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FOREWORD

Dear Friends of the Faculty of Education,

Welcome back to another volume of *Education Matters*!

I am sure it has been no easy period for anyone, as the pandemic has affected every aspect of our lives. Everyone has been forced to go through different kinds of rapid changes, which has been tremendously stressful. But we have and will continue to overcome the challenges together, and I am pleased to share with you our progress and achievements.

In this issue's cover story, we celebrate the School-University Partnerships (SUP) Office's effort in supporting schools during the pandemic, when new teaching arrangements had to be swiftly made. Our students' contribution under the coordination of the SUP Office is equally remarkable, as they provided timely help in various ways to different groups of the education community.

Moreover, we are sharing the good work of our teaching staff. These projects reflect their dedication to improving lives and effectively reached those in need.

From our students' and alumni's stories, we can understand why they chose to become an educator to change lives. I always believe education can empower every single person, and I hope you will feel the passion of our students and graduates as you read this newsletter.

Finally, I would also like to take this opportunity to give thanks to all our staff in the Faculty. I cannot express how grateful I am for their perseverance and positivity in such a difficult period. Our teaching staff tried a wide variety of online pedagogies and tools to make the experience engaging and meaningful for our students. Feedback from students has been positive: they have been pleasantly surprised by the great virtual classes and discussions they are having. I also want to thank the many colleagues who shared their great ideas and innovative strategies for navigating the online teaching environment.

Please enjoy this issue of *Education Matters* and find out what the Faculty has been up to.

Stay well and take care.

Professor A. Lin Goodwin
Dean

Faculty Springs into Action as COVID-19 Closes Schools

When COVID-19 hit, it changed everything. Working from home, social distancing and, above all, teaching and learning online.

The challenges – still ongoing – have been immense, but everyone in the Faculty has risen admirably to the occasion. “There was a great deal of extraordinary great work going on in the Faculty – be it the array of initiatives by our School University Partnerships (SUP) Office, or e-learning opportunities and solutions,” said Professor A. Lin Goodwin, Dean of the Faculty. “All of this was a collective effort, with ideas coming from different places and colleagues, drafts going back and forth, suggestions being shared. I encouraged our Faculty to connect to the HKU COVID-19 website so our work was featured across the university and to the public, and to write blogs for our e-learning website about the interesting things they were doing in their online teaching. I also stayed close to the SUP Office and supported all the great work they were doing with our school partners and our student teachers (STs). In fact the SUP Office’s role throughout has been pivotal.”

Starting in February 2020, the Faculty has been focusing on enhancing student learning through effective use of technologies given the outbreak of COVID-19 in Hong Kong, because of which teaching and learning had to be conducted online. The Faculty’s e-Learning Team has been working tirelessly to support colleagues as they moved their classes online using a wide range of tools and platforms. Some of our teachers also shared their skills, knowledge and experience of online teaching and collaboration with teachers and the community through blog posts - please visit <http://e-learning.edu.hku.hk> for more details.

Dr Gary Harfitt, Associate Dean (Learning & Teaching), continues, “Shortly after the first school closure was announced by the government in February 2020, the SUP Office reached out to all our partnership schools to find out about their teaching arrangements and the challenges they were facing. We knew that while some in-service teachers had used information technology in their daily teaching, many were unprepared for this new type of online teaching. This was further complicated by the fact that schools had to respond very quickly to the ever-changing scenario – for example we didn’t even know if the local exam, the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination (HKDSE), could go ahead.”

“As the saying goes ‘out of crisis comes opportunity’”, said Ms Promail Leung, Director of the SUP Office and Senior Lecturer in the Faculty’s Academic Unit of Teacher Education and Learning Leadership (TELL). “Given that our STs are more tech-savvy and had experienced online teaching since November 2019, we decided to offer our practicum schools support by producing teaching materials, locating e-resources, designing PowerPoint and online teaching tools, and even marking. This was greatly appreciated by schools as the mentors were desperate for assistance.”

“We also launched a collaborative project called the *Schools Online Teaching Support (SOTS)* with school-sponsoring bodies such as Po Leung Kuk and the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals to extend opportunities for our STs to support teachers in providing online teaching, learning and student support in more schools. Some 63 students joined the SOTS Programme, offering different kinds of assistance in various disciplines to over 60 primary/secondary teachers.”

“It was a two-way street,” said Ms Leung. “While the in-service teachers received extra support from our STs, in return those STs who participated in the projects also gained new insights and skills in online teaching, which better prepared them for their e-professional practicum that was to come in April/May 2020 (and potentially in the academic year 2020-21 and beyond).”

In addition, the SUP Office and a local NGO, the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups (HKFYG) jointly launched a *Real-time Online Tutoring programme* for HKDSE candidates. Sixty-six HKU student teachers attending undergraduate and Postgraduate Diploma in Education teacher preparation programmes provided real-time online tutoring to answer questions from 1,123 HKDSE candidates through this initiative.

Top Tips for HKDSE English

Other creative initiatives included the video series, *Top Tips for HKDSE English Exam*, which was developed by Ms Tanya Kempston, Lecturer, TELL, and her students with the aim of helping out secondary students who were about to face one of the most important exams of their life. Said Ms Kempston, “I knew that the full-time (FT) Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) students in the Methods course in Secondary English were well-versed in the demands of the HKDSE. I asked the group if they would be willing to create home-made ‘tips’ that the e-Learning Team in the Faculty could then fold into the video series of *Top Tips for HKDSE English Exam*. With the SUP Office’s help, the final videos were put up on the Faculty website within just one month, and I am so grateful for the diligence and efficiency of e-Learning Team colleagues who worked so hard on the product to make sure it was available to HKDSE exam-takers in a timely fashion.” The resulting videos had 7,800 views as of November 24, 2020.

“Unleash Your Creativity at Home” Workshop

This in turn led to activities including the *Unleash Your Creativity at Home* workshop, the video series *Stay Home Science Experiment: Primary School*, as well as a *Physics Teaching Package for Secondary School Physics Teachers*. Many of the participating student teachers inspired the primary and secondary students who took part and brought about a positive impact.

For the *Unleash Your Creativity at Home* workshop, our STs carried out various hands-on or verbal group activities in breakout rooms, explained the importance of creativity and introduced ways to become more creative. After taking part in the workshop, a young student asked the STs how to join the Faculty and become a teacher himself when he grew up because he was so impressed by their performance.

Stay Home Science Experiments: Primary School

The Stay Home Science Experiment: Primary School videos comprised a series of ideas for primary school students to conduct some interesting and safe experiments with simple materials from home. The teaching packages were disseminated to teachers to supplement their teaching by not only enhancing their students' learning motivation, but also provoking meaningful learning at home.

“Physics Teaching Package” for Secondary School Physics Teachers

Through the Physics Teaching Package for Secondary School Physics Teachers, the SUP Office, together with the Faculty's students, produced seven sets of teaching materials for physics teachers to use. They can also be found in the HKEdCity resources depository and the EDB Physics Learning and Teaching Resource List.

Indeed the Faculty was coming up with so many initiatives that for better dissemination, the External Relations Office integrated all of them into the LIVE to LEARN, LOVE to SERVE (LLLS) Campaign which included launching a website to showcase all the activities, coordinating interviews with participating students, and uploading and publicising students' work on social media. The LLS Campaign was successfully concluded in late August with more than 170 Faculty student teachers participating, and approximately 1,400 people directly benefitting from the activities. Our STs had a rewarding experience participating in many meaningful projects and/or activities as part of the LLS Campaign. Please visit <https://web.edu.hku.hk/community/school-university-partnerships/> others where some of the STs have shared their interesting stories and valuable takeaway.

Reaching Out to Schools

“We quickly learnt that everything we had always taken for granted with the Teaching Practicum (TP) was no longer relevant,” said Dr Harfitt. “We couldn't simply wait for schools to reopen and we couldn't hold classes at HKU to compensate – we had to try and reach out to schools who were facing the same uncertainties as us while accepting that our own TP probably wasn't the biggest priority for them at that critical time!

“So, as much as we wanted our STs to experience teaching from their mentors and TP schools, our emphasis was (and still is) to serve our schools' needs, above all else. That is us hopefully being responsible citizens and trying to see the opportunities for new and alternative approaches that were evident even in crisis.

“Most importantly, we tried to be respectful of our school partners, understanding that they were experiencing many challenges and much uncertainty as well,” added Professor Goodwin. “This meant being patient, communicating frequently with them, and taking their lead in terms of when and what to do. All of us had goals to reach and students to teach, so working together in a collegial fashion to achieve these mutual goals was paramount.”

Lessons Learnt

Dr Harfitt said, “Was it perfect? Of course not, and we must improve in areas like communication with schools and students and colleagues. But this was an emergency response – we didn’t have a manual. As we prepare for semester 1 based on last year’s experiences, it is about mindset. We now need to accept that our old practices are being challenged – and in a good way, perhaps. One ST wrote to me last semester to say that teaching online in the e-practicum didn’t feel real and it ‘was never the same as normal TP’ – we all understood that feeling. But the simple fact was that there was no chance of ‘normal’, even today as we start the new semester.

“But that same ST is likely to have taught online with her new colleagues. So in a strange way the experience was relevant – we just didn’t know it at the time. Generally, our students recognised that this was a unique time and they adapted to the needs of their school, their students and the community.”

After school resumption in June 2020, some of our STs completed their teaching practicum with an additional two-weeks of face-to-face (F2F) teaching. They are very grateful for these precious on-site F2F teaching opportunities, particularly during these challenging times. They also understand better that they also have a responsibility to provide care and attention to their students beyond the e-learning platform.

As for what lies ahead and how education needs to be further adapted in the time of (and after) COVID-19, Professor Goodwin commented, “First, we are planning contingently so as to be ready for both F2F and online modes of teaching and learning. We are also focusing on moving to the next level of virtual instruction – not just making the physical shift to online teaching, but striving for quality teaching in a digital environment, because teaching online demands particular pedagogies and practices that are different from F2F teaching.

“Online teaching also changes the way we think about the use of time in classrooms, student engagement, creating classroom community, assessment, group work, communication, etc. Equity and full participation are also critical issues. Online teaching also means that teachers will need to talk less and think more deliberately about independent and asynchronous learning that is structured and active, such that being independent does not simply mean ‘read on your own’. There is a lot to do, but it all promises to be exciting and renewing.”

And looking back on how the Faculty has done so far and what are the good things that have emerged from all this, Professor Goodwin said: “That it is possible for change to happen quickly and responsively, not just reactively; that we can survive jumping in and experimenting and even failing; that online teaching can actually be better than F2F teaching, or perhaps different but with equally positive results; that we at HKU could move online quickly despite being far behind our international peer institutions in terms of digitising learning and teaching – we may still be far behind, but we have gained critical ground, experience and confidence; that out of challenge and adversity, all kinds of creative solutions emerged; that we, along with the whole world, were pushed to reimagine teaching and learning; and most importantly, that the inherent inequities in our systems (be they educational, social or economic) became vividly visible, compelling us to do something, to act in the name of social justice.

“I can only commend my Faculty colleagues and our students for their generosity, patience, dedication and commitment to learning. There has been much uncertainty, many times when there simply were no answers, when we had no choice but to wait and see what would happen next. There have also been mix-ups and confusions, complaints and criticism too. But overall, everyone has pulled together and risen to their best, all for the sake of students and for the Faculty and HKU. I am grateful for them and to them, and can only express my heartfelt thanks. This has been a year like no other, but as a community, we have managed admirably to come through on the plus side.”

Partnerships for Good

The School-University Partnerships (SUP) Office has been fostering collaborations between the Faculty and schools for more than 10 years.

The difficult times we are all experiencing now have shed new light on just how important this collaboration is – both for the Faculty and for the schools. Director of the SUP Office and Senior Lecturer in the Faculty’s Academic Unit of Teacher Education and Learning Leadership (TELL), Ms Promail Leung, said, “The Faculty of Education is passionate and committed to teacher education, and we have enthusiastic educators with varied expertise. The SUP Office invites partner schools to academic conferences and practical seminars and workshops, thereby giving school principals (and their teachers) the opportunity to interact and share knowledge with both local and globally-renowned scholars and educators.

“Nurturing future generations of teachers requires concerted efforts from both the schools and the university. Hence, it can only be beneficial for them to work in close partnerships, and this in turn enables a larger network for mutual support for the school community. The schools play a vital role in introducing our student teachers (STs) to daily professional practice and preparing them to become qualified and competent teachers - the supervised professional practicum in schools is the central component of all the initial teacher education programmes offered by the Faculty.”

“For example in 2020, over 510 STs were due to go out into the field. Then COVID -19 happened and having strong school-university partnerships became more important than ever, enabling mutual support in a time of such uncertainty, which has given rise to such unprecedented events.” The SUP’s many activities since COVID -19 are described in our cover story this issue (see page 3 to 7) and include having STs coach school students online, helping them prepare for exams and giving guidance to teachers suddenly having to provide all their lessons online.

One of the longest SUP collaborations – dating back more than two decades to before the SUP Office was even created – has been with Cognitio College (Kowloon), whose teachers are part of the Teacher Ambassador Programme (TAP) and whose principal, Ms Amy Au-Yeung Wai-yin, has served a guest speaker at the Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) School Forum for the past four years.

Asked what she thinks her school gets out of the partnership with the Faculty, Ms Au-Yeung said, “Having STs at the school helps our teachers to reflect on their pedagogy and ways to improve the effectiveness of learning and teaching. Lesson observation and giving feedback to STs help mentors to reflect on the necessary components of effective learning and teaching. On the whole, providing the opportunity for enthusiastic young teachers to practice in real conditions is a meaningful way for schools to contribute to the education of Hong Kong.”

Teachers from Cognitio College have also joined the TAP under the SUP Office, and Ms Au-Yeung said, “I am pleased that Vice-Principal Alice Wong and the assistant panel heads in our school joined the programme. They reflected that the training was inspiring, and they have learnt how to conduct lesson observation and professional interflow with the support of education theories.”

Sharing Successful Practice

From the school perspective, the SUP Office offers opportunity. Faculty alumnus Mr Tony Wei is now an English teacher at HKFYG Lee Shau Kee College (HLC). “SUP provides my college a chance to share our successful practice with other schools in the network. It also offers opportunities for my colleagues to have professional dialogues with other teachers in the staff development programmes,” he said. “As my college is invited to present in the upcoming SUP Partnership Forum on empowering leadership in teachers and in students, it will be fruitful for my principal and other senior staff members to have professional exchanges with educators from other prestigious schools in the SUP network.

“My college is also one of the Professional Partnership Schools (PPS) committed to the idea of adopting the ‘Whole School Mentoring Support’ (WSMS) approach. By offering teaching practicum to student teachers from HKU, our teachers also have a part to play and share in helping the STs to gain holistic professional learning to become new professional teachers.”

Mr Wei and HLC’s principal Mr Lin Chun Pong also worked on another initiative with HKU, organised by Dr Leon Lei of HKU’s Technology Enriched Learning Initiative (TELI), to nurture gifted students through Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). After years of dedication to the project, the initiative was shortlisted last year for the Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) Reimagine Education Awards and Conference, the “Oscars” of Education.

Two HLC students gave a presentation at the Reimagine Education Conference, which was held in London in December 2019. The students, Anton Yu Chi Yuen aged 14, and Clive Lee aged 13, presented in front of a large audience. Commented Dr Gary Harfitt, Associate Dean (Learning and Teaching) who was also at the award ceremony: “It was deeply touching at that time to see Leon, Tony and Mr Lin give the stage and full responsibility to their two young pupils - this was quite amazing and the boys were superb.”

The boys also shared their view of the experience. “Presenting on one of the biggest stages in academia was definitely a bit nerve-racking”, said Clive. “But it is a once-in-a-lifetime experience, so I want to make the best out of it.”

The conference, as well as the MOOC programme, “pushes people out of your comfort zone” said Anton, adding: “I completed multiple MOOCs from various top universities and I was eligible for the grade-skipping MOOC Scholar Scheme. Indeed, I am grateful for the help from my principal Mr Lin, my mentor and HKU Faculty of Education.”

Professional Events

Aldrich Bay Government School has been collaborating with the SUP Office for four years. The school's principal, Mr Chui Ka Cheung, has been part of the community of PPS for WSMS, which has been helping STs gain professional learning since 2014. "SUP always broadens and deepens our relationships through various professional events and activities including: joining the PPS programme and attending the annual Partnership Forum; having professors and STs from the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University in Singapore, visit our school; my colleagues being invited twice to share their passion and vision on education at the SUP Symposium; and my personally attending the QS Intelligence Unit's meeting to provide my views and opinions for collaboration with the Faculty of Education," he said.

Regarding the SUP Office's efforts during COVID-19, Mr Chui added, "The Faculty provided our students with valuable opportunities to participate in the Unleash Your Creativity at Home workshop during the pandemic. I would also like to express my appreciation again to the Faculty's STs who designed and led the workshop."

Asked what he would say to other school principals thinking about forming a partnership with the SUP Office, Aldrich Bay's Mr Chui said: "SUP provides meaningful programmes for principals and teachers that facilitate professional dialogue. Moreover, do not feel hesitant about offering placements to the Faculty's STs as you will find that they grow with enthusiasm in learning and teaching, you will be inspired by many new ideas when you attend the SUP Symposium, and you will truly be impressed when you join SUP's programmes."

Support during COVID-19

Fanling Kau Yan College's principal Ms Veronica Yau also expressed her thanks for Faculty support during the pandemic. "Even though school was suspended during COVID-19, the student teacher placed in our school helped design online lessons and materials and offered extra support to our students during the school suspension period. We also put his ideas in our lesson designs," she said.

The College has worked closely with the SUP Office since 2016, offering multiple science-related practicums to the Faculty's STs and developing school-based science/STEM curriculum and projects. "We also conducted a workshop to share our experience in implementing self-regulated learning with the PGDE students every year," said Ms Yau. This year, one of the School Forums took place in Fanling Kau Yan College. Apart from sharing their education innovation, over 13 teachers engaged with all the participants, both onsite (face-to-face) and online (via ZOOM) by using various teaching strategies. Not only did the PGDE students gain a better understanding of how the teachers have brought about changes at school, but they also experienced how the teaching strategies are adopted to engage students in everyday teaching.

Our Dean, Professor Goodwin attended the whole forum onsite and shared the stage with the school principal and teachers, as well as PGDE student teacher representatives to discuss her teaching experience and views on such issues as professional teacher competency and the importance of catering to students' learning diversity during the panel discussion led by Dr Gary Harfitt.

Principal Yau said, "We are so glad to collaborate with the SUP Office. We have a lot of interactions and communications with their colleagues and students, and such interaction is crucial to a professional learning community. Our school believes that 'No one is perfect, but a TEAM can be', and we witness the growth of our teachers in the different projects involving the SUP Office."

A student also commented, saying that he was inspired by all the school forums because of the vision each of the educators and principals had for the future generations of Hong Kong. He said, "These principals have really shown me hope and motivated me to contribute what I can and be part of the change in the near future. It also inspires me to think about what type of teacher I want to be when I start teaching."

Ms Leung summed up as follows: "Given the pandemic and the impact it's having on all aspects of our work in the Faculty and in the process of preparing teachers, we see the role of the SUP and the Faculty as being more of a community hub in the way we need to work together alongside schools, principals, teachers and mentors to tackle common issues and challenges, but also to achieve the collective aim of preparing a community-centred, compassionate and qualified teaching workforce for the 21st century."

Digital Citizenship Study Uncovers Competency Concerns in Hong Kong

In 2016, a multi-disciplinary team led by Professor Nancy Law, Deputy Director, Centre for Information Technology in Education, embarked on a five-year longitudinal study entitled “Hong Kong Students’ Digital Citizenship Development”, with the aim of assessing digital competencies in school children.

Funded by the Research Grants Council of the HKSAR Government under its Theme-based Research Scheme, this was the first such funding received by the Faculty for any education-related project, and also the first time that the scheme has funded a project directly related to education.

In April 2020, Professor Law and Dr Elizabeth Loh, Assistant Dean (Knowledge Exchange), revealed the study’s first wave of findings, including huge differences in digital competency levels in schools in Hong Kong – differences which have become even more apparent with the arrival of COVID-19 and long-term school suspensions.

“We had no idea that the course of events locally and globally would have changed so drastically as to push digital citizenship issues to the forefront,” said Professor Law. “In fact, the unexpected changes did not only include COVID-19, but also the social movement that started in June 2019.

“COVID-19 brought a much more pervasive and a somewhat different context to the entire world. It has forced the whole society to stop as much as possible any in-person connection. However, no society can function without connections and exchanges among individuals and organisations of various types. Digital interactions and transactions have replaced much of the normal in-person exchanges, including education. Hence, the issue of digital competence as a key aspect of digital citizenship becomes even more critical.”

Indeed, such is the uniqueness of the situation that Professor Law and Dr Tan Cheng Yong, Associate Professor, Academic Unit of Social Contexts and Policies of Education (SCAPE), rapidly embarked on a new study – “eCitizen Education 360” – between June and July 2020, when schools briefly reopened, giving them the chance to see how schools were coping with having to do all their lessons on-line. The new study was supported by 1,200 teachers, 1,300 parents and 6,000 students from primary, secondary and special schools in Hong Kong. Professor Law and Dr Tan are gradually releasing the findings of this study over the coming year.

Low Performance

The original Digital Citizenship study found that, while it is true that Hong Kong is a high-tech city, this does not mean that students automatically have a high level of digital literacy. In fact, this assumption has been shown to be not true. The International Computer and Information Literacy Study (ICILS) in 2013 found that Hong Kong's performance was lower than all other developed economies that participated in the study, and even lower than some economically less developed countries.

“Now, our own assessment of students' digital literacy based on data we collected locally from primary 3, secondary 1 and secondary 3 students between November 2018 and March 2019 shows that our students' competence in digital literacy and cognitive aspects of collaborative problem solving are relatively low in general,” said Professor Law. “This finding is rather concerning.”

The study recorded huge differences in performance not only across schools but within schools too. In the same class, some students can be highly competent while there may be others whose digital competence is minimal. This difference was also larger at higher-grade levels.

“Students learn not only through the school curriculum, and this is particularly so with regard to digital competence,” said Professor Law. “Students gain digital literacy through their own use of digital technology, such as for socialising, entertainment and games. However, these types of activity are unlikely to contribute to the learning of higher level digital competence, such as critical evaluation of information, high-quality search results, sophisticated data management and presentation, and data security measures.

“For students whose family members have high-level skills and who may also be inducted into more sophisticated applications of technology in their out-of-school digital activities, they may be able to develop high-level digital competence with or without school intervention. Where there is high diversity within school in competence, it is possibly because the school does not provide many opportunities for students to undertake learning tasks that require the use of digital technology (here, I discount the use of digital technology by the teacher for didactic instruction). So a wide within-class/within-school distribution in digital competence is more a reflection of the students' opportunities to learn digital competence skills outside of school-arranged learning opportunities.”

However, the consequences of COVID-19, as the findings from the new “eCitizen Education 360” show, are not all negative. They have forced all schools and teachers to take some action towards using digital, online means to carry out their educational functions. “We have seen great leaps in the digital competence of students and teachers alike, and the adoption of new tools and digital pedagogy by teachers,” said Professor Law.

Schools Unprepared

That said, the sudden switch to totally online educational provision has also brought challenges and put a spotlight on some of the divisions the Digital Citizenship study found.

“The difference in preparedness of schools for using technology to provide online learning and teaching is huge,” said Professor Law. “Students who are studying in unprepared schools are very much disadvantaged. If this situation is not addressed, the disadvantage brought to students in unprepared schools will only increase.”

This digital divide is often associated with social economic status (SES) divides, but it cannot be addressed simply by ensuring that all students have adequate access to large screen devices (desktop, laptop or tablet computers) and internet connectivity, although this would be absolutely necessary.

“Low SES students may not be able to overcome the competence divide to make use of the technology for online learning”, said Professor Law. “They also may not have a quiet place to take part in online learning. These issues need to be addressed through concerted efforts from different sectors in the community. This is also why we have used ‘360’ in the title of our new project. We need comprehensive data and all-round multi-sector engagement in addressing the problem.”

Asked what schools could start doing to improve the situation, given the likelihood of more suspensions, Professor Law said: “Schools can develop a holistic curriculum plan for each grade level in the school by identifying topics or aspects of the curriculum that cannot be adequately addressed only through digital means, and having a plan ready for implementing these when conditions allow, since the pandemic situation is likely to fluctuate. Site-based learning opportunities are like gold, and schools need to be prepared for taking the most advantage of them when they do occur. Schools can also develop a repertoire of e-learning pedagogies for different kinds of learning outcomes and student needs, and have these recommended for appropriate segments of the curriculum.”

From the teachers’ point of view, the study recommends seeking out professional development opportunities for teachers to learn to conduct online and blended learning, and to organise support teams within the school to overcome difficulties encountered in the implementation process. Professor Law concluded, “Most importantly, schools need to identify students in need of support, and provide access not only to technology but also the support that goes with it. Perhaps partnerships can be forged between schools and community organisations to help bridge this digital divide.”

Helping Parents to Train Their Children through Play

Children should enjoy engaging in play, but some children experience social and emotional difficulties that get in the way. Rather than joining other children in play, they may stand apart from them. Or if they lose a game, they may become inconsolably distraught. The result is that play and social engagement become a source of stress and anxiety for these children and their parents. But help is at hand.

Mrs Kit Chan, Co-Director of the Centre for Advancement in Inclusive and Special Education (CAISE), has developed the Parental Support Programme (PSP) that trains parents to help their children learn through play, and provides an invaluable mentoring experience for students in the Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) programme.

The PSP is under the umbrella of the three-year Jockey Club “Play n Gain” Project, funded by the Jockey Club Charities Trust. Teachers and parents are trained to encourage children to learn through play and enjoy life. Mrs Chan’s contribution is to focus on the parents of children who are at risk of social and emotional difficulties.

Her template is a model she developed and tested two years ago for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and other behavioural issues. Parents attend intensive training sessions over five weeks, learn theories and techniques for shaping children’s behaviour and learn how to set targets. They also have weekly one-on-one practice with their mentors (PGDE students) to practice their skills.

“We use a ‘train the trainer’ approach. We are not directly supporting the child, but training parents in how to teach their children social and emotional skills. We believe this approach can have more sustainable results,” she said.

The key to this training is videos. Before the programme starts, parents send in 10-minute videos of their children that illustrate social/emotional/behavioural issues and give Mrs Chan and her team a better understanding of each child’s style of interaction. After the sessions get underway, the parents submit new videos every week showing how they have applied new skills with their children and the children’s responses. They get feedback from Mrs Chan, who uses these videos as examples during lessons, and from their PGDE student mentors.

What are parents taught? A major focus is on reinforcing positive behaviours by both the child and parent. For example, if a child shares instead of snatching a toy, the parent might point it out – “Hey, I’m really glad you shared your toy with your sister”. The mentor will then feedback to the parent that he/she has done well by being specific and showing the child that his/her actions are appreciated.

Parents are also taught not to simply wait for such moments to arise, but to create opportunities where the children can demonstrate the desired behaviour, such as playing card games that require turn-taking. Mrs Chan and her team have devised games and other learning aids to provide targets that keep children motivated, and to teach parents how to provide positive reinforcement.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

“Lots of parents, you will be surprised to hear, don’t know how to praise their children. They have good intentions but they are quite strict and when the child has achieved something, they want them to achieve the next level without addressing that initial achievement. Therefore, our targets initially are very easy, so that the children can see they can do these, and they are motivated and happy to be involved,” she said.

“Rewards” are also present in the form of positive reinforcement tools. Mrs Chan starts with something concrete – a happy-face token and token board that the children can see and hold. Gradually this gives way to a sticker book and the expectation is that children will eventually develop intrinsic motivation and not need these rewards. However, bribes are strongly discouraged because children will lose motivation once they lose interest in the bribes.

The training is confined in the early stages to only one caregiver (usually the mother) and the child, to give time for the desired behaviour to consolidate. After a couple of weeks, the other parent and grandparents may join in and towards the end, siblings will also be included. The whole family can then enjoy their time together through play without having behavioural issues to deal with.

The feedback from parents, in both the ASD and current programmes, has been enthusiastic. Some have shared comments from teachers and other family members about the pleasant change in their child’s behaviour, and some have continued to provide progress reports more than a year after participating in the programme. “You have not only helped my son, but also helped our lives. I am so content to see his current performance,” said one parent.

The PSP serves another key aim by training our PGDE students, who are also very keen on the experience. “This is the best part of the PGDE curriculum,” said one student. Another student noted, “We cannot learn this from any book. You can only gain experience like this by working with a parent in real life.”

There is one more layer to the programme: mentor supervisors, who are PGDE graduates. “Part of the aim of this programme is to equip future teachers with the ability to help train parents in behavioural modification and reinforcements that they can use when their children have social or emotional problems,” said Mrs Chan. “Having supervisors means we can train more teachers to be trainers in future.”

The focus on teachers is an important part of the plans for the programme. The current round of the “Play n Gain” Project ends in 2021 (it has been able to continue online during COVID-19 restrictions). Mrs Chan has also written a manual based on the PSP and developed teaching aids for distribution to parents, mentors, and other interested parties. The Project Investigator, Dr Yuen Mantak, has applied for funding to continue the programme and wants to expand it to include children’s teachers to enhance home-school collaboration.

Tips for Training Good Behaviour

- Set easy, small, and clear targets to begin with, so the children can gain a sense of achievement.
- Use tokens or other similar concrete objects to reward the children when they perform desirable behaviours. The tokens can be accumulated to trade for a small tangible reward.
- Reinforce good behaviours immediately and pair them up with verbal praise to specify the reason for reinforcement.
- Under no circumstances should children be bribed with a treat to behave well, such as playing on the iPad or getting an ice cream. The aim is to encourage positive behaviour with a reward, not to create a situation where the child performs well only because they want the reward.

Catering for Diverse Learning Needs

Hong Kong's schools have achieved international success in examinations such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), an achievement that the education system is designed to sustain. But as many educators know, examination results are not always a reliable measure of future performance, and students with different learning styles can fall through the cracks of such a system.

With that in mind, the Jockey Club "Diversity at Schools" Project funded by The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust that involves 90 schools, Dr Lo Yuen Yi (Associate Professor, Academic Unit of Teacher Education and Learning Leadership), and The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), is under way to transform the culture of Hong Kong schools so they cater for diverse learning needs, while still meeting the demands of the examination system.

"This project aims to change that business by working with it", said Dr Lo. "Exam-oriented practice is in our genes. We're not saying public examinations are not important, but you also have to pay attention to the learning process," added Mr Poon Kai Cheung, Franky, Project Lead and Principal of Hong Kong Red Swastika Society Tai Po Secondary School.

The approach differs from other attempts to promote learner diversity because it is school-based and draws on existing data about students to give teachers and schools a better understanding of performance and areas of improvement. This contrasts with typical diversity training, in which teachers or school leaders are pulled out of their environment for a few hours or few days of training, then sent back to face business-as-usual at their schools.

The project consists of three parts: Profiling Diversity, which involves data integration and visualisation; Maximising Choices, in which HKU and CUHK scholars are helping teachers design lessons that cater to a wide variety of learners and develop an inventory of best practices based on Differentiated Instruction (DI); and Facilitating Collaboration, which brings HKU-trained learning assistants into the classroom to help implement those practices.

For Profiling Diversity, the data is being drawn from records lodged in the Education Bureau's centralised database, which is mainly a storage facility. Most of the records are kept as separate datasets – for instance, one set for academic grades, another for extracurricular activities. The Jockey Club "Diversity at Schools" Project is integrating and visualising these datasets so, at the press of a button, schools can see that, for example, students on sports teams underperform academically, and they can start to specifically address this issue.

The implementation of professional practice comes under the Maximising Choices part of the project. HKU's team, led by Dr Lo, is building an inventory and systematising good practices so they can be easily accessed and understood.

An example of choice in learning is a lesson where students learn about discounts and percentages through role playing. Some students might be the customers and have to decide on the best deal on a range of discounted products. More advanced students might be shopkeepers who have to set prices that cater to different customers. The most advanced students would be auditors. In this way, different levels of ability are addressed without labelling the students.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Dr Lo said: “This kind of instruction is not very common in Hong Kong because of the examination-oriented culture and the large class size. It is based on Carol Ann Tomlinson’s DI model from the USA, which is an approach to learning and teaching that values individual students and caters for the diverse needs of students. In DI, teachers respond to students’ needs proactively and make differentiation according to students’ readiness, interests and learning profiles. We’re looking at which DI strategies are used by Hong Kong teachers and which are most effective.

“The preliminary data shows that teachers are not using DI in all areas – differentiated assessment in particular is not being applied. We guess this is because assessment is very important and teachers may not be able to diversify in the beginning. We hope they can start with classroom strategies first, get comfortable with that, and gradually move on to diversified assessment at the last stage.”

Mixing things up in the classroom can be a big ask, which is where Facilitating Collaboration comes in. Dr Lo’s team is training Classroom Learning Assistants to help teachers implement diverse learning opportunities. This will require a change in culture – teachers are used to being the sole adult in charge of their classrooms – but it will give teachers more flexibility in maximising choices.

Dr Lo and her team have also been actively promoting the project to teachers, parents and the community through talks, infographics, animations and the like. Short videos about DI, lasting for two to three minutes, provide a quick, easy reference for busy teachers.

“We know from the literature that if we want teachers to change their approaches, the most important thing is to change their beliefs and mindset. So I would consider this a measure of the success of the programme,” she said.

All three components of the programme are being implemented in two laboratory schools (including Mr Poon’s), with other schools joining in for one, two or three components. Some of these other schools have been selected for case studies and others are completing questionnaires. Altogether, 30 primary schools, 56 secondary schools and four special schools have signed up – and many more applications to join were received. This is good sign that there is interest and need for diversity management in Hong Kong schools.

“Knowing students, using student data well, providing as many choices as possible to engage them in active learning and, ultimately, enough staff in the classroom to support students – there’s nothing totally innovative in a sense. We’re not building something new, we are making things more connected and holistic.” said Mr Poon.

“But you have to look at the context. Hong Kong has been very good at pen-and-paper examinations but the world is changing. And the expansion of compulsory education means most students stay until age 18, which means learning diversity is increasing,” he said.

Dr Lo believes that DI and diversity management in schools can even help with the issue they are meant to address: the examination-focused curriculum.

“In the lower bands, schools want to sustain students’ motivation so that they don’t give up. In the elite schools that care a lot about examinations, they worry about how to cater for growing diversity, where you have more gifted students as well as those who may not be able to catch up. Our project can help all of them to deal with these challenges,” said Dr Lo.

A Heart for Education - From Tax Lawyer to Early Childhood Teacher

By the mid-1990s, Ms Winnie Royden had achieved all the marks of conventional success: a law degree from the London School of Economics, a master's degree from New York University, and several years working on Wall Street as a tax lawyer. But when she returned to Hong Kong with two young children in tow, she had an awakening that has resonated deeply to the present day when Winnie can now be found sitting in the principal's chair of Christ Church Kindergarten (CCKG).

The inspiration for this shift was her children. On returning to Hong Kong, Winnie began to look closely at their education and applied the hard research skills she mastered as a lawyer to learn more. The deeper she dug, the more enthralled she became with education as a career and a vocation. She decided to get some classroom experience, securing a part-time English teacher position in the primary school run by her family church, Christ Church (no teacher qualifications were required back then), and she enrolled in what was then called the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) at the Faculty of Education, HKU. She graduated in 1997.

“If I were not a mother, I would have never thought about studying education, but I was curious about what was going in school – that was basically my motivation,” Winnie said. The PGCE – which would be the first of her two teaching qualifications from the Faculty – also exposed her to secondary school teaching through her practicum. “However, during my studies, I reflected that everything you need to do with a child is actually in the foundation years of kindergarten.”

Soon after graduating, she was offered a teaching job at CCKG, where she has been based ever since. Her eagerness to keep learning about early childhood education was unabated. “Governments around the world have been professionalising early childhood education and raising the standards, and there has been a lot of research on the topic,” Winnie said. “I wanted to learn more and brush up my knowledge and therefore I applied to do my training again at HKU in 2017.”

This time, Winnie studied in the Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) programme and she was able to focus on early childhood education. Unlike the more traditional approach of the PGCE, this programme focused less on the teacher and more on the student.

“Everything was focused on children and it was evidence-based and emphasised informed practice. I came across a lot of practices that I realised I had been doing and now there were names for them. Obviously, there were a lot that I had not known about, but now I can speak with more confidence when talking with parents and show them that my approaches are based on research, rather than just my experience.”

Winnie was promoted to principal after obtaining her PGDE and is as enthusiastic as ever about teaching young children and instilling good values in them. “It's like going into a new job every day, they are so delightful and caring and creative, and they have the openness and humility to accept what you tell them. It is just a happy job,” she said.

A Chance to Head in a New Direction

When Leung Wai Yau, Corey was looking to obtain a university degree following her Associate Degree in English for Business Communications, she had the option of continuing down the language and linguistics path. However, the chance to study at HKU in an entirely new field was too irresistible to pass up.

Corey is among the first intake of the interdisciplinary Bachelor of Arts and Sciences in Social Data Science Programme, which is being offered by the Faculties of Education, Science and Social Sciences as a senior-year entry programme for sub-degree holders.

The two-year programme is specifically tailored to meet 21st century demands for skilled professionals who can bring new ways of thinking to analysing and applying data in the social sciences, by integrating information science, computer science, mathematics, statistics and social sciences. Graduates are expected to work in fields ranging from information technology and gaming to marketing, healthcare, consulting, academia and public services.

“The programme offered me a chance to get insights on human behaviour and patterns, and I wanted to try something new,” said Corey. The first year has equipped her with a foundation in social data science, as well as courses related to communication. She said most things have gone smoothly so far. All things considered, that makes it a rather remarkable year.

The disruptions from the social movement in the summer of 2019 and from COVID-19 mean that she has had only three months of face-to-face teaching. However, she has slipped easily into online learning and noted that professors have been available for online consultations.

“My classmates and I also have a WhatsApp group so that we can communicate about our courses and assignments even if we are not able to meet each other,” she said.

Fortunately, these circumstances have not curtailed her desire to experience HKU life because she is staying in the residential halls, which have remained open. She joined her hall’s hockey team and they were able to fit in a couple of games and continue training until the COVID-19 restrictions came into effect.

Looking to the year ahead, Corey is optimistic about joining an exchange in Finland in 2021 – all students in the programme are encouraged to study overseas. She is also rethinking her future goals following a summer internship as an Assistant Project Manager with a company in the Cyberport.

“When I was interviewed for this programme, I said I wanted to be an event planner. But now I would like to be a data analyst. I like the idea of applying my learning to many different cases and topics,” she said.

A Peerless Role Model

Tsang Kwan Lok, Henry is the only male student in the first intake of the new Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood Education and Special Education [BEd(ECE&SE)] programme – and he hopes to be the first of many. As the son of a single-parent home, he understands deeply that children, especially at a young age, need both male and female role models.

“Growing up without a father made me understand the importance of having a male role model in life. Hence, I hope I can be such a role model to support and inspire young children who may be growing up in circumstances similar to mine,” Henry said.

His interest in education arose during his senior secondary school years, when he set difficult standards for himself and suffered psychological distress. Apart from pouring himself into his studies, he was also pursuing athletics (he was admitted to HKU on a sports scholarship, specialising in the triple jump).

“I believe there is a reason why I had to go through those dark times. It is perhaps my mission to use my unique experiences and story to affect others. Being a teacher is my ideal way of doing this,” he said.

He chose early childhood education because of his experience on a summer internship at a kindergarten during secondary school. “The purity and kindness of the children touched my heart and strengthened my commitment to the field,” he said – and made the 1.5-hour commute to the site seem a breeze.

At HKU, he also joined a voluntary programme in his first year to plan lessons and teach young children from underprivileged backgrounds. The programme has been curtailed by COVID-19 but apart from that, his first year has gone smoothly.

“The teachers and students are committed and passionate,” he said, and he appreciates that special education is also part of his training, since early childhood is often the time when children with special education needs first show symptoms. Teachers can play a role in detecting and helping these children.

“This training is crucial even for those students who intend to work in a typical kindergarten, so they can provide appropriate and comprehensive support for every child they encounter,” he said. “That’s why I love this programme.”

He hopes gender imbalance will even out soon, too. “This is a professional field where no gender has an absolute advantage, and there is a need for male kindergarten teachers to enrich the diversity of education and serve as role models,” said Henry.

PROGRAMMES

Our Postgraduate Programmes

Being an educator is both challenging and rewarding. If you wish to enhance your career prospects and strengthen your competence in the field of education, we invite you to study with us in the postgraduate programmes offered by our Faculty in 2021-22:

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PEOPLE

Achievements

President of the International Commission on Mathematical Instruction
Professor Frederick Leung

Special Researcher (Human Resources Management), Ministry of Finance, Finland
Member, Steering Committee on Promotion of Vocational and Professional
Education and Training and Qualifications Framework, HKSAR Government
Dr Vincent Wong

Outstanding Teaching Award 2020 - Individual (University)
Dr Anita Wong

Teaching Innovation Award 2020 - Individual (University)
Miss Nicole Tavares

Emergency Remote Teaching Award 2019-20
Ms Tanya Kempston
Ms Nicole Tavares

Faculty Early Career Research Output Award 2019-20
Dr Chen Gaowei

Faculty Early Career Teaching Award 2019-20
Dr Nutsa Kobakhidze

Faculty Outstanding Teaching Award (Team) 2019-20
Dr Yvonne Huang (Team leader)
Dr Chloe Chu
Dr Lai Chun
Ms Wendy Lai
Ms Louisa Yen

Mr Alan Wong (Team leader)
Dr Susan Bridges
Ms Jo Wong
Mr Murphy Wong

Faculty Outstanding Research Student Supervisor Award 2019-20
Dr Timothy Hew

Faculty Outstanding Young Researcher Award 2019-20
Dr Jim Chan

Director of the Centre for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning
Dr Susan Bridges

Emeritus Professor
Professor Gerard Postiglione

PEOPLE

Achievements

2020 ProQuest Doctoral Dissertation Award
Dr Hussein Haruna, PhD graduate

Fulbright-RGC Hong Kong Research Scholar Award 2020-21
Mr Lin Cong, Jason, PhD student
Mr Lee Man Kit, Stephen, PhD student

1st runner-up, HKU Visualise Your Thesis Competition
Ms Lee Ka Wing, Katherine, PhD student

Promotion and Tenure

Tenured and promoted to Associate Professor
Dr Hugo Horta

Welcome

Dr Chen Jinsong, Associate Professor

Academic Unit of Human Communication, Development, and Information Sciences

Dr Jinsong Chen joined the Faculty as an Associate Professor in August 2020. His research interests include quantitative methods, machine learning, measurement, and assessments in education and psychology. Recently, he has been focusing on integrating psychometric models with statistical learning theory. Dr Chen previously worked at the Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou. He is a panel member of the Collaborative Innovation Center of National Education Examinations in Mainland China.

Dr Zhang Chenwei, Assistant Professor

Academic Unit of Human Communication, Development, and Information Sciences

Dr Zhang Chenwei joined the Faculty as an Assistant Professor in July 2020. She obtained her PhD in Information Science from Indiana University, with a minor in computer science. Her research has two streams – one focuses on science of science, which studies the mechanisms underlying the doing of science. The other stream is mainly on data science, especially educational data mining, where a variety of computational approaches, such as machine learning and deep learning are applied for knowledge discovery.

Dr Anna Mendoza, Assistant Professor

Academic Unit of Teacher Education and Learning Leadership

Dr Anna Mendoza joined the Faculty as an Assistant Professor in September 2020. Her research interests include translanguaging and code-switching in subject-area K-12 classrooms where English is the medium of instruction. She has a PhD from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa and a Master of Arts from the University of British Columbia. Her research and writing have been published in Applied Linguistics Review, Modern Language Journal and Foreign Language Annals. She is also an experienced English for Academic Purposes curriculum designer.

PEOPLE

Dr Tiet My Chanh, Lecturer

Academic Unit of Teacher Education and Learning Leadership

Dr Tiet My Chanh joined the Faculty as a Lecturer in August 2020. She has extensive local and international primary teaching experience in Hong Kong and the USA. She has enjoyed her work as a native-speaking English teacher in Hong Kong for the past 12 years and values the opportunity to bring her love of teaching to higher education. She is a Doctor of Education alumna from HKU with research interests in teacher education, teacher reflection, teacher learning and instructional design.

Dr Jason Wright, Senior Lecturer

Academic Unit of Teacher Education and Learning Leadership

Dr Jason Wright joined the Faculty as a senior lecturer in September 2020. He gained a PhD in Educational Inquiry, Measurement and Evaluation from Brigham Young University in 2015. He has worked in special education in the United Kingdom and the USA for over 20 years. His research areas include social validation of behavioural/educational interventions and systems of support for those with neurodevelopmental and conduct disorders. He was originally trained as a Teacher of the Deaf at the Exeter Royal Academy for Deaf Education before he became the Dean of a special needs college. Dr Wright also lectured in the areas of special education, research methods in education and multiculturalism at Brigham Young University. After coaching kickboxing, boxing, kung fu and mixed martial arts, he has a particular interest in using sports as a positive means to redirect disadvantaged and struggling youth.

New Appointment

Academic Unit of Human Communication, Development, and Information Sciences

Dr Feng Shihui, Assistant Professor

Retirement

We would like to express our heartiest thanks to the following colleagues for their contributions and dedication to the Faculty. We wish them a happy and healthy retirement!

Academic Unit of Human Communication, Development, and Information Sciences

Professor Bradley McPherson, Professor

Academic Unit of Teacher Education and Learning Leadership

Dr Cheung Chi Kim, Senior Lecturer

PEOPLE

Goodbye

We would like to express our gratitude and send our best wishes to the following staff members who have left the Faculty. We wish them the best of luck in their future endeavours; they will always remain a part of our HKU/Faculty of Education family and global network.

Academic Unit of Human Communication, Development, and Information Sciences
Dr Su I-Fan, Assistant Professor

Academic Unit of Social Contexts and Policies
of Education
Dr Liz Jackson, Associate Professor

Academic Unit of Teacher Education and Learning Leadership
Dr Benjamin Moorhouse, Lecturer

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