism, communism and patriotism in the new era. The use of Chinese instead of English as the first language of instruction also causes significant change in education. With the influx of migrants from China, there is a call for adjustment programmes for new migrants and the deprived. Affective education, such as personal and social education, guidance and counselling, moral education and sex education is gaining importance particularly. It is timely for us to modify the curricula for the needs of society and potential development of students. It is also interesting for education researchers to look into the development of the new curricula, particularly the effectiveness of the personal and social education developed in the new era.

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CHANGING POLITICAL SCENARIO IN HONG KONG AND ITS IMPACT ON EDUCATION AFTER JULY 1997

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‘Hong Kong has finally broken free from the psychological constraints of the colonial era…..We should encourage to set aside past modes of thought and plan Hong Kong’s future with vision….We must work to build Hong Kong for ourselves and for future generations: a Hong Kong that is civilized, prosperous, stable and democratic, filled with a new vitality.’

Extracted from Building for a new era, the first Policy Address by Chief Executive of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, Mr. Tung Chee-hwa dated 8 October 1997.

I. INTRODUCTION

Hong Kong is an ever changing society. From a fishing port and barren island with a few houses centuries ago, Hong Kong became one of the most densely populated cities of the world today (Sweeting, 1996). Hong Kong is small and has no natural resources. Nevertheless, her substantial economic achievements have attracted curiosity and admiration, if not the envy of the Western countries. The mix of western managerial ability and Chinese entrepreneurial effort contributes to the economic success of Hong Kong in the post-industrial period. Politically, the ‘1997 issue’ witnesses the historical change that warrants worldwide attention when the Chinese government overtook the sovereignty of Hong Kong after 150 years of British rule. Socially, the influx of new immigrants from China, return of migrants from different parts of the world and the changing family structures also affect the livelihood of the people of Hong Kong. Given an understanding of the political, social and economical factors that affect the education system in Hong Kong, it would be easier to discuss the issues that shape our education agenda (Appendix 1). (Postiglione, 1996; Sweeting, 1996; Sweeting, Postiglione & Lee, 1996). This paper attempts to reveal the changing political scenario in Hong Kong after 1 July 1997 and scrutinize its impact on education policy, curriculum design and educational needs in the new SAR era.
II. POLITICAL CHANGES AND ITS IMPLICATION ON EDUCATION POLICY

1. Basic Law, One Country, Two Systems and Hong Kong

Hong Kong was mandated to become a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) on 1 July 1997. Under the special administrative region, the Basic law is the constitution law of Hong Kong. It lays down the rights of the people of Hong Kong. According to the Sino-British Joint Agreement signed in 1984, Hong Kong people can live under the ‘one country, two systems.’ They can adopt the existing legal, social and economic systems different from those in Mainland China for fifty years. The concepts of ‘People of Hong Kong rule Hong Kong’ with a ‘high degree of autonomy’ were reaffirmed by President Jiang Ze-min at the SAR Establishment Ceremony on 1 July 1997.

Despite the above promises, the people of Hong Kong have experienced a confidence crisis and Hong Kong’s political ‘imperfect transition’ owing to the China factor (Chan, 1997). They have witnessed a dramatic deterioration in Sino-British relations particularly when China undermined the British-sponsored constitutional and administrative reform and impeded the introduction of direct elections and a fuller scale of representative government. Although Hong Kong is a well educated and affluent society, political reforms came at a late stage (Postiglione, 1996). With the assertion of Chinese sovereignty, actualization of military power and establishment of the provisional legislature, most people saw the end of the colonial era. As most people think that they are somehow powerless in making political decisions, they become pragmatic and treasure their freedom and democracy. They are ready to compromise freedom for stability and seek a new form of HK/SAR/PRC identity (Kuan and Lau, 1989, Lau and Kuan, 1991). Nonetheless, the role of education is to harmonize capitalism, communism, socialism and Chinese patriotism.

The Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa reiterated in his first Policy Address (8 October 1997) that Hong Kong is part of China. Hong Kong’s prosperity and stability are closely linked with those of China. The successful implementation of the concept of one country, two systems depends on the understanding of ‘One Country’ and ‘Two Systems’ and the proper handling of the relationship between Hong Kong and China. It is considered that the ‘two-system’ enshrines Hong Kong’s practical and long-term interest.

2. New Vision in the Education System

‘Education is the key to the future of Hong Kong.’ The Chief Executive Mr. Tung Chee-hwa has explained this issue in the SAR Establishment Ceremony (Speech by Mr. Tung Che-hwa on 1 July 1997). He stated on several public occasions that the education system must be firmly rooted in the needs of the people and contribute to the development of the country. It should be diversified, drawing on the strengths of the East and West, having an international outlook and inspiring commitment to excellence. The education system should aim to "cultivate in students:

- an all-round development covering ethics, the intellect, the physique, social skills, and aesthetics;
- biliteracy and trilingualism;
- self-learning ability and an inquisitive mind;
- a sense of responsibility towards the family, the community, the country and the world;
- a global outlook;
f. the ability to assimilate modern technologies and ideas, and to appreciate Chinese values;
g. strength of character, a spirit of enterprise, the desire for continuous improvement, and the versatility to cope with the changing needs of the community; and
h. respect for the rule of law in the pursuit of personal interest."

(Extracted from the Education Commission Report No. 7 - Aims of education and quality indicators, p. 8, 9)

Mr. Tung’s education blueprints were also echoed by his appointed education leader Mr. Anthony Leung. He focused education policy on patriotism, whole person development, new and global knowledge, language skills, technological development and autonomous learning for students in Hong Kong (Tung, 13 May 1997, Ming Pao Daily).

3. Development of more Long-term Education Policy

Whilst world dignitaries are concerned about the development of Hong Kong in the new SAR era, it appears that there are no significant changes in people’s daily livelihood. There is a stronger sentiment of Chinese identity in the community but a slower pace of democracy, or ‘silence on freedom’, as the democratic party leader, Mr. Martin Lee put it several months after the establishment of the SAR government (Angella & Roger Lee, SCM Post, 9 October 1997; Lam, Ming Pao Daily, 10 October 1997). *Most people expected that the SAR administration could have more long-term policy on strategy planning particularly in education and yet the freedom of Hong Kong spirit could remain unchanged* (Hong Kong Economical Daily Editorial, 9 October 1997).

In the decolonisation, localization, internationalization and globalization processes, the SAR government puts much emphasis on promoting the well being of the people and the competitiveness of Hong Kong as an international city in the twenty-first century. That encompasses the strategic development to conduct macro studies on a wide range of issues in education. *Most important of all, the SAR administration can give directions and financial support to the promoted education policy* (SCM Post 9 October 1997).

4. Development of Quality Education

As Hong Kong has entered a new era, the Chief Executive treasures improvement of the quality of education. Quality education incorporates achievement of the aims of education, development of a quality assurance mechanism through school-based management, cooperation among key players in the school system and self-evaluation by schools. (Quality School Education, Education Commission Report No. 7, September 1997). The SAR government has injected $5 billion to establish a quality education development fund as a quality incentive to encourage quality school education. The major purpose is to encourage innovation, competition, self-motivated reform and school-based management in primary and secondary schools. Although the effectiveness of a variety of innovative programmes is subject to review and evaluation, flexibility in the use of funding to improve quality of schools is encouraging.

5. A Dedicated and Committed Teaching Profession

Quality education also includes the establishment of a committed teaching profession, respected and supported by the community (Education Commission Report No. 5 - Teaching Profession; Education Commission Report No. 7 - Quality Education). The new Director of the Hong Kong Institute of Education, Professor Ruth Hayhoe has stated that commitment
on several public occasions (Hayhoe, September 1997; November 1997). A General Teaching Council, a professional body for teachers, will be set up within a couple of years. In fact, the tenth day of September each year is declared as: Teacher Day. To support quality teaching, it is encouraging to learn that more than 800 clerical staff will be provided to relieve teachers’ burden of clerical work. By year 2001, 35% of all primary teaching posts are graduate posts and all new teachers should be graduates. The number of whole-day schools could be increased to 60% by the year 2002 (Policy Address, 9 October 1997).

6. Improvement of the Foundation Education

In congruence with the promotion of quality education, the Report on Review of 9-year Compulsory Education (March 1997) recommended that compulsory education which was introduced since 1978 is necessary and is to be continued. Better future education should gear towards enhancement of professional development of school heads, senior teachers and teachers; improvement of school facilities, information technology and resources on education and promotion of school-based educational research. It is encouraging to learn that the examination system which stresses academic performance rather than extra-curricular activities and other potentials of the children is subject to review (Policy Address, 9 October 1997).

III. SOCIAL CHANGES AND EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Rapid political changes lead to rapid social changes which in turn affect the education system.

1. Social Problems

As the gap between the rich and poor becomes more obvious in the rapid changing society, many social and family problems arise. Some of these problems include youth crimes (4165 cases of assault in 1996, 833 cases of rape and indecent assaults from police records - Ming Pao Daily, 23 May 1997), hurting others or cutting oneself (Ming Pao Daily, 5 May 1997). Other problems include suicide or attempted suicide, pressure from study and work, relationship problems with family and friends, broken families, single parenthood, child abuse, unemployment and so forth. Hence, there is the need for more guidance programmes catering for the non-academic needs of students (Education Commission Report No. 4; Suggested guides on guidance work in secondary schools, 1986).

Political changes also led to the influx of more new immigrants from China. During the transition period when Hong Kong was to revert to China, there was a rapid increase in illegal migrants, such as pregnant mothers and children whose single parent is in Hong Kong. A quota system for Chinese migrants is now implemented to alleviate the problem, but they must be repatriated to China if they arrive in Hong Kong illegally. The case of forced repatriation of Chung Yuk Lam, a primary school girl, has caused much concerns and frustrations to the society. It is estimated that there are still about 30,000 to 130,000 children in China and their parents are in Hong Kong. Eventually, most of them will come to Hong Kong and compete for local resources in housing, medicine and education (Ming Pao Daily, 12 May 1997; Hong Kong Economic daily, 14 June 1997). The provision of alternative education for the new arrivals in schools is an impending and controversial issue. The SAR government has already allocated some funding for some adjustment programmes for migrant children in schools and youth centres.
2. Individual Difference

Due to political and social reforms, it is necessary to modify school curricula to accommodate the needs of students in general and deprived students in particular. More rooms are required to cater for individual differences. The introduction of the Target Oriented Curriculum (TOC) in the primary schools is a forward and innovative step to remedy some problem situations, though its effectiveness is still subject to debate. Other than the core curriculum, it is essential to introduce cross-curricular subjects for the personal and social development of the students so that their talent and potential can be developed to a fuller extent. Furthermore, it is important to show care, concerns and support for the students as individuals.

3. Ineffective Cross-curricular Subjects

There was already an urge towards implementation of more interesting curricula and guidance programmes such as civic education, sex education and moral education in the Education Commission Report No. 4 in 1990. As students spend about 60% of the time or more in the core curriculum such as languages, mathematics and science, little time is left for students to take cross-curricular subjects which address their whole personal development. Coupled with unclear curriculum focus and intent (Leung, 1996) and the lack of support from schools, it is difficult to implement the cross-curricular subjects effectively.

IV. CHANGE IN THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM

The change of sovereignty influences the school curriculum in two ways. Firstly, it results in the introduction of new school subjects such as Government and Public Affairs 1988; the modification of HKCEE History syllabus with a more politicized historical perspective and the inclusion of new topic such as the system of new government in the Economic and Public Affairs syllabus. Secondly, it prepares students to become more citizens of PRC, the mother land rather than autonomous Hong Kong citizens. Topics of identifications of Chinese culture are included in the 1985 Civic Education guidelines and the S1-2 Social Studies syllabus (Moris, 1996). However, owing to the change of education policy, language education in the core curriculum is mostly affected. Other subjects in the cross-curricular areas, such as civic education, moral education and sex education will also need modifications.

1. Language Education

With the shift to use Chinese as the first language and medium of instruction, most students can now use their mother tongue to learn most subjects in schools. Students will develop bi-literacy and tri-lingualism. Putonghua will become part of the curriculum next year. Strategies for improving confidence and competence in the use of Chinese and English language are laid down in the Education Commission Report No. 6 (1995). Most Anglo-Chinese schools use textbooks and examinations in English and verbal classroom communication in Cantonese. To keep Hong Kong up in the international frontier with English language proficiency, a new Native-speaking English Teachers Scheme for secondary schools is being introduced. At the same time, both the new teachers and in-service teachers have to meet certain language standards. The Hong Kong Institute of Education has established a Centre of Language Teaching for training and retraining language teachers.
2. Civic Education

The 1997 issue and sovereignty rights have direct impacts on civic or political education. Basically, the people of Hong Kong are apolitical. The colonial government through Curriculum Development Committee has exerted strong influence on the development of the curriculum and curriculum guidelines in the past (Morris, 1994; 1996). Civic education has never been important in Hong Kong and teachers seldom discussed politics in the classroom. Now, through the 1996 Civic Education Guidelines, teachers are encouraged to cultivate in students a sense of identity and political harmony in the community and prepare them to become "rational, active and responsible citizens in facing the challenges" ahead (Guidelines on Civic Education’s, 1985; 1996). However, there is still a long way to go in promoting political education in Hong Kong owing to various historical, social, cultural and political factors. Critical thinking, wise decision making and independent judgment are often listed but seldom encouraged in schools (Leung and Lau, 1996; Leung, 1997).

3. Moral Education

With the introduction of 9-year compulsory education, there is a rise in the number of students with mixed abilities and family background. With Hong Kong merging with China, there are more working parents whose workplaces are in different parts of China. It is common to have single parent families, deprived families and families where both parents are working. Hence, there is an increase in juvenile delinquency in schools. As a reactive measure to the changing social phenomenon, the Education Department has introduced a series of curriculum guidelines including moral education guidelines. The aim of the Moral Education Guidelines (1981) developed a decade ago was to cultivate students’ moral attitudes and social values through the development of reflective or critical thinking through a permeated approach across subjects.

Recently, the Chief Executive has re-emphasized the moral and ethical components in the aims of education, in the belief that values education can help students make their own judgments. However, little guidance has been given at the school level for the successful implementation of the guidelines.

4. Sex Education

Just as the society is deeply divided over moral and social issues, students may be curious about human sexuality. Some of them influenced by media may have some misconception about sex. The Sex Education Guidelines (1986 & 1997) aim to educate students so that they can experience personal fulfillment, well being and enjoyment through a growing awareness of their sexual identity and a developing regard for interpersonal responsibility. This can be introduced through a permeated approach in the formal and informal curriculum.

5. Impact on Cross-curricular Subjects

Owing to political and social changes, the 1980s saw waves of official guidelines published by the government as education policy reports. A close study of the guidelines in this decade shows that they are rudimentary and lacking directions (Leung, 1996; Luk, 1997). Although the aims of the cross-curricular guidelines on Moral (1981), Civic (1996), Sex (1997), Guidance Work (1986), Whole School Approach (1995) and Environmental Education (1992) are worthwhile in the changing era, the implementation of the guidelines at the policy level, school level and classroom level has encountered much difficulty, in particular when they are not incorporated in the formal curriculum for assessment and therefore misinterpreted as being unimportant.
V. IMPLEMENTATION OF PERSONAL AND SOCIAL EDUCATION IN THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

If innovation and changes are to occur in the quality education era, it is necessary to take a fresh look at political and social issues and school-based problems, work with teachers and parents and understand the students in our school system under the purview of the Basic Law. Traditional curricula are no longer adequate for a rapidly changing society and modification of the curriculum will be required.

Affective education for development of the whole person such as guidance programmes, personal and social education is gaining the attention of humanity workers particularly when the society of Hong Kong is undergoing dramatic political and social changes. The characteristics of a typical personal and social education (PSE) programme (Best, Lang, Lodge & Watkin, 1995, Luk, 1997) are as follows:

1. The aim of PSE matches with the aim of education (School Education in Hong Kong: A Statement of Aims, 1993) which stipulates "the development of the full potential of every individual child... so that our students become independent-minded and socially aware adults, equipped with the knowledge, skills and attitudes which help them to lead a full life as individuals and play a positive role in the life of the community".

2. It also matches with the aims of education addressed in the Chief Executive’s various public speeches in 1997, where "the all-round development of the child covering ethics, the intellect, the physique, social skills and aesthetics" is highlighted.

3. PSE is defined as the promotion of personal and social development through the whole curriculum experience and whole school experience. It includes all kinds of students’ support and guidance, students’ spiritual and social development, linkage with parents, liaison with other schools, class attendance and student disciplines (Watkins, 1995, Luk, 1997).

4. Similar to the cross-curricular guidelines: Civic Education Guidelines, Sex Education guidelines, Moral Education, Guidelines and Environmental Guidelines, the PSE takes a broader view to helping students in both the academic and non-academic areas. Hence, it encompasses other independent cross-curricular subjects. (Refer to the conceptual framework of the PSE in Appendix 2.)

5. Given the conceptual framework, the PSE is now more global, more dynamic, more cohesive, more integrative and more meaningful in helping students develop their full potentials.

6. Similar to other cross-curricular guidelines, it is person-centred, preventive and proactive, developmental and lifelong, experiential and responsible, and facilitates growth for the future.

7. It can be implemented through formal curriculum, integrated cross-curriculum, informal curriculum, or hidden curriculum.

8. In order to have a whole school approach to take place effectively, the whole school must decide on the common goals for PSE, such as to promote self-esteem, sense of responsibility, rationality, empathy and cooperation.

9. The school ethos of care, concerns, genuineness, respect, openness, fairness and understanding are indispensable in promoting PSE.

10. In teacher education, it is essential to prepare student teachers who are competent in PSE as class or form teachers. They must have personal qualities that include understanding of developmental needs of their students, open and non-judgmental minds, and skills for helping students as responsible and self-actualized persons.
As Morris (1996) put it, success in implementation of a curriculum depends on people. It is bound to fail if teachers are just given another curriculum guideline. To this effect, the success of the PSE depends on active involvement of curriculum designers, policy makers or key players, heads of schools, teachers, students and parents. It has to be school-based, problem-solving and understood by the teachers and students concerned.

VI. AREAS FOR RESEARCH IN NEW TIMES

Political, economic and social changes influence our school system and policy and our education system in turn reflects such changes (Sweeting, Postiglione and Lee, 1995; Postiglione, 1992). New curricula are added and old ones are revised or modified. The more impending ones related to the political changes are, to name but a few, *inter alia*:

- language education in Chinese including Putunghwa and Cantonese and English for both local students and new migrants;
- teacher education and enhancement of foundation education;
- affective education related to personal and social education, civic education, moral education and sex education;
- technical and computer education;
- early childhood education;
- special education for the handicapped and deprived; and
- new migrant programmes particularly for those from mainland China.

As the arrival of new immigrants from China is one of the current issues that warrants our immediate attention in this changing political era, the SAR government has already developed contingency plans to help new migrants in society and students in schools. To effect curriculum planning, one of the interesting topics for education researchers is to look into the new Chinese migrant problems in schools and find out whether the school programmes and the school system have met the needs of the students during the political, social and economical changes (*Appendix 3*). Curriculum changes particularly related to personal and social education for teachers with a view to preparing for the whole personal development of the students open vast areas for exploration in the new era.

VII. CONCLUSION

Political, economic and social changes affect education policy and the education system. As there are significant political changes during the handover of sovereignty in Hong Kong, traditional curricula are no longer adequate to serve their purposes. The Chief Executive of SAR in his policy paper gave vision to the future of education. Therefore, new curricula have to be added and old ones are modified with wider or more specific scopes for the development of the full potential of the students. Moreover, affective education such as personal and social education, guidance and counselling, moral education and sex education is gaining its momentum particularly when Hong Kong is undergoing these dramatic changes. It is timely for us to modify the curricula for the needs of society and potential development of students. It is also interesting for education researchers to look into the curricular change, particularly the personal and social education programmes developed in the new era.
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