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The TALENT Approach: An Integrated Model for Promoting Quality Education in Hong Kong

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Education reform in Hong Kong has revolved around two main concerns. One concern is to provide equal access to educational opportunities for all students (equity), and the other concern is to allow all students to develop their fullest potential and work toward the highest level of their abilities (excellence). The TALENT approach developed under the Programs for the Gifted and Talented at the Chinese University of Hong Kong is briefly introduced as a model balancing equity and excellence. The model is intended to capitalize on the experiences of gifted education, extending it to talent development for all students. TALENT, as an acronym, refers to Talent, Acceleration, Learning styles, Enrichment, Novelty, and Thinking, outlining six areas of practice in talent development. While providing an orientation to the development of talents in all students, the TALENT approach can also be conceptualized as an integrated model of teaching strategies to promote quality education for all students.

Education Reform in Hong Kong

There has been substantial rhetoric and action in education reform during the entire existence of the educational system in Hong Kong (see Chan, 1998a). Prior to the 1980s, we emphasized helping bright and intellectual students develop their capabilities, realize their potential, and contribute to society in the context of an elitist system. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the overriding concern was the expansion of educational opportunities such that more and more children and adolescents could get an education that might previously be denied to them because of their abilities or

financial considerations. In line with this concern for equity, the government introduced nine-year free education, bringing into awareness the diverse needs of a student population not limited to those who were academically or intellectually superior (Hong Kong Education Commission, 1990). Confronted with declining academic standards and behavioral problems in schools, teachers now generally complain that students are not motivated to learn and achieve. The primary concern then becomes one of helping below average and troubled students achieve minimum academic standards. Beyond minimal expectations, and in line with the concern for excellence, educators have also been struggling to find ways to meet the diverse learning and emotional needs of students, to enhance their learning and attainment, and to promote quality education for all students. Viewed in this manner, recent education reform measures in the 1990s can be interpreted as efforts to improve the quality of education (Hong Kong Education Commission, 1994, 1997). Some notable efforts initiated by the Hong Kong Government Education Department include, among others, the implementation of the target-oriented curriculum in primary schools, the modularization of the curriculum and the devising of special curricula for the gifted and the less able, the introduction of mastery learning as a teaching strategy in schools, the adoption of a "whole school approach" to school guidance and counseling, and the improvement of the effectiveness of school management through the School Management Initiative. Thus, it can be said that the recent changing focus in education reform reflects the pendulum swing of the concern of our society from equity to excellence.

Balancing Equity and Excellence

From historical times, our Chinese ancestors have championed the cause of equity. The notion that education should be made available to children of all social classes, or "*you jiao wu lei*," often attributable to Confucius of 500 B.C., has become an educational ideal. However, our Chinese ancestors also valued and nurtured children of high abilities. Gifted children or child prodigies were sent to the imperial court so that their gifts and talents could be cultivated (Tsuin-Chen, 1961). This concern for excellence appears to be in line with an elitist system or gifted education, and in sharp contrast to the concern for equity.

The seemingly opposing concerns for equity and excellence however need not be in conflict (Clark, 1997). Rather, equity and excellence can

provide a complimentary and enhancing view of educational goals today. Assuming that the majority of children has some talent areas that can be developed, this concern for excellence extends to the notion of "*yin cai shi jiao*," or that children should be educated in different ways according to their abilities, characteristics, or needs to develop their potential. Specifically, this more inclusive view of talent development supports and enhances the pursuit of both equity and excellence. Equity implies offering each individual student equal opportunities to pursue his or her individual goals toward excellence. The pursuit of excellence implies the enhancement of talent in all students so that all students may realize their fullest potential and work toward the highest level of their abilities.

The balanced view of equity and excellence is realized in many of the gifted programs developed under program models that subscribe to the multiple-talent conceptualization of giftedness, and a more inclusive view of talent development. Some notable exemplary models include the Schoolwide Enrichment Model (Renzulli & Reis, 1991, 1997), the Pyramid Project (Cox, Daniel, & Boston, 1985), and the Purdue Three-Stage Enrichment Model (Feldhusen & Kolloff, 1986). Acknowledging that all students should be provided with opportunities that allow them to attain optimal levels of learning, educators now believe that the curriculum planned for gifted and talented students, and the "gifted and talented" approach in teaching to the strengths and interests of students, should be employed in our schools to benefit all students, including able learners, normal achieving students, and "at-risk" students. The Accelerated Schools Project is exemplary in using a "gifted and talented" approach rather than a remedial approach to provide all students, including "at-risk" students, with empowering learning experience in the context of close collaboration and involvement of home, school, and community for the education of each student (e.g., Finnan, St. John, McCarthy, & Slovacek, 1996; Reis, 1995).

Promoting Quality Education in Hong Kong

The emphasis on the pursuit of both equity and excellence in Hong Kong is also evident in the increasing recognition of the importance of developing programs for gifted and talented students and for all students. Growing from some small-scale isolated enrichment activities, gifted programs in Hong Kong are now characterized by a variety of extracurricular, after-school, Saturday, and summer programs provided by individual schools,

the government, and the universities (see Chan, 1997). While the view of defining giftedness in terms of intellectual and academic abilities is still prevalent, the more inclusive view that emphasizes talent development in all students has been slowly gaining ground. The University-School Tripartite Model of Talent Development developed under the Programs for the Gifted and Talented at the Chinese University of Hong Kong provides an exemplary model of how university-based programs for gifted students can be transformed into school-based programs and activities for all students through the "gifted and talented" approach (see Chan, 1998b).

Essentially, the University-School Tripartite Model of Talent Development has three interrelated components: university-based programs and activities, university-school interface programs and activities, and school-based programs and activities. Under the university-based component, students identified as gifted and talented using a multi-criteria procedure will participate in a variety of programs, including summer programs, Saturday programs, mentorship programs, and international student exchange programs. Specifically designed programs and activities and effective teaching strategies will be continuously developed. At present, thematic developments will be in three areas: developing leadership abilities, nurturing creativity, and reversing underachievement. The university-school interface component will coordinate the transmission of knowledge, skills, and experience of the "gifted and talented" approach to principals and teachers through consultation, teacher training workshops and seminars, and newsletter networking such that school-based programs and activities can be established in individual schools. Thus individual schools participating in the project may develop their own programs and activities to meet the specific needs of their student populations under the school-based component. Different types of extracurricular programs will aim at providing challenging learning experiences to the "talent pool" or 5 to 20% of the school population, or to all students. On the other hand, peer support and counseling programs will aim at providing opportunities for peer leaders trained under the university-based programs to support students in their own schools especially in areas of developing leadership, nurturing creativity, and reversing underachievement. Since the success in enhancing quality education for all students depends critically on the implementation of the "gifted and talented" approach in schools, an integrated model called the TALENT approach has been developed to form the basis of teacher training for quality education under the University-School Tripartite Model.

The TALENT Approach: An Integrated Model of Teaching Strategies for All Students

The TALENT approach has been developed on the basis of effective approaches from gifted education, and can be conceptualized as an integrated model of teaching strategies that can be readily acquired by teachers for enhancing quality education in schools. Specifically, TALENT is an acronym embodying six areas of practice. TALENT refers to Talent, Acceleration, Learning styles, Enrichment, Novelty, and Thinking.

Talent: Teaching to Develop Students' Talents, Strengths, and Interests

In gifted education, differentiated instruction is generally accepted as appropriate to meet the specific needs of identified gifted students. Traditionally, identification of students for government service in Hong Kong has often been based on the IQ score. With this unitary conception of giftedness slowly giving way to a multidimensional view, students can now be assessed and identified using available standardized instruments as intellectually, academically, or creatively gifted, or talented in leadership abilities (see Chan, 2000). This multi-talent conception of giftedness is close to the more inclusive view in talent development in which it is assumed that the majority of students in regular classrooms have some talent areas that can be discovered and developed. Talent recognition and identification is therefore a prerequisite for teaching to students' talents, strengths, and interests. Both teachers and students have to work together to identify where talents of students lie.

In this connection, different educators have expanded on the concept of intelligence (e.g., Ramos-Ford & Gardner, 1997; Sternberg, 1997). Gardner (1983), for example, proposes a theory of multiple intelligences that provides a vocabulary for describing teaching to students' talents. Specifically, Gardner (1983) identifies at least seven intelligences: verbal-linguistic, logical-mathematical, visual-spatial, musical-rhythmic, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. Traditional approaches to school, including teaching methods, have been largely geared to the growth of verbal-linguistic and logical-mathematical abilities or what are generally referred to as IQ. Yet, the other intelligences are equally vital to success in life. Students who have difficulties learning in one area (e.g.,

logical-mathematical) may well have strengths in one or several other areas. The implications for teaching and learning are enormous, as students have at least seven ways of knowing, and teachers have at least seven ways of teaching. Accordingly, no one set of teaching strategies will work best for all students at all times. Thus, it is important for teachers to employ a broad spectrum of teaching strategies addressing the different intelligences or talents of students such that each student will have his or her most highly developed intelligences actively involved in learning. Armstrong (1994), for example, has presented 35 teaching strategies, five for each of the seven intelligences. These strategies include storytelling (verbal-linguistic), problem-solving (logical-mathematical), drawing (visual-spatial), role-playing (bodily-kinesthetic), singing (musical-rhythmic), group projects or cooperative learning (interpersonal), and thinking strategies (intrapersonal).

Acceleration: Teaching to Allow Accelerated and Advanced Learning

In gifted education, acceleration may be used to denote both models of service delivery and of curriculum delivery (Schiever & Maker, 1997). Service delivery acceleration essentially offers standard curricular experiences to students at a younger-than-usual age or lower-than-usual grade level. In this connection, acceleration usually refers to early entry to kindergarten or to college, grade skipping, or partial grade acceleration in which students enter a higher grade for part of the school day to receive advanced instruction in one or more content areas. As a curriculum model, acceleration involves speeding up the pace at which material is presented or expected to be mastered. Such acceleration of content may not result in earlier finishing of formal schooling, and may occur in a regular classroom in the form of telescoping or self-paced studies. There is some evidence that grade-skipping and content acceleration may help prevent or reverse underachievement in highly able students who do not perform well in schools that do not provide the appropriate challenges (Rimm & Lovance, 1992a, 1992b). Viewed in this manner, even though grade skipping may be uncommon in Hong Kong, content acceleration appears to be feasible for students working at their own pace in their areas of strengths. In addition, with flexible ability grouping, curriculum compacting together with tiered assignments employed in educating gifted students may be applied to educating normal achieving students such

that more time will be allocated to broad, extended, and in-depth learning activities.

Learning Styles: Teaching to Accommodate Students' Learning Styles

In general, a student's learning style is his or her typical way of taking in, processing, internalizing, and retaining information and skills (Dunn, 1993). Therefore, it can be assumed that a student learns best using his or her preferred learning style. The importance of learning style in gifted education is emphasized when it is recognized that a great proportion of students are not identified as gifted because of their unconventional learning styles (Dunn & Milgram, 1993). Gifted students have been found to be more independent and self-motivated than regular students (Griggs & Dunn, 1984). In addition, they tend to enjoy unstructured and flexible learning tasks, prefer active participation in learning, and can learn through varied sensory channels, including auditory, visual, tactile, and kinesthetic representational systems (Dunn, 1993). Ricca (1984) also found that gifted students prefer, in descending order of choices, teaching games, independent study, programmed instruction, projects, simulation, peer teaching, discussion, lecture, and drill and recitation. More importantly, these investigators also found that, irrespective of whether students were identified as gifted or not, there were significant improvements in academic achievement, school attitudes and behaviors when students' learning style preferences were accommodated (Griggs & Dunn, 1984). Therefore, teaching with intention to accommodate the diverse learning styles of students becomes important for all students when the enhancement of their academic attainment and learning is emphasized.

There are different classifications of learning styles based on studies of cognitive styles and research on brain lateralization (see Dunn, 1993). Thus a student may have preference in field-dependence or field-independence, global or analytical processing, configural or linear processing, extraversion or introversion, feeling or thinking, intuition or sensing, or some combinations of these variables (Clark, 1997). The important consideration is to design appropriate and effective teaching strategies for specific learning styles, and to plan instruction that intentionally includes opportunities for students with dominant strengths in diverse learning styles to succeed. By intentionally varying the teaching strategies corresponding to diverse learning styles, all students will have opportunities to learn and work from their strengths.

Enrichment: Teaching to Promote Enriched and Extended Experiences

Enrichment in gifted education may also refer to program delivery services or curriculum (Schiever & Maker, 1997). Enriched curriculum refers to richer, more varied, broad and in-depth educational experiences. Although enrichment activities are generally planned for gifted students, they are good for all students especially when they are tied to knowledge goals and thinking skill development. It should be noted that additions or modifications to the regular curriculum for enrichment have to be supported with teaching strategies designed to accommodate the characteristics of the students. Enrichment activities can be implemented in after-school, Saturday, or summer programs or other extracurricular programs. The extension of enrichment activities from gifted programs to school-based extracurricular activities has been proved to benefit all students in a number of curriculum models. An exemplary model is the Schoolwide Enrichment Model (Renzulli & Reis, 1991, 1997) where Type I and Type II activities are good for all students, and all students are invited to develop an interest in pursuing Type III projects.

Other enrichment activities may include mentoring in schools or mentorship programs outside schools. Mentorship programs offer enriched and possibly crystallizing experiences for students who might make the connection between what they would like to become and their talents (Walters & Gardner, 1992).

Novelty: Teaching to Value Novelty and to Nurture Creativity

In gifted education, novelty or creative products are highly valued. Creativity is generally defined as a facet of giftedness, or included in the definition of giftedness. Typical examples are the U.S. Federal Definitions (Davis & Rimm, 1998), and the Renzulli's Three-Ring Model (Renzulli & Reis, 1991, 1997). It is believed that creativity or creative behavior can be taught or at least enhanced in areas where gifted students have some beginning competence (e.g., Parker, 1989). In Hong Kong where tradition and conformity are valued, increasing creativity consciousness and creative attitudes is highly important in teaching for creative growth. In recent years, the Hong Kong Education Commission (1990) recognized the importance of creativity, and there has been an upsurge of interests in research on creativity assessment and the creative process (e.g., Chan, Cheung, Lau,

Wu, Kwong, & Li, in press; Spinks, Ku-Yu, Shek, & Bacon-Shone, 1995).

While there are numerous creativity-training programs designed for gifted students, creative attitudes, abilities, and skills can be strengthened in all students in the course of involvement in activities that intrinsically require creative thinking and problem solving. For example, Renzulli's Type III Enrichment (Renzulli & Reis, 1997) focuses on developing creativity through individual or small group projects and investigations of real life problems. Thus, independent projects in language arts, science, or art areas may help all students develop creative problem-solving attitudes and skills along with valuable technical skills. Other creativity exercises can also be readily integrated into class work for all students.

Thinking: Teaching to Develop Thinking Skills and Increase Metacognitive Awareness

Teaching thinking skills has occupied a special place in gifted education because of gifted students' potential for higher levels of educational and professional development. However, the improvement of ability to compare and classify, analyze and plan, see cause-effect relations, and make good decisions and inferences is a core feature of educational reform for all students. Thinking skills can be taught indirectly through practice and exercise, or taught directly through helping students learn conscious and deliberate strategies for reasoning, problem solving, and critical thinking (Davis & Rimm, 1998). A third approach to teach thinking is to increase students' understanding of their own or others' thinking, or to develop metacognitive knowledge and control (Schraw & Graham, 1997). Students' metacognition may involve their mental capabilities and talents, their learning styles, their sources of ideas, viewpoints, attitudes, and values. While metacognition enables gifted students to translate their knowledge and ability into higher levels of learning via better self-regulation, the improvement of metacognitive skills in all students help them plan and monitor more effectively their learning, and compensate for lack of domain knowledge (Clark, 1997; Schraw & Graham, 1997). Thus, by enabling students to monitor and regulate their cognitive performance, metacognition constitutes a crucial component of effective learning for all students.

In practice, teachers can integrate or infuse thinking skills instruction into existing content areas or subjects as well as teaching thinking as a

separate topic. Metacognitive awareness can be promoted through self-reflection using written daily journal, summaries, expectations, and self-evaluations, along with debriefing and closure sessions.

From Gifted Education to Talent Development

While our Chinese ancestors valued high abilities in children, systematic development of programs for the gifted and talented in Hong Kong has been a relatively recent event (see Chan, 1997). The renewed interest in gifted education parallels the pursuit of excellence and the promotion of quality education for all students. Such an emphasis is also in line with the worldwide movement in talent development that focuses on developing the varied and unique talents of all students, including highly able or gifted learners, in academic, artistic, vocational, and personal-social areas (Feldhusen, 1992; Treffinger & Feldhusen, 1996). By capitalizing on the experiences of teaching gifted learners, the TALENT approach outlines six areas of practices that are best suited for talent development in all students. More importantly, apart from being an integrated model of teaching strategies, the TALENT approach is an orientation that suggests the importance of profiling students' talents, identifying talents above and beyond those assessed using traditional IQ and achievement scores, and programming to accommodate individual students' characteristics, needs, and learning styles for accelerated, enriched, and creative learning. The adoption of the TALENT approach may eventually bring us closer to "*yin cai shi jiao*" (educating students according to their talents, abilities, and interests), the educational ideal that promotes talent development and quality education for all students.

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