LIFELONG LEARNING IN ACTION

HONG KONG PRACTITIONERS' PERSPECTIVES

Edited by

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Growth and Development of Lifelong Learning in Hong Kong

John Cribbin

DEFINITIONS OF LIFELONG LEARNING

Before we describe the background to lifelong learning in Hong Kong it is necessary to spend a little time on reviewing definitions. Lifelong learning has become a globally accepted and popular phrase since the mid 1990s. In Hong Kong, its usage has been adopted by government through references in the Chief Executive's policy addresses since 1998 and popularized by the Education Commission (EC) in its comprehensive review of the Education System undertaken in several steps from January 1999 to September 2000 under the general theme of 'learning for life' (EC 1999).

We need to consider lifelong learning in a number of contexts since there are different nuances. The current popularity of the term derives principally from the political context. As in Hong Kong, governments elsewhere have adopted the concept of lifelong learning — almost as a campaign slogan:

> The value of a diploma or a qualification decreases more and more quickly … access to education and training can no longer be reserved for one age group. (EC Education Commissioner, 1996 introducing the European Year of Lifelong Learning)

In the UK, there have been several reports on lifelong learning: *Higher Education and the Learning Society* (Dearing 1997); *Learning for the 21st Century* (Fryer 1998) and a Government Green Paper, *The Learning Age: A Renaissance for a New Britain* (1998); also *Skills for Life* (Blunkett 2000). In this political context, lifelong learning is unreservedly a good thing, an exhortation to good citizens to take on lifelong learning almost as a duty and a means of economic salvation in the knowledge economy. This may be regarded as a positive move – governments focussing on removing barriers to learning and encouraging individuals to participate (Hodgson 2000) although there are criticisms:

> Lifelong learning is a confidence trick ... by professionalising that learning you risk disempowering people because unless they gain qualifications they are somehow unprepared for the world. This is social engineering. (Furedi 2001)

Whether all learning is beneficial to society can be questioned since determining benefit involves value judgements:

> Prisons are particularly valuable learning organisations — if we want people to be better criminals that is. (Hodkinson 2001)

The political dimension therefore, while moving lifelong learning firmly up the agenda, is a somewhat problematic one for educators.

In the academic context the emphasis is more on learning per se and in terms of definitions the following may be taken as a starting point:

> Until recently, there has been a tendency to treat the term lifelong learning as being synonymous with lifelong education. However, there are distinct conceptual differences. 1. Lifelong learning: the process of learning which occurs throughout the lifespan. 2. the learning that occurs variously in formal institutions of education and training, and informally, at home, at work or in the wider community. (Jarvis 1999)

Jarvis also makes the point that there are two ways of looking at lifelong education, from initial education throughout life and from an adult education perspective stretched backwards. Longworth (1999) refers to the long provenance of lifelong learning by citing Plato and quoting from Kuan Tzu:

> When planning for a year — sow corn, when planning for a decade — plant trees, when planning for a lifetime — train and educate men. (Longworth 1999:3)

Knapper and Cropley (2000) chart the changing emphasis of lifelong learning from being equated with traditional continuing education and being outside the educational establishment to becoming a mainstream concept adopted by universities and education systems generally. So much so indeed that there are now higher degree programmes in lifelong learning at Masters and Doctoral level (e.g. Surrey and Nottingham Universities).

For educators there is a wide ranging and inclusive context for lifelong learning, the focus being on the learner, signifying a shift from mass education to the needs of the individual. This is also reflected in the UNESCO vision that lifelong learning was about a more equitable distribution of educational opportunities based on a humanistic tradition and leading to positive social and individual benefit — the 'Learning to Be' Report (Faure 1972).

> The report's underlying principle is that learning is something that all people do and want to do for reasons which are intrinsically valuable to their human existence and quality of life. Lifelong learning, then, is a process which can make young and old alike 'connoisseurs of the past, implementers of the present and visionaries of the future'. (Berman 1984: 100)

There is therefore a definition in its broad sense of learning throughout life — now adopted in Hong Kong by the Education Commission — and a narrower sense as pertaining mainly to adult and continuing education. Generally speaking, we adopt the latter approach in this book whilst not ignoring the wider context.

A crucial point for our purposes would be to attach the definition mainly to the post-initial stage of education rather than in its holistic sense of through-life learning.[1] Thus, we are looking at an adult education (AE) or continuing education (CE) perspective. Both these terms emphasize the post-initial stage and lead us to consider related terms such as continuing professional education (CPE) or continuing professional development (CPD). These have a more specific meaning related to the development of an individual within a profession, usually by further study such that skills and knowledge are continuously updated and refreshed, whether through a professional's own efforts in an external programme or through a scheme devised by the profession itself.

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[1] The establishment of Community Colleges in Hong Kong as a full-time alternative to senior secondary schooling is being led by the lifelong learning providers and so this long established paradigm may no longer hold true in future.

The initial education stage is from about the age of 5 to 22 or 23, normally conducted on a full-time, daytime basis and characterized by examinations and qualifications at various stages to denote levels of achievement. By contrast, beyond this formal initial education (which can be from the age of 16 to 17 depending on the school leaving age) we tend to have a less formal, less rigid and more flexible structure. The teaching and learning often takes place in the evenings and weekends, at times when working adults have free time. Adult and Continuing Education encompass both general, liberal adult education where students undertake courses for their own sake and their own personal development as well as more formalised courses which lead to qualifications, often professional qualification, on a part-time basis. To the extent that such programmes were organised in universities the term Extra-Mural Studies was also once common though is now less widely used.

In parallel to these, distance education and open education developments should also be recognized. Programmes are made available through the medium of structured learning texts with other media and some tutorial support, generally on an open access basis so that adult students might start with little in the way of formal qualification and be allowed to proceed, provided they had the ability to progress, to degree level and beyond.

During the 1990s, these separate streams have converged and this trend is being emphasised further by the development of web-based and on-line learning materials which we will discuss later.

These are essentially practical definitions; it is possible to write at length on the conceptual (e.g. Oliver 1999), socio-political (e.g. Griffin 1999) or dialectic (Belanger 1994) aspects of the term lifelong learning. Nevertheless, it is important to understand the origins of what is now a buzz-word in both educational and political domains. We should also recognize that

> The terms lifelong learning and lifelong education tend to be used interchangeably. (Collins 1999: 45)

The first use of the term lifelong education is dated to 1929 with the publication of a work of that name by Basil Yeaxlee (Jarvis 1999). Other important influences whose works have fired the commitment of adult educators include: Hodgskin, Antonio Gramsci, Paulo Freire, Raymond Williams, Faure and Husen (cited in Mayo, 1999 and Collins 1999). In this respect Collins draws the distinction between this commitment with the world of 'Adult Education Inc.' within which much lifelong learning takes place, and which 'has little real need for the moral and political concerns which vocationally committed adult educators bring to their work' (1999:47). OECD has also developed the theme of 'recurrent education' as part of lifelong learning (see Chapter 1).

In the Hong Kong context, the CE community has been criticized as having in some sense failed to make the case for CE as an important educational policy issue. Holford 1998 speaks of 'the inability of the professional CE community to formulate a sophisticated or fully coherent alternative agenda' (Holford 1998). The perception is that it has been simply market oriented. This analysis, while having some insight, is flawed in two respects. First it ignores the very wide range of courses on offer in the general liberal arts, generally non-award bearing and studied for individual quality of life reasons. Secondly, events have moved very quickly in recent years such that CE is now much more firmly in the mainstream of educational policy and the collaborative role of the Federation for Continuing Education in Tertiary Institutions (FCETI) in this process has certainly been enhanced. Indeed, a seminal position paper was on 'Lifelong Learning in Hong Kong: The Way Forward into the 21st Century' presented by the Federation at a Forum in June 1999 (FCETI 1999). This represented a collective view of the CE community in Hong Kong on the significance of lifelong learning.

Government has, in fact, accepted many of the recommendations FCETI made, though the provision is to remain market-led and self-funding, albeit with more strategic direction at the policy level. The University Grants Committee has also decided to consider issues of quality in University level CE and include this within its Teaching and Learning Quality Process Review in the 2001–2004 period. The financial autonomy of the CE sector which accompanies the self funding imperative may come to be regarded as an advantage in the future provided the sector can demonstrate its quality (see Chapter 9).

CE DEVELOPMENT AND ECONOMIC CHANGE IN HONG KONG

It is instructive to relate recent economic changes in Hong Kong with the expansion and development of CE in the territory. The past 20 years has seen quite significant economic and social change, particularly the shift from manufacturing to service and knowledge industries such that the

Hong Kong economy is now dominated by services — 85% of GDP in 1997 and 80% of employment. In the period since 1980 manufacturing fell from 24% to 7% of GDP and in employment terms from 42% to just 8%. It is nevertheless relevant to note that Hong Kong manufacturing has moved only a short distance into the Pearl River economic area. Though politically separate until 1997 this has become in economic terms a much more integrated entity.

Table 2.1 Employment in Hong Kong by size of employer (other than the Hong Kong Government civil service which has 180,968 employees)

Size of establishment (other than Civil Service)	*No. of establishment*	*%*	*Employees*	*%*
1–9	262,724	87.3	732,398	31.8
10–19	21,554	7.2	284,639	12.3
20–49	10,955	3.6	324,169	14.1
50–99	3,511	1.2	243,747	10.6
100–199	1,281	0.42	171,698	7.5
200–499	580	0.20	174,447	7.6
500–999	166	0.05	119,482	5.2
>1,000	84	0.03	251,065	10.9
	300,855	100	2,301,645	100

Source: Quarterly Report of Employment and Vacancies Statistics
Hong Kong Government, Census and Statistics Department: March 2001

In Hong Kong, staff turnover is high. This, coupled with the preponderance of small and medium enterprises, acts as a further disincentive to such companies to invest in education and training. CE tends to be much more an individual responsibility and such figures as are available do confirm this trend. For example, HKU SPACE figures show something of the order of 80% of students funding their own studies rather than receiving any employer support (Cribbin 1998).

In terms of the contribution of continuing education in coping with the sectoral shift, it is instructive to note that the manufacturing workforce at the beginning of the 1980s was around one million or some 40% of the workforce, whereas by the end of 1990s it was of the order of 9% with only some 250,000 employees. For most of this period, unemployment was below 2% — a situation of virtually full employment. Thus, the Hong Kong workforce moved from manufacturing to service and acquired the high order skills required, without significant unemployment or immigration. According to ILO statistics quoted by Chung, Ho and Liu (1994), the sectoral shift ratio in Hong Kong in the early 1980s up to 1986 was some 3.58 (lower than Singapore or Korea but ahead of developed economies) while from 1986 to 1992, this accelerated to 8.9 (significantly higher than Singapore or Korea). This coincides in fact with the expansion of provision in the CE sector both by Hong Kong institutions and by overseas universities. The premise therefore would be that these two factors are related.

The figures quoted above on the scale of the shift from manufacturing to service in the past two decades are also associated with no displacement of labour or significant unemployment. The formal educational system was not providing the high level of trained manpower required by the process of change. Individuals undertook programmes themselves to ensure employment in the new and growing service industries.

Developments in HKU SPACE in the last decade are indicative of how CE has responded to economic changes in Hong Kong. The school began as an Extra-Mural Studies Department (DEMS) of the University of Hong Kong in the 1950s, offering both general and liberal art courses to be studied for enjoyment as well as courses to prepare students for professional examinations. This tradition continued up to the 1980s, but at the end of that decade it was clear that the demands in Hong Kong were changing and so increasing emphasis was put on award-bearing programmes in professional areas. Eventually, this led to the development of courses at degree level and beyond with overseas partners since the mainstream university was preoccupied in its commitment to teaching and research in the context of a rapidly expanding full-time undergraduate population. The period of expansion to the early 1990s led to the need for the establishment of the School of Professional and Continuing Education in 1992 as the successor to DEMS in order to provide a more coherent structure. In a similar fashion the Extra-Mural Department of the Chinese University, established in the 1960s, followed this trend and also became a School (of Continuing Studies – SCS). Other schools were also founded shortly after this by City University and Baptist University while Centres were established at the Polytechnic University (later becoming a School in 1999), the Open University (also became a School in 2000) and the Institute of Education. Most recently (2000) the University of Science and Technology has established a College of Lifelong Learning (CL3). In the non-university sector, major providers include Caritas, the Vocational Training Council, the government's evening adult education provision and many private companies.

A UGC commissioned study acknowledged the part played by continuing education:

> The very active and extensive market for continuing education in Hong Kong has by and large catered to the need for retraining and reinvesting in new skills of these displaced employees remarkably well. … Throughout these years, in comparison, the numerous providers of continuing education from the HEIs, VTC, OLI, Caritas and other non-profit organisations as well as commercial training firms had equipped hundreds of thousands of adult workers with higher level skills. (Chung, Ho and Liu 1994)

The classical model for university and enterprise linkages can be summarized as follows:

- production of skilled manpower at initial graduate and postgraduate level
- applied research projects funded by industry
- spin-offs from 'pure' research
- joint ventures in science/technology parks
- joint research work (Young 1998)

However, the time has now come for lifelong learning to be added to this list since the pace of development of lifelong learning opportunities of a part-time, flexible and self-funding nature to meet the needs of the workforce has been significant. The elements of lifelong learning are not in themselves new, but the convergence in the mid-1990s of the various strands of continuing and professional education, adult education, distance, open education and new multi-media web-driven technology has made such learning much more effective, and one that now has become a service industry in its own right.

In addition, it is clear from some recent research (Ng 1997) that the returns to individuals undertaking award-bearing courses through lifelong learning are quite significant. This is supplemented in a later work to show that the contribution in 1995 of self-funded lifelong education programmes to human capital development in Hong Kong was 29% of that of the government funded programmes (Ng and Young 2000). Moreover, there have been various assessments of the volume of the lifelong learning market in Hong Kong. In 1992 one estimate put it as of the order of HK$2 billion (Lee and Lam 1994). A later figure put it at HK$3.5 billion for 1996 (Cribbin 1998). More recent evidence, produced in a telephone survey, suggests that the market demand may be of the order HK$9 billion per annum (Shen and Lee 1999; and see Chapter 4). This is therefore an economic factor in its own right as well as having made a significant contribution to the educational needs of the re-structured economy (see also Ashton, Chapter 28). Nevertheless, the whole area of CE activity has been an under-researched phenomenon. Even though lifelong learning has now become an important issue in the education policy debate its potential and actual roles remain largely unknown as far as public acknowledgement and reporting is concerned. For example, figures of student enrolment in the CE sector have never been published in government statistical returns. The Education Commission has recommended the establishment of private universities blithely ignoring the facts that a huge capital investment would be needed. Moreover, according to the Non-Local Higher Education (Regulation) Ordinance Registry statistics, there were in 1998 and 1999 some 18,654 students in degree courses exempted under the Ordinance (i.e. mounted in collaboration with the Hong Kong tertiary institutions, largely the CE units), and some 24,000 students in registered degree courses (i.e. overseas programmes mounted with private Hong Kong operators). If there are already some 42,000 students in the private sector in Hong Kong, is it likely that demand exists to establish a private university? The question of overseas provision is reported in greater detail in Chapter 3. Before that, however, it is necessary also to consider, as part of the background, what levels of programmes are mounted, how they are delivered and, briefly, how CE is organized.

LEVELS OF PROGRAMMES

The lifelong learning provision in Hong Kong is in fact extremely diverse though in statistical or reporting terms it is not by any means completely recorded. A further issue with this diversity is the lack of any standardization of awards. For example, a certificate or diploma level award may mean different things in different institutions, and even within the same institution. This is a matter that has been picked up in the Education Commission's recommendations to government and is likely to be a prominent issue for lifelong learning in Hong Kong in the next few years. In terms of types of programme offered the following broad categorizations can be made:

Non-Award Bearing Programmes

These are also described as short courses or general courses. Their length can vary from 1 or 2 hours to 100 or more hours of instruction though most would be less than 30 hours. Courses tend to be either for general interest purposes (e.g. arts or music appreciation), or skills-based to teach a particular technique or software application. Generally, only a statement of attendance would be issued although if there is assessment of skills or training provided in a course, a statement of proficiency might also be issued. In terms of level the range could be from very basic (e.g. in the government evening institutes) to a high academic level, but there would generally be no entrance requirements, admission being on a first-come first-served basis. Prior to the 1990s such courses formed the majority of what was offered in the CE sector, certainly in the then universities. In absolute terms the numbers involved have remained somewhat constant — in the case of HKU SPACE around 23,000 to 25,000 per annum — but in relative terms the proportion of activity at this level has declined sharply from 90% of the total in the late 1980s to less than 30% of the total in 1999/2000 such has been the growth in the number of award bearing programmes.

Award-Bearing Programmes

These may also be at a number of levels and while there is some comparability and notion of progression, for example at bachelor's degree and master's degree level, there is also a grey area in terms of certificate and diploma awards as to the precise level of an award.

Certificates

These are offered at a number of levels:
  Foundation Certificate
  Introductory Certificate
  Certificate
  Advanced Certificate
  Higher Certificate
  Professional Certificate
  Postgraduate Certificate

There is clearly some sense of hierarchy here and in particular subject/ disciplines or professional areas there are well-defined routes for progression through different levels of certificate to diploma and beyond. However, a weakness of the CE sector as a whole is the lack of a well-defined articulation framework for qualifications. Such recognition and credit transfer that exists has developed on a case by case basis.

Diplomas

The same comments can be made in respect of diplomas. These also are offered at a number of levels:

Foundation Diploma
Diploma
Advanced Diploma
Higher Diploma
Professional Diploma
Postgraduate Diploma

Diplomas would generally be regarded as at a higher level than certificates (except for Postgraduate Certificates requiring first degree entry). There are general levels of expectation of teaching contact hours as between certificate and diploma though these may vary from institution to institution. In HKU SPACE, for example, a certificate would require on average some 90 hours of formal teaching (though the range may be from 72 hours upwards), while a diploma would be at least 200 hours on average (or 100 hours following on from a 100 hour certificate programme).

Unlike well developed systems elsewhere such as the US credit hours or UK GNVQs there is no qualifications framework for these awards (see also Chapter 7). Among HKU SPACE Diploma awards, for example, there are clearly different perceptions of the exit level in different subject areas. Some diplomas are considered 'A' level equivalent, i.e. they allow holders consideration for university entrance, some are given recognition in degree programmes for the equivalent of completion of the first year of university level studies, while there are examples of even higher recognition, up to postgraduate entry level.

Degrees and Postgraduate Awards

At these levels, the understanding of articulation is better structured and more straightforward. Most international university systems can differentiate levels of achievement through the years of university study be they three- or four-year programmes and at masters level and beyond. There are differences of course in European, UK and US systems. A very useful reference point in this respect is the work by Butler and Hope whose *Documentary Study of Arrangements for Credit Accumulation and Transfer in Higher Education* was commissioned for advice to the Hong Kong University Grants Committee (UGC 2000).

There is a tension in higher education institutions relating to the work of those institutions which have adopted a more flexible and open approach to learners. This ethos can be characterized as 'flexible entry' and 'stringent exit' — the standard is measured at the level of the exit qualification rather than by selection at the entry stage. For example, the UK Open University made it a fundamental principle, *ab initio,* that its degrees must be comparable in standard to that of any other UK university degree. At its inception this appeared to be an outlandish claim since in the traditional university world of the 1960s it was almost unthinkable that an institution which did not have 'A' level entry could in any way achieve this. Nevertheless, over time this has proved possible. Such challenges have now to be faced in Hong Kong since traditional university thinking is also heavily biased towards 'A' level scores for entry, whereas the CE sector, with its commitment to greater access and flexibility, takes the route of stringent exit qualification, i.e. that standard for the exit qualification must be the same as for a comparable full-time award. This must be the yardstick. In part, the issue is one of the transference from an elite to a mass higher education system but there are deeply held preconceptions to be overcome in this respect.

Technologies also drive flexible learning since material is increasingly available on-line and not only in the university lecture theatre. To that extent universities must respond to the reality of greater access to ensure that quality judgements are at the exit level rather than solely at the entrance level. It will be futile to defend the gates only to find the walls have crumbled around them. This is not to say that the access issue is a clash of mutually exclusive approaches. In fact the modern university must adopt both approaches. Demand for full-time initial higher education with stringent entry requirements can co-exist with flexible access to part-time lifelong learning opportunities in the CE sector. Indeed, the evidence is that school leavers are less adept than adults at coping with flexible learning (Woodley and McIntosh 1980).

The Community College movement has arisen from the cause of education reform in Hong Kong articulated by the Education Commission (see also Chapter 32). This has resulted in a developing scenario of Community College programmes as an alternative to senior secondary education. Secondary education itself of course forms the basis of any yardstick for academic levelling in that the established public examinations at HKCEE and HKAL level (for which comparison can be found in other educational systems) are benchmarks for the initial stage of education on which continuing further and higher education must develop. The Community College movement forms an alternative pathway through to an Associate Degree level award equivalent to year one of a three-year degree and/or year two of a four-year degree curriculum. This offers a potential framework around which other awards in CE may evolve and revolve over time. If these awards become a principal pathway through from the initial to the continuing and higher stages of education then the pathways to other awards may well have to fit in with this. Indeed, it is most likely that research and development of a qualification framework for CE will be an important issue in Hong Kong in the next one to two years.

ACCESS: LADDERS AND PYRAMIDS

References have been made to access to educational opportunities and the metaphors of ladders and pyramids of opportunities have been widely used to represent this. Figures 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 show models of such ladders and pyramids that exist in a number of subject areas within programmes offered by HKU SPACE.

DELIVERY OF PROGRAMMES

Hong Kong has a wide variety of delivery methods of educational programmes. It is worth noting that pure distance learning (where there is no physical presence by an overseas institution) is exempted from the local legislation which controls overseas programmes. However, such pure distance learning programmes are currently few and far between. By far the most common model throughout Hong Kong is supported distance learning whether locally generated or, as is more widespread, with overseas providers. Local tuition is provided to support distance learning material,

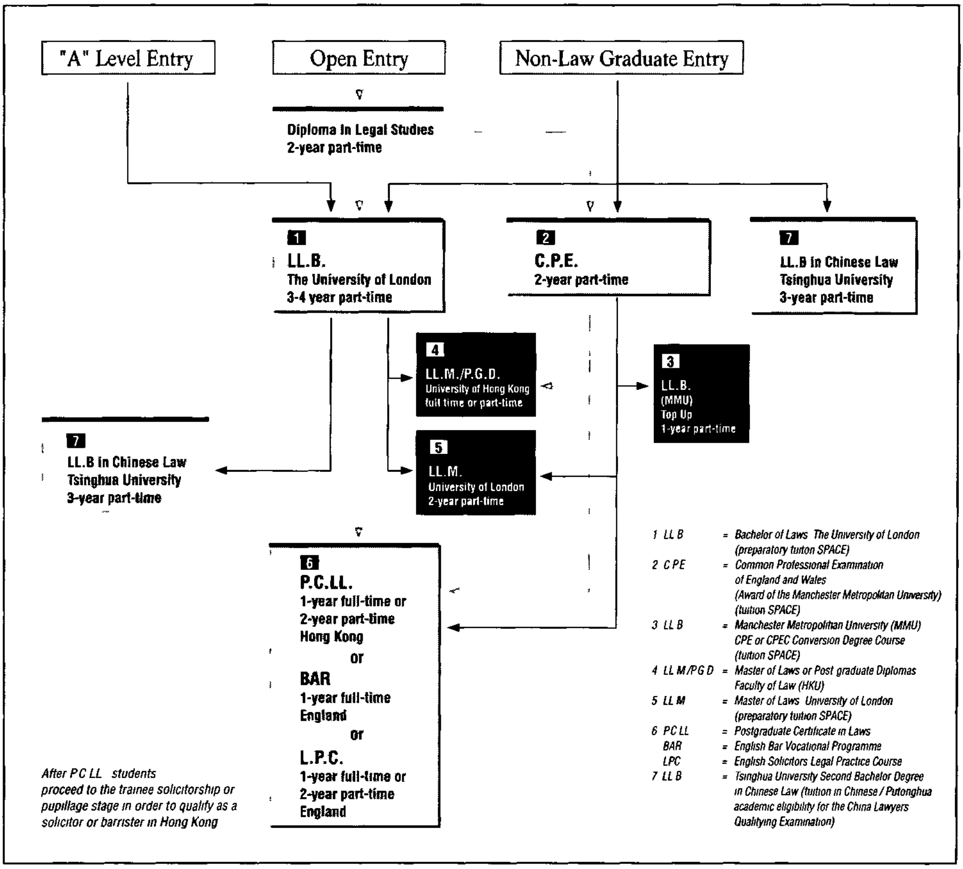
"A" Level Entry
Open Entry
Non-Law Graduate Entry
Diploma in Legal Studies
2-year part-time
1
LL.B.
The University of London
3-4 year part-time
2
C.P.E.
2-year part-time
7
LL.B in Chinese Law
Tsinghua University
3-year part-time
4
LL.M./P.G.D.
University of Hong Kong
full time or part-time
3
LL.B.
(MMU)
Top Up
1-year part-time
7
LL.B in Chinese Law
Tsinghua University
3-year part-time
5
LL.M.
University of London
2-year part-time
6
P.C.LL.
1-year full-time or
2-year part-time
Hong Kong
or
BAR
1-year full-time
England
or
L.P.C.
1-year full-time or
2-year part-time
England
After PC LL students proceed to the trainee solicitorship or pupillage stage in order to qualify as a solicitor or barrister in Hong Kong
1 LL B = Bachelor of Laws The University of London (preparatory tuiton SPACE)
2 C PE = Common Professional Examination of England and Wales (Award of the Manchester Metropolitan University) (tuition SPACE)
3 LL B = Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) CPE or CPEC Conversion Degree Course (tuition SPACE)
4 LL M/PG D = Master of Laws or Post graduate Diplomas Faculty of Law (HKU)
5 LL M = Master of Laws University of London (preparatory tuition SPACE)
6 PC LL = Postgraduate Certificate in Laws
BAR = English Bar Vocational Programme
LPC = English Solicitors Legal Practice Course
7 LL B = Tsinghua University Second Bachelor Degree in Chinese Law (tuition in Chinese / Putonghua academic eligibility for the China Lawyers Qualifying Examination)

Figure 2.1 Routes to legal qualifications

be this print based or on-line. The local support may be locally sourced or may be via visiting academic staff from overseas (and is often a combination of both). The possibility of purely correspondence education exists as does the option of purely on-line courses but in a compact place like Hong Kong, it is relatively simple to organize face-to-face support and this is generally the preference of the learners. The 'loneliness of the long distance learner' was an early catch phrase in the UKOU and underpins its commitment to providing at least some face-to-face support for learners to be more successful. The experience of HKU SPACE and other course providers in Hong Kong attests to the need for similar support.

Apart from distance learning programmes, many programmes are also offered in Hong Kong purely on a face-to-face basis, albeit in the evenings and weekends when the adult learners have some free time to engage in study. The need to make face-to- face support available has, of course, resulted in strong demand for learning centres. Initially these were provided on university campuses at times when there was unused capacity — evenings, weekends — but demand has been such that this capacity has long been out-grown. In addition, there has been growth in evening demand for local part time courses so that the supply of such campus premises has also been reduced. Before the extensive growth of award-bearing programmes in the last decade there had been widespread use of secondary schools. With the increase in award-bearing programmes, particularly at degree and postgraduate levels together with the associated higher fees, it was clear that such centres could not meet the learners' needs and expectations. This has led to the development of 'town centres'. HKU SPACE, and the Chinese University, in fact had town centres from very early stages in their operations. They have also tried to maintain in those operations a mix of levels of programmes. Again, in part driven by the economic pressure, the best learning facilities tend to be provided for those programmes commanding higher fees and therefore higher expectations from learners. Whilst CE schools are generally committed to a balanced and comprehensive offering of programmes in town centres, it is nevertheless the case that there is a pressure that drives the non-award programmes (that generally have lower fees) to less expensive centres. This pressure is not always easy to resist. Even so, in the costing of the administration of programmes a notional charge for the learning premises concerned has to be taken into account. HKU SPACE now has seven major learning centre complexes (including Shanghai) in its operation and many of the other institutions (Open University, Baptist University, City University) have also opened new learning centres in recent years. These centres are expensive to fit out and acquire and this outlay has to be recouped from the operation of programmes. Clearly, the costs have, as far as possible, to be spread over a number of years and over many programmes. Ultimately it is the learners themselves who fund development since continuing education is a largely self-financing operation.

ORGANIZATION OF CE UNITS

All this level of activity in the CE sectors does require sophisticated organisation. Historically, this had been extra-mural departments or continuing education units but in the 1990s these all followed the HKU SPACE example and became Schools of their respective universities. Internal organisation structures differ but there are some similarities in that academic programme responsibility tends to be delegated to individuals who lead groups of staff in supporting these programmes. HKU SPACE, for example, now has eight academic divisions but within each division individual academics take responsibility for programmes, generally within the purview of their own disciplinary specialism. This has historically given an academic strength to the work of the school since its programmes are directed by academics in the field. However, this also leads to a weakness in that cross-disciplinary work is not thereby encouraged and there may be issues of overlap of subject areas and duplication. The divisional organisation to some extent overcomes this by uniting a set of cognate disciplines but it remains true that strong coordination is necessary at the central level to direct the operation.

Indeed, given the current and growing size of the various CE schools, the management issues today are quite challenging. In addition to organizational change over time reflected in departments becoming schools, there has also been the self-financing imperative. Historically, almost all the CE units have had to cover the direct costs of mounting programmes even at times when there was some funding subsidy. However, in the 1990s, those subsidies were largely withdrawn, partly, it is said, as a result of the Open University lobbying for support for its programmes. Rather than provide such support there was pressure to withdraw the CE subsidies in the universities — levelling down the playing field rather than levelling up! The OU was initially set up to be self-funding, a challenging and difficult condition, and it certainly experienced some problems after receiving initial setting up grants, largely related to the cost of operating its premises. Again, ironically, the OU has in recent years received specific funding and land for its buildings whereas the CE units in the more traditional universities have had to become self-financing and fund their own premises. This has not been to the benefit of the Hong Kong adult learner who has had to pay higher fees to cover the withdrawal of subsidy. The signs are that their situation is changing, from 2000–2001, government has provided non-means tested loans for learners in recognized CE courses.

There has also been a drive to ensure that funding of continuing education programmes is very clearly separated from the government funded parent universities. In the case of HKU SPACE this has been achieved through the establishment of a company limited by guarantee by the university (see Chapter 27). A further factor in this has been the Non-Local Higher and Professional (Regulation) Ordinance which requires an annual certificate from the Vice-Chancellor of the institution concerned that, where there are overseas collaborations, no government subsidy is used in their operation. Hence, throughout all the institutions there is pressure to ensure in organizational terms that there is a very clear demarcation line as far as funding is concerned and this may argue in favour of clear organizational separation. There is, in any event, a robust autonomy in the CE sector which has supported a rich level of provision in a competitive environment — in contrast to more tightly controlled school education and vocational training sectors which government strictly regulates. Whether, lifelong learning in its widest sense, or CE in the narrower sense we describe in this book, will come under government scrutiny and become as tightly regulated as the other sectors, remains an open question at present (see Chapter 7).

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5

Learning Cultures and Learning Styles: Myth-Understandings About Adult Chinese Learners

Peter Kennedy

INTRODUCTION

The picture that often emerges from the research literature on 'Chinese learners' is a caricature of rote-learning, memorization and passivity. In this chapter I wish to take issue with the stereotype. The chapter is in three parts. First, I will examine the extent to which Chinese culture may influence Chinese learning styles. I set out some of the received opinions and counterpoise these with some recent reinterpretations. Then I will look at some of the findings from the literature on effective adult learning. Finally, I will consider the extent to which Hong Kong adult learners do adopt learning styles consonant with those outlined earlier. The arguments are situated within the literature on adult Chinese second language (L2) learning but have wider resonance and application to Hong Kong adult learners in general.

CHINESE CULTURE AND CHINESE LEARNERS

Some Received Opinions

Culture

Biggs (1993) defines culture as '... the sum total of ways of living built up by a group of human beings which is transmitted from one generation to another' (1993:24). Culture is not just a matter of overt behaviour — what people in particular societies wear, eat etc. — it is also the (social) rules, beliefs, attitudes and values which govern how people act and how they define themselves. It is '... the fabrics of meaning with which human beings interpret their experience and guide their actions' (Geertz 1973:42).

Comparing Cultures

Hofstede (1980) developed a framework for measuring cultural differences in 40 countries.[1] He identified three cultural 'layers': the basic norms and values shared by all human beings; the collective beliefs and values shared by particular groups of people; and an individual's unique experience of people and things. The four dimensions of 'cultural difference' Hofstede posited are: individuality/collectivism, power/distance (relative inequalities of power and wealth), uncertainty avoidance and masculinity/femininity. Trompanaars (1993) in his study of 50 countries, developed (five) similar measures of cultural orientation.[2]

In Hofstede and Bond (1984) and Hofstede (1980), (Hong Kong) Chinese culture is characterized as low on individualism and high on collectivism; power/distance ratios were amongst the highest of all 40 countries surveyed; weak uncertainty avoidance was identified (e.g. the motivation for students to study hard would be to achieve the required marks but no more); (stereo-typical) masculinity was found to be 'medium'. Trompanaars (1993) concluded that in Hong Kong, Chinese culture there is a high level of collectivism, a strong sense of belonging to a social group and a preference for working together in groups to solve problems. A study by Redding (1990) of Chinese middle managers also indicated high power/distance relations and an overriding concern with the maintenance of harmonious relationships at work.

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[1] Of course, in mapping 'cultural traits', it was recognized that only general tendencies and patterns can be identified; within any particular society there will be a diverse range of beliefs and attitudes. Cultures are neither static nor isolated; societies are constantly changing and are, increasingly, influenced by global trends.

[2]
1. universalism/particularism (the relative focus on rules or on relationships)
2. individuality/collectivism
3. neutral/emotional (how people express emotions, feelings and thoughts)
4. specific/diffuse (the importance of personal contacts)
5. achievement/ascription (the extent to which people are respected for their job status or for their personal qualities and achievements).

Chinese Culture and Learning

Cortazzi and Jin (1996) remark that although 'Chinese students constitute a major group of the world's learners, roughly 25%, as yet there is very little data-based research into their culture of learning ...' (1996:172). What are the cultural roots of 'Chinese' learning? The learning styles adopted by Chinese learners are often attributed to 'Confucian values'. Students' apparent reluctance to express opinions in class is said to be determined by their 'Confucian heritage'. Murphy (1987) suggests that the reason 'Hong Kong students display an almost unquestioning acceptance of the knowledge of the teacher ... may be a transfer of the Confucian ethic of filial piety, coupled with an emphasis on strictness of discipline and proper behaviour' (1987:43).

The Confucian code of social conduct, *Wu Lun*, requires that in the 'five cardinal relationships', respect and obedience must be accorded to the latter by the former in each of these pairs: ruler and minister, father and son, husband and wife, older and younger brother, older and younger friends (Bond 1996). In Hong Kong Chinese families, it is said, children are taught to have respect for age and rank — for parents, elders and ancestors. Proper respect is also to be given to teachers whose wisdom and knowledge is taken for granted and not to be questioned. (Teachers in turn are expected to have a good moral character). There is strong pressure to conform and act in the interests of the group. Compromise, moderation and the maintenance of harmonious relationships are encouraged, individualism and self-assertion discouraged: 'honour the hierarchy first, your vision of the truth second' (Bond 1992:83).

The concept of 'face' (*mien-tzu*) — having status in front of others — is important. It is considered selfish and shameful to cause someone to 'lose face' (Bond 1996). Being modest and self-effacing, not 'blowing your own trumpet' is praiseworthy, while wasting other students' class time by expressing independent judgements is egotistical and selfish. Besides, such challenges are disrespectful to teachers and may cause them to lose face.

Teachers should also be moderate in their behaviour too. Hong Kong teachers seldom seek to encourage students' with positive appraisals of their performances (Hau 1992). Parents do not usually praise to encourage their children's learning either — (Hess, 1992) — though children are often publicly chastised for deviant behaviour.[3] It is frequently contended that such socio-cultural attitudes promote conformity and reinforce passive, compliant roles in class. Students are not encouraged to speak out, to question, to criticize and are unwilling to commit themselves for fear of being wrong (and thus losing face). Teaching is largely didactic and text-bound, with little time allowed for discussion: 'for many Chinese students and teachers books are thought of as an embodiment of knowledge, wisdom and truth. Knowledge is 'in' the book and can be taken out and put inside students' heads .../whereas/ for many foreigners, books are open to interpretation and dispute' (Maley 1983:101).

When learning their first language Chinese students have to memorize thousands of written characters. In mainland China and in Hong Kong, the nature of the ideographic script develops children's ability to recognise patterns and memorise by rote. It is sometimes suggested that such learning habits and teaching styles are transferred, subsequently, to other classrooms. The examination culture in mainland China and Hong Kong is also said to influence learning styles. In China, from the thirteenth century onwards, success in public examinations could lead to great wealth and high status.[4] Academic success in Hong Kong still remains the route to a good job. The family's 'investment' in education is not just for the child's personal benefit; within a network of mutual obligations, the debt to the family is as tangible as a bank loan that must be paid off: 'ultimately, accomplishments are on behalf of the family's well-being and reputation .../their/ social and economic insurance ... today's child is tomorrow's ancestor' (Pratt 1999:254).

The ancient Civil Service examination tested the ability to memorize classical works; many commentators on the examination system in China and Hong Kong suggest that little has changed, and that learning for examinations still relies heavily on memorization. Examinations, they argue, promote surface learning — the ability merely to repeat information without a real understanding of meaning or of how the new information relates to previous knowledge. Examinations act as a barrier to creative expression, critical thinking and problem-solving in education and, subsequently, in work too.[5] Hong Kong students are usually characterized as hard-working and diligent but lacking in creativity and originality: '... even though Chinese students do better than Western students in mathematics and sciences, they are not known for their creativity and original thinking' (Salili 1996:100).

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[3] These two studies are cited in Watkins and Biggs (1996:89).

[4] Lee Wing On (1996: 25–41) states that the percentage of persons of obscure origin entering government service rose from 6% in 722–693 BC, to 44% in 512–483 with even greater social mobility when the civil service examination was instituted in the 13th century through to the 20th century and the fall of the Qing dynasty.

Chinese (L2) Learning Styles

Learning styles have been defined as the 'characteristic cognitive, affective and physiological behaviours that serve as relatively stable indicators of how learners perceive, interact with and respond to the learning environment' (Keefe 1979 cited in Melton 1990:30).

Oxford and Anderson (1995), summarizing a number of major cross-cultural studies of (L2) learning styles, identify six interrelated aspects.[6] In terms of preferred patterns of mental functioning the Chinese learner is said to be 'field dependent' and prefers classrooms where (grammar) rules are emphasized and learning is inductive (whereas a 'field independent learner' enjoys greater personal autonomy, deductive learning, and does not readily accept other people's views before making a judgement). Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995) describe Chinese learners as adopting a *'concrete-sequential'* cognitive style as opposed to an 'intuitive-random' one (the latter type of learner seeks out 'the big picture', a mental model of the L2, while the former prefers to follow the teacher to the letter and to use strategies such as memorisation, lists and repetition). Chinese learners are more reflective than impulsive, that is, they prefer a slow, accurate, systematic approach and are less comfortable with guessing or predicting. They feel the need for rapid and constant correction and have a low level of tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty.

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[5] For instance, a recent Education Commission document states that, in the Hong Kong education system: '... learning is still exam-driven and scant attention is paid to "learning to learn". School life is usually monotonous, student are not given comprehensive learning experiences with little room to think, explore and create.' (EC September 2000:4)

[6] 1. cognitive element (preferred pattern of mental functioning)
2. executive element (the degree to which a person seeks order, organisation in the learning process)
3. affective aspect (attitudes, beliefs and values that influence what an individual pays attention to)
4. social element (the extent of involvement with other people while learning)
5. physiological element (sensory and perceptual tendencies)
6. the tendency to seek situations compatible with one's own learning preferences (1995:203).

The issue of Chinese learners' 'extroversion' or 'introversion' — their preference for group work and interactive activities or for working alone — is more complex. It is said that Chinese students seldom work in small groups in class but co-operate readily in groups outside the classroom (Su 1995). In terms of sensory and perceptual tendencies, Rossi-Le (1995) reports that Chinese learners, particularly older students, have a strong visual orientation. Su (1995) found that Chinese students prefer kinaesthetic movement and like to work with tangible objects.[7]

Some Recent Re-interpretations

Confucian Confusions

The 'Confucian values' of collectivism and conformity are often stressed in the research literature on The Chinese Learner. However, as Lee (1996) says, this is only part of the story; Confucius also had much to say about individuality and learning. Education is only meaningful if it leads to the perfection of the self: '... the purpose of learning is to cultivate oneself as an intelligent, creative, independent, autonomous being' (1996:34). Cheng (2000) concurs, pointing out that the Chinese term 'knowledge' is made up of two characters: 'One is *xue* (to learn) and the other is *wen* (to ask). This means that the action of enquiring and questioning is central to the quest for knowledge' (2000:441).

Wrong About Rote

Memorization was never seen as an end in itself but as a prelude to deeper understanding. Committing texts to memory enabled the 'learner' to savour and reflect on them and, finally, to assimilate them with the learner's own experience. In any case, memorization need not be synonymous with surface learning. For instance, in situations such as an examination or performing in a play, as Ho (1999) reminds us, 'memorizing lines or already understood facts may be required to ensure success and is considered to be a deep approach' (1999:48). Recent research on Hong Kong learners has sought to draw a clearer distinction between rote learning (mechanical learning without meaning) and repetition for 'deep memorizing'. Marton et al. (1996), for example, report on a study exploring the conceptions of learning of twenty English teachers from China and Hong Kong. What emerges is a '... a notion of deeper understanding through repetition' (1996:81).

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[7] The studies mentioned in this paragraph are cited in Oxford and Anderson (1995)

Groups That Work

The picture of passive, non-participative Chinese learners and teacher-dominated, authoritarian classrooms is also common. However, as Cortazzi (1996) suggests, it may be that '... students are not passive but reflective ... Chinese students value thoughtful questions which they ask after sound reflection ... less thoughtful questions may be laughed at by other students' (1996:191). Nor are teacher-student relationships as cold or 'authoritarian' as they at first appear. There is much interaction outside class with the teacher for '... students with problems in class expect the teacher to realize this and offer help after class, whereas Western teachers will assume that students with problems will ask for help' (Ibid 1996:191). Flowerdew (1998) cites a Hong Kong study, by Wong 1996, indicating that 'student-initiated collaborative learning strategies have been found to foster the adoption of a deep approach to learning and the use of high-level cognitive strategies' (1998:325). Group solidarity can be an asset when it is harnessed for collaborative learning as studies on peer learning in Hong Kong by Winter (1996) and Tang (1996) illustrate.

Learning in such groups goes beyond knowledge transfer to critical analysis and questioning: '.../students/ become aware of different perspectives on controversial issues, form judgements through critical thinking ... rehearse, organize and clarify information in order to be able to communicate with the other members' (Tang 1996:185).

It seems that 'Chinese learning styles' are more subtle and complex than they appear to be in some (Western) misrepresentations of them.

ADULT LEARNING STAGES AND LEARNING STYLES

Jarvis (1998) charts a shift of emphasis in recent years from the provision of education — planned, controlled and institutionalized learning — to greater learner autonomy: 'Education is a public phenomenon and provides public recognition for learning' (1998:60) whereas learning can be more individualistic, and take place outside educational institutions at work or at a distance without a teacher present.

Developmental Stages?

Is learning in adulthood qualitatively different from learning in childhood? Piaget identified four stages of cognitive development[8] a person passes through, in linear fashion, from childhood to adulthood. The culmination of the process is the attainment of maturity and the development of explicit, rational ways of knowing. Bruner saw these as overlapping rather than as discrete stages, a new stage supplements rather than supplants the preceding one. Claxton (1998) argues that Piagetian 'earlier' stages need not atrophy in adulthood; different modes of learning — through immersion, imagination, intuition or intellect — may continue to be deployed concurrently. Tennant (1997) questions the view that certain 'developmental' stages are immutable and inevitable. He argues that such a position is based on a consensual view of human existence '... which posits a socially approved timetable for individual growth ... perhaps it is best to abandon the project of identifying universal age-related stages or phases of development' (1997:54).

A view of learning as something that continues across the whole life course entails a rejection of the notion that youth is the only phase for learning. Boulton-Lewis (1997) presents evidence that there is no serious decline in memory until people are well into their sixties. Premature assessments of who is a 'success' and who a 'failure' are also inappropriate for, as Ball (1994:6) says, while there may be faster and slower learners, there are few who are non-learners. Adults are as well equipped as younger learners to continue learning. To find (or to continue) in employment nowadays requires a constant updating of a person's 'cognitive capital' (Claxton 1996:5). However, recurrent education can also be transformative, a point of departure for a new lifestyle or a new sense of personal identity. Is it perhaps more helpful to look at adult learning styles than at (age-related) learning stages.

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[8] Piaget's major stages of development are the sensory-motor, pre-operational, concrete operational and formal operations

Experiential Learning

Pogson and Tennant (2000) cite studies of adult learning capacities which appear to indicate that while intelligence, as measured by IQ tests, may decline in old age, 'those components of intelligence based on learning from experience are maintained and even developed with age' (2000:25). Much more attention is now being given to the importance of (life and work) experience in learning. As Kolb (1984) puts it 'learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience' (1984:56). Adults do not just acquire new information and add it to their existing 'knowledge bank account', they integrate the new information with what they already know — they construct meaning by relating it to their prior experience. Eraut (1994) elaborates on the role of experiential learning in professional knowledge. He questions the traditional idea that professional practice is based solely on propositional knowledge — the theories and concepts that are codified and taught in higher education institutions. Professional knowledge also includes process knowledge (know-how) and personal knowledge acquired through experience and social interaction. He points out that when professionals are asked to describe what they do, a list of processes results. Functional analyses of the kinds of knowledge needed in professional contexts — for instance, the interweaving of theory with clinical experience in medicine — may lead to a better understanding of what professionals actually do and suggest better ways in which these skills may be taught.

Research on expertise and the 'practical intelligence' adults demonstrate in non-professional contexts, from grocery shopping or gambling to taxi driving and factory work, has helped broaden our understanding of (non-academic) adult learning. What the studies[9] reveal is the extent to which such learning is situated and 'domain specific'. For instance, grocery shoppers attained much higher scores when they were asked to do mathematics calculations while shopping than they did when given identical pen-and-paper problems. Factory workers accustomed to a particular setting and to certain routines, incorporate 'the external environment into the problem-solving system ... adopt effort saving as a higher-order cognitive strategy which informs the way they work and /use/ "practical thought" to reformulate and redefine problems for ease of solution' (Pogson and Tennant 2000:27). The challenge then is to harness the experiences adult learners bring to class and link these up with new learning.

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[9] The studies mentioned in this paragraph are reported in Pogson and Tennant (2000 25–29)

Jarvis's (1987) model of the adult learning process starts with (life) experiences. Every (social) situation is a potential learning experience — though that potential is not always realized — 'even miseducative experiences may be regarded as learning experiences' (1987:16). Some responses to experience will lead to non-reflective learning such as memorisation, while others will result in 'higher forms of learning' that call for application of or reflection on what has been learnt. In the past, learning was too narrowly concerned with academic knowledge alone. As Ball (1994:13) reminds us, nowadays, we all need to be equipped with 'technical' skills such as word-processing, personal skills such as how to work effectively in teams, as well as conceptual skills such as problem-solving. The old distinction between academic knowledge and vocational training is obsolete.

Other Modes of (Adult) Learning

It is often assumed that scientific explanations and rational ways of knowing are the highest modes of understanding. Piaget asserted that the 'formal operations' stage — abstract, intellectual ways of knowing — represents the pinnacle of adult learning. Riegel (1979) comments that '... only under the most exceptional circumstances of logical argument and scholastic disputes would a person engage in such a form of thinking / Piaget's view of learning/... reflects the non-artistic and non-creative aspect in the intellectual history of Western man' (1979:49–50, quoted in Squires 1995:93). The traditional IQ hypothesis has been superseded by Gardner's idea of 'multiple intelligences' — linguistic, mathematical, spatial, musical, physical as well as inter- and intra-personal skills. Claxton (1996) also takes issue with the Piagetian idea that imagination should be a mode of learning only associated with childhood: 'Imagination and fantasy are treated as primitive forms of learning ... emotions are still treated as interruptions to learning rather than resources for learning' (1996:53). Lang (1998) defines 'affect' as 'a significant dimension of the education process which is concerned with the feelings, beliefs, attitudes and emotions of students' (1998:4). If adult learning is to be effective it needs to engage the imagination and the emotions as well as the intellect.[10] The importance of affective/imaginative learning is acknowledged in recent revisions to the admission criteria to Hong Kong tertiary institutions and in Education Commission reports. Claxton (1998) reminds us that our contemporary culture of speed often (over)values knowledge expressed in the hyper-precise language of mathematics and science and neglects or devalues the more patient modes of mind. Learning also comes from 'emotional intelligence', imaginative insight or after a period of rumination when the '... metaphorical apple falls on the prepared mind' (1998:67). Learning to be is as important as learning to do.

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[10] I am not polarizing cognitive and affective learning here In the case of L2 learning, for instance, improving fluency through affective learning tasks need not preclude grammatical accuracy

Effective Adult Learning Styles

There is no single 'best way' for adults to learn. Knowles (1980) contends that effective adult learners are more self-directed and independent, they are able to draw on a reservoir of accumulated experience as a rich resource in learning, are aware of their learning needs and want to apply skills and knowledge to real life problems and tasks.[11] (cited in Jarvis 1995:90). Brookfield's (1986) six principles for effective adult learning are: voluntary participation, mutual respect, collaborative spirit, action, reflection and self-direction (cited in Foley, 2000:48). Among the features of mature adult thinking styles identified by Rybash (1986) are a willingness to accept contradiction, an ability to synthesize contradictory thoughts and emotions into coherent wholes, a readiness to recognise the relative nature of knowledge and accept that there are multiple subjective perspectives on a situation, as well as a recognition that constant change is a fundamental given of modern life. Kegan (1994) adds that a key factor in a mature learning style is the development of a critical consciousness — the ability to reflect on and challenge the socially constructed discourses in which we have been embedded and the inherited beliefs imbued in youth (1994:278).

The cultivation of such a reflective attitude will depend crucially on how knowledge is presented by a teacher to learners. Knowledge may be presented 'as if it were established to be universally and incontrovertibly true /or/ conditionally, as if it were one position or viewpoint among several .../for/ when knowledge is presented as cut and dried universals, learners are implicitly led to engage learning strategies that simply record it ... when an element of doubt is introduced into the situation by the teacher's choice of language, one is invited to engage with it in a more questioning and intelligent fashion' (Claxton 1996:51).

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[11] Knowles has been criticised for focussing too narrowly on adult learners as autonomous individuals and neglecting the fact that we operate in a social context and there are 'organizational and social impediments to adult learning' (Grace, 1996 cited in Merriam and Caffarella 1999:276). Some adults may be self-directed learners, as are some children, others are not. His third and fourth traits have been called into question for presenting too technical and reductionist a view of knowledge. Perhaps his framework is more of a prescription for what adult learning may be rather than a description of what it actually is.

Effective adult learning, particularly the self-directed kind, is closely linked to an adult's readiness to learn, which, in turn, seems to be linked to his or her (changing) roles as worker, family member etc. Merriam and Caffarella (1999) report findings that show '83% of adult learners were engaged in learning activities because of some transition in their lives' (1999:277). Adulthood is a time of growth and change and learning may be affected by adverse changes — such as unemployment — or positive changes such as the opportunities to return to study when child-care responsibilities end.

'Learning involves the reorganization of experiences' (Merriam and Cafferella 1999:254) and the extent to which an adult is prepared for this and enters into the new learning — wholeheartedly, half-heartedly, cynically, anxiously or reluctantly — will be a major factor in determining whether that learning will be successful or not. Claxton et al. (1996) argues that we need to attend more to a learner's preparedness for learning and the factors that affect an adult's decision to engage. 'Learners can be effectively blocked from taking up learning opportunities, or, if forced into them, will engage with them in a way that is designed to defend against the anticipated or imagined risk, rather than maximizing their learning ... a major goal for learning support then becomes the dissolution of these blocks' (1996:11). A Hong Kong study by Ip et al. (1996) on the coping patterns of (247) mature students studying at City University provides some useful insights into the coping strategies adopted by these Hong Kong adults when faced with time constraints, work pressure and family responsibility while studying. They discovered that learners' first broad strategy was to try to cope with problems themselves, then to turn to spouses and family members for support and only as a last resort to seek help from professionals. They speculate that 'many Chinese like to keep their problems to themselves or within their families. To seek help from outsiders .../is/ an admission of inadequacy ... only a small number of mature students ... approached professionals such as teachers or counsellors for support' (1996:38–42). They recommend that courses on coping strategies — time management, planning, problem-solving and critical thinking — be organized for adult learners and that there should be support networks for spouses and family members as well as better use of peer counselling. If teachers are to take a more active role in helping mature students, they need to arrange informal gatherings to establish meaningful contacts (1996:46).

Learning Tasks

How should these different models and frameworks of adult learning translate into modes of delivery in the classroom? Knowles (1978) distinguishes between the 'pedagogue' who imparts knowledge and the 'andragogue' who facilitates (adult) learning through discussion, problem-solving and social interaction. Tasks and activities such as case studies, simulations and project work may be more appropriate for adult learners than traditional teaching methods. Group work tasks can enable adults to pool the wisdom, experience and expertise they bring to the classroom and, especially in the Hong Kong context, to obtain peer support.[12]

CHINESE ADULTS LEARNING

Research on the Chinese learner often fails to make it clear whether the learners being written about are adults or children. Do Chinese adult learners adapt to learning styles different from those they were used to in secondary school? To what extent can Hong Kong adult learners deploy successfully learning styles of the kind identified above?

Preferences of Hong Kong Adult Learners

Contrary to the rote-learner stereotype, adult Hong Kong Chinese students '... report a stronger preference for high-level, meaning-based learning strategies and avoidance of rote-learning than do Western /Australian/

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[12] Squires (1995) points out that there are also implications for the (continuous) assessment of experiential learning as the boundaries between '... non-formal and informal modes of learning, between education and everything else ...' weaken. He cites the work that has already been done by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning in the US (1995: 105–106).

students' (Watkins and Biggs 1996:49).[13] Tang and Biggs (1996) contend that in schools, Hong Kong children adopt certain learning styles for purely pragmatic reasons: the exams take a certain form and so students develop strategies they think are appropriate for dealing with them. It does not follow that these are their 'preferred' learning styles or that they are not capable of deploying other learning styles in other contexts. 'A learning approach must not be confused, as it often is, with the context-independent learning style' (1996:165). In fact, when Littlewood (1996) asked over 2,000 Hong Kong adult learners about their preferred L2 learning styles, they 'exhibited an orientation to active and communicative modes of learning English ... wished to have more opportunities to develop their fluency and attached more importance to it than to correct grammar and vocabulary' (1996:78). Lam's (1997) study found a strong preference among (118) Hong Kong undergraduate students for group work over individual learning tasks. It may be that at present, in Hong Kong schools, the competitive examination-oriented system does not encourage the deep approaches to learning advocated in recent Education Commission reports; but 'if the goal of education is deep learning, then educators in Hong Kong should adjust their teaching and /the/ evaluation system accordingly ... teaching students study skills that the ecology of the classroom does not support is simply a waste of time' (Ho 1999:55–56).

Teachers' Expectations

Teachers' preconceptions about students will determine the types of learning experiences those students have. Change will not occur if, for instance, teachers believe students are only capable of rote-learning (and related assessment). Adult students who take evening classes do not want to replicate what they did in school. Indeed, as Claxton (1996) points out '... if adult learners make an analogy between a current learning context and their own (unhappy) experience of school /then/ anachronistic assumptions may be activated ...' (1996:47). While this does call for approaches to teaching quite different from those which students encountered in school, there is a need for cultural sensitivity in the characterization of 'effective teaching' and in the management of change. A study by Pratt et al. (1999) revealed significant differences in the perceptions of Hong Kong Chinese teachers and Western expatriate teachers as to what constituted 'effective (university) teaching'. The Chinese teachers (and students) stressed the importance of foundational knowledge. They felt students needed to attain mastery of this as a first step in any discipline. The teacher is the authoritative source whose job is to take students systemically through a set of tasks, step-by-step, varying the pace according to students' understanding.

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[13] Reported in Watkins and Biggs (1996:49).

The Western expatriates tended to view their job as the elaboration, application or critique of foundational knowledge. By encouraging discussion, their aim was to facilitate independent learning so as to bring about a qualitative change in students' thinking. As mentioned earlier, the Chinese teachers saw themselves as having a pastoral role in guiding and mentoring students outside class. Though Western teachers had more 'egalitarian' relationships with students, they were less understanding of them than their Chinese colleagues were, often characterizing students as lazy, spoon-fed or incapable of deep thinking. They had failed to 'see a link between student behaviour and social structures of formal schooling and family life in Hong Kong' (1999:250). In effecting curriculum changes, such as the move towards more problem-based learning in Hong Kong universities, it needs to be recognized that notions of 'effective teaching' are rooted in cultural values and social norms; the perceptions Chinese teachers (and students) have of their roles, responsibilities and relationships need to be acknowledged and handled sensitively during the change process.

All too often, what comes through in the research literature, is a deficit view of Chinese learning and teaching methods — the implication being that they are not so much different as old-fashioned and wrong. Cortezzi cautions against such cultural imperialism: 'there is no reason to suppose that one culture of learning is superior to another ... this needs to be kept in mind when teaching methodologies migrate around the world' (1996:174). Harvey (1985) describes (Western) comments on Chinese (L2) learning styles as being rather like a Chinese opera in which '... a crusading communicative force /is/ intent on stamping out rote learning, memorisation, grammatical analysis and intensive reading: a linguistic Gang of Four ...' (1985:183). In fact, a better understanding of certain aspects of 'Chinese learning styles' — such as collaborative group learning (Kember, 2000 and Tang, 1996) and the pastoral role teachers have outside the classroom (Pratt, 1999) — could well be of benefit to The Western Learner (and teacher). Ho (1999) for instance, reports that Hong Kong students often attribute their academic success to effort rather than to ability and so they 'tend to find ways in which they might improve their performance, whereas Western students tend to attribute past performance to things they cannot do anything about' (1999:45).[14]

Adopting New Approaches

Kember (2000) mentions 90 action learning projects that were carried out at universities and colleges in Hong Kong. These included problem-based learning, group projects, peer teaching, simulations, reflective journals, multi-media packages etc. The results of the projects lead him to conclude that 'the impression that Hong Kong students prefer passive learning and resist teaching innovation can have little or no foundation' (2000:110). In a study of Hong Kong distance learners, Hills (1998) found that there was '... a demand from students for more participative learning' (1998: 159–163 and the next chapter). Lee (1998) reports on a project to promote greater autonomy in (L2) learning at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. She lists five factors that are important in helping students to take charge of their own learning: the programme must be voluntary and sufficiently flexible so as to allow students to change either the content or the process of learning; students need to receive regular feedback and encouragement from a teacher, they must be able to work at their own pace and to decide on what, when and how much they will study. Peer support is also important to help foster collaboration, negotiation and interaction (1998:283).

Ho and Crookall (1995) found that in City U, students who took part in a world-wide computer mediated simulation developed some of the attitudes that are said to characterize autonomous learning. Traditional teacher-learner roles were redefined for the activity, students were no longer told what to do but had to plan, make decisions, debate, deal with people from other cultures, handle unpredictability, time management and conflict issues. In the event, they were able to rise to the challenge and take responsibility for their own learning. Liu and Littlewood's (1997) research leads them to conclude that Hong Kong students' reticence in class is 'less a question of modesty and face than one of competence /in English/ and /

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[14] Although the drawback is that, since both low achievers and high achievers attribute failure to lack of effort, the former may 'be pressured to increase their efforts when they are already working to their utmost /rather than being/ taught in what ways and in what direction their effort may be more fruitfully deployed' (Ho 1999:55).

lack of/ confidence' because they are unaccustomed to participative modes of learning. However, students can be guided towards greater autonomy if teachers make explicit their expectations and perceptions, get students to brainstorm ideas and clarify concepts in small groups. Students also have to become familiar with the strategies needed for successful communication in English, such as turn-taking, asking for clarification, giving non-verbal feedback etc. (1997:378–382).

Smith (1999) distinguishes between the reading strategies and research processes that arise from a post-Enlightenment critical tradition in the West and the very different traditions of reading and scholarship in 'Confucian cultures'. In the former, reading is an individualized act, entailing a certain irreverence towards texts and an approach to research that requires students '... to analyse, problematize and synthesize a critical response to a specific problem' (146). He contrasts this with the (Confucian) tradition of scholarship as commentary and exegesis on canonical texts, with its emphasis on the conservation and reproduction of knowledge rather than critical challenge or individual interpretation: 'the aim of /such/ reading was not to excavate a private significance in the text but to recite and compare the interpretation of acknowledged authorities' (150). Leaving aside the relative merits of either 'tradition', if this characterization is accurate, the key issue for the many Hong Kong adult learners undertaking postgraduate study with overseas universities is how they can develop the required critical approach. Smith outlines a practical, systematic approach to the development of the necessary skills. He proposes equipping students with techniques to help them develop an attitude of 'reflective scepticism' towards texts: strategies such as attending to the definitions of key concepts, being alert to problematic assumptions or to ambiguous statements and asking whether conclusions are warranted. Students also need to be made aware of the discourse conventions — the 'rules, routines and ruses' — of their particular subject disciplines. Through a systematic programme of (guided) critical reading, it is possible for students to acquire the critico-creative skills needed: 'if critical thinking is a skill that derives from academic socialization (itself part of a broader cultural orientation), it follows that the supervisor can play a role in developing this skill' (1999:147).

The evidence suggests that when Hong Kong students are given the chance to adopt more active methods in their post-compulsory education they can and do adapt their learning styles accordingly. However, there may be some initial difficulties for students accustomed to more teacher-centred classrooms if new and strange methods are suddenly imposed.

Students, as much as teachers, will need to be given time and support to make the transition to new forms of teaching and learning: 'any teacher, Western or Eastern, who plans to use methodologies which inevitably involve students' participation must make sure that the students are familiar with and accept such methodologies' (Cheng 2000:444). The crucial element is building what Kegan (1994) calls a 'consciousness bridge' between the students' previous learning experiences and the new approaches.

Extrinsic and Intrinsic Motivation for Learning

Many Hong Kong adults learners undertake further study for career enhancement but it is important not to make a simplistic distinction between those who have intrinsic motivation (and are studying for interest) and those with extrinsic motivation (who are solely interested in material rewards) and so will only do what is necessary to achieve their goals. Kember (2000) found that the Hong Kong students he interviewed wanted courses '... to be both interesting and to provide an appropriate preparation for their future career ... 40% of the interviewed students commented on both intrinsic and career motivation' (2000:113).

CONCLUSION

There is undoubtedly a cultural component in learning styles and, no doubt, previous learning experiences can affect learning. This needs to be acknowledged and a culturally sensitive pedagogy developed that takes account of learners' (and teachers') prior learning experiences and expectations. However, as Liu and Littlewood (1997) state 'like Asian values ... Confucian values have become a convenient explanation for any observed or actual behavioural trait.'(1997:374). So-called 'Chinese learning styles' are far more subtle and complex than they are often made out to be. Adult Hong Kong learners express a preference for learning styles quite different from the practices of rote-learning and memorisation usually attributed to 'The Chinese Learner'. They are receptive to new modes of learning and adopt quite different learning styles to those they may have encountered in school provided they are given time to become familiar with them and to develop confidence when deploying these new strategies and styles. The adoption of new approaches by Hong Kong adult learners will depend on the context, their level, motivation and attitude to learning. Changes will also need to be made to current assessment methods in Hong Kong so as to encourage students to employ more active methods of learning.

In the West, 'Chinese Learning' still conjures up for some a picture of abiding truths cut in stone, of the Confucian Civil Service exam system, of rote-learning, memorization and passivity: such images are out of date. As Claxton (1996) says: 'learners possess different repertoires of learning strategies .../and/ attempts to reduce learning styles to two, or four or sixteen predetermined categories are too crude to do justice to the qualitative differences between learners ...' (1996:13). The same observation applies to the misconceptions, unexamined socio-cultural interpretations and deterministic accounts of Chinese learning styles that recur so frequently. Chinese adult learners are capable of deploying a wide range of learning strategies and styles. It is time to art a new paradigm and to go beyond the self-fulfilling prophecies and Confucian confusion that circumscribe notions of The Chinese Learner and Chinese Learning Styles.

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