Education Policy
Schooling with a shadow
by Professor Mark BRAY

Keep learning first in education
by Emeritus Professor Kai-ming CHENG

Language policy for learning quality and social justice
by Professor Angel LIN

Policy environments for Asian universities
by Professor Gerard POSTIGLIONE

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Dean’s Message

The Faculty of Education at the University of Hong Kong is home to more than 100 international researchers from a wide range of disciplines spanning education, communication sciences and information sciences. This diversity of background and discipline results in a vibrant research culture. We proudly consider ourselves to be a nexus for the exchange and development of research that draws on the best of Asian (especially Chinese) and Western scholarship.

Within the many research themes addressed by colleagues in the Faculty, we have recently identified three common threads, which we have set out as our strategic focal research areas: the Science of Learning, Education Policy, and Equity and Social Justice. For each of these areas, we have produced a booklet, introducing the theme and also the scholarly work of some of our leading researchers in that area.

I very much hope that you will find these booklets interesting. If you would like to learn more about our research— in any of these areas or more generally— please visit our website at http://web.edu.hku.hk/research/our-research/strategic-research-focal-areas.

Professor Stephen J Andrews
Dean of Education
Policy Research

Educational policy in the 21st Century is expected to strengthen civil society, drive an economy towards unabbreviated economic growth and maintain social stability through an equitable distribution of opportunities in schools, universities and the workplace. In cities like Hong Kong, education policy is also expected to anchor economic globalization, improve global competitiveness, strengthen national identity, and promote democratic development. These are formidable challenges.

The Faculty of Education is well positioned to address policy challenges, and colleagues are regularly called upon by governments, multinational agencies, schools, universities and NGOs to conduct research and provide evidence-based policy advice.

Education Policy Unit

The Education Policy Unit (EPU), led by Kai-ming Cheng, conducts policy-sensitive research, locally and abroad. In so doing, the unit creates collaborative relations with other research centres. The EPU organizes the Summer Institute on Higher Education for the Future, providing an opportunity for Asia’s policy-makers to meet and discuss key challenges with some of the world’s most influential higher education leaders. EPU also conducts an Annual Summit on Higher Education jointly with the Asian Development Bank, focusing on emerging issues for regional higher education systems. The Unit also hosts visits and exchanges from countries interested in policy matters in education.

Language Policy

Language policy is a central focus of the Faculty, and covers topics including: trilingualism and biliteracy in Hong Kong (two scripts – Chinese and English, and three tongues – English, Cantonese and Mandarin); medium-of-instruction issues in Asia; and the popularization of Chinese language around the world. Tollefson & Tsui lead in studying how language policy around the world creates and perpetuates an economic elite. Lin’s research on Chinese-medium and English-medium schools reveals how language-based instruction strategy maximizes respective language advantages. Pérez-Milans critically assesses the role of language policy in late modernity. Tse, Shum and colleagues are strategically engaged in the international movement
to popularize the Chinese language around the world. Locally, they have influenced policy for Hong Kong’s non-native speakers of Chinese.

Higher Education Policy

As Asian universities make the transition from elite to mass higher education and enrolments rapidly expand, there are several key policy issues on the research agenda of the Faculty. Aiston examines obstacles to women’s leadership in higher education. Yang advises governments on building systems of higher education that pay attention to historical-cultural factors. Oleksiyenko focuses on the policy challenges confronting universities across Eastern Europe to Central Asia. Postiglione has engaged in policy-related projects for China’s 13th Five-Year Plan, including graduate employment. Horta conducts comparative research on doctoral education, and Jung studies patterns of research productivity.

Early Childhood, Mathematics, and Shadow Education

As research on pre-school education has shown its enormous effect on cognitive development and economic opportunities throughout the life-cycle, Rao and Li have established internationally comparative scales to evaluate effects of pre-schools across Asia. Explaining Hong Kong’s consistent position at the top of the world rankings in students’ mathematics achievement is the focus of Leung’s research; he has applied research results to the development of mathematics policy locally and internationally. A further policy area that is receiving worldwide attention is the growth of private tutoring and other forms of shadow education affecting children, their families and local/private school systems. Through the efforts of Bray, governments are gradually getting the message that policies guiding the proliferation of shadow education need more attention.

Other members of the Faculty also engage in government commissioned projects supported by the Quality Education Fund, public policy research commissioned by government bodies, independent foundations and international development agencies. More information is available at http://web.edu.hku.hk/research/our-research
The last two decades have brought an explosion of private supplementary tutoring for school-aged children. This phenomenon is widely called ‘shadow education’ because it mimics the mainstream: as the curriculum changes in the schools, so it changes in the shadow.

Shadow education has been especially visible in Hong Kong. Recent research indicated that 54% of Grade 9 students and 72% of Grade 12 students were receiving private supplementary tutoring. Some of this tutoring is provided informally by university students and others, while other tutoring is provided by small, medium-sized and large companies. Some companies advertise aggressively with street posters and on the exterior of buses.

Private supplementary tutoring has positive sides in promoting learning. It may help slow learners to keep up with their peers, and stretch further the learning of high achievers. However, private tutoring exacerbates social inequalities because middle-income and rich families can afford more and better shadow education compared with low-income families. Shadow education may also be a burden on young people, increasing the academic pressure and contributing to neglect of leisure activities.

Commentators in other parts of East Asia readily recognise these themes. Shadow education has long been a major issue in Japan, South Korea and Taiwan, and the sector is expanding rapidly in Mainland China. Yet although the phenomenon was once mainly associated with East Asia, now it has become global.
Policy makers might ask how they should respond to the phenomenon. The first answer would be to improve the database. Better information is needed on both the scale and nature of shadow education, including the perspectives of both recipients and providers. A second answer might point to regulations. In general the shadow education sector is under-regulated, especially in comparison with the school sector.

At HKU’s Faculty of Education, shadow education has been designated a Faculty Research Theme. Colleagues are exploring the scope and implications of shadow education not only in Hong Kong and the rest of China but also in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Georgia and Iran. Further, a Special Interest Group (SIG) within the Comparative Education Research Centre (CERC) is a focal point for partners in Jamaica, Japan, Philippines and United Arab Emirates. These countries have a wide range of cultures and economic systems.

The team at HKU is led by Mark Bray, who has studied the expansion and implications of shadow education since the 1990s. His 2009 book on the theme, published by UNESCO’s International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) is available in 20 languages. Related work has been published by the European Commission and the Asian Development Bank.

Through the efforts of the HKU team and their partners, governments are gradually getting the message that shadow education needs more attention. Private tutoring is still growing around the world, and has become a major concern not only for children and their families but also for schools and policy makers.
It is still taken for granted in much worldwide conversation that education means learning. Therefore, it is unsurprising that too few education policies manage to keep student learning in clear sight. More often than not, education policies begin by emphasizing administration, governance, finance, school management, teacher training, curriculum reform. Too often, the learning of students is last to be considered. Policies that begin and end with student learning comprise a wholly different approach. Policies that focus on the kind of learning experiences that students deserve, will set different priorities. When policies move away from the generic concept of student and toward the idea of each student as an individual, learning inevitably changes for the better.

Much policy research over the past 30 years in East Asia has too often concentrated on education in a vacuum. While radical changes have taken place in the workplace, schools still educate for a past era workplace. Education policies around the world are increasingly driven by an economic discourse as national governments fund education as a means to drive GDP upward and become internationally competitive. For education, this inevitably means a trade-off, with the individual learner being sacrificed in the name of economic globalization.

Education is about real learning.
Kai-ming Cheng has been trying to shake up this mentality in Asia by pointing out the crisis in the basic education system of the United States. He has joined leading Asian educators at the forefront of the worldwide discussion about the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development’s Programme of International Student Achievement (PISA). In recent years he has played an increasing role in explaining why several Asian countries top the ratings. This is prompted enthusiasm among educators, policymakers and funders in the United States.

In 2011, he held a symposium on learning with ten learning scientists and ten policy leaders from international organizations such as UNESCO, the World Bank, UNICEF, and OECD. At the symposium, five dimensions were identified as a banner for policymaking — to change education discourse into learning discourse. He continues to promote his thesis that the state of basic education is neither about money, nor about the quality or knowledge of teachers. Rather it is about real learning. Recently invited to Bangkok by the UN Commission, he helped explain why Thailand’s reform of education policy, including curriculum, teacher training, school finances and management, could not raise Thailand’s PISA ranking.

In 2014, he has brought together speakers from the National Science Foundation, OECD and UNESCO for a global learning convention in Shanghai to achieve true integration among researcher, practitioner and policymaker. Researchers in various areas of learning, including neuroscientists, pedagogy experts, assessment experts, and specialists in ICT, discussed how to move forward.

Kai-ming Cheng continues to influence educational policy with his five point advocacy: Instead of talking about school management or leadership, talk about learning leadership; Instead of talking about education finance, talk about learning resources and learning environment; Instead of talking about teaching force; talk about learning professionals; Instead of talking about assessment of students achievement, talk about assessment for learning; Instead of using ICT, information and communication technology to replace teachers, use ICT to liberate learners.
In Hong Kong, the Medium of Instruction (MoI) policy in secondary schools has been a hotly debated issue for decades. Hong Kong is geopolitically unique with its British colonial past and closeness — geographically and culturally — to the Chinese mainland. It is a multilingual community facing a globalizing world where the English language has gained dominance.

At different times, the MoI in most secondary schools has been Chinese (Cantonese), English, and sometimes both. Before 1998, over 90 percent of secondary schools were Anglo-Chinese in name. They used English textbooks and examinations, and the amount of spoken English used in these schools varied on the basis of the capabilities of students and teachers. Their popularity was due to the perceived advantage after graduation, though English medium instruction was a major hurdle for many students, often acting as an obstacle to learning across the curriculum.

In 1998, the Education Bureau initiated a policy that limited the English medium education to 114 secondary schools, about one quarter of all secondary schools. The rest became Chinese Medium of Instruction (CMI) schools. A controversy ensued among parents who felt their children were being disadvantaged by curtailed access to English — the main language in all of Hong Kong's universities. English language retains its cultural currency in Hong Kong as a perceived ticket to the world of business, higher education and social mobility.
Last year, the government announced a “fine-tuning” of its MoI policy by giving schools more autonomy in the choice of MoI. There is a great need for policy research because the results of the new MoI policy will be far reaching for the quality of education in Hong Kong.

Angel Lin has received a major grant from the Research Grants Council to undertake research on the impact of the government’s fine-tuning of the MoI policy. The policy is interesting because of the new space for manoeuvre and how it is used by individual schools, formerly classified as EMI or CMI. The fine-tuning is intended to allow for bottom-up initiatives on the part of individual schools, teachers, parents. The research will focus on precisely how they strategize and position themselves within the parameters set by the policy to maximise their advantage.

The implications of this research go beyond education and include issues of access, equity, learning quality and social justice. Such research is also becoming relevant to educational institutions in Southeast Asia where multiple languages often enter into the learning of students at all levels of schooling, and economic globalization increases the cultural capital of English speakers.
As the race to build world-class universities intensifies, many governments are formulating policies to strengthen the capacity of their flagship universities. This helps to explain why Asian research universities continue to stun the academic world. According to the latest Times Higher Education ranking, four more Asian universities have joined the ranks of the world’s top 200. No fewer than 24, almost one-eighth, of the world’s top 200 universities are Asian. At this pace, a quarter of the world’s best could be Asian by 2040, and this excludes Australian universities which some consider as within the Asian block.

Asia’s leading research universities are committed to help drive their nation’s global competitiveness. Unlike Singapore and Hong Kong which have small highly selective systems anchored in service economies, the other three Neo-Confucian economies (Japan, Korea and the Chinese mainland) are industrial giants that received enormous financial support from their governments in the form of policies, plans and programmes such as Brain Korea, Japan’s COE21 and China’s 211 & 985 plans. These government initiatives gave their universities a jump-start just as the rankings became a measure of prestige, confidence and investment potential.

As globalization intensifies, East Asian research universities are expected to play an even greater role in strengthening their economies and civil societies by providing an internationally competitive and high quality higher education.
One of the challenges for the eastern Asian region in the years to come is to forge mutually beneficial cross-border partnerships and high quality teaching and research programmes to help ensure that Asia will become a centrepiece for the world’s knowledge production and innovation by 2050. This is no small order. While Asia’s top-tier universities have made excellence a priority, only Singapore and Hong Kong have been able to ensure quality across the entire higher education system. With over eighty per cent enrolment rate in Korea, the task remains daunting. For China, with the most university students in the world, there is enormous potential for worldwide influence in the coming decades.

To position itself as a global hub, the entire system’s reputation for excellence is a necessary condition. Reforms are underway that will place the onus on the academic profession to adapt to rapid change, and to integrate teaching and research with knowledge exchange that addresses the pressing problems in their societies. Performance-based assessment will become increasingly common among the professoriate in Asia.

In order to continue their rise and without increasing the risk to their core academic mission, Asian research universities need more effective governance at both state and institutional levels to gauge, adjust and balance quantity and quality in teaching and research. Far more direct and systematic attention is needed on the improvement of second and third tier-colleges, polytechnics and universities, equal access to top-tier universities by students from under-served communities, and cultural diversity on campus.

Gerard Postiglione has engaged in policy-related projects with the Asian Development Bank (on China’s 13th Five-Year Plan), Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (on building research universities), United Nations (UNDP on university reform in Mongolia, and UNESCO on promotion of academic staff), and the World Bank (on world class universities), as well as the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (on the academic profession), and the Ford Foundation (on China’s educational reforms). He is currently the Humanities and Social Science Prestigious Fellow at the University of Hong Kong.
Language policy is used to create and hopefully to reduce various kinds of social, economic and political inequalities. In many places in the world, language policy is aimed at creating privilege for some at the expense of others. In essence, language policy is really about social justice.

Research into language policy has shifted in recent years, away from studying what governments do and towards what people do. There is increasing interest in looking at real people’s lives, and seeing how their lives are affected by government actions in the arena of language. Research is focusing on resistance to government policies, how language policies change as they are passed through the education system, and what they mean by the time they reach the classroom.

In the case of English language policy, the tendency to implement it as a cure-all to diminish inequality has often failed. While speaking English can bring certain advantages, for some groups it makes no difference whatsoever. For some groups, the myth that learning English alone will improve their lives is sustained by the discourse about language policies. For example, educational policy in Hong Kong discourages code mixing (English and Cantonese) within the classroom. Yet, in reality, students and teachers do a great deal of code mixing — often for very good and practical reasons. Ethnographic approaches to research on language policy in schools as a lived experience brings a vivid picture of the daily realities of life in schools.
James Tollefson has collaborated extensively with colleagues across the world, including HKU’s Professor Amy Tsui. They have done extensive work on access and medium of instruction issues, and their books include *Medium of Instruction: Which Agenda Whose Agenda?* He is currently working with colleagues at the University of Washington on discourse and policy, in particular discourse at times of national crisis, as well as on a parallel project in Japan on how mass media use language, in particular media coverage of the 2011 nuclear disaster. He and Miguel Perez-Milans are compiling a 900-page Oxford Handbook of Language Policy and Planning. Their goal is to influence the direction of Language Policy research for the next few years. They want to layout a research agenda, specifically aimed at integrating traditional policy studies (that is, looking at the government institutions) and ethnography (that is, looking at real people’s daily lives). They want to integrate the two strands through this book.

The University of Hong Kong is at the very top of the Language Policy research centres in the world. It is remarkable to James Tollefson how many people here are interested in it, especially Language Policy in schools, and it presents fertile research opportunities.
Policy and politics go hand in hand. Policy is necessarily political, and politics are cultural. Cultural aspects are important since making policy is at least to some extent a cultural phenomenon. While in Western political organization individuals in positions of power have the right and even obligation to transmit their will to others within their jurisdiction through command, the primary mode of maintaining hierarchy in Chinese political organization is through self-cultivation. The Chinese tradition of bibliography or classification differs significantly from Western categorisation. The Chinese library, for example, known as the Imperial Catalogue of the Four Treasuries, classified knowledge into four areas: classics, philosophy, history and miscellaneous works. As more scholars in the Western world begin to study non-Western cultures, more attention and respect has come to the value of alternative intellectual traditions.

This is not to say that alternative cultural traditions cannot converge — what is sometimes termed “travelling policy” or “policy convergence”. Although the so-called “great convergence” has been on the lips of many, interpretations of it differ. Policies do not converge unilaterally. They converge due to a variety of international and transnational forces, especially when driven by international organizations such as the World Bank, and other regional development banks, as well as influential scholars. Peripheral societies are much more inordinately influenced by those in the centres. National governments work with international governmental organizations in differing ways. The approach of the Chinese national government, for example, contrasts with how the Indian or African governments handle development issues of aid and development. That difference, to a great extent, is because of culture. How they make decisions, how they learn from other people — all are influenced by culture.
Universities are essentially Western in concept. Begun in mediaeval Europe and very successfully exported – the style has been adopted almost everywhere. But while the basic concept has been copied, it is not always a good fit culturally. For non-Western societies it needs to be indigenized and that indigenization can be truly difficult, because culturally the concept is Western. During the past two and a half decades, Yang Rui contributed to deepening the understanding of higher education in East Asia generally and in China in particular. His book *The Third Delight* with Routledge in 2002 has remained the only comprehensive study of China’s higher education internationalization. His recent work focuses on East Asia’s bid for ‘world-class’ universities, paying close attention to historical cultural factors to argue that without an infusion of traditional education values, East Asian universities risk losing touch with their cultural contexts in their quest for international stature.

Yang Rui’s policy research focuses on the cultural foundations of policy. Having grown up during the Cultural Revolution with parents who were teachers sent to the countryside, he left the countryside at 16 years old to go to university. He eventually learned about educational policy from working at the Ministry of Education and State Education Commission. At HKU, he is well positioned to look at China and Southeast Asia. With the university’s geographical advantage, his scholarship has worked to reconcile the policy underpinnings of Western and Eastern approaches to building systems of higher education.

With a track record on research at the interface of Chinese and Western traditions in education policy, Yang Rui has established his reputation among scholars in English and Chinese national languages in the fields of comparative and international studies of higher education policy, especially in East Asia’s Chinese societies. His research bridges the theoretical thrust of comparative higher education and the applied nature of education policy. In 2006, he was among the first to document in English how education policy is researched in the Chinese mainland. During 2008-2009, he interrogated the significant influence of international organizations on educational development in East and Southeast Asia. Since 2007, he has also written on how education policy could and should be compared across cultures.

Yang Rui’s research has led to invitations from Japan’s ministry of education, non-government organizations, universities, the World Bank, UNESCO, the Asian Development Bank, APEC Summit in Russia, and the UNESCO World Congress on higher education to discuss Chinese higher education.

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