

[Special Issue: *International Perspectives on School Counseling*]

School Counseling: Current International Perspectives

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This article introduces the main theme for the special issue by summarizing some of the literature that informs understanding of the current development of school counseling in Hong Kong and the Chinese mainland. Brief comparisons are also made with the practices evident in the United Kingdom and Australia. Within this issue, the articles from the United States, Japan and Korea reveal converging views on school-wide collaboration and a systems approach in supporting the personal-social, academic and career development of all students. The concluding thoughts from the overview of literature, together with the contributions to this issue, are summarized as a list of questions to challenge researchers, guidance professionals, educators and administrators working together for the further improvement of counseling programs in schools.

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This special issue of the *Asian Journal of Counselling* has articles on school counseling in the United States (U.S.), Japan, Korea, and Hong Kong. To set the stage for this special issue, I will begin by briefly reviewing the development of school counseling in Hong Kong and the Chinese mainland. Brief comparisons are also made with the practices evident in the United Kingdom (U.K.) and Australia. From this position, it is possible to view developments occurring in neighboring Asian countries and in the U.S.

The current model of counseling in Hong Kong schools evolved from what began as essentially a remedial approach targeting individual students, to become a whole school approach through the implementation of a comprehensive developmental guidance and counseling program for all (Gysbers, 2000; Hui, 2000). All teachers are expected to play a caring role in their daily relationships with their students. Guidance teachers — who are full-time teachers with additional guidance duties — are involved in the development and management of the school's guidance program that aims to support the “whole-person” development of all students (Yuen, 2002). Full-time guidance professionals and teachers now work together to conduct guidance activities such as implementing a guidance curriculum (e.g., personal growth education), providing responsive service (e.g., individual counseling and group guidance), delivering support services (e.g., parents' education and teacher consultation), individual planning (e.g., career and education guidance workshops), and organization and management (e.g., program development and evaluation). Within this range of activities, individual student planning is perceived by teachers as being implemented now to a lesser extent than other guidance activities in schools (Yuen, 2006).

Teachers are required to use their counseling skills and knowledge when supporting students with problems (Lam & Yuen, 2008) and when

working with their parents (P. Leung & Yuen, 2001), but a major weakness in the current system is that many teachers involved in guidance work have not been trained for such work (Yuen, Chan, Lau, Gysbers, & Shea, 2007). There are also concerns about inadequacies in the supervision of guidance professionals (R. M. C. Chan, Shea, Lau, & Yuen, 2005). To address some of these concerns, the Hong Kong Professional Counselling Association has begun a supportive supervision scheme in which a program has been established to train professional counseling supervisors (C. Chan, 2003). In addition, the Education Department and Health Department of the Hong Kong government, the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charity Foundation, the Hong Kong Association of Careers Masters and Guidance Masters, and some university departments have been actively involved in the development, implementation, and evaluation of a “guidance curriculum” in schools (Lee & Wong, 2008; Shek, 2006; Yuen, Lau, Leung, Shea, et al., 2003). A position statement on life skills curriculum and comprehensive guidance program in schools was developed by a group of academics and guidance professionals (Yuen, Hui, et al., 2004; see Appendix).

School counseling in the Chinese mainland has been led by central government policy and has developed rapidly since the 1990s (Jiang, 2005). The level of implementation of counseling activities in schools is higher in big cities than in small towns and rural areas. Counseling in mainland schools is termed “mental health education” in the official documents of the Chinese government (Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China, 2002). Mental health education is implemented as a specific curriculum subject in schools (Yu & Wang, 2002), with emphasis on study skills, human relationship, and emotional and personal growth, but with rather less concern for career development. More recently, positive psychology has influenced the direction of mental health education toward assessing students’ positive

human strengths and cultivating positive cognition, emotions, and social behaviors among students (X. Liu & Cao, 2008; Meng, 2008).

In a similar situation to Hong Kong, many of the teachers involved in mental health education in the Chinese mainland have not been trained in school counseling. However, some teachers are appointed as psychological counseling teachers and have been trained to certificate level before they are involved in mental health education (Jiang, 2005). Unfortunately, career development issues and vocational psychology are not often included in the training program. There are few experienced trainers, counselor educators, and counselor supervisors (Hou & Zhang, 2007).

So far, there is a relative lack of evaluation research in school counseling in the Chinese mainland (Jiang, 2005). However, longitudinal data from one recent study show that there are improvement in students' academic motivation and better psychosocial adjustment after the implementation of mental health education that includes class guidance curriculum, teacher professional development, individual counseling, and psychological assessment (R. Liu, Liang, Xu, & He, 2008).

By way of comparison, in the U.K., school counseling (manifesting itself as "pastoral care" and "personal-social" education) has worked against the processes of depersonalization in education. School counseling focuses on students' social-emotional needs and thus helps to personalize schooling (Watkins, 1999, 2008). Schools are to provide students with opportunities to listen more to others, evaluate information, and decide things for themselves (Lang, 2003). In the U.K. and Australia, as in Hong Kong, a whole-school guidance approach is advocated to meet the personal-social needs of students and teachers. This involves teachers and counselors in building positive learning communities, nurturing attachment to school, and promoting social-emotional development of

all students and teachers (De Jong & Kerr-Roubicek, 2007; McLaughlin, 2008). In the U.K. and Singapore, more full-time guidance professionals are being placed in schools to implement a life skills guidance curriculum, prepare students for transition from school to work, and provide individual and group counseling support to students in need (Fox & Butler, 2007; Tan, 2006).

Some of the issues identified above in the on-going development of school counseling in Hong Kong and the Chinese mainland are reflected in similar concerns in reports from other countries. Indeed, there is much overlap in the nature of the services provided, in the general direction that developments are heading, and in the matters that may be seen as potential obstacles to the optimum development of a comprehensive and effective counseling service. However, differences in school systems, together with cultural or social differences and expectations are also evident in the articles presented here. Watkins (2001) acknowledges that school counseling is always implemented within national, systemic, and school contexts, and differences in these contexts influence the development of specific models of school counseling. Even within a single country or community, the actual practices of school counseling vary among individual schools (Watkins, 2004; Watkins, Carnell, & Lodge, 2007; Webb & Vulliamy, 2007).

The Special Issue

This special issue offers a concise picture of school counseling in the Chinese mainland, Hong Kong, the U.S., Japan and Korea that could be of value in stimulating reflection on converging themes within the different systems and cultural contexts currently existing. The authors were invited to describe the development of school counseling in their countries and to identify any current issues.

The lead article by Norman C. Gysbers outlines the rationale, research and practices of individual student planning within the comprehensive guidance program typically operating in U.S. schools. The second paper by Darryl Takizo Yagi examines the current development of school counseling in Japan. Similarly, Sang Min Lee and Eunjoo Yang explore the current status and future prospects of school counseling in South Korea. The reflection paper by Yuk-Fan Ho focuses on career education in Hong Kong. The final reaction paper by Patrick S. Y. Lau and Suk-Chun Fung explores the common characteristics and problems in implementing school counseling raised in the invited papers in this special issue.

Concluding Thoughts

School counseling in Hong Kong and the Chinese mainland has been moving toward a universally sound yet culturally specific model (Fischer, Jome, & Atkinson, 1998). It may be that traditional Chinese philosophy is providing a good foundation for applied psychology and school counseling (Hou & Zhang, 2007; Thomason & Qiong, 2008). Researchers have identified that an indigenous model of a hybrid guidance curriculum exists in Hong Kong's schools wherein Confucian traditional expectations in social relations meet the liberal Westernized curriculum (Luk-Fong, 2006). Positive psychology constructs such as enhancing self-efficacy and connectedness have been incorporated into the life skills guidance curriculum (e.g., Shek, Ma, & Merrick, 2007; Yuen, Lau, Leung, Chan, et al., 2004). Guidance teachers in Hong Kong have reported that they are now more confident of using counseling skills in working with their students (Yuen, Chan, Lau, Lam, & Shek, 2004). The growth of school counseling in neighboring countries and the increase in exchanges with counseling professionals from various parts of the world may serve as stimuli for the healthy development of school counseling in Hong Kong and the Chinese mainland in the coming years (S. A. Leung, Chan, & Leahy, 2007).

The extant research data and the professional literature (including contributions in this journal) seem to converge in highlighting some challenging issues that researchers, guidance professionals, educators, and administrators of career education and guidance in schools need to confront. These issues include:

1. How to strengthen the professional identities of guidance professionals, and how best to increase collaboration among these professionals and teachers in schools (e.g., McMahon, 2006; Pope, 2004)?
2. How to enhance the competencies of guidance professionals and teachers in implementing school counseling through adequate resources, quality supervision, and continued professional development (e.g., R. M. C. Chan et al., 2005; Torres-Rivera, Nash, Sew, & Ibrahim, 2008)?
3. How to develop an indigenous framework for development, implementation, and evaluation of school counseling programs (e.g., De Jong & Kerr-Roubicek, 2007; Lee & Wong, 2008)?
4. How research and international publishing could best enhance evidence-based practices in school counseling (e.g., Kwan & Gerstein, 2008; S. A. Leung & Tsoi-Hoshmand, 2007)?

These questions may help readers to reflect on the articles in this special issue.

In closing, I would like to thank Alvin Leung and the ad hoc reviewers for supporting this special issue and I thank the authors for their contributions. I hope readers find that this issue does approach school counseling from an international perspective indeed and stimulate advances in research and practice of counseling in the Asia-Pacific school communities.

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學校諮商：當前的國際視角

本文藉綜述有關香港和中國內地學校諮商當前發展的文獻，介紹本期學報的主題「學校諮商」，並簡略對比這些地區學校諮商的發展與英國和澳大利亞的實踐情況。本專輯中，來自美國、日本和韓國的研究文獻都一致贊同全校合作的重要，並認為要以系統方法支援所有學生的個人—社會、學業和職業發展。最後，本文從文獻綜述所得結論和本專輯中其他文章，帶出一系列問題，讓研究者、督導專業人士、教育者和管理人員聯合起來，為進一步改進學校諮商專案而共同努力。

Appendix: Position Statement on the Life Skills Curriculum and the Comprehensive Guidance Program in Schools *

Pledge

We, members of the project team, commit ourselves in collaboration to promote life skills development among students and a whole school approach to comprehensive developmental guidance in schools.

Rationale

1. Individuals, groups, families, schools, organizations and community agents all have a role to play in the whole person development of students.
2. Schools should provide all students with education conducive to their healthy development. The guidance program in schools is aimed at enhancing the academic, career, personal-social and spiritual development of all students.
3. Implementing a whole school approach to comprehensive developmental guidance involves a planned process of curriculum design and staff development in schools.

Mission

The Project Team invites parents, teachers, principals, education administrators, university teachers, researchers, guidance personnel, social workers, counselors, psychologists, guidance teachers, discipline teachers, career teachers, teacher educators, guidance educators, health

* 1. Reprinted from Yuen, Hui, et al. (2004) with the permission of the authors.
2. In May 2004, 97 participants of the Symposium & Forum on Life Skills Development and Comprehensive Guidance Programme signed their names in support of the position statement.

educators, educational and professional bodies, government departments and non-government organizations to join together to:

1. Provide students with opportunities and support for their academic, career, personal-social and spiritual development.
2. Conduct classroom guidance activities for all classes at their corresponding developmental levels.
3. Facilitate educational and career planning for each student.
4. Ensure responsive services are available to students in need, such as individual counseling, group guidance, peer mediation programs.
5. Create a support system for students, parents and teachers such as peer tutoring scheme, teacher development and consultation service, parent education program, cross-curricular and extra-curricular activities that facilitate student self-development and services to the community.