

YEU07421

Workload and Psychological Wellbeing of Hong Kong Teachers

Alexander Seeshing Yeung

and

Winnie Puiling Liu

*Centre for Educational Research
University of Western Sydney, NSW, Australia*

Paper presented at the Australian Association for Research in Education, Fremantle, November 2007. Enquiries concerning this paper should be directed to Alexander Yeung, Centre for Educational Research, University of Western Sydney, Locked Bag 1797, Penrith South DC NSW 1797 or via email to a.yeung@uws.edu.au

Abstract

Teacher education programs have mainly focused on pedagogical issues and have often neglected the psychological wellbeing of pre-service and in-service teachers. The fast changes due to recent education reforms have heightened teachers' level of stress. Those teachers who cannot cope with the changes may suffer from psychological illnesses. Even though the government's intent for reform is legitimate, it is important to consider ways to save the ailing profession from the stress arising from the changes. Given support from the government, teacher education can help in the following ways: (1) conduct workshops for personal and interpersonal development, (2) focus on learning, not teaching, (3) reduce unnecessary activities, (4) increase the scope of support, (5) provide lifelong learning opportunities, (6) increase human resource potentials, and (7) cater for teachers' psychological wellbeing. Revenue spent on these measures is worthwhile because it can prevent wastage of human resources.

Teacher education programs have often focused on pedagogical issues and emphasized a balance between theory and practice and the integration of both (Deng, 2004; Stones, 1987). However, there has been much less discussion as to what we should do to enable teachers to cope with the vast changing practices in schools. In recent years of education reform when previous expectations in terms of teacher roles and performance no longer prevail (Curriculum Development Council, Hong Kong, 2001; UNESCO, 2000), at least some teachers will find it hard to cope with the new expectations and changing values. The fast-paced changes during this time have inevitably brought about vast impacts on the teaching profession. Unless there are

effective measures to assist teachers to cope with the changing requirements, the anxiety and stress arising from the abrupt changes could lead to a demotivated profession. This paper examines the psychological impacts of changes on teachers in a Hong Kong context. We hope to be able to make some useful recommendations for teacher education to remedy the situation and save the profession.

What Teacher Education is Doing

It is generally agreed that highly qualified teachers could bring about high student achievement. Hence, teacher education has the goal of developing individuals into qualified teachers who are competent and can work well with students. However, there is difficulty in coming to an agreement on the essential characteristics of teachers who create value-added learning and a consensus about the ways in which professional development may foster and develop those critical teacher characteristics (Lasley, Siedentop, & Yinger, 2006). In the past when the emphasis was placed mainly on the delivery of knowledge and skills, the major function of teacher education may be limited to the development of teachers' academic proficiency. Today, for a teacher to perform to the satisfaction of societal expectations, being academically strong may no longer suffice.

Since the Hong Kong Government's early Education Commission Reports in the 1980s (e.g., Education Commission, Hong Kong, 1984), reforms in the Hong Kong education sector has been vigorous. New initiatives included a long list of items such as target-oriented curriculum school management initiative, school-based management, the development of a new general studies curriculum, the merging of special education with the main stream, the wide-spread introduction of a Putonghua (the official language in mainland China) curriculum after the handover of the British colony back to China in 1997, the use of information technology techniques in instruction, the mandatory submission of school development plans, the formal implementation of staff appraisal procedures in each school, the benchmarking of language teachers' proficiency, an overhaul of the senior secondary curriculum, etc. (Curriculum Development Council, Hong Kong, 2001; Curriculum Development Institute, Hong Kong, 1999; Education Commission, Hong Kong, 2002). Hence teacher education today has to attend to a much wider range of knowledge and skills that were not included in the curriculum in the past. There are also matters in the school that have not been covered in teacher education programs, and they could render the teachers incapable of handling changing situations, and perhaps also their own psychological adaptations to such changes.

A major change that teachers experience today is the teacher's role. Today, a teacher often serves not only as a person who delivers knowledge and skills, a facilitator of learning, and a model of behaviour but also as an agent of change and a researcher in the classroom. The role of the teacher is continually undergoing rapid changes; and it is often the clash of roles that constitutes an important source of

psychological distress (Bredemeier, 1979; Chan, 2002b). For example, to serve as an effective agent of change, teachers today are often expected to make use of action research to continually improve their teaching (Keating, Diaz-Greenberg, Rosario, & Thousand, 1998). Nevertheless, most in-service teachers have not received any training in action research. Without adequate training in this aspect, the introduction of action research in the classroom has probably introduced a tremendous amount of stress. Furthermore, the teacher needs to continually undergo evaluations from peers and external parties as well as self-evaluation of performance. Hence, for both pre-service teachers under training and for experienced teachers, sources of stress that are common to both include adapting to new roles and handling student diversity problems, while some sources of stress may be perceived as more serious by teachers with less experience (e.g., dealing with complicated student matters) but some other sources may be perceived as detrimental by more experienced teachers (e.g., use of technology). Hence, the rapid changes in recent years in their roles can be very stressful. Perhaps teacher education could contribute more to the alleviation of some of the stress teachers are faced with.

Psychological Wellbeing

Despite high stress levels, there is no clear evidence showing that teachers in Hong Kong are psychologically unwell. Neither is there any evidence showing that the current education reform in Hong Kong, which started in the year 2000 (Curriculum Development Council, Hong Kong, 2000) has had any detrimental impact on teachers' psychological wellbeing. However, as a consequence of two cases of teacher suicide within four days in the month of January 2006 followed by the denial of one of the highest ranking government officials of the association between the death and stress in teaching, the teachers in Hong Kong had strong reactions. Led by the Professional Teachers' Union (PTU), around 10,000 teachers in Hong Kong joined a campaign and demonstrated in the streets of Hong Kong on January 22, 2006 to express their grievances and protest against the seemingly unreasonable expectations of the Education and Manpower Bureau, the highest government authority in the education of Hong Kong (PTU News, 2006). Even though it would be unreasonable to impose an association between the cases of suicide and education reform, the response from the government has unfortunately delivered an unwelcomed message, even though unintentionally, that all teachers shall meet the official requirements of reform, no matter what.

As a matter of fact, any case of suicide is likely to be due to a bunch of various factors and should not be attributed solely to the single factor of education reform. Since teachers tend to have enormous influences on students' values, attitudes, and behaviours, it would be terrifying for teachers to even think of suicide. Fortunately, teachers tend to be positive toward human life, and in a study using a sample of 299 Chinese teachers in Hong Kong, Chan (2002a) has found a general agreement among

the teachers that such self-destructive behaviour is unacceptable. However, despite generally positive attitudes of teachers, five cases of teacher suicide were reported in the year 1994-1995 in Hong Kong (Leung, 1994). It seems that these teachers were psychologically ill even though there was no evidence of such kind of illness as a general phenomenon.

Although suicide may involve a complexity of psychological issues, there was at least evidence that people with low self-esteem, a depressed mood and perceptions of failure may be at an increased risk of suicidal thoughts and behaviours (Richardson, Bergen, Martin, Roeger, & Allison, 2005). Triggered by certain events, these thoughts may turn into action. Of the five cases of teacher suicide in 1994 in Hong Kong, three were preceded by suicides of several students (Leung, 1994). Hence sadly, certain events may trigger such an action. However, it would be mysterious to outsiders as to how teachers could establish a low self-esteem, a depressed mood, and perceptions of failure when they are in charge of their own work most of the time.

There may be various reasons for a teacher to feel stressed. Researchers have identified various stressors that may affect the psychological wellbeing of teachers (Chan, 2003; Hui & Chan, 1996; Tang, Au, Schwarzer, & Schmitz, 2001; Tang & Yeung, 1999). Of these stressors, workload is an important one that may lead to burnout (Tang & Yeung, 1999). Although some researchers may argue that social status is one of the most important factors for psychological wellbeing (Bredemeier, 1979), it seems that excessive workload could impose an undue level of stress that is more serious than any other stressor. In support of this line of argument, Yip (1998) found that responsibility and workload in married life, rather than low social status, are likely reasons for female suicide in Hong Kong. To teachers in Hong Kong, workload and time pressure were perceived to be the most stressful aspects of work (Hui & Chan, 1996). Hence, workload is probably one of the most devastating factors that lead to teacher stress and burnout (Mykletun, 1984; Tang & Yeung, 1999). Hence in the present study in which we interviewed teachers from primary schools, we would expect them to emphasize the issue of workload as a result of recent changes.

Stress Due to Workload and Change

Teacher stress may develop partly due to the workload, which has become unmanageable and partly due to changes which the individual has no control of. Sometimes, excessive workload is derived from change. In the recent decade of education reform worldwide, change is inevitable (Curriculum Development Council, Hong Kong, 2001; UNESCO, 2000). Goals of previous school systems are no longer valid, and the roles of schools and teachers need to change accordingly. Such changes can have strong impacts on teachers. Research has shown that change in the work environment and work requirements may influence the psychological wellbeing of workers. For example, in a study with secondary school teachers in Hong Kong, Freidel and Dalbert (2003) found that the transfer to another type of school results in

a decreased job adjustment and a shattered wellbeing of the teachers. Even in an unchanged physical setting, a change in job nature and requirements could bring detrimental effects to the workers.

In a study on work restructuring in Hong Kong with a sample of 1,176 workers from different fields, work restructuring was found to reduce workers' job performance and attendance at training (Cheung, 2005). In another study, Freidel and Dalbert (2003) suggest that when teachers are transferred from one school to another, they tend to feel less satisfied with their job, feel more overburdened by their jobs, and show more depressive symptoms. It is therefore not surprising that teachers dislike being placed in an uncomfortable situation of uncertainty and continual change that are out of their control. Consistent with this contention, in a study exploring the ways in which teachers reposition themselves in the face of rapid and extensive changes in the field of education, Moore, Edwards, Halpin, and George (2002) found that some teachers view such changes with ambivalence or hostility.

In face of changes, some teachers may use coping strategies (Admiraal, Korthagen, & Wubbels, 2000). In a study with 3,466 teachers in Nigeria, teachers were found to console themselves with the fact that work is not everything and this thinking tended to make them feel less stressed. In fact, many teachers were found to prefer keeping away from any situation that could cause stress to them (Arikewuyo, 2004). Thus, teachers may choose to face the stressful situation and try to employ effective strategies to get things done, or to avoid direct contact with such problems. In essence, teachers may have their individual ways to cope with reform. In a study in Hong Kong secondary schools, Cheung (2005) found that teachers may have different understandings of their careers and perhaps different interpretations of their identity and roles. In the case of teachers who have a weak personality, their choice may be to quit the profession or to try to survive until their fate comes for them to be laid off. For those who have a stronger personality, they may try to adapt themselves to the new situations and requirements and change their ways to meet new needs.

Naturally, only those teachers who are strong enough to go on will remain in the profession. These resilient teachers may act from a set of values that guides their professional decision-making (Patterson, Collins, & Abbott, 2004). However, it is not only that their values have kept them in the profession, but it is also their values that have subjected them to cope until they reach a break point. Studies have shown that teachers suffer more than other professional groups from the occupational lack of motivation (de Jesus, & Lens, 2005). Probably as a consequence of official expectations of compliance to strict requirements coupled with a lowered sense of status and value in the profession, a sense of learned helplessness in the years of reform is developing fast, leading to the lack of motivation in the teaching profession (de Jesus, & Lens, 2005).

In the present study, we examined the psychological impacts of changes on

teachers and discuss the situation of the teaching profession in a Hong Kong context. We asked primary school teachers about their daily work in the school and hope to be able to make some useful suggestions for teacher education institutes to help them face the world of reforms.

Method

In the present study, we explored some of the possible factors that may have made the teacher's life stressful. The investigation was done through interviews with teachers with a focus on the things they did daily and the special events that they found most taxing. Then from the information they provided, we examined the association between the stressful events and their psychological status.

Participants. From a random selection from 20 schools, a total of 10 teachers who consented to participate were interviewed. They were experienced teachers who have taught various levels in the primary school. They came from 10 schools from different districts of Hong Kong. At the time of the interview, they were teaching at least a language subject and more than one curriculum area, ranging from 2 subjects to 4 subjects, at various levels in their schools. Although the small sample may not be representative of the teacher population, the information obtained from them would help us understand the general situation in Hong Kong primary schools.

Procedure. The teachers were interviewed individually for about 45 min each. The interviews were conducted from March to June when the major examinations and special events were not so frequent as at the beginning or near the end of the school year. Hopefully, the choice of time for the interviews could avoid any inflated estimates of stress and grievances expressed by the interviewees. The teachers were informed that the purpose of the interview was to investigate their stressful experiences, if any, and how teacher education institutions can be of help to them. The interview was semi-structured. The teachers were asked to name some of the things they did in the school that they found stressful. For each response from them, they were asked to provide evidence and actual figures wherever possible (e.g., number of students, classes, minutes of work). Then in a less structured manner, they were encouraged to voice out their feelings, identify the most important stressors, and to suggest ways to improve the situation. We then asked them to provide any suggestion as to what teacher education could do to reduce their work stress. To ensure that we had interpreted the information obtained from the teachers correctly, about 3 months later, we showed them the findings and asked whether they were accurate. The data were analysed using a content-analysis approach. The notes were coded and analysed by hand. Possible patterns were searched and emergent coding was used to reveal the teachers' perceptions of stress-related themes.

Results and Discussion

The Workload

Not surprisingly, although the interviewer avoided it, all interviewees mentioned the cases of suicide and expressed their sad feelings about the happenings. But also unanimously, they complained about the volume of workload they and their colleagues were experiencing in the last few years. Although they did not directly relate the suicidal cases to workload, they heatedly accused the education authority of introducing a range of new tasks on top of their existing workload, some of which they found unnecessary and dispensable.

The teachers were asked to give examples and provide actual amounts of work they did. The following reports the figures reported by most of the teachers interviewed (from at least three interviewees for each item discussed below). According to the teachers, on an average day in the primary school, a teacher can teach up to eight 35-min lessons. When asked to provide a more conservative estimate of an average teacher's daily workload, the teachers mostly considered a day of only six lessons, adding up to a total of 3.5 hours. For each lesson taught, there was usually some homework assigned to students. This also means that the teacher would have to mark exercises assigned for six classes on the previous day. Assuming that the teacher was fast enough to mark each book in 1.5 min and assuming an average-sized class of 30 students each (a class can have a maximum of 40 students), the total amount of time spent on marking would be about 4.5 hours (1.5 min x 30 students x 6 classes).

As the interviewees pointed out, of course there were times when the marking task was less heavy, but it was an interesting phenomenon in Hong Kong that parents asked for more homework for their children than the amount judged to be sufficient by the teacher. From the interviewees' responses, it seemed that parents of students in more prestigious schools expected even more homework than those from average-ability schools. Furthermore, as one of the teachers commented, "most parents would expect us to mark their kid's work with extreme care and detail. They will become cranky if they find any part of their kid's work unmarked." This may add a lot of stress to the teachers.

Like most primary school teachers, each of the interviewees had a class to take care of. Every morning, the class teacher took up a 30-min session in which class matters were handled. These included any announcements, collection of exercise books and fees if any, and other routine matters. For four of five days in a week, the teacher looked after the students during lunch time (30 min each time). This would be an average of 24 min per day. For the safety of students, the teacher needed to be on duty each week in the playground or in the corridor once for about 1 hour (i.e., an average of 12 min per day). In most schools, the teachers would take turns to supervise the students after school until they had left or were taken home by their parents. This would take an average of about 10 min per day. All these added up to 9 hours 16 minutes for an average day (3.5 hours for lessons + 4.5 hours for marking +

30 min for class matters + 24 min lunch duty + 12 min duty + 10 min after-school supervision), if the teacher was lucky. On an unlucky day when the teacher had to counsel students who had academic or disciplinary problems, which could take up to an hour, or had to meet with a student's parent, the whole day's work could be over 10 hours non-stop.

With this heavy workload, it is difficult for the teachers to have a healthy family life. As reported by a teacher, "This is ridiculous. We as teachers encourage parents to spend more time with their children but what about us? We have no time to take care of our own kids." Ironically, two teachers reported that their children tended to develop behavioural problems due to a lack of parental care, and their teachers, in turn, had to deal with their problems.

According to the interviewees, the above situation is but a conservative estimate. The estimate was based on the assumption that there were few student problems in that particular class or that particular school. In Hong Kong, teachers are found to have a greater workload if they need to address the needs of more troubled students, which may also increase their stress level (Leung, 1994). In some schools with a high proportion of migrants and children from families of lower socio-economic status, a class teacher may have a countless number of troubled cases to deal with. Even if you have a good class of well-behaved students, the large class size could be a source of stress. Burnout has been found to be associated with numbers of students taught, time invested in various activities, and numerous student evaluations (Lackritz, 2004). For student evaluation, in many schools, the amount of assessment is overwhelming. Some schools have three tests and three examinations of a summative kind in a year and dictation once every fortnight. In addition to this, it is also hard to imagine how teachers and students can cope with the numerous activities they are involved in each week (e.g., sports, math competition, art classes, music and choir practices, religious activities, etc). As expected, the interviewees pointed out that whereas inexperienced teachers found it difficult to handle a diversity of student problems, more experienced teachers found it physically and mentally exhausting having to work long hours every day.

In the analysis, we believed we had made a reasonably good estimate on the basis of the teachers' reports. However, when we revealed the above estimate to the teachers again about 3 months later, they all disapproved it. According to them, the estimate above is nowhere near the reality in most schools because the estimate has not included extra-curricular activities, remedial classes, extra tutorials, meetings (staff meetings, curriculum preparation meetings, post-exam meetings, subject meetings, meetings for special events), recruitment of new students, promotion of the school to the community, sharing of teaching experiences within and beyond school, display of students' work, preparation for and marking of tests and exams, management of student records and teaching schedules, special events such as sports

day, visits, prize-giving, speech day, parents' night, open day, outings, and inter-school competitions on top of the routine lesson preparation and loads of paperwork. Furthermore, each teacher is required to actively engage in continuing professional development courses for at least 150 hours for 3 years in order to qualify for continual employment (Education and Manpower Bureau, 2006), and these courses are taken after office hours. Nevertheless, their comments have ascertained that our estimate based on their reported events was reasonable although conservative. In view of this workload, Hong Kong teachers are probably the busiest among all teachers over the world. It is not surprising for teachers in Hong Kong to experience stress and burnout.

Difficulty in Coping with Change

When asked about the ways they coped with the situation, the teachers did not seem to be able to indicate a good solution. All of them said that all they could do was work harder. When asked whether they had considered rearranging their tasks and better time management, their responses varied but, interestingly, the essence was the same—"A delay in any task is but lengthening the pain", as an interviewee put it. When asked whether they would take a course on stress management (actually three of them did), they unanimously rejected the idea because it would mean having to squeeze extra hours to attend such courses and adding more stress to themselves instead.

In addition to the problem of a lack of effective coping strategies in a stressful workplace, the socio-psychological aspect of teachers has long been neglected too. According to an interviewee, "We are so busy we don't have time to talk to each other. The heavy workload in the school has made it impossible for us to maintain a harmonious relationship among ourselves. Really I haven't talked to my colleague sitting next to me for almost a week now, other than saying hello in the morning." For those schools where there is a possibility of reduction in the number classes due to a declining birth rate in that district, there may even be hostile competitions among colleagues for limited employment opportunities. Furthermore, they believed that the social status of teachers is hopelessly deteriorating. When they entered the profession years ago, they had an expectation of being respected by students and their parents and a desire for professional contributions to the community, which require judgment and autonomy. However, according to one of the interviewees, "Teachers listen to the Principal and the Principal listens to parents, and if anything goes wrong, it is the teacher who is at fault, not the students." She implied that the education system has changed to the extent that teachers now have the least say in what they ought to do. Whereas half of the interviewees revealed that they could do nothing but tolerate with anything imposed on them, half of them who were much more experienced were looking forward to early retirement. The younger ones also revealed that they had considered quitting teaching and taking up some other jobs, but found the idea of

such a drastic change even more terrifying.

When asked to sum up what they thought was the worst stressor among all, the interviewees unanimously named teaching load as the worst. The finding is consistent with previous research (e.g., Hui & Chan, 1996; Mykletun, 1984; Tang & Yeung, 1999), and is therefore not surprising. However, follow-up questions about what they meant by teaching load revealed that there were conflicting perceptions regarding their overall workload. On the one hand, they accepted the need for retraining and professional development, but they found it hard to find time to attend the courses. On the other hand, there were problems in trying to keep a balance between professional development and personal and family commitments. They also found that while the professional development courses mostly targeted improvement in teaching so that they would teach their students better, there were few chances that they could take courses that focused on their own personal wellbeing. Judging from the fact that the interviewees perceived the importance of attending relevant courses in order to cope with the reform, we believe that they accepted the need for change and were trying to adapt themselves to it. However, the perception of a heavy teaching load is an interesting issue given the fact that the number of lessons per week has not really increased drastically in the last few years. The data implied that whereas teaching load has remained the most salient stressor among other stress sources (including student behavioural problems, overloaded curriculum contents, non-teaching duties, parent expectations, and lack of recognition, etc. mentioned by the interviewees), they cannot afford to place the newly imposed burdens second on their priority list, and yet some of the required tasks may not be essential and urgent. That is perhaps why they have found the workload overwhelming. As one of the more optimistic interviewees put it, "I know I can do it, but just give me time." In essence, the interviewees found it difficult to cope with the newly added duties and requirements as a result of the rapid change.

What Teacher Education Can Do

The interviewees were asked to suggest ways to reduce their work stress. According to the interviewees, the teacher profession is in an urgent need for measures to reduce stress levels and prevent burnout and wastage of human resources. Based on the suggestions of the interviewees and in view of the various factors discussed above, it seems that there is a range of things teacher education can do:

1. *Conduct workshops for personal and interpersonal development.* There exist various kinds of stress management workshops but it is unclear how effective such workshops are for reducing teacher stress. For example, in response to the cases of teacher suicide in Hong Kong in 1994-1995, Leung (1994) argued that interventions and workshops after these happenings were driven by politics rather than by science because there was a lack of empirical support for such interventions. To the benefit of teachers, the focus of such workshops should be placed not only on personal mental

health but also on collegial support. Personal development programs can prepare for new teachers to face stressful situations, and such programs should increase their social problem-solving skills (Montgomery, 2003). For interpersonal programs, the focus should be on how to work together with other teachers as a team. Particularly for inexperienced teachers, peer support in the first few years of their career does make a big difference (Hsu, 2005). Advice from and sharing with more experienced teachers would be particularly helpful. Nevertheless, the provision of such programs may have resource implications. Whereas teacher education institutions can provide a suitable curriculum and expertise to achieve the goals, the government should provide financial support to release teachers to attend workshops, training programs and sharing sessions. As one interviewee commented, “Asking teachers to attend training without providing them with relief support is unfair; it is imposing more work and stress.”

2. *Focus on learning, not teaching.* Teacher education should help teachers adapt to new environments and meet new requirements in an effective and efficient way. Since the roles of the teacher are changing and clash of roles is likely to be an important source of psychological distress (Bredemeier, 1979), teacher education programs should attempt to enhance teachers’ ability to cope with the tension and stress they are subjected to in the classroom where role conflicts may occur (Dillon, 1978). When the focus is on learning and not teaching, then the number of tests and exams will be reduced, and even if not reduced, the emphasis will be placed on learning (i.e., the process) rather than the marks and grades (i.e., the product). Furthermore, a lot of unnecessary work (e.g., marking every trivial mistake made in homework, attending meetings which can be replaced by a memo or a note) will no longer be required. This will ultimately reduce teachers’ workload and also their stress. This shift in emphasis should be strongly encouraged by the government. In fact, the education authority of the government should play an active role in facilitating such a shift at the school level.

3. *Reduce unnecessary activities.* “Education reforms have added new tasks but have never taken away any old things and that’s why we are overloaded,” an interviewee remarked. Whatever attempt to reduce stress may have trivial effects (Admiraal, Korthagen, & Wubbels, 2000) and after all, it is probably the reduction of workload that will really help. Teacher education can provide school-based support to help teachers reassess and readjust their curriculum. Presently, most schools are trying to teach too much and test too much. One of the interviewees gave an example of how workload may be reduced in a practical way, “We’ve been testing too much. We can reduce the number of tests and exams and teach more. We can also cut some unnecessary units. Take one module of year 2 English as an example. There are six units and each has nine pages. In a bright class I can cover it all in six or seven lessons, but in a weak class, it may take up to 12 lessons or more.” In addition to the

book, there are usually two workbooks which will take at least one lesson to complete if the students are bright. On top of this, there are also extra worksheets for students to finish and having the students to complete them may take another lesson. The total time for various language activities including speaking, listening, writing, and diction takes no less than an equivalent of four lessons. Thus, in reality, covering every bit of the unit within a normal schedule (usually 13 lessons) is impossible without sacrificing those students who cannot catch up with the speedy pace of delivery by the teacher. To ease the situation, academics from teacher education institutions can work with the teachers as partners on curriculum tailoring to suit the abilities and needs of the students. By cutting down the scope of the curriculum and unnecessary work, students will be expected to learn better and teachers will teach with more effectiveness and less stress.

4. *Increase the scope of support.* A range of support from various sources may help in the reduction of teacher workload and stress. For example, by employing at least one more student counsellor in the school, the time-consuming duty of teachers in counselling students and meeting with their parents can be taken up by experts who have good experience in handling student misbehaviours. Since handling student problems tends to lead to a greater workload and greater stress (Leung, 1994), an additional expert in student guidance and counselling should be expected to save the teachers' energy for more productive tasks. Teacher education should provide training that integrates psychological theories and practices in the school for the counsellors to operate effectively in the school. Teacher education institutions can also provide schools with consultancies to help them improve in teaching and learning.

5. *Provide lifelong in-service education of teachers (INSET).* INSET has been acknowledged to be an increasingly important focus in the era of education reform (Centre for Education Research and Innovation, 1998; Department for Education and Employment, 2001; Department of Education and Science, 1990). Currently, teachers in Hong Kong need to be active in attending workshops and training for 150 hours' INSET programs for every 3 years so as to secure their employment. Teacher education institutions should continue to provide a wide range of personal and professional development programs to suit different needs of teachers. Nevertheless, if INSET is required by the education authority, the government should bear the responsibility of providing financial support. The budget for the lifelong education of teachers is worthwhile because it will ultimately save the revenue as a result of wastage of human resources due to ill health and attrition.

6. *Increase human resource potentials.* Research has indicated that change in the work environment and work requirements could have negative effects on the psychological wellbeing of workers (Cheung, 2005; Freidel & Dalbert, 2003; Moore, Edwards, Halpin, & George, 2002). Education reform is in essence change in both work environment and requirements. No matter what we do to alleviate the stress of

teachers, after all, we should explore measures to actually reduce the workload brought about by new requirements. Whereas additional human resources may not be readily available because of extra financial implications, we may consider ways to maximize potential use of human resources. One possible source of assistance may come from parents, who can be helpful in two ways. First, parents can be trained to assist their own children to learn better while at home. Second, they can be trained to work with teachers in the class. Whereas some parents are already helping schools in special events such as open day and competitions, they can provide further help with reading practice in the classroom and can help teachers take care of the children during lunch and after school. However, even though these are non-teaching duties, they need to be trained, and teacher education institutions should take up this new role of parent education. To this end, financial support will be worthwhile because the spending will be one-off while the benefits will be long-term. After training, parents can work with other teacher aides to reduce the workload of in-serve teachers in the school.

7. *Cater for teachers' psychological wellbeing.* We should make every effort to enhance the psychological wellbeing of teachers. Teacher education programs can help teachers enhance their self-esteem, sense of competence, and sense of commitment to the profession with consideration of individual characteristics and needs. Nevertheless, teacher education can hardly enhance teachers' social status or prevent their sense of failure, which are devastating factors in suicidal cases (Richardson, Bergen, Martin, Roeger, & Allison, 2005). The best way to boost a sense of achievement is open recognition of good work and accomplishments. Like any human being, teachers need recognition, not endless criticism. It is the teachers' values that would guide their professional decision-making (Patterson, Collins, & Abbott, 2004). With a strong sense of the values of their professional contribution to society, teachers will be more willing to contribute even more. Ultimately, it is the value within the teachers, not the value imposed by the authority, which will make them persevere.

In fact, excellence of teaching is publicly recognized in mainland China. Teachers are appraised in terms of their teaching and those who demonstrate effective teaching are eligible for promotion. As a special administrative region of China, Hong Kong should be able to follow suit and promote a strong recognition for teaching performance. Furthermore, although teachers in China do need to adapt to rapid changes like anywhere else in the world, teachers over 45 years of age are encouraged to change at their own pace. This positive view toward reform should be adopted by the special administrative region. Hence, instead of feeling a compelling and coercing demand from the government, the teachers will feel a respect to them and the profession, and change on their own accord for the benefit of their students and society. Let us cherish the excellence of effective teachers and celebrate the

success of effective teaching!

To conclude, education reforms have brought about vast impacts on the teaching profession. What teacher education has done may not be sufficient to prevent teachers from suffering from stress and burnout. As a result, some teachers may be in critical psychological conditions. To assist teachers to face the fast-paced changes and to help them cope with such changes, there are a number of actions teacher education institutions can take. In sum, teacher education may help in the following ways: (1) conduct workshops for personal and interpersonal development, (2) focus on learning, not teaching, (3) reduce unnecessary activities, (4) increase the scope of support, (5) provide lifelong INSET, (6) increase human resource potentials, and (7) cater for teachers' psychological wellbeing. Nevertheless, these provisions cannot be successful without financial support from the government. The government should therefore at least provide support for teachers to undergo training with relief teachers who stand in for them. Above all, it is important to recognize the contribution of teachers and cherish the success of effective teachers and celebrate outstanding outcomes. Let us save the profession from the overloaded work environment!

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