**The Comparative Education Society of Hong Kong**

The Comparative Education Society of Hong Kong (CESHK) was founded in 1989. Membership of the society is drawn from educational institutions in Hong Kong and the Asian region. The CESHK provides a forum for the exchange of views, development of partnerships, and shaping of new initiatives. The society is a member of the World Council of Comparative Education Societies (WCCES), and its officers have contributed to the functioning of that body. In the process, this work has given Hong Kong visibility within the wider arena. Among the activities of the CESHK is the annual conference. Through this, and other activeties such as seminars, workshops and the society publication, the Comparative Education Bulletin, the CESHK brings together scholars across institutions. The CESHK has organized and will plan to have more study tours to enrich members' experiential learning of comparative education in the region.

香港比較教育學會成立於1989年，宗旨為促進香港與亞太地區內的比較教育研究，發展比較教育的亞太地區的觀點，傳遞國際教育訊息，為研究者提供交流思想與研究心得的場所，以及舉辦有關的研討會和學術活動。

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**Comparative Education Bulletin**

比較教育通訊

**No.10 (2007)** 第十刊 （2007年）

**The Comparative Education Society of Hong Kong**

香 港 比 較 教 育 學 會

# Comparative Education Bulletin

# No.10
# 2007

# 比較教育通訊

第十刊
2007年

# Comparative Education Bulletin

## No.10

## 2007

# Comparative Education Society of Hong Kong

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# Comparative Education Bulletin No. 10 (2007)
## 比教教育通訊 第十刊 (2007年)

# Editorial: Comparative Education and International Educational Development

Mark Mason, The University of Hong Kong &
Kokila R. Katyal, Hong Kong Institute of Education

While not designed as a themed issue around the role of comparative education in international educational development, four of the six articles in this issue of the *Comparative Education Bulletin* do indeed coalesce around major issues in educational development. But before offering a brief introduction to those papers, we should note that it is particularly gratifying, not least to the first editor in his capacity as President of the Comparative Education Society of Hong Kong, to be able to write that this issue of the Bulletin opens with an article on the history of the Society. Wong Suk-Ying and Gregory Fairbrother's chapter on the history and development of CESHK in *Common Interests, Uncommon Goals: Histories of the World Council of Comparative Education Societies and its Members*, edited by Vandra Masemann, Mark Bray and Maria Manzon, and published a few months ago by the Comparative Education Research Centre (CERC) at the University of Hong Kong and Springer, has been reproduced here with the permission of the publishers. Readers will find there a short history of how CESHK has helped to have the voices of comparative education in Hong Kong and more widely in Asia heard more prominently in the global arena.

The four articles that focus this issue on concepts and issues in international educational development then follow. First is Bjorn Nordtveit's consideration of how the insights of complexity theory enhance our understanding of development processes, in a paper that considers problems of development and change in education from the perspective of complexity theory.

Inequalities in educational development in any society lie primarily in inequities that can probably be traced back to the big four: socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, gender, and space/region (the urban/rural divide, for example). Theories of change have thus sought the levers of history in economic structures, in human agency, and in combinations of these and other factors that include or exclude either or both. Complexity theory offers a theory of change that might be said to encompass all of these and more, and that might offer the most helpful insight yet into how educational development and change might be rendered sustainable.

Complexity theory's notion of emergence implies that, given a significant degree, or critical mass, of complexity in a particular environment, new properties and behaviours emerge that are not

contained in the essence of the constituent elements, or able to be predicted from knowledge of initial conditions. These concepts of emergent phenomena from a critical mass, associated with notions of lock-in, path dependence, and inertial momentum, contribute to an understanding of continuity and change that sheds light on educational, institutional and system-wide change. In the complexity of the educational environment, the plethora of relevant constituent elements – agents and structures – includes teachers, students, parents and other community leaders, the state and its education departments, economic structures and business organisations, NGOs, agencies, and so on. Complexity theory suggests that intervention to differing but sufficient extents in each of these areas is what would probably be necessary to shift a prevailing ethos in education. In other words, change and sustainable development in education, at whatever level, are not so much a consequence of effecting change in one particular factor or variable, no matter how powerful the influence of that factor. It is more a case of generating momentum in a new direction by attention to as many factors as possible. Complexity theory thus indicates that what it might take to change a system's inertial momentum from an ethos of failure to one of sustained development is massive and sustained intervention at every possible level until the desired change emerges from this new set of interactions among these new factors and sustains itself autocatalytically. And despite complexity theory's relative inability to predict the direction or nature of change, we are, by implementing at each constituent level changes whose outcome we can predict with reasonable confidence, at least influencing change in the appropriate direction and thus stand a better chance of effecting the desired changes across the complex system as a whole. Nordtveit looks specifically at the consequences for conceptualizing and enabling development that is indeed sustainable.

The first Education For All (EFA) goal sets down a commitment to "expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children". The EFA Global Monitoring Report of 2008 notes that "although child mortality rates have dropped, a majority of countries are not taking the necessary policy measures to provide care and education to children below age 3". The Report also notes that "early childhood care and education programmes generally do not reach the poorest and most disadvantaged children, who stand to gain the most from them in terms of health, nutrition and cognitive development". In her article, Purisima Gonzales documents the processes and outcomes of four training sessions aimed at the development of early childhood care and education in Laos. Gonzales' research shows that traditional beliefs in parts of the Lao PDR undervalue the importance

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of early childhood experiences in subsequent learning and cognitive development. The project on which she reports, undertaken in terms of a joint partnership between *Aide et Action* and the Lao Ministry of Education, attempted to change some of those beliefs. Perhaps the most valuable insight to be drawn from this paper is how important it is in any development work to engage with local actors in changing attitudes – whether they arise from deeply rooted cultural perspectives or simply from a lack of knowledge – that could otherwise confound even substantial material efforts.

Jana Zehle switches the focus from south-east Asia to east Africa in her assessment of school failure in Ethiopian government primary schools. She identifies some of the usual suspects: the long distances between home and school; the lack of text and exercise books and stationery; parental, teacher and student discontent with conditions in schools; the economic and social challenges faced by poor families; poor student health; and student learning difficulties. But it is the last factor, student learning difficulties, and its relationship to school dropout rates, on which Zehle focuses. While the term 'development' in the psychology of education generally refers to cognitive or other maturational development, Zehle highlights its importance in the field of international educational development. She offers a critical analysis of the learning model that informs much formal instruction in Ethiopian government primary schools, identifying teaching and learning models that are typically based in knowledge transmission and rote learning, probably because of, she hypothesizes, the hierarchical nature of and the epistemological perspectives associated with colonially imported Orthodox Christian and Koranic schools. In their place she proposes a model based in cognitive-constructivist and social-constructivist learning theories, which, critically, takes account of the learner's perspective. She concludes that, in order to avoid mistakes typical of a colonialist past, we ought to consider "local underlying teaching-learning traditions and cultural habits more seriously" when we engage in international development co-operation. After all, "co-operation implies a togetherness of both sides and excludes the un-reflective acceptance of somebody else's ideas".

In their article on "non-Chinese researchers conducting sensitive research in Chinese cultures", Mark King and Kokila Katyal raise some methodological and ethical issues that ought to be carefully considered not only by comparative education researchers working in education development in cultures and societies different to their own, but probably by all researchers working across cultural contexts. King and Katyal consider issues in sampling, problems pertaining to data collection, and the challenges of data interpretation. They suggest that researchers might enhance the reliability and validity of their studies

by being sensitive and flexible in their research design.

One of King and Katyal's more important insights lies in this observation: "it became clear to us that any researcher, whether using qualitative or quantitative methods, has a distinct point of view with cultural and personal values that cannot be removed from the research equation". "It was important," they continue, "that as researchers we acknowledged our locations within the specific social world in which we conducted our research, and explored how our locations influenced our particular worldviews in terms of [inter alia] … the development of research instruments … and data interpretation." They conclude that "the challenge … is not to eliminate these cultural and personal values but to consider – and even document – the effects of personal bias that may influence one's perspective and positionality in research".

There are researchers in the fields of anthropology and education and of ethnography and education who maintain that it is possible for researchers to leave their own cognitive and epistemological frameworks 'at the door' when they enter a research site characterized by cultural perspectives that are not their own. Their view is that the theory, the classificatory frameworks, the patterns and their significance, will emerge on their own, (happily) independently of the researcher's preconceptions. This view is not only naïve, it is wrongheaded – not least because it is simply not possible to see without some kind of framework within which to recognize patterns and make sense of data. King and Katyal acknowledge this and offer some indications, through their own research experience across cultural perspectives, as to how researchers might work with this inescapable epistemological challenge.

Anthony Lau brings the focus squarely back to east Asia in his explicitly comparative paper, which concludes this issue, on Chinese music in Hong Kong and Taipei junior secondary schools, where he considers the influence of socio-political forces on the intended, the resourced, and the actually implemented curricula in this domain. He finds that the music taught in these schools is predominantly Western, and sets out to find the reasons why. Lau concludes that concepts of national identity, preferences with regard to national and local cultures, ideas about national and colonial education, and relationships with other cultures have all played "important roles in the shaping of the nature and extent of Chinese and non-Chinese elements in music curricula in Hong Kong and Taipei".

In this, the tenth issue of the *Comparative Education Bulletin*, the Comparative Education Society of Hong Kong can be proud of making available through the pages of its journal scholarship that illuminates that most worthwhile aspect of comparative education, its contribution to educational development.

# The Comparative Education Society of Hong Kong: A History

Wong Suk-Ying, Chinese University of Hong Kong &
Gregory P. Fairbrother, Hong Kong Institute of Education

In March 1989, several academics from Hong Kong's two major universities, the University of Hong Kong (HKU) and the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), went separately to Boston, USA, to attend the annual conference of the Comparative and International Education Society (CIES). Without any prior arrangement, these academics bumped into each other while attending each other's presentations, and were excited about what each other had to say. The fervour for some form of intellectual exchange in a comparative context led to the birth of the Comparative Education Society of Hong Kong (CESHK) that same year.

When the founding President of the CESHK, Bernard Luk (1989-91), gave this vivid description of the founding of the society at the 2005 annual conference, one could still detect his intellectual concern for a body of which the founding members had held a visionary agenda. It was a time of much attention to the political and social development of China, especially after the outbreak of the social unrest in and near Beijing's Tiananmen Square in June 1989. Hong Kong was still a colony of the United Kingdom, but since it was scheduled to return to Chinese sovereignty in 1997, the population was very sensitive to political developments in China. The Tiananmen incident penetrated almost all dimensions of life in Hong Kong. Looking back, Luk (2005) recalled:

> At that time there was very little communication across the Harbour [i.e. between the two universities]. The few of us at the Chinese University of Hong Kong got together and decided to form a CESHK. I took a pen and paper and wrote a first draft of the constitution. The other two colleagues went to the police station to register [it in] Spring 1989. Up north bigger things were happening. All of Hong Kong's attention was focused on Beijing/Tiananmen. Nobody did any work. I was on sabbatical then so I helped draft the constitution, and sent colleagues to register it with the police. That was it.

## Building Comparative Education as an Institution

*In Search of a Role Identity*
Recalling the origins of the CESHK, Luk (2005) added that the intellec-

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tual climate in 1989 intensified the uncertainty about the future of Hong Kong:

> It was a time that academia in Hong Kong began to articulate its role and identity. And the identity for comparative educationists was not only about the place of Hong Kong vis à vis the rest of the Chinese-speaking world. It was also about how these intellectuals looked at education. In the 1980s the most active academic group concerned with education in Hong Kong was the Hong Kong Educational Research Association (HKERA). It was … dominated by quantitative researchers who focused on the psychological dimensions of education. There was a need for those who were interested in a qualitative approach, highly motivated to further expand the horizon of inquiry to a macro level, to be more assertive.

In this attempt to assert the role and identity of a specific group of university professors and researchers, the CESHK was founded on the basis of promoting an alternative approach for framing educational inquiries and the methodological strategies. Luk (2005) was convinced of the need and advantages for doing comparative education in Hong Kong especially when taking into consideration the colony's unique trajectory:

> If not taking into account the issue of 1989 and as a colonial society, Hong Kong's education has always been implicitly comparative. In Hong Kong there is more than one education tradition. People usually identified two strands of education in Hong Kong: English strand and Chinese strand. However, if you look at the history of education in Hong Kong until the 1980s, there have always been more than the Chinese and English strands. A good many of the most important educators in Hong Kong have been Italian, French and German. What did they bring into Hong Kong's education setup?

Luk felt that many dimensions of the implicit comparativeness in Hong Kong education had been neglected. He maintained that the first person who consciously did comparative education was Cheng Tung Choy, who had first-hand experience in the colonial English-speaking education system and the nationalist Mandarin-speaking education system in China. Cheng proceeded to a Master's degree at the University of London Institute of Education, where his thesis compared education in Chinese communities in Hong Kong, Singapore and the Dutch East Indies (Cheng 1949). He continued his career as a civil

servant and university administrator, and he gave Luk his first job at the CUHK upon Luk's return from his MA and PhD studies overseas. Cheng was by the mid-1970s the head of the School of Education at the CUHK. When Luk was appointed, Cheng said to him: "We have to add comparative education as one of the options for Masters degrees at the CUHK."

While Luk's remark on the implicit comparativeness in the educational experience of the colony is noteworthy especially in laying the foundation for the establishment of the CESHK, some forms of comparative education research in Hong Kong can be dated back to the 1920s. As noted by Sweeting (1999), in 1926 the University of Hong Kong published an article that was at least contiguous with the field of comparative education. The earliest university course in Hong Kong with a comparative education focus was in the programme of the postgraduate diploma in education at HKU. By the 1980s, while the Faculty of Education at the CUHK had become active in research on comparative education, its counterpart at HKU had also invested substantial resources in the field through offering courses and recruiting academic staff. It was at this time that legitimate programmes in comparative education began to take shape and were institutionalised at the masters' degree level at both universities. The initiatives to launch a programme of study at the postgraduate level was partly due to the elaborate training in comparative education that those faculty members had received from major centres of comparative education (London, Columbia, etc.) at the time. They were the direct cultural carriers of comparative education in higher education institutions in Hong Kong. The demand for applying their disciplinary training in the context of education was also in place. Those who had formal training in social sciences or humanities also found comparative education a viable platform to substantiate their research and professional interests in education.

Consequently, much effort was directed toward the location of comparative education as an alternative and then supplementary field in the higher education sector. Disciplinary identity and role functioning were not clearly differentiated at that point, nor was it a major concern for academics and educational professionals. However, the initial undertaking gave room for interested scholars to position their scholarly interests, and some might even have possessed a positive outlook towards the handover and found a mission for their academic careers. Most importantly, it might have created a reservoir for preserving these intellectuals who might have left the community when Hong Kong faced political and social instability. Commitment to Hong Kong among academics could not necessarily be taken for granted, with 33 per cent of academic staff in the seven institutions

funded by the University Grants Committee (UGC) employed on non-local terms, though foreign nationals constituted only 2 per cent of Hong Kong's total population (Postiglione 1996).

The institutionalisation of comparative education as a field of teaching and research was definitely enhanced by the establishment of the CESHK. By the time Bernard Luk completed his presidency of the society, his successor, Leslie Lo (1992-94), a professor in Comparative Education and Educational Administration & Policy Analysis in the CUHK, had a distinct goal of identifying the disciplinary nature of comparative education and its role in a transforming society. As advanced by Lo (2005):

> Being in its infant stage, the society was small, constituted by a number of interested scholar-teachers and some of their research postgraduate students at the CUHK and HKU. The scholar-teachers were relatively young people who were trying to establish comparative education as a viable field of study in their respective institutions. The efforts, though not concerted by any means, came under many guises: educational development in Chinese societies, education in small states, education and national development, and more. I think we had a critical mass to sustain comparative education as a viable field of study in the Hong Kong academia; but the interests were so diverse and work agendas so different that opportunities for cross-institutional endeavours were not readily available.
>
> In addition to its stated purpose, I did have a vision for the society: to find theoretical footing in the empirical context of Hong Kong's education, then initiate comparison with certain localities in the Chinese Mainland, and then expand comparison to include Taiwan and Macao in order to afford a more comprehensive view of educational change in the Chinese societies. With that secured, comparison with other societies could be confidently conducted. This initial vision has been gradually fulfilled with the nurturing of PhD students and the participation of scholars in the disciplines, such as economics and sociology of education. However, its fruition has taken much longer than I had anticipated.

Lo felt that the scope of comparative education should be focused on the greater China region as an initial departure, highlighting his concern and vision for the legitimacy of the field while the colony was approaching the transition. The CESHK had by then incorporated members from other tertiary institutions, and the third President, Gerard Postiglione (1994-96), was an American-born sociologist from the University of Hong Kong who had done most of his work

in the context of comparative education. He highlighted the role that the CESHK could play in Hong Kong's political transition by providing the community with a better understanding of education in China (Postiglione 1995, p.4). A decade later, Postiglione recalled his concern and support for intellectual freedom when Hong Kong was experiencing a period of decolonisation during his tenure as President (Postiglione 2005).

If the initial effort had been devoted to the positioning of comparative education as a field in the academic domain within which an organised community emerged to reinforce its legitimacy of presence, the subsequent effort consolidated both the intellectual identity and role functioning of comparative educationists. The historical juncture that Hong Kong encountered was an important factor; and patterns also demonstrated the dynamics of the Hong Kong academic community. The society has lived up to the expectation of being an international mix which serves as a force for its continued existence.

**Functioning of the CESHK**

*The Hong Kong Educational Context*
A review of Hong Kong's educational context helps in the understanding of several factors related to the development of the CESHK. Both before and after 1997, Hong Kong society, politics and education underwent changes related to the resumption of Chinese sovereignty. Among the changes in education were those in the curriculum, including the incorporation of new subjects, adaptations to existing subjects, and increased emphasis on civic and moral education, especially with regard to national identity (Bray 1997; Vickers 2005). Pressure in the pre-1997 period for a shift from English to Cantonese as a medium of instruction led the government in 1998 to require such a change for schools that were deemed to be better able to serve students by teaching in Cantonese (Cheng 2002). In 1999, the new government embarked on a wide-ranging set of reforms of the primary and secondary education systems and curricula with the goal of adapting Hong Kong education for the knowledge economy (Education Commission 2000).

The period after 1989 also saw a rapid expansion of Hong Kong's higher education system, nearly doubling the number of students admitted to first-degree courses by 1994/95 (Postiglione 1998). Before 1991, Hong Kong maintained only two universities: HKU and the CUHK. The newly-founded Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST) began to enrol students in 1991. By 2004, Hong Kong had nine publicly-funded degree-granting university-level institutions. The expansion was partly driven by the government's goal of providing

equal access to higher education and the strong social demand for higher education. The expansion was also viewed by many as an attempt to boost confidence in Hong Kong as the colony approached the 1997 change of sovereignty (Yung 2004).

The expansion of higher education was one demonstration of the indirect influence that mainland China had on Hong Kong's education system. However, postcolonial Hong Kong also saw a need to be more receptive to both the sovereign motherland and the international community in the process of searching for its identity. Hong Kong's reunification with China was accompanied by Beijing's encouragement of closer links between Hong Kong and mainland universities, continuing a trend of increasing academic exchanges since the late 1970s (Law 1997; Postiglione 1998). UGC allocations for Hong Kong-mainland academic exchanges nearly doubled to HK$4.4 million (US$0.56 million) between 1992 and 1996, and new visa policies made it easier for Hong Kong's universities to recruit mainland academics returning from having earned their doctorates abroad. In the area of student exchange, the number of postgraduate students from mainland China studying in Hong Kong's universities nearly doubled from 948 to 1,868 between 1998 and 2001 (Li 2004).

Exchange with mainland China represented a new arena for Hong Kong's external academic links which traditionally had focused on Australia, Canada, the UK and the USA. One manifestation of such links was the high proportion of foreign academics working in Hong Kong's universities, as well as a large number of overseas Chinese and locals who had earned their doctorates abroad (Postiglione 1998). In an international survey of the academic profession, 85 per cent of Hong Kong respondents claimed that connections with scholars in other countries were very important to their professional work (Boyer et al. 1994). In the same survey, Hong Kong academics ranked third in terms of both the amount of time served as a faculty member in another country and agreement to the necessity of reading books and journals published abroad in order to keep up with developments in their fields.

Contrary to the expectation of pessimists that Hong Kong's social and cultural institutions would be interrupted after the handover, postcolonial Hong Kong became more dynamic in presenting a transnational orientation by playing an active role in the international arena while being conscious of the optimal link with China. This was especially prominent in higher education, and was evident for example in recruitment of students and academic staff, student exchange, and financing. Postcolonial Hong Kong would not have been as exciting and challenging had the development of China not commanded much attention in the world map. The various organisational goals that had been identified by the CESHK posed more compatibility

than contradiction to the aspiring effort of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region government in terms of the positioning of Hong Kong. The postcolonial framework described as 'one country, two systems', which allowed Hong Kong to be part of China but to operate differently from the mainland, easily accommodated both a local/culturalist and international outlook into the agenda-making of comparative education.

This context raised several salient points with regard to the CESHK's development. First, the expansion of higher education and teacher education had implications for the membership and leadership of the society. Most of the founding members of the society had been drawn from the two university-level teacher education providers, the CUHK and HKU. By the second decade in the society's history, it was drawing members from these two institutions as well as from the Hong Kong Institute of Education, Hong Kong Baptist University, City University of Hong Kong, and others. Second, the international composition of academic staff in Hong Kong's universities, because of colonialism as well as the recruitment of foreign and overseas-trained mainland Chinese and Hong Kong academics, was reflected in the make-up of the CESHK's membership. Third, increased links with mainland China, among faculty and also demonstrated by increasing numbers of mainland Chinese postgraduate students, were reflected in the research interests of society members, the composition of the membership, and the direction and nature of its activities. Finally, the overall traditional internationalism of Hong Kong's tertiary education sector demonstrated the importance of and interest in cross-societal research and scholarship in education. All of these factors have meant that Hong Kong's small geographical and academic territory has been host to a society which is characterised by multiculturalism and multilingualism.

**On Membership**
It only took three years for the society to go beyond the local and regional context. In 1992, the CESHK became a member of the World Council of Comparative Education Societies (WCCES). This membership became a crucial milestone for the development of the CESHK, since it represented a leap forward for the society in becoming a legitimate member of the largest community of comparative education at the international level. Throughout the remaining years of the 1990s, CESHK membership grew steadily and by 2005 the society had approximately 80 members. While this might not be seen as a large number, it was impressive in proportion to the size of the total population. The geographical representation of the members was not confined to Hong Kong, but included researchers and professionals

in Australia, mainland China, Japan, Macao, Philippines, the UK and the USA. The membership fee remained HK$150 (US$19) for regular members and HK$90 for student members, which was modest in terms of general costs in Hong Kong.

Despite its small size, the efforts of the society's executive committees and membership have ensured its flourishing, avoiding the fate of other small comparative education societies which have collapsed. Part of the explanation for the society's success, among other factors noted by Bray and Manzon (2005), has been a motivation to continue holding a series of activities which provide a platform for scholarly exchange both locally and internationally and among educational researchers and practitioners.

**On Activities**
The objectives of the CESHK set out in its Constitution are as follows:

- to promote the study of comparative education in Hong Kong;
- to disseminate ideas and information, through seminars and publications and other means, on recent developments, in Hong Kong and abroad, of comparative education scholarship; and
- to liaise with other scholarly associations of comparative education and of other areas of educational research, in Hong Kong and abroad.

The fifth President of the society, Mark Bray (1998-2000), at that time Director of the Comparative Education Research Centre (CERC) at the University of Hong Kong, revitalised attention to these objectives. Bray had a distinct mission of taking the CESHK further beyond the local context, which was partly achieved through the links with the WCCES. Bray's address at the CESHK's 10th anniversary conference highlighted the impressive output of Hong Kong scholars in the prominent English-language and Chinese-language journals of the field, namely *Comparative Education Review* (Chicago), *Comparative Education*, *Compare*, *International Journal of Educational Development*, *International Review of Education*, and *Comparative Education Review* (Beijing). Hong Kong scholars, Bray pointed out, were doing much to promote the visibility of Hong Kong itself, and also mainland China, Macao and Taiwan, in the international literature. He added that they had particular strengths in being able to publish in Chinese-language as well as English-language journals. However, Bray underscored the need for stronger attention to methodology, and urged CESHK scholars to reach further beyond local case study research into the broader conceptual arena (Bray 1999).

During Bray's presidency, the CESHK began its tradition of holding conferences on a regular annual basis rather than on a somewhat ad hoc pattern. The conferences have typically attracted 50-70 participants, and have benefited from the relatively informal atmosphere that that size has permitted. The CESHK has made efforts to rotate the location of the conferences around the tertiary institutions in Hong Kong in order to promote a broad sense of ownership of the society.

The society has also benefited from close links with the HKU's Comparative Education Research Centre (CERC), founded in 1994, which serves as the society's Secretariat and hosts its website (Bray 2004). Lee Wing On, Mark Bray, Bob Adamson, and Mark Mason have served as both Directors of CERC and Presidents of the CESHK, and other CERC members have served as officers of the society. Emily Mang, the CERC Secretary and a graduate of the HKU Master of Education programme in comparative education, has worked as the CESHK Secretary and Manager of the website and archive. CERC's publications, including the book series co-published initially with Kluwer and then with Springer, have served as a very visible outlet for the works of comparative education scholars based not only in Hong Kong but worldwide, and have been made available to CESHK members at discounted prices.

Some of the activities organised by the society have served as useful platforms for younger scholars to identify and substantiate their interest and knowledge in comparative education. The annual CESHK conference has provided an opportunity for postgraduate students to practice presentations for larger conferences and to learn from each other not only in terms of content but also in presentation styles. Opportunities to practice presentations are certainly available among colleagues and students at students' own institutions, but the cross-institutional and international participation at the conference has helped widen the range of feedback and brought in the voices of academics within participants' own specialisations as well as perspectives from those previously unfamiliar with their work. These factors help to reduce the anxiety of presenting for the first time at larger conferences. The CESHK conferences have also provided for students a forum to present their developing ideas and frameworks for their dissertations, and to test their research conclusions and get an idea of potential challenges during the period of waiting before their final dissertation defences. Selected conference papers have been published in the CESHK Newsletter, which was first issued in March 1993, and evolved into the *Comparative Education Bulletin* in May 1998.

Other activities deserving mention are seminars and study trips. The seminars have commonly been co-hosted by the CESHK and the tertiary institutions. In many cases, the institutions have paid the

expenses of visiting scholars, and invited the CESHK to co-host in order to support the society and expand the audience for the events. Some study tours have been to international schools in Hong Kong, thus substantiating Luk's point, made above, about the potential for instructive comparisons even within Hong Kong (see also Bray & Yamato 2003). Study tours have also been undertaken as day trips to Macao and Shenzhen. These cases have again illustrated the potential for the field of comparative education to gain insights from neighbouring locations, and have demonstrated that it is not necessary to travel to distant countries in order to undertake meaningful cross-border comparative studies of education.

Further, the CESHK has collaborated with other WCCES member societies in the organisation of various events. In 2002, and again in 2005, the CESHK supported the Chinese Comparative Education Society (CCES) in its partnership with Beijing Normal University to host the first and second Worldwide Forums of Comparative Education. These events attracted several hundred participants, and were a demonstration of collaboration in the Chinese-speaking community. Regionally, in 2007 the CESHK joined hands with the Comparative Education Society of Asia (CESA) in hosting the 6th CESA biennial conference in conjuncttion with the CESHK annual conference.

**Conclusion**

It was during the presidencies of Mark Bray and Bob Adamson that the CESHK gained substantial prominence in the international arena. The growth of the society had continued in terms of the establishment and regularisation of activities such as the annual conference, study trips, the website and the publication of the Bulletin which replaced the older Newsletter. The society's finances had also become much healthier, chiefly because of the willingness of institutions to absorb various costs and the willingness of enthusiastic supporters to work voluntarily. As successors to the Presidential office, Ip Kin Yuen, Mok Ka Ho and Wong Suk-Ying all worked conscientiously to continue these activities while advancing their own visionary agendas for the society. Further synergies and international visibility were achieved by Wong Suk-Ying between 2005 and 2007 with the CESA partnership, achieved through her dual role as President of the CESHK and co-President of CESA. Mark Mason at HKU, who had become the CESHK President in 2006, played a major role in hosting the CESHK/CESA conference in 2007.

The CESHK has undergone various stages of development during which emphases were modified and advanced. It has also handled well the constraints of being a small organisation. Nevertheless, it is salient that the society has relied on a small group of committed volunteers. Furthermore, the Presidents frequently became the defining and mo-

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bilising force for society activities. The increasing intensification of work in the higher education institutions exerted some threat, which was related to Lo's (2005) observation that the society somehow had missing links:

> The identifiable contribution to comparative education is mostly linked to individuals rather than the society. My involvement for a time in the editorial board of the *Comparative Education Review* and Mark Bray's involvement in the WCCES and the *International Journal of Educational Development* [as the Corresponding Editor, 1983-90; and Editor for Asia Pacific, 1990-2005] were cases in point. Some of the scholarly work that members performed for comparative education was mostly linked to the institutions. Academic papers and books published, websites for related areas, and even visits by overseas scholars in the field were identified as the fruits of labour by individuals in certain institutions. For example, visits by Philip Altbach, Torsten Husén and Wang Chengxu to the Chinese University did not always involve members of the society. Be that as it may, the infant society existed as a useful platform for individual scholars in the field.
>
> My last personal observation: while it seems conveniently logical to have someone 'in power' in institutions to run the society, it may not bring the kind of benefits that have been anticipated. Deans and department chairmen who serve as officers of the society may help to establish comparative education as a viable field of study in their institutions, and they may have some resources to channel to worthy activities of the society. But they are also very busy people with numerous tasks to attend to, and the society's affairs are only one of those tasks. As officers of the society, they may be constantly distracted from its developmental needs. This was my own situation, though other former Presidents may have different impressions of their roles and performance.

Among the special features of the CESHK is its bilingual identity in both English and Chinese. This has particularly promoted links with scholarly communities in mainland China, Macao and Taiwan. The conference presentations and articles in the Bulletin have given more prominence to English than Chinese; but the fact that both languages can be used has helped with cross-fertilisation and collaboration. The historical identity of the CESHK in Hong Kong's colonial era has been carried forward as an asset in the postcolonial era.

The trajectory of the CESHK has demonstrated that much effort has been devoted to attending and adapting to the conditions that would have made possible the maintenance and development of the society.

Likewise, changes of organisational goals of the CESHK might have reflected the society's effort to locate its meaning of presence by playing a unique role of promoting either a local/culturalist or international identity. With the rapid changes in China and the increasing interest in education as a global phenomenon, the CESHK has reached the juncture of not only working to safeguard the continual presence of the organisation but also to expand and consolidate its role identity and function through bridging both academic and practical endeavours of education within the intellectual realm of comparative education.

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# Complexity Theory in Development Theory

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## Introduction

Complexity sciences (or Complexity Theory) have for a long time been used to explain biological systems that are non-additive and self-organizing. Increasingly, this approach has also been used in the social sciences, to explain structures in which a large number of agents are believed to be interacting in a dynamic and non-linear fashion. This paper proposes to analyze development processes using insights from Complexity Theory. Such an approach may prove valuable because it looks at the total product of development efforts and investigates whether and how, as a system, it leads to change; which are the factors of inertia, and the combined factors that could lead to a positive transformation of the status quo.

It may be argued that complexity has not yet been systematically articulated in such a way that it could be termed a theory (Kuhn, 2008). In this paper, I have used Complexity Theory as an umbrella term of scientific theories sharing the idea of non-linearity of complex social interactions, i.e., that outcomes in complex systems are determined by multiple causes, and that these causes interact in a non-additive fashion, because factors reinforce or cancel out each other in non-linear ways (Byrne, 1998). I will seek to demonstrate that development, both at macro and micro levels, is a non-linear phenomenon that must be analyzed as such.

Accordingly, this paper contends that development practice and theory needs to make use of Complexity Theory for a better understanding of development processes. I argue that complexity and development may be brought together because human cultural settings, productions and institutions as they are related to development efforts are complex and dynamic by nature. Individual human beings (beneficiaries, donors, administrators, service providers) as well as associations of individuals (institutions and associations) are multi-dimensional, non-linear, interconnected, far from being at equilibrium and are unpredictable: "Rather than seek to undertake inquiry that simplifies through reducing this complexity to that which can be measured objectively, a complexity approach begins by acknowledging that human settings and activities are necessarily complex" (Kuhn, 2008, pp.182-183). The first part of the paper seeks to understand the complex and problematic concept of "development." The second part of the paper argues that Complexity Theory can add to development theory by

showing how the outcomes of development programs are influenced in non-linear ways that contribute to inertia or change, depending on the circumstances. More specifically, in this second part I seek to develop the two themes of integration and flexibility of development initiatives. In the conclusion, based on the lessons from Complexity Theory, I suggest how development initiatives can contribute more effectively to sustainable development.

**Development**
In this paper, the word "development" is used deliberately in a reductionist sense, i.e., as the action of progressing towards the realizations of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Hence, the reduction of the number of people living in absolute poverty (less that $1 a day), higher literacy scores, more gender equity, etc., will, in the analysis and discussion below, be considered as "development."

The term development acquired a special significance in the1940s, when President Harry Truman in his famous inauguration speech defined most of the world as underdeveloped, and proposed that all nations move along the same path as the United States, and to aspire to the same goals of development (Sachs, 1999). At that time, development efforts concentrated on increasing levels of agricultural and industrial production as well as exploitation of natural resources (mining, forestry, etc.), which it was believed, would lead to economic growth. It was not before the early 1970s that leading donor agencies began focusing on rural development, and then, in rapid succession during the 1970s and 1980s, began developing specific programs to address poverty, basic needs, education, women, etc. (Sachs, 1999). The overreaching purpose of most funding agencies' programs, however, never shifted from the focus on economic growth as a path to development (Daly & Farley, 2004). Most project proposals are still evaluated by their contribution to economic growth, and in this way, most funded projects had economic growth as their ultimate goal. This view of development has been rejected by various critical perspectives, for which development policy choices should first and foremost respond to distribution criteria (i.e., empowering the poorest people in society), rather than a search for economic growth, which often benefits the wealthy and creates an increasing gap between the rich and the poor (an example of such disparate development can be seen in the explosive economic growth of China, which has nevertheless left millions of people locked in extreme poverty). The decisive criteria of development would in such a perspective be related to social justice, and not just be based on questions of cost effectiveness and economic growth.

In 1987 the term "sustainable development" was introduced into

the discourse by the Brundtland report. The work on this report started in 1983, when the United Nations appointed an international commission to propose strategies to improve human well being in the short term without threatening the local and global environment in the long term. Sustainable development especially favored ecologically sound growth: "transition towards greater sustainability would require a more holistic approach to development, entailing inter-generational equity as well as harmonization of economic growth with other human needs and aspirations" (Mehmet, 1999, p.133). Despite the idea of a holistic approach of development, programs and project were still sector-dependent and looked at sector-specific sustainability. In the 1990s, the notion of sustainability was adopted by most international development agencies, and even largely incorporated into the conservative discourse. A critical version of the sustainability concept contends that economic growth cannot continue without limits because there is an ecological boundary for growth and that economic growth is not distributed equitably in society. Therefore, instead of promoting unsustainable and unequal economic growth, development should be striving to promote a qualitative change towards an improved and more equitable society.

Development projects are generally supported by various policy papers and national or international targets. At a national level, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) supposedly offers an integrated vision of development needs:

> a PRSP would be expected to recognize and deal with intersectoral links and complementarities, the interdependence between sectoral and macroeconomic performance, and overall social and institutional functioning. In many countries the characteristics of poverty are fairly well understood, but the links between alternative public interventions on the one hand and poverty and inequality on the other are often not clearly articulated (Klugman, 2002, p.13).

However, PRSPs and Poverty Reduction Support Credits (PRSCs) are created by representatives from different line ministries, and they refer to international policy goals within their domain. Hence, although the PRSP is a tool to generate intersectoral links and complementarities, the actual programs often depend on each line ministry's own priorities and goals. In other words, each intervention is still connected to one specific MDG or EFA goal (Klugman, 2002). What characterizes most development discourse, whether critical or belonging to a more conservative pro-economic growth approach, is a sector-specific vision.

Many development efforts focus on pro-poor economic growth.

The efforts are generally geared towards the achievement of goals set by two types of international policy agendas, notably sector-specific agendas e.g., the Education for All (EFA) effort, and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). In addition, some international targets are cross-sector, e.g., gender equity, HIV/AIDS and environment concerns would be integrated into many development projects. The MDGs offer international targets in different areas of development, including eradication of extreme poverty; education; gender equity; reduction of child mortality; improvement of maternal health; reduction of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; environmental sustainability; and the creation of a global partnership for development. These are the eight main goals of the MDGs, each of which is addressed, generally, by separate projects, policies and programs.

The field of development, therefore, is generally characterized by separate efforts to score against subject-specific indicators in the field of the concerned project, program or policy. For example, a literacy program will seek to eradicate illiteracy and will be evaluated for its score in this regard. It would not be primarily seen as a requirement in an agriculture or health project, nor be evaluated for its impact on health or agriculture. I suggest that a useful way of looking at the effects of a development program is to evaluate its contribution to the larger context of development by using Complexity Theory.

**Complexity Theory**
The problem with most economic analysis of development products is the focus on the efficiency of delivery of a single product, not at the society (and stakeholders) as a system of inertia and change. The basic premises of Complexity Theory is that a system needs to reach a certain level of complexity, or critical mass, to overcome inertia of the status quo, and to reach a "sustainable autocatalytic state – that is, for it to maintain its own momentum in a particular direction" (Mason, 2007, p.4). Once this critical mass is reached, new proprieties and behaviors emerges that are not necessarily contained in the system's constituent elements:

> In non-linear systems small changes in causal elements over time do not necessarily produce small changes in other particular aspects of the system, or in the characteristics of the system as a whole. Either or both may change very much indeed, and, moreover, they may change in ways which do not involve just one possible outcome (Byrne, 1998, p.14).

In order to reach the critical mass for change, interactions between factors of change are important. If a development effort (project, policy,

program) is failing, it may therefore be that it has not attained a sufficient level of interactions in order to attain a critical mass for change. Most proponents of literacy education, for example, would argue that providing literacy for literacy's own sake is not likely to be successful. It is in the interaction with other development efforts that literacy can produce a literate and enabling environment, prone to the dynamics of change. In Complexity Theory, each additional factor (for change) added to the system multiplies quadratically the number of interactions between agents, and hence multiplies quadratically the number of possible outcomes (Mason, 2007). Hence, literacy alone does not interact with anything if it exists in isolation – which is the case in many communities in which there is no usage for reading and writing. If one activity or agent is added to the literacy course, say newspapers, one connection is made, literacy-newspapers. If an additional element is added, say religious books, there are three connections: literacy-newspapers, newspapers-religious books, and literacy-religious books. The system is still very simple, but will have a better chance in providing a successful literacy course than an isolated literacy system. If we add an extra element, the number of possible interactions are six; if we add another one, the number of interactions are ten, another one, fifteen; another one, twenty-one, etc.[1]

Of course, no development system or activity acts in isolation – we would have to add in factors of culture, religion, political belonging, which each interact in a non-additive fashion, some reinforcing, and some reducing the effect of the initial development agent, literacy. The combined effect of these interactions is not necessarily the sum of the separate effects. It may be greater or less, because the interactions and elements reinforce or cancel out each other in non-linear ways. Also, they do not act the same way in each system. In other words, the introduction of an element such as newspapers or religious books may have a positive effect in some circumstances (i.e., contributing to reach a critical mass for literacy acquisition by the target group), or may be neutral (i.e., have no effect) in other circumstances. In some other situations, they may even be counterproductive. The way a factor will interact with others depends largely on the initial condition of the system. Complexity theory, thus, emphasizes the need of understanding of each actor's motivation and the bounded rationality of the agents' actions: a small change in the initial conditions of a system may exert great influence on the subsequent behavior of each added factor of change.

We have looked at a simple example of literacy above, but the same type of connections holds true for the greater picture of development. Hence, it may be argued that:

- Health efforts (in themselves a complex network of inter-actions) are influenced by literacy
- Literacy acquisition is influenced by the health of the stake-holders
- Agriculture is influenced by literacy
- Literacy acquisition is influenced by the type of agriculture of the stakeholders
- Culture is influenced by literacy
- Literacy acquisition is influenced by the culture of the learners

These interactions again are not linear and depend on the locality and the initial conditions of the system. In order to attain a lock-in for sustainable autocatalytic change, it is necessary to add as many inter-actions as possible to the system, i.e., to multiply intervention in order to overcome the initial condition of inertia (Mason, 2008). Also, it is necessary to understand, as much as possible, the initial condition of each system in each locality, since the agents for change do not inter-act in the same way; the (bounded) rationality of each actor is not the same, and the possible outcomes of each added factor is therefore variable according to initial circumstances.

Complexity research has identified a number of qualities that habitually are manifest in a complex phenomenon (Davis & Sumara, 2006). These characteristics include:[2] Self-organization: a system emerges through self-organization of various interacting elements. Such a system or structure can of course be negative or positive: in development it can range from negative outcomes (such as corruption) to positive ones (such as coordination of activities). The systems are bottom-up emergent: they do not depend on a specific organizational or an over-arching super-structure, although they can be part of such structures. Likewise, they do not depend on centralized control, but on short-range relationships amongst actors. For example, in a development project, the systematic, self-organized and non-formal relationships between the local service provider, local administration and the beneficiaries will usually be stronger than the overarching, top-down administrative structure of the project. Further, complex systems are often nested one within the other, i.e., in a development effort, various levels and types of coordination, field activities, and learning take place and interact. Many of these activities in themselves constitute complex systems. In the example above, we saw that health efforts (a complex network of interactions) can be influenced by literacy (another complex network). Then again, the health of the beneficiaries is likely to affect literacy acquisition: an inter-relationship that is likely to promote lock-in to a positive feedback loop.[3] Further, the systems are ambiguously bounded, i.e., it is difficult if not impossible to define

the boundaries of a complex system. In the example above, it would be difficult to determine with precision which other sectors are influenced by literacy (health, agriculture, culture, religion, etc.). Also, the systems are constantly changing and evolving – they are learning and "thus better described in terms of Darwinian evolution than Newtonian mechanics" (Davis & Sumara, 2006, p.6). This implies that they are not in equilibrium.

Kuhn (2008) interprets the list of complexity characteristics in an educational context as descriptive, not proscriptive. With development efforts, it would seem possible to construct services as leading to complexity, i.e., as "bottom-up emergent" and "self-organizing," without such structuring being a contradiction of its own terms. This again, plays on the ways implementation of any given development effort is given.

Development programs are usually set up and implemented in a non-integrated way, and thus each activity reaches actors in a way that precludes the maximum effect of interaction between factors of change, which in many, if not all, cases prevents the systems of poverty to reach a critical mass of change, leading to development. In using the aforementioned example, literacy efforts acts alone to obtain literacy, health efforts acts alone to reach health, and I argue that these efforts are often disseminated in a non-integrated way, precluding the complex interaction needed to achieve the necessary momentum of change. With other words, the system of literacy, although possessing all the characteristics of a complex system (it is a complex system), is locked in to inertia, because the health of the learners, the cultural incentives to learn, and all the other complex relationships that need be explored and exploited are not included or facilitated in the initial set-up of the project, policy or program. In the cases where non-integrated development projects have been successful, I would argue that the success is due to complex, bottom-up emergent self-organization of the actors. I would further argue that the development process could and should facilitate such interactions to obtain better results.

Thus, development efforts, through their adherence to a static and linear worldview, in many cases do not reach the necessary critical mass to cause change. This is due to the inertia of the status quo, and in many cases to the positive feedback cycle of poverty, which will maintain the poor (in an intergenerational cycle) locked in a path of poverty – or even in increasing poverty. Policies and programs are generally targeted at one aspect of poverty instead of seeking to create a monumentum to reach critical mass for change.

## Conclusion

Development efforts have often been criticized by mass media for the

low impact realized. Different development theories have attempted to improve the effectiveness of each separate program. Increasingly, NGOs and some International Organizations have started to look at the interconnection between different sectors and started to propose more integrated activities. In this paper, I have argued that the overall effectiveness of development efforts is dependent of the integrated effort of many development activities within the same society. Instead of "thinning out" activities (i.e., proposing one service to each community), it is necessary to integrate the activities so as to create the impact for change desirable. The question that now arises is how this can be achieved in a context of donor fatigue and limited funding. Mason (2007), in an analysis of complexity theory and schools, proposes to start with the poorest schools. This may be the way to go with development efforts. I will argue that integrated activities will be more cost-effective than traditional sector-specific activities; hence, although the initial investment may be high, the outcomes will be worth the initial investment.

However, this may also mean that certain Millennium Development Goals would not be reached. For example, at present the Education For All initiative (reflected in the MDGs) focuses on providing mass education programs, which in view of insufficient financing are inadequate to create a sufficient critical mass for change in the sense of development, let alone reach a sufficient literacy level after primary schooling. It follows that in view of a financing that is not sufficient for achieving the education MDG, one could adopt one of two strategies: provide mass-education services of a low-quality nature (which is the current strategy), or make use of Complexity Theory to offer integrated projects which would enable the target beneficiaries to reach a sufficient critical mass for change. In many cases, this is not an either-or scenario; one could improve all development projects by using lessons Complexity Theory:

- Integrate service delivery to create a sufficient complexity to enable change in target communities
- Understand the initial condition of the beneficiaries, build adequate programs and address the bounded rationality of actors
- Create flexible programs that change as circumstances change and that can easily be modified to the unique circumstances of each beneficiary and target community
- Evaluate the programs as a holistic system and not as separate efforts towards separate goals (e.g., seek to understand a literacy program's effect on all development indicators instead of reducing it to literacy alone)

Finally, recent development "miracles," such as the unprecedented economic growth in certain Asian countries has shown that a rapid growth is not synonymous to equitable growth. The trickle-down principle of the economic growth-based development paradigm has proven inadequate to address the situation of the poorest of the poor, who find themselves locked in a cycle of intergenerational transmission of poverty and illiteracy. In view of finite financial capacities, it may be useful to focus on high-quality integrated service delivery for the poorest of the poor to achieve sustainable change and empowerment as a first step towards equitable development.

### Endnote

1. The mathematical formula is $y_n = \frac{1}{2}(n^2 - n)$, in which $(y_n)$ is the number of possible connections associated with a given number of elements or agents (n).
2. See: Davis & Sumara (2006) and Morrison (2002).
3. The positive feedback can lead to inertia (no health program, insufficient nutritional intake of learners, low participation and low outcomes), or of dynamic change (health program in place, better nutritional status of learners, better learning, learning about health further stimulate participation in the health program which results in better nutritional status, which results in more interest for further learning, etc. etc.).

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# Cultural Tradition in the Lao PDR and the Development of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)

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## Abstract

*In the last three decades, after the communist regime gained power in 1975, the education system in Laos has been facing a number of problems. However, in 1987 the education system was redesigned and was given a high priority in the general schemata. This paper documents the processes and outcomes of four training sessions held in two provinces between July to November, 2007, under the aegis of the joint partnership between Aide et Action and the Ministry of Education of Laos. In general, positive outcomes were noted at the end of each of the training sessions whereby there was a change in the beliefs of the participants.*

## The Background

Laos, officially the Lao People's Democratic Republic, is a landlocked socialist republic communist state in southeast Asia, bordered by Myanmar (Burma) and the People's Republic of China to the north-west, Vietnam to the east, Cambodia to the south, and Thailand to the west. Laos traces its history to the Kingdom of Lan Xang or "Land of a Million Elephants", which existed from the 14th to the 18th century. It was colonized by the French and gained independence in 1945. A long civil war ended when the communist Pathet Lao came to power in 1975. Private enterprise has increased since the mid-1980s, but development has been hampered by poor communications in the heavily forested and mountainous landscape. Most of the population of around 6 million practices subsistence agriculture. The country's ethnic make-up is diverse, with only around 60% belonging to the largest ethnic group, the Lao. Laos is divided into 16 provinces (khoueng), 1 municipality (kampheng nakhon), and 1 special zone (khetphiset).

## Education System in Laos

Considerable efforts were made after 1975 to extend elementary education to all ethnic groups and consequently an adult literacy campaign was launched, but these efforts were seriously undermined by the exodus of qualified teachers. In 1987, the educational objectives of the region were redesigned in the context of overall economic development and in harmony with the New Economic Mechanism that recognized education as the driving force in socio-economic development and gave priority to the development of an education system which could

provide the skilled workforce required by a modern economy. Since that time improvements have taken place in the education system at all levels, although across the country the sector continues to be hampered by shortage of human resources, under-qualified teaching staff, inadequate curricula, dilapidated facilities and lack of teaching equipment.

The general education system in Laos comprises pre-school education (crèche and kindergarten), primary education (five years), lower secondary education (three years) and upper secondary education (three years). Private schools and colleges have been encouraged since 1990. Literacy is currently estimated at around 50%, and only 71% of primary school aged children are in school. Net enrolment rates drop to 15% at lower secondary level, and two per cent at upper secondary level. Another serious issue is the wide difference of enrolment rates between boys and girls, and between the different ethnic groups. The higher the level of schooling, the relatively lower is the attendance of girls and ethnic minorities.

**The Rationale behind the Partnership Project**
It is widely acknowledged that the environment and experiences of children, particularly in the first years of their lives, have a profound impact on their overall development, setting lifelong patterns for physical, cognitive, emotional and social development. This is the most critical period for brain development, which affects progress in forming cognitive, language, social and educational skills. It is also a time when young children face the greatest risks to their survival, health status and emotional and physical growth.[1] The case studies conducted by UNICEF in mid 2003 attempted to show various programs that provide options that support the holistic development of the young child, emphasizing the importance of "integration". The case studies provided insights into how "integration" can be made to work in real situations, how it evolved in each case, and what consequences and/or benefits were attained.

Though for Lao PDR, special features on developing inter-sectoral coordination mechanisms at all levels through which efforts can be coordinated was emphasized to ensure that young children are at the centre of village planning, there are serious challenges for the country in the area of education. Not more than 7% of the children have access to pre-school or early childhood education programs while primary school level enrollment, attendance and completion is low and the transition to higher levels of education is even lower, especially for girls.

Decentralization aimed to progressively transfer responsibility to local administration such that greater responsibilities were delegated to provincial governors and the actual implementation of development

activities was rooted in villages. The implementation policy for IECD lay with the Lao Women's Union which aimed at establishing linkages with various sectors for giving young children a good start in life.

**Some Legal Basis**

The Basic Education Section of the Lao PDR EFA Plan was stated in reference to Article 19 of the Lao PDR Constitution and a commitment was signed in July 19, 1996 when the Prime Minister issued the Decree of Order on Compulsory Education in Lao PDR. The Education Strategic Vision of Lao PDR promotes increasing availability and quality of ECCE provisions through initiatives such as the "Best Start in Life" multi-sectoral cooperation of the Women's Union that aimed at integrating early childhood with community development processes and focused on the whole child and improved family and community care practices (Bernard, 2005). Lao PDR is also focusing on improved ECCE action to increase enrolment – anticipating an 11% increase for 3-4 year olds and 30% for 5 year olds by 2010, largely through expansion of community preschools (Bernard, 2005).

The partnership project between Aide et Action and the Laos PDR Ministry of Education hoped to implement a community-based, integrated early childhood development project with a gender perspective that demonstrated a tri-partnership model involving the family, school and community to address the holistic development of the child. This project was conducted in partnership with the Ministry of Education of Lao PDR and other stakeholders and was in support of the EFA goal on basic education, with reference to article 19 of the Lao PDR Constitution dated 19 July 1996.

This project aimed to create a wholesome preparatory environment for 5 years pre-school children on their transition phase from pre-school to primary education; assist in the development of locally available, low cost learning materials for pre-school classroom activities; assist in the strengthening and enhancement of knowledge and skills of pre-primary teachers (PO) and primary school teachers as needed; increase the knowledge and skills of key implementers in early childhood activities at different levels, community/village leaders and volunteer workers; develop gender-based resource materials/visuals for parent orientation/education; and establish a community-based support mechanism through participation of the concerned people in development planning for early childhood activities and other projects.

**The Transition Phase: From Pre-Primary to Primary**

The domains of young children's development revolve around the physical, emotional, psycho-social and cognitive/intellectual areas. As children grow and develop, they exhibit different traits and charac-

teristics where people and environment contribute and influence their total make-up as a person, i.e., parents, teachers, other siblings, grand-parents, adults, friends, etc. Institutions such as schools, pagodas, governments also contribute to how children behave in society in later years. Therefore, schools need to be welcoming, encouraging and child-friendly and teachers, parents, adults, schools and the environment needs to be supportive of the socialization process and learning of children.

The newly concluded PO teachers training on the use of curri-culum aims to improve the knowledge and skills of teachers related to the 4 domains of child's growth and development. This helps the PO teachers to be better facilitators and to understand the concepts and principles of child development and learning. Children learn and behave differently according to age and how teachers treat the children is a factor for the child's desire to stay on in school. In other words, teachers should be supportive and encouraging in this new learning experience in basic formal school.

The project on early childhood is designed to create a community-based early childhood development that demonstrates a closer collabo-ration involving the parents, families, schools, government and com-munity. The 2 provinces that the project covered are Champassak in the south closer to Cambodia and Oudomxay in the north closer to the border of China. As a first step of the process, site visitations and dialogues with key officers of Ministry of Education (MOE) and Pro-vincial Education Support Laos (PSEL) in Champassak as well as meetings with villagers, officers and members of community/school organizations i.e., the parent teachers association, local women's union and village leaders were conducted. Discussions with teachers, observations of pre-school classroom activities provided background information and validated some key issues particularly on the lack or absence of community participation and parent support to pre-school activities and vice versa.

The findings of the field visitations conducted between the months of October 2006 to February 2007 are summarized below. These were based on the analysis of data gathered from Champassak Province, specifically from the villages and schools of Huiphek, Nonchampa, Ban Dou and Vangtao, and were validated by the Provincial Director of Champassak Province Ministry of Education and the Education Specialist of Aide et Action based in Vientianne.

**Findings of Field Visitations**
a. Children – There were no formalized preschool education activities for 3-5 year old children and there were a disproportioned number of children per teacher in classes. Young children had no place to stay in the village, and they loitered around because the nearby village would

not accept them in their PO class. Younger siblings (3-4 years old) came to attend preschool activities with enrolled older siblings in PO class. Finally, there was limited teaching and learning materials for preschool teachers and children.

b. School Directors and Teachers – There was limited understanding of early childhood development related concepts and principles. It was also evident that there was a lack of training for pre-school teachers and the extent of community participation was limited to monetary contribution and the physical improvement of school buildings. There was a marked lack of ideas on the link between the preschool and primary school. There was also an absence of development programs and activities for parents i.e., parental orientation regarding responsibilities towards supporting children's development. Finally there was a lack of technical skills upgrading of pre-school and primary grades teachers.

c. Parents/Family – Parents believed that the preschool was a place where they could safely leave their children while they were at work. However, existing supportive groups were not maximized nor were there any development programs and activities for parents i.e., parental orientation and education on their roles and responsibilities towards children, school and community.

d. Community Groups (Village Leaders/Committees, Women's Groups, Parents Association) – Though there are strong, supportive community leaders committed to promoting education but these are under-utilized.

e. Others – There are no linkages with agencies dealing with other services for child development such as the health department, agriculture department, etc. There are also differences in the understandings and concepts about the child, and thus a need to translate plans into concrete actions.

It was recognized that a participatory planning process and implementation that involved local people, MOE partners, local women's union, parents, teachers including children should be an inherent part of the process. This would also take into account the development of skills for the sustainability of the project. Thus, continuing needs assessment, field monitoring and supervision through dialogue, feedback and assessment should be an integral part of the process.

**The Training of Pre-School Teachers**
Forty participants were selected from the PSEL and non PESL villages of the 2 provinces of Champassak and Oudomxay. The training was conducted with an aim towards enhancing the knowledge and skills of the participants in the utilization of pre-school curriculum. The partici-

pants have varied length of experience as PO and primary teachers that ranged from 1 year to more than 20 years.

The training was conducted in a participatory manner involving the participants serving as host teams in different days. This allowed them to manage the training partly by setting the tone for the day, giving recapitulations and exercises. The idea of participatory training involving participants with some responsibility as a host team, the managing of expectations and conducting of daily evaluations through the use "smiley faces" (cartoon art depicting a happy face) aimed to increase self confidence of the participants and develop more facilitating skills. Some school directors, new and old PO teachers, and primary teachers also attended these sessions. Their presence was a bonus point because while they were not expected to manage the PO classrooms but their knowledge of the pre-primary specifics made them more supportive to pre-primary activities. There was a need, however, to clarify their roles during the training. As to the attendance of primary teachers, their knowledge of pre-school children character traits and behavior, helped them in the handling of the first grade entrants.

**Feedback and Lessons**

The daily evaluation by the participants noted that the five days of training were useful and successful. They noted that they felt confident that they could use the curriculum at the end of the training. Nevertheless, it was also recognized that the training could be made more enriching by adopting a more experience-based approach to learning. This could be made possible by using the experiences of the participants as the basis of designing of the training. The design took into account the problems and difficulties encountered in the conduct of PO classes, in particular to the content/curriculum. It was also important to have the main document, the PO curriculum, available immediately as the absence of this document posed a challenge to the application of learning, especially by the inexperienced teachers. Monitoring and follow-up were also needed from key authorities to support and clarify questions of participants in the field. Reading materials were also to be made available so that participants could read and asked questions immediately since they have nobody back in their school or community to clarify their doubts.

Lessons from Champassak experience were adopted to further improve the training in the next province to ensure its smooth flow and avoid repeating past mistakes. It was believed that methods needed to be more participatory, evocative and experienced-based with trainers giving attention to details. It was also helpful to build connections between the topics to help participants understand the links. It also helped that trainers and facilitators to be proactive in terms of activities

(for example, like modulating their voices) especially in sessions where people were likely to be disinterested as in post-lunch sessions. The field practitioners utilized a variety of methods from talking, creative arts, games and exercises, jointly facilitated in teams or with partners. The experienced practitioners coached the less experienced colleagues during the actual sessions with the children. Finally, there was the need to develop local trainers – participation of local trainers increased their confidence and appreciation of their own skills when given the opportunity to handle sessions where they were comfortable. While the training were not meant to be "trainers' training", everyone needed to be observant about the training methods used, the processing of activities, learning, organizing and presenting materials, etc. as these could also be adopted in their own line of work.

**The Orientation Training in Child Development**
The partnership on education between Aide et Action and the Ministry of Education in Laos PDR focused on 3 major areas, i) reading promotion which trained a number of librarians to set up school libraries, ii) training of teachers on the use of PO curriculum and iii) general orientation training on early childhood care education.

The latter training provided participants a clearer understanding about early childhood care and education. This ultimately helped them think about planning for a community-based approach in ECCE by bringing together the collaboration of the schools, government, parents, families, and community and village officials. This approach was intended to address the best interest of the child through community participation. The training in ECCE and child development invited the participation of pre-primary and primary teachers and village leaders represented by officers and members of different village organizations. Attendance of males was encouraged in an effort to create a gender balance in this collaborative effort. It was also deemed important for everyone to clearly understand the importance of the tri-partnership collaboration by the school, family and the community in the holistic development of the child. Thus, it is emphasized that the child cannot be helped in isolation but within the context of her/his family, community and society at large.

Creating a team of trainers in ECCE from the two provinces required inputs in terms of facilitation, practice, demonstration and critiquing. The participatory process of engaging trainers started with the level of designing the process. Thus it led to clearer understanding of the direction of the project activity itself and it also helped local trainers to acquire technical knowledge and skills. This process was revealing as along the way certain personal biases, misconceptions and views about children and parenting practices, including gender, were

revealed and this led to further discussion. The local trainers were vocal in their appreciation of the opportunity as they rarely have the chance to receive staff development trainings.

**Traditional Beliefs, Concepts and Views**

The results of the simple tests given before and after the training was very interesting as it helped determine some base knowledge and attitude on early childhood, child caring and parenting of participants and trainers alike.

In Champassak Province South of Laos, there was a massive shift of understanding among participants on the statement "learning begins at birth". Before the training, 50% did not believe this is true, however, at the end of training, 100% affirmed this statement to be true.

There was a marked change of perspectives on "experiences of early childhood have an enduring effect on an individual's future learning capacity". In the beginning, 60% did not believe this however, at the end of training, 100% affirmed this to be true.

In the same province, prior to training, 75% of the participants believed that the brain fully developed on its own and was not affected by the environment. At the end of training, 25% changed their minds and still believed otherwise, thus giving a rating of 50-50% positive and negative belief.

On the subject "children's development comes naturally as they grow so it is not necessarily important for them to participate in early childhood activities", 55% said this is wrong prior to training, this retrogress to 85% that believe this to be true at the end.

In terms of decision making, a rise from 60% to 85% of the participants believed that "parents should always make decision for their children because they know what is good for them". On the other hand, 55% in the beginning said that it is the teacher's over-all responsibility was to discipline the children, however, at the end of the training 85% said that it is not true.

Regarding values and communication, a rise from 25% to 40% believed that "values are caught not taught", while 25% to 60% that believe in a statement "in non-verbal communications, action speaks louder than words".

On the issue of gender, traditionally there was a belief that boys are brighter and smarter than girls, so they should get priority for education was indicated by a positive affirmation from 50% to 90% at end of training. On the other hand, a view about the status of the female children yielded 80% of the responses that believed female children are safe in their own homes. At the end of training this view was maintained by half of the participants as indicated by a 50-50% who believe either way. Discussion on this issue during the training was

supported by unreported cases of domestic violence and abuse within the family abode that was shared by the participants.

In the northern Province of Oudomxay, 14 women and 6 men completed the five days training. Accomplishing the same pre and post test questionnaires, following is the consolidation of such assessment.

On the first statement learning begins at birth, 55% did not believe this to be true prior to training, however, at the end of training 75% validated the statement to be correct.

A significant change was noted when 100% claimed that experiences from early childhood have an enduring effect on an individual's future learning capacity in contrast to 35% that agreed prior to the training.

Initially, 85% did not agree that the brain fully develops on its own and is not affected by anything in the environment like stress, at the end of the training, 20% of participants maintained the same thinking. In the same manner, 80% believe that children's development comes naturally as they grow so it is not necessarily important for them to participate in early childhood activities, at the end of training, 15% maintained the same view.

The catchy phrase "values are caught not taught" was confirmed positive by a low 35% of the participants in both pre test and post test. In the phrase, in non-verbal communications – actions speaks louder than words similarly a low 35% and 50% in pre and post test believe respectively.

On the issue of decision making and discipline, 50% remarked positively before the training that parents should always make decisions for their children because they know what is good for them. This belief heightened with an increase to 70% of the participants who reinforced the same belief at the end of training.

Similarly, 85% believed it is the teacher's over-all duty and responsibility to discipline the children but this view was reduced to 25% among participants at the end of training.

On the gender issue specifying that "today, children especially girls are not safe even in their own homes", this generated a high 60% disagreement that increased to 85% at the end of training. Also, 60% did not believe it true that boys are brighter or smarter than girls and that they should get priority attention to education. This is in contrast to 85% who believe this to be true at the end of the training.

**Views of the Participants**

On the whole, according to the participants, the ECCE training was useful because new lessons were learnt that they never had before and this allowed them to use these for future planning. The training emphasized the development of children, not only how they develop but also how they can be taken cared of. This helped the participants to improve their skills in child development and apply these to their

own children, and to dispense this knowledge to other parents and the community. It also helped them to understand the importance of early childhood development which was useful in their professional lives. The training also reinforced their knowledge to the rigorous practice in their field and suggested the need to provide similar trainings of this theme to allow teachers and community volunteers to ensure success of their activities on child development.

All topics were found to be relevant and interesting. It allowed them to review previous work especially where they had not been done well, and also to put in practice the successful lessons from this field. Lastly, the training provided knowledge and encouragement that could provide access to education of children and civilization of society and all the topics are important and cannot find what are not useful.

The above proceedings were very encouraging for both Aide et Action and the Ministry of Education Lao PDR and the Provincial Districts of Champassak and Oudomxay. At this stage of partnership collaboration, with the completion of two trainings in early childhood, it is interesting to note that ECCE as a gender- and human resource-base program deals more with intangibles. This means that qualitative indicators are equally important as numbers. And unlike the projects on buildings, roads, bridges, livelihood, fundraising where one can see visible results, indicators and changes brought by ECCE interventions takes time with the process. Changes as far as human behaviors and attitudes, shifts of concepts from negative to positive as well as traditional beliefs do not happen as an overnight sensation.

In this region, traditional concepts, practices and beliefs about child care and parenting, behaviors and attitudes are deep rooted and are influenced by the local culture. And clearly, this plays an important role in the struggle among different key actors; parents, teachers and the community in an effort for the best interest and holistic develop-ment of the child. The traditional beliefs, concepts and issues have to be further analyzed in as much as they have big implications in the process of implementing community based ECCE. This is true given the irony that the actors involved will be teachers, school administrators and key community leaders and officers of various organizations. Lastly, dealing with many issues is a struggle as they prove to be deterrent in the access of quality education for many young children everywhere, especially the female children.

**Endnote**
1. UNICEF regional IECD case studies 2004.

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# School Failure in Ethiopian Government Primary Schools: A Critical Analysis of the Learning Model upon which Formal Instruction Is Based

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## ABSTRACT

*Students dropping out of schools are a widespread phenomenon in primary schools in Ethiopia. Though the reasons for dropout varies from school to school, and from student to student there are certain factors have been identified as being common to most situations. There are long distances between home and school, lack of learning materials (for example exercise books, writing implements), discontentment with the school conditions, social and financial problems of the parents, ill-health and learning difficulties of the students. In spite of the alarming rate of dropout this problem is given insufficient attention by the national education policy as is evident in the published literature in this area. Particularly, the relationship between learning difficulties and dropout appears to have been insufficiently investigated so far. This paper argues that the learning model guiding learning practice at Ethiopian Primary Government schools, as well as a comparative depiction of the learning model delineated in this paper, indicates that the stake-holders should consider local underlying teaching-learning traditions and cultural habits more seriously when they plan practical investigations in international development cooperation.*

## Introduction

There seems to be little argument that learning processes are generally influenced by school factors, both internal and external and that these very factors may also lead to learning difficulties. Learning difficulties manifest themselves in low achievement, grade repetition and eventually in dropout. Students dropping out of schools is a widespread phenomenon in primary schools in Ethiopia. Though the reasons for dropout varies from school to school and from student to student there are certain factors like long distances between home and school, lack of materials such as exercise books, textbooks, pencils, discontentment with the school conditions, social and financial problems of the parents, sickness and learning difficulties of the students that appears to be the most commonly identified reasons. In spite of the alarming rate of dropout, this problem is given insufficient attention by the national education policy as is evident in the published literature in this area. Particularly the relationship between learning difficulties and dropout appears to have been insufficiently investigated so far.

Before suitable steps can be taken to improve the situation for children with learning difficulties, these children and their special needs must be identified. According to Mamo,

> ...children without observable disabilities but with a variety of needs are not identified and are left to fall. Most of the class repeaters and school dropouts are more likely to be from this unidentified group. This is partly for lack of technical experts in developing assessment tools and procedures and mainly lack of resources..." (2000, p.88).

Apparently ignorance about the situation for children with learning difficulties is not just the result of a paucity of experts in the area who can identify the problems but is aalso the result the prevalent attitudes and prejudices:

> ... we must work hard to change inappropriate and backward attitudes prevailing in our society related to disabilities and support persons with disabilities so that they become not only self-supporting but also be able to function in society..." (Getachew 2001, p.134).

There is ample statistical data that lends credence to my viewpoint that the dropout rate remains conspicuously high in the first grade of Primary school. The alarming nature of this problem is highlighted by the fact that at this the students are barely literate or numerate. Despite efforts from a number of agencies the problem of dropout remains severe,

> The progress made to reduce drop-out during the past two years has shown no improvement. The drop-out rate in grade 1 which was 27.9% in 1999/2000 has increased to 28.7% in 2001/02. This is not an encouraging result...the drop-out rate at primary stage was 17.7% in 1999/2000 and still persists around 17.7% in 2001/02..." (Melesse 2004, p.4).

Having strongly emphasised the critical nature of this problem, it is of vital importance to highlight the reasons leading to learning difficulties and dropout. I would sum these up under the following groups:

> (i) The socio-economic characteristics of the individuals and the local environment that have a significant influence on student learning that the resources made available to the schools cannot compensate.

(ii) The combination of the school inputs (teaching material, classroom equipment, teacher's characteristics etc.) is not the most cost effective.

(iii) The practices and pedagogical methods employed by the teacher in the class (difficult to measure and quantify in financial terms) have an important impact on the student learning process in schools. (see UNESCO 2005, p.136).

**Teaching and Learning – models for the Ethiopian context**
This section deals with the deeper significance of the last factor elucidated above – "the practice and pedagogical methods employed by the teacher in the class".Teaching practices and methods are generally based on an underlying learning model. The following paragraphs focuses on the learning model on which education and schooling in Ethiopia is based and is constructed on the data gathered from my experiences, unobtrusive observations while sitting in classes, having discussions with students, teachers and stake-holders and through reviewing the relevant literature in the field.

Learning occurs in a socio-cultural context. The Ethiopian social-cultural context is clearly differentiated from my own. Though there are thus grounds for the evaluation and judgment of the Ethiopian school system to be skewed but as a result of my insider knowledge and other ethical reasons I would argue that through comparison, it is possible to decide about inputs for practical investigations to improve the teaching-learning situation in general and for the students with specific learning needs in particular.

Theoretical models are are generally thought to be drafts to stress the instrumental character of ideas and concepts. The creation of such models tends to be influenced by the researcher's philosophical stance but also by his/her social-cultural background and personal experiences. Therefore learning models are by and large simplified drafts of the teaching-learning process to facilitate the research of school realities and could possibly be subjective descriptions. The learning models described here may be seen through the lens of the work of Edelman (2000) who theorized that learning could be undertaken through a number of ways, which are:

1) Learning through Reaction on repeated Stimuli or Stimuli-Reaction-Learning (S-R-L)
2) Instrumental Learning
3) Deductive Learning or Forming of Concepts and Acquisition of Knowledge
4) Systematic Acting and Problem Solving

Bateson (1979) expounded the differentiation between Learning 0, Learning I and Learning II and the two models may also be viewed through this lens.

However, there seems to be a dualism between the learning models. The first and the second learning models – S-R-L and Instrumental Learning – form one pole, which is the external control of learning processes. The third and fourth learning models – Deductive Learning or Forming of Concepts and Acquisition of Knowledge and Systematic Acting and Problem Solving – form the other pole, the internal control of the learning processes. Between these two poles there exists a continuum where two the models pertaining to Ethiopia are located. The first learning model reflects the observed reality and practice in the primary schools run by the government and the second learning model expresses my own conceptions. I will compare the two models and suggest possible ways by which the problem of dropout and learning difficulties in Ethiopian Government Primary schools may be eased.

**The Learning Model Used in Ethiopian Government Primary Schools**
For better contextual understanding a brief overview of the history of Education in Ethiopia must be considered. The educational system in Ethiopiais developed under the aegis of its religions. Christianity has been a presence in the country since 330 AD. Until the end of the 19th century the responsibility for the educational system fell mainly to the Orthodox Church, the Jews and to a few Koran schools. These religious institutions have the following in common "…conservative in thought and deed …", and the students are expected to be "…quiet, polite, shy unquestioningly, obedient respectful…". The characteristic methodology "...at all levels is based on repetition and memorization..." (Teshome 1979, p.23). The milestone of modern education in Ethiopia was set with the opening of the Minilik II School in Addis Ababa 1908. The development of the modern educational system of Ethiopia can be divided into five periods:

- The pre-war period
- The period of the Italian occupation
- The post-war period
- The revolutionary period
- The post-revolutionary period.

Each of these periods had left a significant influence on educational development including the underlying the learning models used and for detailed information about the history of education in Ethiopia one can refer to Wartenberg & Mayrhofer (2001).

In a typical class in Ethiopia, the teacher is at the centre of the teaching-learning process. He/she sets the parameter of what is right and wrong. (see Simon 1998, p.323). Simon notes that teachers claim a central and leading position as they are the only individuals guiding the teaching learning process. They are thus the source of knowledge. The students learn in a pre-established and deterministic learning situation. In other words every step is set in advance and after every step, the students have to wait to discover whether their results are judged right or wrong. This way of learning echoes the patterns of Operational Conditioning and Instrumental Learning elucidated by Edelmann (2000). It implies a mechanical way of learning and echoes patterns of Learning I (Bateson 1996). Bundschuh calls this type of learning "situated learning" of "lethargic knowledge" (2003, p.123). The function of the teacher is to directly instruct the students. The relationship between students and teachers is characterized by absolute obedience as a sign of respect and vice versa: "…teachers were expected to daily supervise and see what happened to the child" (Poluha 2004, p.87), and "The children's respect for the authority of these specific adults [teachers] and their right to distribute punishment and rewards seemed to be great…" (Poluha 2004, p.94). Positive and negative strengthening determines what is happening during lessons, therefore also to a certain extent, successful learning. A well known study conducted by Rosenthal und Jakobsen (1971) established impressive credentials for the influence of strengthening learning processes. The teacher is not only feared as an authoritarian person but is also regarded as the source of knowledge and: "…teachers were considered to be close kin, the older ones like fathers and mothers, and the younger ones like sisters and brothers" (Poluha 2004, p.116). Not only are these extreme roles and hierarchical structures pre-determined but also the thinking and acting occurs in externally set norms. They are recognized as being legitimate and are not expected to be critically questioned. Hierarchy and equity are not two incompatible concepts. People believe in equity as a noble value. Equity, regarded in this way has nothing in common with the distribution of resources (wealth).

Ethiopian history highlights that kings and heads of state have had to always strive for their position. This is behind the ideas put into the students' heads "if you work hard you will have a successful future". While holding interviews with street children, dropouts and socially neglected children and youths, I found this conspicuously optimistic view of their own future rather astonishing. This short "cultural-anthropological excursion" is important for understanding more clearly the interaction and methodology employed in the classroom and the underlying learning model. As mentioned earlier, formal learning in Ethiopian Government schools originates from religious instruction

through the Orthodox Church and Koran Schools: "The purpose of church education is not to extend man's understanding of the world but rather to lead men to accepting the existing order of things as it is to preserve whatever has been handed down through the years and in turn to pass it on unchanged to the next generation." (Teshome 1979, p.27). An established set of information (in the guise of knowledge) is transferred from one generation to the next and so the knowledge is not dynamic or individually constructed. Ideally, this transfer occurs through memorization, imitation and repetition. Even in contemporary classrooms these are the dominant methodologies and reflect the expectations of student's abilities in Ethiopian Government schools: "…they [the students] are required to demonstrate their powers of memory and not their skills in processing that knowledge. The product is important, the process of arriving at the product is not…" (Plass 1998, p.310). Although "participation", "active learning" and "student-centred teaching" are mentioned in the guidelines of the Ministry of Education (MOE 2003 [4]), they are rarely observed in practice as the interpretations is different whilst they actually being applied in classrooms. Participation in the Ethiopian school context means that the students listen attentively to their teachers and they are allowed to ask comprehensive questions. Students are expected to complete their tasks and duties conscientiously and to answer questions addressed directly to them and in a correct way. Their answers are taken as an example of whether certain content has been understood or not. Seime's research confirms: "…that the bulk of questions (94%) raised by the instructor are all recall questions (i.e. knowledge, comprehension and application) that emphasised rote learning and that required short answers…" (Seime 2002, p.1). Poluha draws the conclusion: "All motion, all initiatives were expected to come from the teachers and good, participating students should re-act to these stimulants…What actually happened was that teachers lectured to these students…" (Poluha 2004, p.117).

**The Need for a New Learning Model**
In a Constructivist point of view it is believed that man is structurally defined – it is not external stimuli but his internal structure that decides his behaviour and his actions. The individual internal structure changes through interaction with his social and material environment and through self-reflection. Maturana and Varela (1987) describe the interaction between man and his environment as "Structural Coupling". Edelmann mentions the term "Structure" in the context of the "Learning Model of Acting and Problem-Solving" where students develop the ability to act and to solve problems through the creation of an epistemic structure and through the heuristic methodology

of discovering. They are intrinsically motivated to solve a problem with the help of rules and heurisms. In addition to the cognitive and motivational processes, emotional processes play an important role in learning as emotions have the effect of a "selective filter" and information acquired within the purview of an emotional reference is better anchored. Following Bateson's terminology, this learning model can be characterized as Learning II. The individual learns to: "… seinen Handlungs- und Erfahrungsraum in einer bestimmten Weise zu organisieren. Es verändert somit nicht nur sein Verhalten in einem bestimmten Kontext, sondern es verändert seine Beziehung zu den Kontexten, die seine Lebenswelt ausmachen…", [organizes his room of experience and acting in an individual way. He is not only changing or developing his behaviour in a certain context, moreover he is changing his relationship to the contexts of his environment…] (Werning 96. p.95). Therefore, learning is active, self-regulated and refers to a context without depending on it. The arrangement of the learning environment is important to stimulate and optimize learning processes. They should be meaningful to the individual learner in a way that they stimulate him to meaningful actions or they build up structural coupling.

**A More Comprehensive New Model**
The theoretical and practical teaching at Ethiopian Government Primary schools and the learning model which guides the teaching process is based on an orthodox ideology. Accordingly, the aim of schooling is to induct learners into a particular religious or political orthodoxy. "Religious" through the main Orthodox Church and Koran schools, as well as "political" and thus schools might be misused for political indoctrination – a quick glance at the history of the country gives proof enough. The underlying learning model observed at Ethiopian Government Primary schools contains numerous elements of instrumental learning. Learning can be described through this model as a change of behaviour that is externally controlled and it belongs to realm of the Behaviouristic Learning Theory. The researcher's learning model contains elements of acting and problem-solving. Learning according to this model is a self-regulated acquisition of dispositions for behaving and acting. The individual learner chooses specific and for him meaningful modes of acting in a certain context. Cognitive-constructivist and social-constructivist learning theories form the basis of this model. The models are thus contrasting. As mentioned at the beginning, models can emphasize ideas and concepts but do not reproduce reality. In schools, direct instruction as a methodology has its advantages, if it is a competent one. Competent instruction occurs when what Vygotsky called the learner's Next Zone of Proximal Development is considered, and the individual situation of the learner

is taken into account. Students develop structural coupling before starting schools, in their family and social environment. They might have developed certain ways of behaving and acting which causes disturbances in lessons and they are negatively judged and punished, e.g. they act quickly and briefly or they act cautiously and passively. Such ways of behaving and acting though inappropriate for classrooms may be useful or even necessary in the deprived environment in which the students at Ethiopian Primary Government schools grow up. This short excursion proves again that the individual learner must be in the centre of the teaching-learning process and that the teaching methodology and didactics should consider the individual learner. The individual learner is rarely considered in a teaching-learning situation based on the traditional model which determines teaching at Ethiopian Primary Government schools, as is highlighted by the following quotation: "…When one day the homeroom teacher complained about the students, their laziness, stupidity, ignorance…But I soon understood what he meant. These were children without basic knowledge, who did not understand his explanation; they always copied from each other just to get their marks…" (Poluha 2004, p.35)

The critical description of the learning model guiding learning in practice at Ethiopian Primary Government schools, as well as the comparative depiction of my learning model indicates that the stake-holders must consider local underlying teaching-learning traditions and cultural habits more seriously when they plan practical investigations in international development cooperation. Cooperation implies a togetherness of both sides and excludes the unreflective acceptance of somebody else's ideas. Mistakes of the "colonialist" past should not be repeated. On the other hand, an acknowledgement of the facts and deplorable states of affairs alone are senseless and ineffective if no pedagogical, social and political reactions and measures follow. Finally to reduce dropout in Ethiopian Primary Government schools contributes to the achievement of the goals of UPE by the year 2015 and to meet the demands of intercultural and international comparative education according to Maarmann and his colleague's definition: "Comparative Education is seen as explaining individual's experience of particular societal contextualised educational institutions and situations. With the focus on the education debate shifting increasingly to the theme as how learning could best be facilitated…", (Maarmann et al. 2005, p.12).

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# Non-Chinese Researchers Conducting Sensitive Research in Chinese Cultures

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**Abstract**

*This paper addresses some fundamental methodological and ethical issues confronting Non-Chinese researchers undertaking research in Hong Kong Chinese society. Among other things, it considers the following: sampling issues; problems pertaining to data collection; and the challenges of data interpretation. While the issues are by no means unique to Hong Kong, there are a number of matters related to outsider research that require special attention in the Hong Kong Chinese context, even when the researchers may be acquainted with both the context and the participants. The authors argue that sensitivity and flexibility need to be built into the research design in order to arrive at reliable, valid and truthful findings.*

Increasingly, educational researchers are beginning to investigate a wider range of topics to enhance their understanding of the many issues that affect not only teaching and learning but also a burgeoning body of more variegated topics. The investigation of issues related to health and well-being that have traditionally been the mandate of sociology, psychology or social work are now within the purview of educational researchers. Indeed, some of today's educational researchers stand at the intersection of a number of disciplines and what is becoming increasing evident is that researchers are delving into areas that require extreme sensitivity, caution and a code of ethics that may not have been evident in the earlier investigations. This paper charts a critical look at some of the methodological and ethical issues faced by us, two non-Chinese researchers, whilst conducting two separate research projects in the context of Hong Kong's predominantly Chinese society. It needs to be noted that whilst the two research domains are vastly dissimilar – Study One investigating into the stigmatized world of non-normative sexuality and Study Two in the seemingly innocuous world of schools and schooling – an in-depth look at the operationalization of both the studies reveals striking similarities and indeed unlooked-for contradictions in the realm of research methodology and the more complex world of conducting research in a culture that is dominant yet not our own.

**The Hong Kong Context: culture and demographics**
The notion of culture brings with it complexity and confusion. An

additional consideration in our case was that though the concept of the contextual culture was closely related to our respective studies, neither of us belongs to the dominant Hong Kong Chinese cultural milieu.

There seems to be little argument that no one definition of culture exists: instead there are numerous diverse definitions. Nonetheless, a synthesis of the different viewpoints reveals that culture appears to be typically defined in terms of shared orientations that hold a unit together and give it a distinctive identity. King (1995) defined culture as a group's individual and collective ways of thinking, believing and knowing, which includes their shared experiences, consciousness, skills, values, forms of expression, social institutions and behaviours (Ho, 1995). For the purpose of our study we used this definition in order to build up our conceptual understanding of the culture of Hong Kong and its people.

Hong Kong is one of the most densely populated areas in the world and the mid-2006 census puts the population close onto 7 million people. 95% of the population are ethnically Chinese, mainly of Han origin. Han Chinese residents generally refer to themselves as *Hèung Góng Yàhn* and are often referred to as Hong Kong Chinese people. Non-Han-Chinese individuals born in the area are also technically classified as "Hong Kong people", though they may choose to be identified by their original heritage instead.

Hong Kong is in many ways a cosmopolitan city, with Westernization and Modernization having influenced the worldview of many Hong Kong people (Ng & Lau, 1990). Even so, social attitudes remain quite conservative, and continue to be strongly influenced by the two predominant traditional Chinese philosophies, Confucianism and Taoism (Hsu, 1985, 1995; Wilson, Greenblatt, & Wilson, 1977). Confucianism requires that social order be maintained through conformity to the Rule of Heaven, and demands collective uniformity in terms of ideas and behaviour (Ho, 1994; Yang, 1959). According to Chinese scholars, the social order of traditional Chinese society was built upon the Wu Lun, the Five Cardinal Relations (Bellah, 1970). These five cardinal relations comprise the central value system through which fundamental relationships are governed (Hostede & Bond, 1988). Essential to the individuals' existence, as Yang (1959) asserts, these five cardinal relations, centering upon kinship ties, formed the core of social and moral training for the individual almost from the beginning of his consciousness of social existence until he became so conditioned to it that his standard of satisfaction and deprivation was based upon it (p.7). According to the five distinctions (three of which belong to the kinship realm), women are subordinate to men, a son is expected to ensure the continuity of the family line, to take care of himself, to avoid harm to his body, and to conform to society and not to bring disgrace

to the family and ancestors. According to Fung (1949), the principle of *hsiao* (filial piety) is at the very centre of personal, family, and social existence, and constitutes the basic ideal against which any other form of self image has to be judged. From the social order demanded by Confucian teaching, it is clear that the virtues and moral cultivation of the individual are personal, concrete, and particularistic in nature. Bond and his colleagues have called it "Confucian Dynamism"(see for example, Hostede & Bond, 1988).

The other traditional Chinese philosophy that holds sway over many Chinese people's sense of identity and behavior is Taoism. Taoism refers to the harmonious unity of heaven and earth. Consequently, Chinese society places a high value on the adjusted equilibrium, harmony, conformity, loyalty, and the strict controlling of one's emotions (1999). According to Ma (1988), any individual deviation from the societal norms would be regarded as bringing shame to parents and ancestors.

**What Is Sensitive Research?**
A key question for this paper is what actually constitutes sensitive research. Sieber and Stanley (1993) define socially sensitive research "as studies in which there are potential consequences or implications, whether directly for the participants in the research or for the class of individuals represented by the research" (p.49). As Lee and Renzetti (2001) assert, defining sensitive research in this way is broad in scope and allows for the inclusion of topics that might not ordinarily be thought of as 'sensitive' to be addressed by researchers. It also brings to the surface the responsibilities researchers have to their institutions, as well as to wider society.

These considerations may be investigated from a methodological or pragmatic perspective. Over the past decades, methodological considerations have been examined across a vast range of perspectives, from both qualitative and quantitative approaches, especially in terms of validity and reliability and the overall quality of research. Much less focus, however, has been placed on pragmatic issues and concerns that researchers generally face during their investigations. This paper begins to address the concept of 'sensitivity' in research that utilizes both qualitative and quantitative methods, by delving into a range of issues and discussing the nature of sensitivity in each of them, and offering some of the strategies that were used to address these sensitivities.

There appears to be little equivocation that the definition of a 'sensitive' research topic is dependent on both context and cultural norms and values. In this paper, we address the ways in which we believed our respective studies might have been perceived to be sensi-

tive, and the responsibilities we had to ourselves and to the wider society in which we were operating. As is highlighted in this paper, the level of sensitivity of a given study may not be apparent at the beginning of the research project; alternatively, a subject that was presumed to be of a highly sensitive nature may turn out not to be so. For example, although attitudes towards sexuality and sexual behaviour are considered by many in Asian societies to be a 'private', 'sensitive', and even 'taboo' issue, Hong Kong Chinese people were seen to be becoming increasingly more open about such discussions. In contrast, subjects that on the face of it seem to be devoid of any sensitive issues turned out to be a minefield of possible conflict on multiple layers of thinking, from interpersonal to professional relationships.

This discussion highlights the fact that studying 'sensitive' topics creates both methodological and technical issues for the researcher. According to Lee (1993), these issues may include (1) conceptualization of the topic, (2) defining and accessing the sample, (3) mistrust, concealment and dissimulation between the researcher and participants, and (4) safety. These issues become all the more complicated when the perspective and perception of the researcher is an outsider versus individuals who may be insiders.

**Outsider versus Insider Research**
Whilst this paper does not undertake to go into the ramifications of outsider and insider research, it must be mentioned that a key concern that dominated both our studies was the relationship between our own cultural cognition and that of the culturally different community that we were studying. Eisenhart (2001) points out in the case of educational research that "culture may mean one thing to bilingual educators, another thing to educational anthropologists and something else to ethnic scholars or cognitive psychologists" (p.16). This becomes important in a wider research context where there is a strong lobby of scholars who argue that only those who have shared in, and have been part of, a particular experience can have a true understanding of what it is like. Arising from this school of thought is the eye-catching slogan "Nothing about us without us," that has come from the disability camp (Charlton, 1998). Similar views may be noted in research that is linked to potentially sensitive areas, like gay and lesbian studies or research into minorities. There is also a number of scholars who believe that though individuals from one community have access to a particular form of cultural cognition, this does not automatically attach authority to this cognition (see for example, Kreiger, 1982).However, it has also been argued that the very 'outsiderness' of the researchers may shed light on information which might otherwise have been overlooked by the day-to-day world view of the insiders. In our case subjects were

willing to talk of sexual matters to a *gweilo* (foreigner) – racial difference making perhaps the subjects less inhibited than they would have been talking to somebody from their own community.

It must also be noted, and this has been echoed by scholars like Bridges (2001) that a question fundamental to all research dealing with cross cultural studies is that it is not always very obvious who is inside and who is outside the group. It is only when descriptors are added to define the identity of any given community (for example, Black, female, teacher) that demarcations may be formed, placing someone inside or outside. In our studies we faced the complexity of this problem. One of us conducted research in schools and is an insider on a professional level as she has many years experience in schools. However, on a different paradigm she is an outsider, being racially non-Chinese. The second researcher too faced this dilemma of being both an insider and an outsider. He is a white hetero-sexual male. Thus he is an outsider in the world of Chinese male to female transgender, his field of research. On the other hand he has lived in Hong Kong for more than two decades which makes him, on one level, an insider to the social mores in this city. These distinctions led the two of us to negotiate through our way the challenges of our respective research projects keeping in mind the unique dichotomies of our circumstances.

**The Studies**

Study One investigated Hong Kong Chinese people's attitudes towards transgenderism and transgender/transsexual civil rights, using a mixed-methods research design with weighting on the quantitative phase. In this study, transgender refers to individuals whose characteristics transcend traditional gender boundaries and corresponding sexual norms. The term 'transsexual' refers to individuals who strongly identify with the opposite sex and seek to live as a member of this sex, especially by undergoing hormone therapy and/or surgery to obtain a physical appearance that is congruent with their sense of self. Civil rights refer to the area of law related to rights that are enforceable or are a privilege of citizenship of a given nation (i.e., freedom of speech, due process, equal treatment under the law of all people regarding enjoyment of life, liberty, property, and protection).

Participants in this study were 856 (362 men, 494 women) Hong Kong Chinese residents ranging in age from 15 to 64 years old (M = 33.3, SD = 13.8). A random sampling technique was used to select the households, and a random method was employed in sampling each individual within the household. The sample included 1358 telephone numbers, and as a result of phone calls to those numbers, 856 respondents agreed to participate in the phone interview. A total of 353 people refused to participate and 149 dropped out or only partially

completed the interview. The final response rate was 63.03% with an estimated sampling error of 3.35% ($\alpha$ = .05).

The instrument used in this study was the 'Chinese Attitudes toward Transgenderism and Transgender Civil Rights Scale (CATTCRS), which was a structured interview questionnaire including 8 background items of which two items were dedicated to contact with TG/TS individuals where that contact occurred in Hong Kong or overseas, or both. The other background items included familiarity with terms related to transgenderism in the Chinese language, an evaluation thermometer, and items related to etiological and biological essentialist beliefs. The demographic data collected in this study included gender, age, educational level, and religiosity, among others. The instrument also included 38 items intended to reflect eight a priori constructs. These constructs were embedded in either the personal (Social Distance, Social Discrimination, Gender Essentialism, Transprejudice) or in the institutional (Awareness of TG Discrimination, Support for Equal Opportunities, Support for TS Civil Rights, Support for Anti-Discrimination Legislation) dimensions.

*Measuring Attitudes on the Personal Dimension*
On the personal dimension, Social Distance measured acceptance of TG/TS people in various social circumstances and acceptance of TG/TS persons generally in Hong Kong. Social Discrimination measured attitudes towards discrimination against TG/TS people in various spheres. Gender Essentialism measured aspects of the Chinese cultural gender belief system, as well as ethics and morality in Chinese society surrounding cross-gender behaviours. Transprejudice measured attitudes toward psychological and behavioural aspects of transgenderism and transsexuality.

*Measuring Attitudes on the Institutional Dimension*
On the institutional dimension, Awareness of Discrimination against TG/TS measured belief about the level and impact of discrimination against TG/TS. Support for Equal Opportunities measured attitudes toward the legal protection of TG/TS people. Support for TS Civil Rights measured attitudes toward marriage, adoption, and the ability to change legal documents such as birth certificates. Support for Anti-Discrimination Legislation measured government responsibility to protect TG/TS citizens from discrimination.

At a surface glance, Study Two, which investigated the impact that teacher leadership had on student engagement with schools, dealt with issues that are non-controversial, but it proved to be otherwise. A qualitative research methodology was adopted. Three Hong Kong schools were chosen as case studies. The schools were selected on

the basis of being ones where teacher leadership was recognized informally as a significant feature of school life. Data were collected through on-site participant observation and detailed semi-structured interviews conducted with teachers, parents and students. Written standardized question interviews were also undertaken. This research delved into the lives of teachers, parents and students within schools and outside.

Recognizing that undertaking in-depth investigations of this nature requires an awareness of the possible challenges that may be faced and the sensitivity that is required to overcome these (Denzin & Lincoln, 1996), we undertook meticulous planning of the research. Though many of these challenges are an integral part of a qualitative framework of study (for example, having to balance maintaining boundaries with building rapport), we found, nonetheless, that many of these factors were compounded by conducting research in a culture that was firstly different from our own ethnocentricities, and secondly fairly unique in terms of its beliefs and attitudes.

*Understanding that 'yes' may mean 'no'*
Hong Kong schools are relatively unexposed to the concept of being research sites. Therefore, the first hurdle that we faced was that of gaining access. In one instance, where the principal of a particular school was open to the conduct our study in the premises, the teacher who was to be our 'in-house collaborator' was less enthusiastic about the project, though at no time did she verbally share her reservations with us or her principal. However, deference to those higher in an administrative/organizational echelon and the necessity "saving face" (Hu, 1944; Kim & Nam, 1998) is deeply rooted in this culture and indeed form the fabric of both Confucianism and Taoism (see Ma, 1999). Therefore, it was only after wasting considerable time and resources that we realised that the obstacles that were being put in our way by this teacher were her way of indirectly informing us that we should withdraw from her school as she was hesitant to openly thwart the promise made by her principal.

*Understanding social and organizational hierarchy*
It is a commonplace assumption, note Stenning and Zhang (2007), that the notion that "every one counts" is a "perspective that might reasonably be taken in many societies but might not be true in a highly stratified society as China" (p.128); we can plausibly apply this to the context of the Hong Kong Chinese people as well. They go on to note that in Chinese organizations (in this case, schools) communication is very hierarchical (see also, Child, 1991) and as "one's relative place in the hierarchy is closely correlated with one's power, who is included

in the sample takes on greater significance than in more egalitarian societies" (p.129). An interesting manifestation of the latter was evident in schools where newer or younger teachers saw themselves as "just staff" and were reluctant to voice their opinions as opposed to the more senior teachers, who, by and large, were more eager to talk about education related matters, both during the interview process and elsewhere. There were other overt and less explicit manifestations of the school hierarchy that we dealt with in the course of our study and we list some of these below.

First, though the participation of teachers was to be voluntary, it transpired that in some cases it was not so much that we obtained informed consent from the teachers but that there was a 'directive' consent at play – the principal had directed the teachers to meet with us. This lead to additional concerns whether these participants would resort to giving socially desirable responses, and care had to be taken during the interview process to elicit responses that were as realistic, accurate and reliable as possible, rather than 'right'.

Second, there were also instances of the principals 'infantilizing' the teachers by wanting to see the responses and check these, not necessarily to change the content or tone of the responses but to 'correct' any possible linguistic errors the teachers might have made.

Third, a more subtle form of hierarchy was also evident within the school community. Whilst interviewing teachers it soon became apparent that many of them regarded that there was a communication gulf between the school and the parents resulting from the teachers' being in a higher social position (teachers were university graduates, in many cases parents were not). More obvious were the barely contained prejudices that the Hong Kong teachers and students had about the Mainland students who were viewed to be troublesome and academically weak.

Fourth, what became increasingly apparent in our study is that there is "a cult of secrecy" (Simon, teacher, School 2) that is present in Hong Kong Schools. There was a marked lack of transparency in administrative procedures and a Western teacher in a local school pointed out that, "Basically, you have to respect and adapt to the hierarchy".

Paradoxically, however, teachers were content to be a part of this hierarchy as one teacher pointed out: that she found it "easy and comfortable" to work in such a setting and stated that the hierarchy is "very clear and from top to the down it is very coherent." Another teacher said that the school was very "well organized" and thus worked "efficiently and seriously". Loew (2001) and Fang (2006) argue that in general Western conceptualizations (and measurements) of Chinese culture are intrinsically flawed as they present a Chinese world view that is a "rational structural perspective" rather than one that is full of

paradoxes and contradictions. In essence, we would argue, the views held by the teachers are a case in point.

Given this rather tight control in schools, where there is at least a superficial orderliness that comes close to the maintenance of equilibrium (balance and harmony being among the fundamental beliefs of Confucianism) it gradually transpired that the issues that were being discussed during our research, where teachers critiqued the school administrators, or students, their teachers, or even parents the schools – thus notionally creating disharmony – that the data was far more contentious than was previously believed, and consequently, whilst perhaps not formally falling into the category of a 'sensitive' study, it nonetheless acquired a great degree of sensitivity in dealing with both the participants and the data.

*Understanding verbal and non verbal structures*
Bevan-Brown (2001) voices concern about the differences in language and concepts expressed by linguistic means. Researchers have found that generally even fluent bilingual individuals differ in the amount of information that they offer in one language (usually the first) to another (Li, 1999). In our study almost all the participants were Cantonese speakers, though most were fluent in English, nevertheless it required great patience and a conscious attempt on our parts to make the participants feel at ease. Huer and Saenz (2002) note that the "very act of interviewing may be foreign to members of some cultures..." and we found it so in Hong Kong. Therefore, to build up trust different strategies had to be built into our design. In some cases there were follow up written interviews and often participants (especially the student participants) expressed themselves more freely in writing than during the actual interview. This seems to be in keeping with the work of other scholars who have found that direct questions about perceived sensitive topics are more difficult as participants may be culturally accustomed to communicating indirectly (Huer & Saenz 2002) and thus there is an innate concern that their community would judge them harshly as a result of their opinions. Many of the participants chose not to vocalise their thoughts whilst raising criticisms and instead resorted to body language and gestures. There are, as researchers have noted, (see Bevan-Brown, 2001) pitfalls in trying to interpret these non-verbal communicative cues because of a danger of misunderstanding as a result of cultural differences and we had to be aware of these potential shortcomings.

**Challenges of Data Interpretation**
One of the most challenging problemsfor researchers who take on both insider and outsider perspectives is in the interpretation of the data. This

is especially true for researchers who are culturally and linguistically alien to the research under investigation. As such, we needed to maintain an informed perspective through which to contextualize our respective subjectivities throughout the research process, but especially the interpretation of the data. As suggested by Dinges and Baldwin (Hall, 1976), even deep immersion in a particular culture over a long period of time will not guarantee that one's interpretation of data will not be flawed. This is explained by the fact that although competence in the given culture may be achieved at cognitive level, residual affective effects from one's own culture make objective assessments difficult. For this reason, a self-reflexive perspective permitted us to reconcile our respective motivations for conducting the research in the first place and the extent of accountability we owed to the participants in our studies. Further, it became clear to us that any researcher, whether using qualitative or quantitative methods, has a distinct point of view with cultural and personal values that cannot be removed from the research equation. The challenge, therefore, is not to eliminate these cultural and personal values but to consider (and even document) the effects of personal bias that may influence one's perspective and positionality in research.

It was important that as researchers we acknowledged our locations within the specific social world in which we conducted our research, and explored how our locations influenced our particular worldviews in terms of settling upon a 'researchable question', sampling issues, the development of research instruments and issues regarding data collection and interpretation. These are all significant issues for any researcher, but also for non-Chinese researchers conducting social science investigations in Chinese societies. Non-Chinese (or at least Western) researchers tend to be more familiar with low-context cultures, whereas Chinese societies are typically high-context in which people's meaning is often deeply embedded in what they are saying (Dennett, 1995, p.340). According to Dennett, "what we are is very much a matter of what culture has made us" , this we found to apply to us and the participants equally.

In interpreting the data in Study One, we had to come to terms with a sociolinguistic frame of reference that was quite different from our own. As non Cantonese speaking researchers conducting quantitative research in the Cantonese language, one of the critical issues that we faced dealt with the linguistic conceptualization of transgenderism, one in which transgender people were commonly referred to as yen yiu or 'human monsters'. This seemingly highly negative representation, we thought, must have a significant effect on attitudes. Another issue we encountered was in the interpretation of data on the impact of contact on attitudes. Although this particular

area of research is supported by theory and a vast body of literature, the specific cultural nuances for Hong Kong Chinese people required extensive consideration. Coming to terms with the data on the impact of etiological and biological essentialist beliefs on attitudes required an extensive review of the literature and referral back to the data from the qualitative interviews. We also had to consult with experts in Hong Kong Chinese culture to confirm that my interpretations were accurate and plausible within the Chinese cultural context. A final area of consideration was understanding the effect of demographic variables on attitudes towards transgendersim and transgender civil rights, and interpreting the data in a way that understood the pathways in which Hong Kong Chinese people codify, abstract, and diffuse information relevant to their attitudes, ways that are fundamentally and markedly dissimilar to the researchers' ways of being.

Study Two, being a qualitative study, enabled us to engage in periods of immersion in the three research contexts, and it was partly this immersion that helped us to better understand the socio-linguistic-cultural mores operating in Hong Kong schools — some of which we have delineated in earlier sections of this paper. Another factor that helped us to overcome challenges was the strong conceptual framework upon which this study was based. This enabled us to objectify and verify the truthfulness of our data, a task which may have been more difficult to achieve otherwise. On a more practical level, cross verification from different data sources and different data types also led us to form a clearer understanding of the issues at stake.

**Implications for Research and Practice**

One of the first implications that arose from our studies is a fundamental need for researchers to conduct studies that provide contextually sensitive evidence for the design and/or evaluation of issues in the social sciences. Another implication is relevant to the study of sensitive subjects within the Chinese cultural milieu. Considering how much has been written about insider and outsider perspectives and the amount of conceptual work that has taken place over the last decade, it is surprising that there is still so little empirical research on conducting studies in Chinese populations. We believe that this may be due to the lack of psychometrically sound measures that have been developed by non-Chinese researchers for use in quantitative studies on Chinese populations, as well as conceptual frameworks to guide such research. On the qualitative side, a great deal of cross-cultural research has been conducted across a wide range of societies, but very few studies have focused on the particular issues relevant to this discussion.

We contend that any researcher conducting such studies, whether considered at first glance to be sensitive or not, needs to have a com-

prehensive framework to guide their investigations. Though in this paper we do not offer a model for such studies, we do emphasize that such frameworks may go a long way towards overcoming issues dealing with an overt or covert clash of the researcher's own cultural cognition with that of the participants under study. Moreover, we would emphasize that that research does not need to be sensitive in order for its participants to fall in the sensitive category. Consequently, researchers need to be finely attuned to the needs and vulnerabilities of the particular groups of participants that they are investigating – even though at commencement of the study the participants may display no such qualities. Finally, flexibility needs to be built into research designs so that gradual cultural understanding of the researcher, should it happen, may be incorporated into the research methodology used in the research, as well into the findings which can then be questioned and analysed at each level so that it is possible for the researchers to adapt their research strategies to overcome methodological problems.

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# Socio-political Forces and Intended, Resourced and Implemented Curricula: Chinese Music in Hong Kong and Taipei Junior Secondary Schools

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## Abstract

*This paper[1] is a study of the nature and extent of Chinese music in junior secondary schools in Hong Kong and Taipei (City), and investigates the impact of socio-political forces on curricula in the two places. It investigates the syllabuses, textbooks and teachers of Chinese music education; identifies the socio-political and/or cultural forces that have influenced the design of music syllabuses and textbooks and the teaching of Chinese music; examines the roles and status of Chinese and non-Chinese elements in the curricula; and assesses the similarities and differences in outcomes in the two cities. During the period covered by this study, the music taught in Hong Kong and Taipei junior secondary schools was predominantly non-Chinese, and in particular Western. The paper aims to explain the reasons for this situation, and the reasons for situational change*

## Introduction

The values and the attitudes of people towards education are an important reference-point for policy makers in their formulation of education policy, including policy on curriculum design, textbook design and the school curriculum in general. These values and attitudes are much affected by a society's political history, socio-cultural background and economic development, and these forces in turn influence the development of education.

This paper is a study of the nature and extent of Chinese music in junior secondary schools in Hong Kong and Taipei (City), and investigates the impact of socio-political forces on curricula in the two places. In order to do this, it investigates the syllabuses, textbooks and teachers of Chinese music education; identifies the socio-political and/or cultural forces that have influenced the design of music syllabuses and textbooks and the teaching of Chinese music; examines the roles and status of Chinese and non-Chinese elements in the curricula; and assesses the similarities and differences in outcomes in the two cities. During the period covered by this study, the music taught in Hong Kong and Taipei junior secondary schools was predominantly non-Chinese, and in particular Western. The paper aims to explain the reasons for this situation, and the reasons for situational change.

**An Overview**
This paper traces the nature and extent of Chinese music in the music curricula of junior secondary schools in Hong Kong and Taipei, and as such presents a fresh understanding of Chinese culture in the two cities. Several studies of music curricula in Hong Kong and either Taipei or broadly in Taiwan have noted the unbalanced content of Western music and Chinese music in both textbooks and actual classroom teaching (e.g. Ng 1997; Brand & Ho 1999). This study tries to understand what forces have shaped these patterns. Using questionnaires and interviews with music teachers and an in-depth analysis of official music syllabuses, music textbooks and other curricular documents and reference books, the study investigates the nature and extent of Chinese music through a three-angle analytical model, the dialectical Model of Fägerlind & Saha (1989), and a comparative four-stage modified Bereday Model by Yu (1996). It addresses the three levels of the curriculum in junior secondary schools in Hong Kong and Taipei (Appendix 1).

**Research Questions and Focus**
Many Hong Kong and Taipei students have little or no interest in Chinese music in junior secondary forms, and the lack of knowledge about Chinese music and deficiencies in Chinese music education at junior secondary forms are often cited in criticisms of Hong Kong and Taipei music education (see for example, Brand & Ho 1999). The main research question addressed in this paper is – What socio-political forces have determined the nature and extent of Chinese music in the music curricula of junior secondary schools in Hong Kong and Taipei?

The analysis for data gathered during the study was undertaken with the help of a set of conceptual models drawn from the literature on comparative education. The research methods included content analysis of two official syllabuses and four sets of music textbooks, as well as interviews with syllabus designers, textbook publishers, and music teachers in Hong Kong and Taipei. The analysis centres on the curricular choices made regarding Chinese and non-Chinese music. This is a significant area of political, cultural and educational decision-making, which is bound up with questions of national identity, allegiance and citizenship. The process of curriculum-making, starting from policy making to teaching implementation, creates different curriculum products, for example, policy documents, syllabus materials, textbooks, and teaching materials. The details of the relationships between the three focus levels in the research are shown in Appendix 2.

**Socio-political Forces and the Three Levels of Music Curricula**
In this study, the researcher found that socio-political forces, cultural,

economic, and political forces, have had a certain impact on Chinese music education in both Hong Kong and Taipei. From studying these forces at the three levels of curricula, the researcher found that both cities have similar outcomes and effects due to the impact of these socio-political forces.

The purposes which the curricula in Hong Kong and Taiwan are attempting to achieve and the means by which they are to be achieved are substantially affected by a range of social, economic and political factors. This section discusses the relationships between these socio-political forces and the three levels of the curriculum of Chinese music education in Hong Kong and Taipei. Specific characteristics of those socio-political forces are shown in Appendix 3.

Hong Kong and Taiwan are both cosmopolitan cities with fast-growing and prosperous economies. Hong Kong, particularly, has a very efficient infrastructure and a laissez-faire government, unlike that of Taiwan which exercises strict control over many aspects of society. Also, in contrast to Taiwan, Hong Kong is seen as a major entrepôt between China and the rest of the world. The various social and cultural characteristics which may affect curriculum design in the two places are: the presence of a Chinese culture and a local culture, Confucian belief and ethics, uncertainties about identity, localization and globalization, Western influences, and the educational back-grounds of the curriculum designers. However, whereas Hong Kong has a great deal of ethnic homogeneity, this is not the case in Taiwan. The political factors are different in the two places: Hong Kong had a long history of colonial rule by Britain (1842-1997), it has a close connection with China, and there has been political instability over the return of its sovereignty to China. In Taiwan the rule of the Kuomintang (1949-2000) with its tight control of the curriculum has had an effect on the school curriculum, as has the determination of Taiwan to remain independent from China, its political instability, its lack of connections with China, and various local characteristics (Minnan, Hakka, local aborigines).

The same socio-political and economic factors influenced the design of the intended curriculum and the resourced curriculum, but one extra important political factor influenced the music textbooks in Taipei. Also, after the lifting of martial law, local publishers have been free to publish and this has been in effect from 1989. In the case of the implemented curriculum, there are other factors such as teacher training (pre-service and in-service training), and teacher education payment. The detailed analyses of the relationships between the socio-political forces and the curricula are given below.

**Socio-political Forces and the Intended Curriculum**

The purposes which the intended curricula in Hong Kong and Taiwan, the official music syllabuses, are attempting to achieve and the means by which they are to be achieved are substantially affected by a range of social, economic and political factors. This section discusses the relationships between these socio-political forces and the intended curriculum of Chinese music education in Hong Kong and Taiwan.

The socio-political background of the music syllabus promulgated by Curriculum Development Council (CDC 1983) in Hong Kong was formulated by the former colonial government. Therefore, the design of the syllabus has been greatly influenced by that in the UK and this has resulted in the emphasis given to Western music. For example, as reported by one of the designers, the framework of the CDC (1983) syllabuses is similar to those in Britain at that time. In contrast, the socio-political background of the music syllabus promulgated by Ministry of Education (MOE 1994) is that of Taiwan promoting her own localization, and her own culture, as well as her independence from China. Taiwan wanted to develop her own characteristics and find a specific and unique place in the international world rather than relying on China or maintaining relationships with China. As a result, many governmental official decisions are influenced by the government's intention to promote localization, and in this, music, being an important part of the culture, has an important role to play. Therefore, the MOE (1994) syllabus placed a great deal of emphasis on introducing local Taiwanese music into the music syllabus, including Taiwanese songs sung in different local dialects, and local Taiwanese repertoires.

From the above discussion of the two music syllabuses, there are some points to be summarized. First, the basic training recommended in the music syllabuses is mainly based on Western practices (for example, Italian Bel Canto vocal production), and uses Western musical notation (rhythm, key signatures, time signatures). There is little concerning non-European music training and practice. It is clear that Western music in terms of basic training has made a substantial impact on the music syllabuses designers.

Second, the music syllabuses affords great flexibility to music textbook designers, publishers, and teachers to choose the nature and extent of Chinese and non-Chinese music in their textbooks or teaching. Music teachers can create their own unique music curriculum according to the same music syllabus, due to the ambiguity of the syllabuses. It is likely that the designers do not want to strictly control the design of music textbooks and the teaching of music teachers, and so they have devised more open music syllabuses to allow textbook designers and teachers to select what they like according to their

abilities, strengths and limitations, the social and political environment, and the school environment. However, the way in which textbook designers interpret the official music syllabus has a great influence on music teachers as many music teachers both in Hong Kong and Taiwan strictly follow and rely on textbooks instead of following the syllabuses.

Third, in the section on music appreciation, the syllabuses show a balance of Chinese and non-Chinese music content. Despite this, both Hong Kong and Taiwan music teachers tend to have a preference for teaching Western music. It is interesting to find an unbalanced implemented curriculum (music teaching) coming from a balanced intended curriculum (official music syllabuses). The reason for this imbalance is that music teachers in both places have more confidence and interest in teaching Western music than in teaching Chinese music because their basic music education, teacher training, and social-political environment have been mostly influenced by Western culture.

It can be seen from the above-mentioned factors that the two societies have been shaped by both similar and different socio-political factors, and these various factors have emphasized different educational goals and have resulted in different perceptions of what should be included in the music syllabuses. The balanced syllabuses in terms of Chinese music and non-Chinese music give rise to different interpretations and understandings on the part of textbook designers. This may be the original idea of the music syllabuses designers or it may be only a misunderstanding on the part of the textbooks designers and music teachers. This will need further study in the future.

Finally, the semi-structured interviews with the music syllabuses designers were very important. As these two syllabuses have been implemented for over ten years, many original documents have been lost or are difficult to get hold of. Therefore, the interviewers provided many useful and important data which were missing. One such piece of information provided by the syllabuses designers concerned the background and criteria used during their design of the music syllabuses.

The intended curriculum normally is a rather abstract curriculum. The readers, both textbooks designers and teachers, can freely interpret it. The curriculum does not to have too many restrictions: its aim is just to give guidelines and instructions to the readers on a way to follow, rather to tell them how and what to teach. Consequently, this 'root' of the curriculum, the intended curriculum, normally is smaller in 'size', in terms of contents, than the other two curricula, the resourced curriculum and the implemented curriculum.

**The Resourced Curriculum and Socio-political Forces**

Through analyzing the contents of the music textbooks, one can understand better the rationale behind the designing of their textbooks by the publishers and designers. In particular, one can understand better what socio-political forces have influenced publishers and textbook designers. However, there are some limitations in studying the relationships between textbooks and their designers. For example, the textbooks may not fully reflect all the forces influencing the designers in shaping the textbooks because of the limited economic support or limited time or resources available in designing these textbooks. Nevertheless, they can still indicate the various factors which have affected their design. As many teachers rely heavily on textbooks, due to their lack of confidence or knowledge in a particular field, the contents of the textbooks take on an important role and status. The contents of textbooks not only give teachers and students, adequate knowledge, but they also have a responsibility in disseminating culture. That is, if textbooks focus on or are biased against certain issues and perspectives, then, it is unquestionable that the teachers and students will tend to be influenced. For example, if music textbooks are biased towards non-Chinese music content, or Chinese content, or even local music content, then teachers and students will probably focus more on these areas.

Moreover, the resourced curriculum is an important bridge between the intended curriculum and the implemented curriculum. Normally, the intended curriculum is written in a very ideal and abstract way and is freely interpreted by designers or teachers. Similarly, the implemented curriculum is often very different among teachers, who have to adapt the intended curriculum and design a curriculum according to their students' abilities, schools' environment, and their own abilities etc. Therefore, the resourced curriculum takes a 'neutral or central' road between the other two curricula. It interprets the abstract intended curricula in a more realistic way and provides more information and choices for teachers. In this way, the nature and extent of the contents of the resourced curriculum are much more than the intended curriculum, and the nature and extent of the contents of the implemented curriculum depend on the abilities and preferences of teachers.

**Socio-political Forces and the Implemented Curriculum**

In the examination of music teaching (the implemented curricula) in Hong Kong and Taipei, it was found that Western music was predominant in both places. Chinese music was not able to arouse the interest of the music teachers, who preferred teaching Western music as they were more interested in it and more confident about teaching it. Second, the reason why music teachers had no confidence in teaching Chinese music was their weak educational background in Chinese

music, inadequate training in tertiary and in-service training for music teachers and insufficient support and the cultural environment in the two cities. Consequently, they just followed strictly, or with only slight modifications, the Chinese music suggested in the music textbooks. Third, the contents of the official syllabuses (the intended curriculum) in Hong Kong and Taipei and the Chinese and non-Chinese music content (the implemented curriculum) of music teaching in Hong Kong and Taipei were quite similar. The exceptions were some local Chinese music content, for example, Canto-pop music and Guangdong opera, in Hong Kong's Chinese music curriculum, and Minnan and Hakka songs and music in Taipei's Chinese music curriculum. Fourth, the results obtained from the questionnaires and semi-structured interviews reveal that in spite of the balanced intended music curricula in Hong Kong and Taipei (in terms of the nature and extent of Chinese and non-Chinese music), imbalanced implemented curricula (in terms of the nature and extent of Chinese and non-Chinese music) were produced. The music teachers viewed Chinese music as having a lower status and showed little interest or confidence in teaching Chinese music. It seems that the social, political, and economic factors have had a certain impact on the implemented curricula. What implications arise from the above discussions and what is the relationship between the socio-political forces and the implemented curricula?

The same socio-political factors which were discussed in previous sections in relation to the intended and resourced curriculum have also affected the implemented curriculum. However, in the case of the implemented curriculum, there are other factors such as teacher training (before and after teacher education), and teacher education payment etc.

Both Hong Kong and Taipei music teachers have a long history of Western music training, and are more familiar with Western music than Chinese music. Chinese music seems not to be accepted and appreciated by either Hong Kong or Taipei music teachers. However, Taipei music teachers have a stronger sense of belonging to their government and of promoting local cultures. Taiwanese local music is promoted by the music teachers. If Taiwanese music is considered as a part of, or one kind of, Chinese music, then the promoting of Chinese music in Taipei is higher than in Hong Kong. Moreover, due to the fact that English is not a compulsory subject or language in Taipei elementary and junior high schools, most of the songs taught by the music teachers are written with Chinese lyrics. Therefore, if songs which have Chinese lyrics, regardless of the melody are considered a kind of Chinese songs, then Chinese songs are much more promoted in Taipei than in Hong Kong. In Hong Kong, both English and Chinese songs are important, and most Hong Kong students start to learn English at a

very early stage. Therefore, more English songs are found in textbooks and the music teachers find it easier and more comfortable to teach English songs than do teachers in Taipei.

Both Hong Kong and Taiwan have been colonies ruled by European powers for a long time, and Western missionaries have also had an impact on the two societies, especially on education. Furthermore, both are cosmopolitan cities. As a result of these factors, both have been greatly influenced by the West, particularly with respect to Western music training, learning and teaching. The music teachers spend much time learning about Western music, including instrumental tuitions and listening to, and reading, Western music. Consequently, they lack interest in, and have poor knowledge of, Chinese music. Because teachers lack confidence and interest in teaching Chinese music, students are generally not willing to learn Chinese music.

The two societies have also been influenced by strong Confucian thoughts, whereby people believe study is a key to success way and a brighter future, and so most students experience examination pressure, and most senior students face 'university entrance' pressure. Teachers also have similar views as the students; they consider examinations as a higher priority than teaching music, and consequently, some music teachers do not put much effort into music, and give less time to teaching Chinese music. Both Hong Kong and Taipei have been separated from the Mainland for a long time, and so Chinese music is considered a rather lower status than Western music in the two societies. People see it as an out-dated and old-fashioned leisure activity, and it is not popular with either the young or the old, apart from a few very old people who lived in China when they were young.

The teacher is an important tool for spreading knowledge, as well as culture. Therefore, if socio-political forces influence teachers, then they influence and shape the implemented curricula. Consequently, the varieties of the implemented curriculum are much more than the intended curriculum and resourced curriculum, and these variations in the implemented curriculum depend much on teachers' abilities, their preferences, their school environments and their students' abilities.

## Conclusion

In this comparative study of Chinese music education in Hong Kong and Taipei, the researcher discovered some critical (both common and different) social, political and economic forces that are essential to the understanding of (1) the intended, resourced and implemented music curricula in both cities, such as the backgrounds of the music syllabuses designers, textbook designers, and teachers; (2) the definitions and nature of Chinese music, such as the ways of classification; and (3) the ambiguity of the Chinese identity in the two cities, such as the histories

of the Chinese, Hongkongese, and Taiwanese. The researcher thinks they are critical because they are the basis and the 'root' of the socio-political forces found in this study, and not only have the greatest amount of impact and influence on the education system (music curriculum), but also, are sub-divided into many different smaller branches of (specific) forces which have a further impact and influence on the system (intended, resourced, and implemented music curricula). The adapted Fägerlind and Saha Model helped the researcher to understand that socio-political forces can affect an education system. It also helped the researcher to identify and classify the forces which influenced the education systems of Hong Kong and Taipei into three main categories, social/cultural, political, and economic, at the very beginning of the study. This provided the researcher with a basic understanding and a clearer classification of the different types of influential socio-political forces.

Hong Kong and Taipei have similarities in their ethnic compositions, geographic locations, economic structures, and relationships with Mainland China. However, they also have significant differences in each of these spheres, and in other socio-political dimensions. Socio-political factors have had an impact on the music curriculum as well as on other domains of education. This paper has compared the intended, resourced and implemented curricula in Hong Kong and Taipei. Comparison across place and across dimensions of curriculum has helped to identify the forces which are unique to particular locations and dimensions, and the forces which are more generalisable.

The paper argues that the overall process of curriculum development (from the intended official written curriculum to the resourced textbooks curriculum, and then to the taught implemented curriculum) in the two cities has been influenced by similar socio-political forces. It further maintains that the process is characterized by some similar and some varying complex patterns in the nature and extent of Chinese and non-Chinese music which has not been adequately recognized in the existing literatures. The study contends that the national identity, preference of national and local cultures, national education, colonial education, and acceptance of, and relationships with, other cultures have played important roles in the shaping of the nature and extent of Chinese and non-Chinese elements in music curricula in Hong Kong and Taipei.

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# New Book in Comparative Education

## Common Interests, Uncommon Goals
### Histories of the World Council of Comparative Education Societies and its Members

CERC Studies in Comparative Education 21

**Common Interests, Uncommon Goals**
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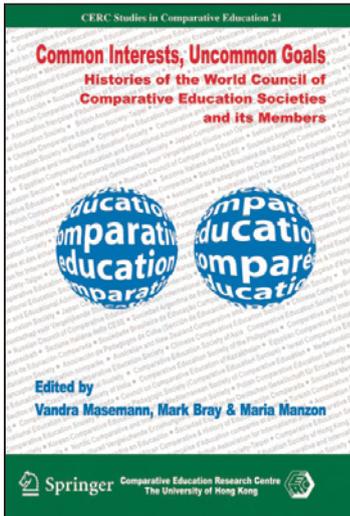
Edited by Vandra Masemann, Mark Bray and Maria Manzon

The World Council of Comparative Education Societies (WCCES) was established in 1970 as an umbrella body which brought together five national and regional comparative education societies. Over the decades it greatly expanded, and now embraces three dozen societies.

This book presents histories of the WCCES and its member societies. It shows ways in which the field has changed over the decades, and the forces which have shaped it in different parts of the world. The book demonstrates that while comparative education can be seen as a single global field, it has different characteristics in different countries and cultures. In this sense, the book presents a comparison of comparisons.

The Editors: **Vandra Masemann** is a past WCCES President and Secretary General. She has also been President of the US-Based Comparative and International Education Society (CIES), and of the Comparative and International Education Society of Canada (CIESC). **Mark Bray** is also a past WCCES President and Secretary General. He has also been President of the Comparative Education Society of Hong Kong (CESHK). **Maria Manzon** is a member of the CESHK and has been an Assistant Secretary General of the WCCES. Her research on the field has been undertaken at the Comparative Education Research Centre of the University of Hong Kong.

# New Book in Comparative Education

## Changing Education
### Leadership, Innovation and Development in a Globalizing Asia Pacific
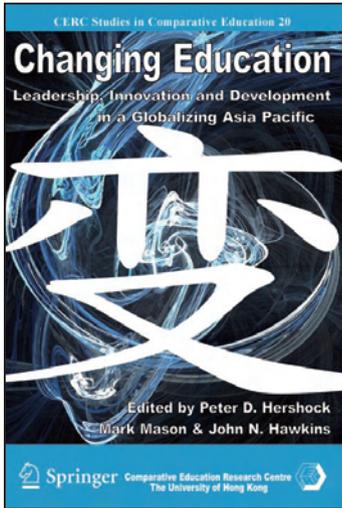


**Edited by Peter D. Hershock, Mark Mason & John N. Hawkins**

This book responds to the growing unease of educators and non-educators alike about the inadequacy of most current educational systems and programs to meet sufficiently the demands of fast changing societies. These systems and programs evolved and were developed in and for societies that have long been transformed, and yet no parallel transformation has taken place in the education systems they spawned. In the last twenty years or so, other sectors of society, such as transportation and communications systems, have radically changed the way they operate, but education has remained essentially the same. There is no doubt: education needs to change.

To those ready to accept this challenge, this book represents a welcome guide. Unlike most books on educational policy, this volume does not focus on improving existing educational systems but on changing them altogether. Its focus is not on doing things better, but on doing better things; not on doing things right, but on doing the right things to prepare students for a fast changing interdependent world.

**Peter D. Hershock** is an Educational Specialist and Coordinator of the Asian Studies Development Program at the East-West Center in Honolulu, Hawaii. He is trained in both Western and Asian philosophy, with a specialization in Buddhist philosophy. His research and writing focus both on historical dimensions of Buddhist thought and practice, and on their relevance to addressing such contemporary issues as technology and development, education, human rights, and the role of values in cultural and social change. **Mark Mason** is Associate Professor in Philosophy and Educational Studies in the Faculty of Education at the University of Hong Kong, where he is also Director of the Comparative Education Research Centre (CERC). With research interests in philosophy, educational studies, comparative education and educational development, he is Regional Editor (Asia & The Pacific) of the International Journal of Educational Development, Editor of the CERC Studies in Comparative Education Series, and President of the Comparative Education Society of Hong Kong. **John N. Hawkins** is a Professor in the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles. He is Director of the Center for International and Development Education at UCLA, where he served for twelve years as Dean of International Studies. His research focuses on education and development, and specifically on higher education reform, in the Asian region. He is the author of 15 books and over 60 articles on educational development in Asia.

# New Book in Comparative Education

## Citizenship Curriculum in Asia and the Pacific

### Edited by David L. Grossman, Wing On Lee & Kerry J. Kennedy

**CERC Studies in Comparative Education 22**

**CITIZENSHIP CURRICULUM IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC**

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David L. Grossman
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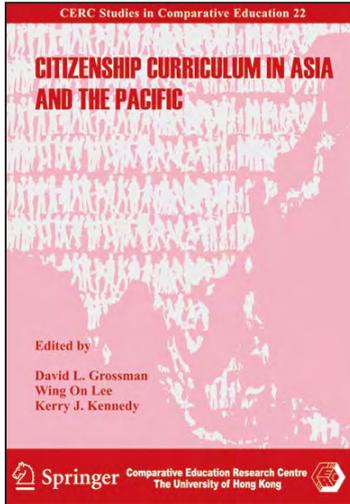
Based on case studies of 11 societies in the world's most dynamic region, this book signals a new direction of study at the intersection of citizenship education and the curriculum. Following their successful volume, *Citizenship Education in Asia and the Pacific: Concepts and Issues* (published as No. 14 in this series), the editors, widely regarded as leaders in the field in the Asia-Pacific region, have gone beyond broad citizenship education frameworks to examine the realities, tensions and pressures that influence the formation of the citizenship curriculum. Chapter authors from different societies have addressed two fundamental questions: (1) how is citizenship education featured in the current curriculum reform agenda in terms of both policy contexts and values; and (2) to what extent do the reforms in citizenship education reflect current debates within the society? From comparative analysis of these 11 case studies the editors have found a complex picture of curriculum reform that indicates deep tensions between global and local agendas. On one hand, there is substantial evidence of an increasingly common policy rhetoric in the debates about citizenship education. On the other, it is evident that this discourse does not necessarily extend to citizenship curriculum, which in most places continues to be constructed according to distinctive social, political and cultural contexts. Whether the focus is on Islamic values in Pakistan, an emerging discourse about Chinese 'democracy', a nostalgic conservatism in Australia, or a continuing nation-building project in Malaysia – the cases show that distinctive social values and ideologies construct national citizenship curricula in Asian contexts even in this increasingly globalized era.

This impressive collection of case studies of a diverse group of societies informs and enriches understanding of the complex relationship between citizenship education and the curriculum both regionally and globally.

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