

Promoting Quality Education through Developing Gifted Programs: The University-School Tripartite Model of Talent Development

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The development of gifted programs in Hong Kong reflects the changing notion of giftedness from a unitary to a multidimensional conceptualization. Based on the assumption that the majority of students have some talent areas that can be developed through the "gifted and talented" approach, the University-School Tripartite Model of Talent Development initiated at the Chinese University of Hong Kong has interrelated university-based, school-based, and university-school interface components that call for close collaboration between university and school. The Model serves as an invitation to research and development in all component areas. It also highlights the importance of translating exemplary university-based programs and practices into school-based activities for the gifted and for those who are less able such that enhanced quality education can be achieved for all students in Hong Kong.

Key words: gifted / education; talent development; quality education

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Organizing programs that will deliver educational services to gifted students is said to be the most complex, least researched, and least clarified area in education (Clark, 1997). While educators generally endorse that gifted programs should be differentiated, they disagree as to the specifics of the programs that are best suited for gifted and talented students. For one thing, there is no generally agreed upon program model or models that can best serve to guide the development of program activities for gifted students. Indeed, based on somewhat different conceptualizations of giftedness and program philosophy, there are a variety of models that make general to specific procedural recommendations regarding selection procedures, curriculum content, and evaluation.

Despite the fact that the Chinese have a long tradition of valuing and nurturing special abilities in children (see Chan, 1997), systematic design and development of gifted programs in Hong Kong have been relatively recent events. The earliest attempts can perhaps be traced to the isolated enrichment activities conducted by the Extended Learning Committee of the Hong Kong International School in the 1980s (Wu & Cho, 1993). In the 1990s, some notable developments include the initiation of school-based enrichment programs in 19 primary schools in a pilot project organized by the Hong Kong Government Education Department, the establishment of an enrichment curriculum in the G. T. School run by the Gifted Education Council, and residential summer gifted programs organized by the Chinese University of Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Baptist University. However, these attempts are at best isolated and ad hoc. Programmatic efforts at developing gifted programs should therefore aim at finding the most suitable combination of models, which best meet the needs of gifted and talented students in the context of the education system in Hong Kong. From a different perspective, the development of gifted programs in Hong Kong represents the increasing commitment of our society to expand opportunities for learning experienced by gifted students, and reflects the evolution of our conceptualization of giftedness and talent.

Evolving Conception of Giftedness in Hong Kong

Historically, giftedness, talent, or “cai” in Chinese was categorized into different types (J. Chan, 1996). At the top of the hierarchy was “cai” exhibited in the exceptional abilities of geniuses or the precocious abilities of prodigies. Such “cai” or “tian cai” (heavenly ability) was regarded as an endowment from heaven and was superior to acquired or developed talents or “ren cai” (human ability). While the early Chinese recognized developing talents in at least six domains, including the rites, music, archery, horsemanship, calligraphy, and mathematics (Zhang, 1988), giftedness and talent was generally identified by literary abilities (see Chan, 1997). This emphasis on academic abilities continues into the 1990s and even to the present day in Hong Kong. Therefore, prior to the 1990s, it was considered that the nurturing of giftedness and talent, defined narrowly as academic abilities, could be largely accommodated in the elitist education system in Hong Kong.

With the introduction of the provision of free education to children and adolescents up to grade 9 in secondary schools in the 1980s, and the consequent awareness of diverse learning and emotional needs of a student population not limited to those who are academically or intellectually superior, there is a gradual changing in the conceptualization of giftedness in Hong Kong. This change is in line with the worldwide movement from the emphasis on general intelligence or IQ to a broad and inclusive view of giftedness (Runco, 1997). Specifically, the Hong Kong Education Commission (1990), in its fourth report, introduced the first policy statement on gifted education and a definition of giftedness adopted from the U. S. Federal Definition of giftedness that included demonstrated achievement and/or potential in any one of the following areas: General intellectual ability, specific academic abilities, creative or productive thinking, leadership ability, visual and performing arts, and psychomotor ability (see also Hong Kong Board of Education, 1996). While Hong Kong students are still identified as gifted on the basis of IQ scores for services provided by the government, this multiple-talent conceptualization of giftedness will inevitably influ-

ence the identification and programming for gifted students in Hong Kong in the future.

Program Goals and Program Models

Related to the issue of the conceptualization of giftedness in the design of gifted programs is the view of the primary purposes of gifted programs. The notion of differentiated education can be said to be embedded in the Chinese philosophy of “yin cai shi jiao” or educating or developing the potential of children in different ways according to their abilities, characteristics, or needs. The question appears to be one of how best differentiated education can be accomplished. In general, there are at least three major approaches guiding the design of programs for the gifted and talented (e.g., Davis & Rimm, 1994). The first approach aims to deliver content at a faster pace, to deliver more content, to examine content in greater depth, or to deal with subject matter at a higher or more complex level. This approach is essentially accelerative in nature and aims to match instruction to the precocity of gifted and talented students. The second approach aims to enrich the learning experiences of gifted youths and allow them to study topics of interest to them. Very often, in this approach, gifted students are kept in subject matter appropriate to their grade level but are allowed study and investigation of supplementary content. The third approach is an individualized approach that aims to provide instruction that individually fits the achievement levels, ability, interests, and learning styles of the gifted students. Feldhusen (1989) suggested that a combination of these three approaches might be the best overall approach to programming for the gifted.

In general, a combination of these three approaches with different emphasis is articulated in program models. Davis and Rimm (1994), for example, listed 11 program models, which helped provide a theoretical framework within which specific differentiated experiences for gifted and talented students might be planned. They further suggested that program coordinators could draw ideas from two or more models as their prescrip-

tions were quite consistent and complementary and arrived at the most suitable “model” to meet the needs of gifted students in the particular school or district.

Feldhusen (1989) examined program models that he classified as suitable for students at the elementary or primary school level, and those for students at the secondary level. In brief, at the primary school level, school-based programs, enrichment in nature, are generally advocated, as the crucial problem is how to provide appropriate, challenging learning experiences for the gifted on a daily basis in basic subject matter and in the supplementary experiences. Thus, suitable models for primary school students include the Enrichment Triad Model (Renzulli & Reis, 1986, 1991, 1997), the Individualized Program Planning Model (Treffinger, 1986), the Purdue Three-Stage Model (Feldhusen & Kolloff, 1986), and the Autonomous Learner Model (Betts, 1991). Other options include special classes, and after school, Saturday, and summer enrichment classes.

At the secondary level, gifted youths may have found their special talents or strengths, and their needs, talents, characteristics, and levels of ability call for different program services. Feldhusen (1989) suggested that the Secondary Triad Model (Reis & Renzulli, 1989), and the Autonomous Learner Model (Betts, 1991) were viable models. In addition, Feldhusen suggested an eclectic program, which included counseling services, career education, advanced placement and honor classes. In brief, at this level, gifted youths need opportunities to discover their own talents or academic strengths in accelerated curricula and through intensive experiences at advanced levels in interaction with the key concepts of the disciplines.

Despite the proliferation of program models and classificatory schemes (Van Tassel-Baska, 1994), it is recognized that there can be no single “best” program, and one needs to aim for the most suitable combination that best meets the needs of the students in the context of the education system in Hong Kong. With a common core curriculum, and a practice of not allowing grade skipping or advanced placement in mainstream schools in Hong Kong, the likely options within this context will be after school, Saturday

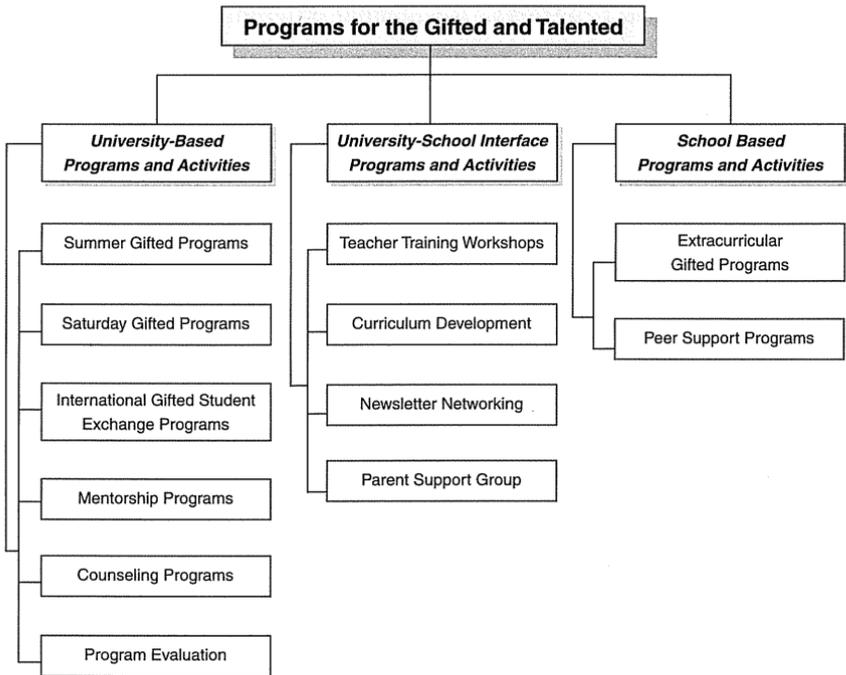
and summer enrichment programs. Indeed, the Education Commission (1990), after reviewing a number of options, rejected the options of special classes or special schools for gifted and talented students, but endorsed the development of school-based extracurricular enrichment activities for students. Following this recommendation, the Hong Kong Government Education Department has initiated a pilot scheme involving 19 primary schools, supporting these schools in their development of extracurricular enrichment activities for identified gifted students through providing information and resources from the Fung Hon Chu Gifted Education Centre. However, school officials and teachers organizing these programs have generally felt that training and support were inadequate, and that enrichment activities developed ad hoc and without any clear themes could easily degenerate into nothing more than a simple fun-and-games approach in extracurricular activities. With little support from the government, school officials and teachers are now turning to the universities where there is expert knowledge in gifted education, and in teaching and learning. Therefore, what is needed is the adoption of a systematic and organized approach to the programming for gifted students in Hong Kong, one that requires close collaboration between universities and schools, and one that is supported by an articulate, informed educational leadership from the universities.

The University-School Tripartite Model of Talent Development

For the development and organization of gifted programs for gifted and talented students in Hong Kong, it is contended that universities, with exceptional human resources (e.g., knowledgeable scholars and dedicated researchers) and advanced facilities (e.g., general and discipline-oriented libraries, general science and marine laboratories, computer services, theatres, and museums), can play an important and leading role in meeting the special needs of gifted and talented students. Further, universities can be centers for training teachers of gifted programs and other program personnel, and for the development of curriculum materials. In line with the university mission of nurturing and developing human potential for our

society and humankind, the Faculty of Education at the Chinese University of Hong Kong has plans for organizing a scheme of comprehensive gifted programs and services under the Programs for the Gifted and Talented (PGT). Specifically, the PGT at the Chinese University of Hong Kong follows the University-School Tripartite Model of Talent Development in planning and developing programs and activities for gifted and talented students. Figure 1 is a schematic representation of the Model, which has three interrelated components: (1) University-Based Programs and Activities, (2) School-Based Programs and Activities, and (3) University-School Interface Programs and Activities. A description of the programs and services follows.

Figure 1 The University-School Tripartite Model of Talent Development



University-Based Programs and Activities

The notion of organizing programs for gifted and talented students by universities is not novel. Indeed, some of the best programs in North America are those offered by colleges and universities such as those at Duke, Northwestern, and Purdue, as evidenced by the favorable results of program evaluation of summer and Saturday programs (e.g., Feldhusen, 1991; Feldhusen & Koopmans-Dayton, 1987). These programs have proved to be very beneficial to gifted and talented students in providing them with high-level and challenging learning experiences to facilitate their growth and development toward creative leadership careers in the arts, sciences, business, humanities, government, and other professions (Goldstein & Wagner, 1993; Olszewski-Kubilius, 1997). These programs also serve to help recruit talented youngsters to the universities as full-time students later.

Summer Gifted Programs. Residential programs are organized for gifted students from primary and secondary students in Hong Kong in summer months. These programs will provide a level of challenge and a pace of learning that is more suitable to the abilities of gifted students. There will be more opportunities for independent inquiry, in-depth study, and accelerated learning, and for interaction with gifted peers. Leading scholars and scientists of the University will be invited to share their expertise with students, exposing students to the cutting-edge research and technological advances in different fields.

Saturday Gifted Programs. Saturday programs also provide more opportunities for accelerated and enriched learning experiences to gifted students. The University will be urged to take into consideration bright students' concurrent enrolment in high school and the University such that they will earn university credits when enrolled in accelerated courses on campus.

International Gifted Student Exchange Programs. These programs help promote interactions among gifted youngsters from different cultures, helping students to broaden knowledge and enhance friendship in the context of a changing world. These programs will also strengthen Hong Kong's

educational links with other institutions in the mainland and overseas.

Mentorship Programs. The concept of mentoring is not novel and can date back to historical times of the Greek philosophers. A mentorship typically involves an extended relationship between a professional at the University or a leader in the community with a bright student over a period of several months. The multiple benefits of mentorship include increased knowledge beyond book learning, support in career planning, building confidence and competence, development of personal ethics, and enhancement of creative behaviors (Edlind & Haensly, 1985). Through these programs, gifted students will be helped in seeking mentors within the University or the community such that their educational and emotional needs can be more readily met.

Counseling Programs. Individual, group, and family counseling are predicated on the recognition that gifted students do have unique social and emotional needs that interact in the development of talent. The relevant issues may include self-esteem and self-definitional problems, heightened emotional sensitivity and overexcitability, perfectionism, underachievement, and multipotentiality (Chan, in press). There is a critical need to include counseling services as an integral part in the development of programs for gifted students in Hong Kong.

Program Evaluation. Program evaluation should be a continuing process directed at answering whether our programs and activities achieve their goals in helping to meet the special needs of gifted students in Hong Kong. To monitor and improve the effectiveness of our programs and services, evaluation should be an integral part of program planning from the beginning. Specifically, evaluation should include a formative or an ongoing process directed at modification and improvement of the programs, and a summative or final assessment of the overall success of the programs. Accordingly, evaluation will take various forms and will include evaluation of the acquisition of specific knowledge and skills, student attitudes, student behaviors, student products, curriculum materials, attitudes and perceptions of peers, teachers, principals, and parents (D. W. Chan, 1996).

School-Based Programs and Activities

The University-based programs have the compelling advantages of allowing gifted and talented students to meet and work with each other in the stimulating university environment. However, due to the constraint of limited enrollment, only a certain number of students can be served at any one time. Since each school may have a student population or a talent pool with specific needs, it is appropriate for a school to design and develop its own programs with the support and consultation from the University PGT.

Extracurricular Gifted Programs. School-based enrichment programs in participating schools can be organized with professional support from the University PGT, capitalizing on the experience of organizing University-based summer and Saturday programs. Specifically, professional support through teacher training, consultation on program planning, design, implementation, and evaluation will be provided. The focus will be on the development of three types of programs, which aim at developing leadership, enhancing creativity, and reversing underachievement.

Peer Support Programs. Through these programs, gifted students are given the opportunities to realize their leadership potential in their home schools. Gifted students will be encouraged to become doers, to take charge, and to take action in forming peer tutoring or peer counseling systems in their home schools. Such peer support programs will help gifted students develop a deeper appreciation of the skills necessary for effective leadership, and allow them to practice while remaining connected to their peers.

University-School Interface Programs and Activities

Programs under the component of University-School Interface are those that require close collaboration between university and school. The training of teachers can be organized for teachers from different schools or teachers in a particular school to serve students with specific needs. The development of curriculum materials can be generally for all participating schools, or specifically for individual schools.

Teacher Training Workshops. Teachers of gifted students should have

an appropriate repertoire of teaching strategies that are suitably differentiated to fit the characteristics and needs of gifted students. They should be highly knowledgeable or skilled in the disciplines they teach, verbally articulate and enthusiastic, inspiring gifted students with their joy and mastery of the field (Sisk, 1975). These training workshops organized for teachers will prepare teachers to develop gifted programs and activities in their home schools, to adopt the “gifted and talented” approach in their teaching, and to create more exciting learning environments for students in regular classrooms, so that enhanced learning and attainment can be achieved for all students. Further, teachers will learn, among other things, how to recognize and develop students’ strengths and interests, and how to help students understand themselves, develop positive self-esteem, and value educational and career accomplishments.

Curriculum Development. It has been pointed out that gifted and talented students have intellectual and artistic abilities advanced beyond their peers, and that special curriculum materials should be developed. With higher-level and faster-paced instruction, gifted students can pursue topics in greater depth and deal with abstract and complex ideas. Curriculum development will be guided by Bloom’s Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (Bloom, 1974), where high-level thinking skills are usually translated into stages of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. While curriculum materials may be individualized for specific courses or specific populations, the acquisition and accumulation of such resources will ultimately benefit school-based programs through sharing among different schools. Thematic development of curriculum materials will focus on developing leadership, enhancing creativity, and reversing underachievement in the Hong Kong setting.

Newsletter Networking. It is recognized that clarification or confirmation of gifts and talents for youngsters is important, and this can be achieved through interacting or communicating with professionals, parents, and talented peers. A newsletter published regularly will help promote the linkage among schools, the University, and gifted students. In addition, stu-

dents interested in creative writing will find an outlet for their publications.

Parent Support Group. While it is generally recognized that parent encouragement and support is critical to the child's talent development, appropriate parental involvement in gifted education has often been overlooked in Hong Kong. In contrast to parental under-involvement, parents may also react with understandable anxiety over how to do the right thing in raising their child. Thus, a parent support group will provide an opportunity for parents to support each other in recognizing signs of the child's abilities, promoting creativity, developing caring relationships, and providing enriching cultural or educational experiences.

Beyond Gifted Education: An Invitation to Research and Development

In the past two decades, the educational system in Hong Kong has undergone many waves of reform. While the history of our reform efforts can be rightly interpreted as revolving around our concern with providing equal access to educational opportunities for school-aged children and adolescents, recent years have witnessed a gradual change of focus, shifting toward the aim of striving for quality education for all students (see Chan, 1998). In this connection, it is believed that all students should be provided with opportunities that allow them to attain optimal levels of learning, and that curriculum planned for gifted students should be used in our schools with as many students who can benefit from it. Thus, the strong interest in focusing efforts on raising the level of performance for all students is translated into a belief that successful approaches to the achievement of the gifted can also enhance the educational enterprise for those who are less able.

The programs and activities under the University-School Tripartite Model of Talent Development at the Chinese University of Hong Kong are at present in various stages of development. While these programs and activities provide focal areas for educational research, the Model is intended precisely to serve as a model of exemplary programs and practices that offer exciting, creative alternatives in instruction and curriculum not only

for gifted students but also for all students. It is the assumption of the Model that the majority of students have some talent areas that can be developed through this “gifted and talented” approach. This approach thus seeks to apply strategies used in the university-based programs for gifted students to school-based programs for all students, emphasizing talent development in all students through curricular adaptations, independent study, thinking skills strategies, and enrichment strategies. It is believed that through developing the talent in all students, allowing them to realize their fullest potential, and work toward the highest level of their ability, that the Chinese education ideal of “yin cai shi jiao” can be actualized, and quality education for all students can be accomplished.

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