Inclusive Education and Life-long Learning in Hong Kong – Implications for Educational Development

Kwok-wai CHAN and Man-tak LEUNG
The Hong Kong Institute of Education

Paper presented for the ACSA Biennial Conference “Education Futures and New Citizenships” at Manning Clark Centre, Australian National University, Canberra, 29 September – 1 October 2001

Abstract
This paper attempts to discuss two of the educational reformations/changes put forward by the Education Commission and the Curriculum Development Institute of Hong Kong: Inclusive Education and Life-long Learning. Psychological analysis of inclusive education and life-long learning in Hong Kong was attempted with application of relevant theories and reference to cases reported in a local magazine article. The discussion and analysis include clarification of concepts, relating inclusive education, student diversity, life-long learning and the psychological factors involved (e.g. motivation). Implications are drawn with suggestions on the direction of these two educational development.

Background
Like many countries, Hong Kong has faced numerous educational changes and reformations in the last decade. The educational reformations and changes were put forward and implemented by the Education Commission and the Education Department respectively. These reformation changes included the School Management Initiative (SMI, later renamed as School Based Management, SBM), Target-Oriented Curriculum (TOC), Curriculum Integration, School Based Curriculum, Tertiary and Teacher Education, Inclusive Education and Information Technology in Education, etc. While teachers and students are busy in coping with all these changes, the Curriculum Development Committee of the Hong Kong Government Special Administrative Region has recently proposed another educational paper in November, 2000. The paper is meant to deal with the radical changes in the 21st century and seek the public’s comments about the proposed changes. The vision of the paper is “Learn how to learn, life-long and continued education, flexibility in teaching and expand development in curriculum”. The paper was based on the Reform Proposals for the Education System in Hong Kong put forward by the Education Commission of the Hong Kong Government in September, 2000 (Hong
Kong Education Commission, 2000). The main theme and spirit of the paper included to learn how to learn, to expand scope and opportunity of teaching, to look after individual differences and learning needs, and to promote continued life-long learning etc (Curriculum Development Council, 2000). Apparently, the proposal is in line with the educational changes in other countries subsequent to globalization. Nevertheless, the direction of implementation and development of the proposed changes need further clarification, analysis and interpretation.

It happened that the author of this paper has read a local magazine article titled “She lightens the school campus”1. The article was about a blind girl who tried very hard in learning, achieved successfully and was well received in an ordinary secondary school. The article triggered some thoughts of the author on inclusive education and lifelong learning in Hong Kong. Superficially, the two seem to bear no relationship. However, inclusive education and lifelong learning carry some common elements, such as motivation to learn, achievement goal orientation/achievement motivation, persistence, etc. This paper attempts to discuss the two issues: Inclusive Education and Lifelong Learning mentioned in the consultation paper of the Hong Kong Education Commission and the Curriculum Development Committee from the perspectives of Educational Psychology and Sociology, with reference to the cases described in a local magazine. The paper begins with an analysis of the concepts of Inclusive Education and Lifelong Learning, followed by a discussion of how inclusive education and lifelong education are related to individual diversity/differences and other psychological elements involved, such as empathy, motivation and achievement goal orientation. Implications for education development are drawn for the consideration of educators and curriculum or policy decision makers.

Inclusive Education: Conception and Need

Due to the close relationship between inclusive education and children with special educational needs, it is better to have an understanding of “Special educational needs” before touching upon the term “Inclusive education”. The term “Special educational needs” has been widely covered in literature of special education and carries a wide conception and meaning (e.g. Gross, 1995; Hong Kong Board of Education, 1996; Hong Kong Education Commission, 1990; Slavin, 1994; UNESCO, 1995). Apparently, children with special educational needs are often taken as either one of the following categories or mixed categories. These categories include slower

---

learners, children with reading and writing difficulties, children with sensory defects (such as visually handicapped and hearing/auditory handicapped), children with physical disabilities and children who are socially/emotionally maladjusted, which include hyperactive and autistic children. Of course, the aforementioned children have some sorts of special educational needs. Nevertheless, children with special educational needs are not confined to the aforementioned categories, even gifted children have some sorts of special educational needs which may prevent them from satisfactory learning in the normal classroom.

In principle, everyone is born with different potential or ability, which accounts for individual diversity or difference. Howard Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligence (Gardner & Hatch, 1989) suggests a person is born with different kinds of abilities, which may not excel in every aspect. While one may be good at verbal ability, say being fluent in speech and reading, one may not perform equally well with his/her body-kinesthetic intelligence. The latter needs the support and assistance from others for further development, which parallels to what Vygotsky has promoted about the zone of proximal development and scaffolding in his theory (Santrock, 2001; Woolfolk, 1995). Therefore, all children and adolescents may be considered to exhibit some kinds of special educational needs to different extent in their learning (Beveridge, 1999). When we review our past days of learning, we might have encountered some difficulties in learning and in getting along (social interaction) with others even though we might not have been labelled or assessed by our teachers as someone with special educational needs. Usually, children who are identified or considered as children with special educational needs belong to a small group of children in the class. They are being diagnosed and assessed by the educational psychologist from the Education Department and school teachers, based on their obviously different behaviour and achievement. The criteria of diagnosis and assessment would vary according to the aims and objectives of special education, the conceptions about special educational needs, the expectations of teachers and school children on academic achievement, as well as social and economic changes in the educational policies.

Psychological analysis of an individual development from childhood to adolescence shows the process is affected by many different factors, which have drawn the attention and research of many psychologists. The Psycho-social Developmental Theory of Erikson and his proposed eight stages of development well illustrates the influences of psycho-social factors. Whether the risks encountered by a developing child would turn to opportunities depend on the impact of significant
others such as parents, siblings, teachers, friends, schoolmates, peers and the socializing agents (Santrock, 2001; Slavin, 1994; Woolfolk, 1995). The Ecological Development Theory of Bronfenbrenner and Selman’s suggested socializing functions of friendship also illustrate the relative importance of peers and friends in the socialization development process of individuals. This is particularly obvious for children with special educational needs, who need to learn together with children or teenagers of similar age in the normal world. Through studying together, they learn the social skills and interaction with others, prepare themselves for the normal developmental tasks of individuals. It is due to this belief that many educators consider children with special educational needs should not be confined to special schools or classes. Instead, these groups of children or teenagers should wherever possible, be able to get in contact with the ordinary or normal peer in their study so that they can eventually merge themselves into the normal adult world. This kind of conception constitutes the recent popularized educational policy and movement known as mainstreaming, integration and inclusive education.

**Development of Inclusive Education**

Mainstreaming, integration and inclusive education have their origins from western countries such as North America, Britain and Australia. The policy and development of special education in Hong Kong usually follows the practices of western countries. Since 1970’s the Hong Kong government has tried to arrange the disabled children to receive education in the ordinary schools with their peers although the effect is not every obvious. After the publication of the UNESCO Salamanca Statement in 1994, there appears a strong force to push forward the implementation of inclusive education and the Hong Kong government is also moving along similar direction in educational reformation and changes (Crawford, Heung, Yip, & Yuen, 1999; Dyson, 1999; Hong Kong Board of Education, 1996; Hong Kong Education Commission, 1990; Lipsky & Gartner, 1997, 1999; Winzer, 1999).

**Who Gains from Inclusive Education**

People generally conceive inclusive education is only beneficial to children with special educational needs, who gain the assistance and support of their normal fellow students in promoting their learning abilities and achievement. Certainly, inclusive education is advantageous to children with special educational needs, nevertheless, the ordinary children also gain from inclusive education. All depend on their psychology and attitudes of learning.

The argument that inclusive education benefits both the normal
children and those with special educational needs is supported by evidences found in many ordinary schools which implement inclusive education. A case described in a local magazine article, titled “She lightens the school campus” (refer footnote 1) can be taken as an example. The case reported in the magazine article is about the success of a blind female student, Maria\(^2\) in an ordinary secondary school. The article described the psychological changes (included attitude) of the students towards learning, their social interaction and their academic achievement brought forth by inclusive education introduced in the school, a reputed secondary girl school in Hong Kong. Below are some of the author’s translated narratives of Maria, her normal fellow students, the form teacher and the principal, all illustrate the merits brought by inclusive education in that school. Under the introduced inclusive education, all parties gain regardless whether the student is blind or not.

During the interview, the blind student Maria told the reporter that her entry into the school helped her inclusion in the society.

The report also reflected the feelings of the normal fellow students upon interaction with Maria.

“Her various obstacles appear to bear no relation with the school campus. Nevertheless, her perseverance in overcoming even the simplest topic has changed the attitudes of other students who now become more industrious”.

When students went to the museum for field studies, because Maria was blind and could not see what was written, her fellow students had to read word by word the important points to Maria. Incidentally, one of her fellow students found that she gained something from this practice. She told the reporter:” Initially I have no interest in cultural studies and the archives, if Maria was not there, I would just browsed through quickly and leave. However, because I have to read all the words and letterings to Maria, I have to study and read carefully and slowly; then I found they are not as monotonous as I thought before. Gradually I feel interested in what I read and I can retain what I read better.”

“Often I lose my temper when I encounter problems and difficulties. Maria does not know what is a cylindrical pyramid, yet she needs to measure and calculate the area of lateral cross sectional surface and she does not lose her temper. From her I learn how to manage my emotion and become better tempered now.”

\(^2\) A fake name for privacy purpose
Another student said, “I do not consider looking after Maria a burden/nuisance. A normal person needs love and care. When I get used to asking Maria what she would like to eat, I develop similar habit of dealing with others and I get more friends. Helping Maria actually helps myself.”

“Many daily trivials mean lots of problems to Maria, but she still gets 20 marks in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education (A = 5, B = 4, C = 3, D = 2, E = 1 in the computation of score in the examination result for application of Form Six study). This is a hard trial especially for a blind student like Maria. This is a good lesson for me and subsequently I have to be more diligent in my study.”

“The public usually labels the blind to be a telephone operator or do massage as his/her own possible career. Maria insists to further her study in the university. I have never thought of that before; it broadens my scope of visualization.”

Even the class teacher of Maria admitted that he has gained through teaching the blind student for three years. He reported what he felt during the past three years of teaching a blind student within a normal class.

“I used less blackboard because I had to read out the notes to cater for the needs of Maria who could not see any written work on the blackboard. Apparently, it seemed inconvenient but it turned out that the spelling abilities of the students got higher. As well, I learned how to be considerate and care for other’s need. I have been teaching in the school for eight years and mostly what I did was to grade students. However, having taught Maria in the last three years, I learnt from a blind student things which I have never got before in my past twenty years’ of study.”

The vice-principal of the school summarized the gains of the school from admitting the blind girl in the school.

“The ordinary people cannot imagine the far reaching positive effects brought by a blind student in the normal school. The inclusion of Maria in our school has helped teachers to teach our students many of things which cannot be covered from textbooks, such as caring, valuing and devotion. Not every class has the inclusion of blind student. I found the class with the blind student shows much better inter-relationship with the blind/handicapped. Prejudice and despise usually come from misunderstanding and little contact with one another. When students find a blind
classmate behave independently and achieve a good result, they show admiration and respect for her. When students get in touch with an unfortunate one in their class, they will understand how lucky they are and they value what they possess, else it is rather difficult for them to appreciate what they are given and be voluntary workers for others. Our teenagers are getting more and more self-centered nowadays. The inclusion of Maria in our school help students to be aware of others’ need and care for them, that is the most important point.”

The Psychological Elements of Inclusive Education

To assure every party gains from inclusive education, pre-requisites including school facilities and resources, the provision of trained teachers and support deem necessary. In addition, the psychology of teachers and students cannot be ignored. Taking the previous case in the magazine article as an example, the blind or handicapped should have a strong desire to be included in the normal society. The blind or the handicapped should avoid being passionate and pessimistic and be receptive to others. Several incidences of the aforementioned case illustrated the importance of these psychological elements. In the school campus, fellow students always said she could not see but they might not offer help at suitable time. Maria did not take these as sarcastic sayings, instead, she conceived her fellow classmates having the intention to share their feelings with her when they said, “Can’t you see the decoration board is very beautiful!” Once she was brought along by her classmates but happened to fall downstairs. Her classmates felt very sorry for that, but Maria comforted them that it was her fault rather than theirs. Her optimistic personality and considerate character gained her many friendship within the school. The ordinary or normal students and teachers of the school for inclusion should not conceive the one with special educational needs as a burden. Rather, they need to appreciate the merits of the SEN counterpart and be ready to accept him/her for inclusion. Empathetic understanding is a psychological element which facilitates the successful implementation of inclusive education and deserves to be promoted in affective education in school. References can be made to the guidelines suggested by the Education Department in the promotion of positive attitude towards inclusive education and children with special education needs.

The case of Maria represents a successful case of inclusive education, however, not every one succeeds. If the children with special educational needs and the students and teachers of the school for inclusion are not psychologically prepared, the disabled/handicapped ones would feel being rejected from inclusion and very unhappy. This applies particularly to the intention of inclusion of severe mentally
handicapped and extreme emotionally maladjusted ones in the ordinary school. The regular teacher and the students are not prepared and unable to cope with it. Particularly when the teachers lack the skill and resources required for inclusive education. This explains why they feel frustrated and reject inclusive education in their schools. In that case, special school or practical school may be a suitable alternative for this group of students. Hence in the 21st century, inclusive education is not the only possible route for development in special education, special schools and practical schools/centres have their roles to play simultaneously. All of them serves the purpose of individual diversity and fulfills educational ideality. Even the Secretary for Education and Manpower has pointed out recently that if the ordinary schools cannot cope with the students with behavior problems, the students can be moved to practical schools or special schools/centres to continue their studies. These special or practical schools have a much better teacher student ratio and facilities, including counsellors and additional support that may prove good to the students with special educational needs. When these students improve their behaviour and study, they may get back to their ordinary school for study. Such measures suggest that curriculum development and educational policies/reformations can be implemented in many possible directions. Flexibility and matching of individual needs and diversity is an important element for consideration for educational changes.

From Inclusive Education to Lifelong Learning

The successful inclusion of Maria in an ordinary reputed school and her good academic achievement shows not only the positive attitudes towards inclusive education adopted by both parties but also indicates the strong motive and perseverance of Maria in her study. Similar situation has happened to another blind scholar Andrew3, whose episodes of struggle was reported in another article of the same magazine, titled “The blind who changes the history of Oxford” 4. With a strong achieving motivation and perseverance, Andrew was able to move from a special school for the blind to a local famous secondary school to continue his secondary and matriculation course. Afterwards, he was accepted by Oxford University, a very famous British university to finish his bachelor and doctorate degree in Physics and took up teaching in the Hong Kong University. Achievement motivation is the driving force for success, for continued effort and for life-long learning, regardless one is normal or with special educational needs. In fact, opportunity for learning exists everywhere, it depends on whether the an individual strives to learn

3 Another fake name for privacy purpose.
4 The magazine article is in Chinese and the author translated the title and contents in English for reference in this paper. Source: Next Magazine, Issue. 570, pp. 66-69, 8 Feb., 2001.
Life-long Learning

Life-long learning is a prominent trend for individual and societal needs in the coming century. Definitely, facing the challenges of a rapidly changing world, the step of globalization makes individuals and society to experience the strong demand of life-long learning for survival and continued development.

The idea of lifelong learning exists long time ago. There has been a Chinese saying “Learn while you live”. The American scholar, John Dewey has also put forward notions about education and lifelong learning. Since 1960s, the notion of life-long learning has been promoted by UNESCO and OECD and has become the principle and driving force of educational changes and reformations in many countries. In the last three decades, many educational reports and organizations in western countries and Japan have actively promoted life-long education and call for practice in educational policies (e.g. Cropley, 1977; Hasan, 1996; Tuijnman, 1996).

Often, there is an exchange use of the term life-long learning and life-long education in literature and saying, causing them to appear to be similar issue. Strictly speaking, the two are different. Life-long education refers to the organization and provision of learning opportunities in the educational system for individuals. Life-long learning refers to the development of the ability and habit of an individual to continue learning throughout one’s life span. With close matching of the two: life-long learning and life-long education, the societal needs for learning can be achieved (Cropley, 1977; Tuijnman, 1996).

In fact, life-long learning is a result of the progress of society. A person needs to learn continuously so as to be in pace with the changing world. Within the ever changing society, it is nearly impossible to set boundaries among stages like education, working and retirement. What has been taught in school may not be sufficient to cope with the vastly changing daily life activities. There should be a structural planning of education and learning on a life span basis, be flexible and adequate for one to enjoy one’s life while being adjusted to societal and daily living requirement. Meanwhile the government and the education authority have to provide opportunities for individuals to continue learning, in line with the societal needs. Cheng Mo Chee in his keynote speech in the educational seminar conducted by the Asia-Pacific Centre for Education Leadership and School Quality held at the Hong Kong Institute of
Education in 2000, has cited a renounced Australian educational reformer, Professor Brian Caldwell’s argument for the importance of life-long learning. There is a consensus that school must by all means, develop the basic language and mathematical abilities of students such that they are able to conduct life-long learning in an era of globalization and knowledge based environment with achievement motivation and satisfaction. From the sociological perspective, life-long education produces the required human resources for the prosperity of the society. In parallel, life-long learning promotes self-actualization and development of individuals.

Developmental psychologist Havighurst (1972) pointed out that each person has many developmental tasks to solve at different stages (childhood, adolescence, adulthood, aged) for personal and social adaptation. All the developmental tasks are related to the cognitive processes of an individual, including knowledge acquisition, development and achievement (Schaie, 1977; Slavin, 1994; Woolfolk, 1995). Subsequently, learning can be conceived as a life-long process illustrating how a person acquire knowledge in pace with the changing era.

**Psychological Elements of Life-long Learning**

Review of both literature and the government’s education reform documents indicate the importance of life-long learning. The Hong Kong government has encouraged life-long learning in a number of ways, e.g. salary tax deduction for people who has participated in continued education, provision of life-long education opportunities through the continued education centers of the local universities, the Vocational Training Council, re-training education scheme, learning programmes from subsidized and voluntary organizations. Whether the provision is sufficient depends on the supply versus the demand. On the whole, for those who intends to continue to learn, opportunities exist for their choice.

From the psychological perspective, the opportunity to learn exist everywhere. While formal education is provided by schools, learning is not confined to the schools. The family, local community, the working organization and many spots serve as environments for life-long learning. It is only that ordinary people usually consider schools, universities and academic institutions as agencies for life-long learning for the sake of getting qualifications for advancement of their career. Such altruistic conception is embraced in the Theory of Instrumental Conditioning proposed by Skinner and constitutes one’s external motives or drives for continued education or learning. Definitely the function of external motives by reinforcement

---

5 The keynote speech was in Chinese and was about the coping of challenges in the changing era.
cannot be ignored, nevertheless, the intrinsic values and motives of continued or life-long learning need also to be understood.

The essence of life-long learning lies in the learning attitude. It refers to the satisfaction of the knowing needs (a kind of growth needs in Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs Theory) and achievement goals, which gradually develop into a kind of learning habits. Once this learning attitude/habit is developed, it becomes an internal driving force, directing one to pursue learning continuously throughout one’s life span. Actually, learning is within one’s control if he or she wishes. The contents of learning are found everywhere and can be picked up by a person if he desires. Even within the supermarket, a person has the chance to learn many vocabularies which may not be taught in school. Things like the names of different fish, vegetables and fruits in both Chinese and English are often displayed. Similar happenings can be found when we go to the park, visit museum, read newspaper, watch television or movie. These things/knowledge may not be covered in the text we read or lesson attend. The aforementioned examples illustrate the possibilities of enhancing one’s language abilities and word power. Not only students, but also teachers can develop their language proficiency in this informal way of learning provided they have a heart for that. Staff development programmes, retraining programmes and other continued learning courses are functional in promoting one’s ability and efficacy in teaching and learning. Meanwhile, reflection, discussion and sharing with colleagues’ experiences in daily teaching practices and conversation can also be taken as a way of continued or life-long learning. A person with strong achievement goal or motive to learn will find learning opportunities lie everywhere. On the contrary, a person without a positive learning attitude nor values the chance of learning may adopt an instrumental or altruistic view of life-long learning – to get a certificate or qualification for career advancement and that’s all. As the learning goals vary individually, if one does not possess a self-directed goal of learning, place values on learning and development of one’s potential throughout his or her life-span, one may not feel the essence and actual effect of life-long learning.

Conclusion

Whilst there are numerous educational reformation changes put forward by the Education Commission of the Hong Kong Government and that teachers are tired in copying with them, it is questionable to find the quality of students’ learning and teaching effectiveness promoted as pursued by the objectives stated in all these changes. The government has put in a lot of money and resources in the proposed educational reformations, looking for improved cost effectiveness of education,
claiming for wider scope of teaching and encouraging life-long learning. However, it seems that we need to pause for a while and evaluate the effectiveness and direction of all the educational changes. Usually when the Hong Kong people talk about the objectives of education, they would expect a balanced one with respect to five aspects of human development, moral, cognitive, physical, social and aesthetic. They also point out that the education in Hong Kong tends to emphasize the cognitive development and neglect the other four. Despite that, the outcomes of cognitive development of education is not satisfactory, the qualities of the students have been commented/criticized as falling, for example, the language standard/performance of students is getting lower, and this also applies to their motivations to learn. Of course there are many complicated factors accounting for the phenomenon. The author suspects one of the important causes is the psychological element of the learners, which includes their learning attitudes. The Education Commission of Hong Kong is trying to promote life-long learning and ways to improve the language standard of teachers and students with what they call two languages and three iterates. However, if we analyze the learners’ behaviour and attitudes towards learning, it appears that they are not well prepared for that. One obvious example can be found from the reading/working habit of students which also reflects their attitudes and motivations towards learning, a major determinant of continued or life-long learning. When one is reading a book, a magazine or newspaper or even book and encounters some difficult words or phrases which one does not understand, one seldom takes the initiative to look for the meaning of the words or phrases even a dictionary is within reach. When an assignment is completed, it is not a usual practice for the students to read again the completed work and make use of dictionary or the computer speller check to settle any questionable words or phrases. If a student develops a positive attitude towards knowledge acquisition, probably he or she is ready to seek every opportunity to learn, which forms the base of life-long learning. While educators and teachers wish students to be self-regulated learners, it follows that a positive attitude towards learning plus strong motive and perseverance would be the basic components of regulated learning, that lays the foundation of life-long learning. It is questionable whether the existing education serve the required function and objectives or not.

Lastly, there appears to have little relation between inclusive education and life-long learning. Nevertheless, a close analysis of the two reveal some common psychological elements viz. motivation and attitudes that connect the two. Caution must be exercised when one tries to draw generalization as the discussion is limited by the number of cases examined. This paper attempts to pinpoint the relative importance of these psychological elements and points to note in the implementation
of inclusive education and life-long learning in Hong Kong. As well, the paper attempts to draw the attention of those who feel interested in the two educational issues for further study and discussion.

References