



## Prologue: A focus on learning as universities change

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This prologue has two aims. First, it addresses critical challenges for university renewal, and the centrality of the scholarship of teaching and learning. Second, it sketches issues in Hong Kong's higher education. The prologue provides a context for the selected contributions.

### CRITICAL CHALLENGES FOR UNIVERSITY RENEWAL

The notion that universities are now positioned in a context of complex and multi-dimensional changes has been well documented and rehearsed. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has succinctly summarized the trend as globalization, regional integration, fragmentation, specialization and marginalization of higher education institutions and the redesign of their programmes and modes of teaching and learning (OECD 1993; OECD 1999). In the vortex of change, universities have been described as changing from a focus on 'an institution of society to an institution in society' (Schuller 1997).

Discourses on how universities should respond to the challenges of the 21st century are many, ranging from institutional renewal to modelling universities after industrial enterprises. Of course, each discourse has its ideological support and deep-seated values. Outlined here are some converging trends that constitute a critical agenda for adapting universities to contemporary challenges.

### **Accountability within resource constraints**

Increasing demands are placed on universities from a wider diversity of interested parties, as there are pressures for the broadening of missions to satisfy new demands from commerce, industry, government and society. Essentially, universities have to be more proactive and responsive to changing environments. This includes assisting in economic development. At the same time, such pressures need to be resisted to a certain extent: universities should not let their mission statements slip into crude and intellectually-impoverished 'production of manpower' formulations, to the exclusion of other legitimate social and cultural demands. These matters require scrutiny by all concerned, and not least by universities themselves.

Most universities world-wide receive substantial funds through public subsidies. Alongside the general trend of contemporary government cutbacks in university funding per capita, the multiplication and differentiation of higher education institutions also tend to reduce per capita public funding. Consequently, there is a growing need for universities to seek new sources of funding for both existing demands and new initiatives. The value-for-money approach means that universities have to justify their existence in terms of inputs and outputs, cost-effectiveness, and achievement by students of demonstrable learning outcomes. Issues of accountability and resource competition intensify the pressure for universities to demonstrate that they deserve ongoing public funding. A major challenge for academics concerns the development of appropriate evaluation mechanisms that both meet the need for accountability and promote desirable learning initiatives.

## Adaptability and choice

Students are typically now paying more for higher education than their predecessors a few years ago. The proliferation of higher education institutions and the multiplication of programmes of distance learning give students more choices. As customers in a learning market, they can make choices according to their (or their parents') preferences for institutions and programmes. The challenge for institutions is that of educating potential students about their learning needs, and ensuring the quality of the programmes through which such needs can be met.

There is a new demand for 'vision' and 'mission' statements. Universities in the past often complacently assumed that these were not needed. In developing new and expanded objectives that are fuelled by the broader demands, universities need to re-visit and re-construct their processes, governance and relationship with broader constituencies. There is a parallel need to update curriculum contents, pedagogical practices, assessment structures, and reward systems, which is an ongoing challenge for activities under the banner of scholarship of teaching. The climate for encouraging new development initiatives needs to be inculcated in terms of employment practice, incentives, and collaboration strategies within and beyond individual institutions.

## From elite to mass higher education

In the United States, the Carnegie Foundation has distinguished between research and teaching universities (Cabal 1993). The National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education in the United Kingdom has made similar classifications and finer categorization for other vocational specialized institutes (Dearing 1997). For decisions on funding, the University Grants Committee of Hong Kong (1996) divided local universities into categories according to their research outputs and teaching programmes. In all cases, research universities were at the top of the pyramid of institutional ranking. The research universities gained the best government funding and still could avail of themselves additional funds from multiple sources because of the high quality of their research.

However, to view research and teaching as conflicting roles for academics is a misleading conception (Hughes and Tight 1995). Academics' effectiveness and performance can be much improved if scholarship and teaching can harmonize with each other (Schuller 1997). In the transition from elite to mass higher education, academics have to be strong in both teaching and research, with an integration of their strength in research into teaching so that teaching can ignite creativity for new research possibilities.

### **Integration with society**

In the transition from elite to mass higher education, emerging issues require adjustment in management structure and governance. The elitist orientation of the past does not match the broad missions of contemporary universities. These broad missions include development initiatives, networking, bridging the gaps between university and society, integrating theory and practice, and developing professionalism in both teaching and university administration. This requires differentiation of roles, and new models to match new demands and responsibilities. All these presume new management practice and its dissemination to support a broader mission, and new governance structures and processes to match new objectives and goals. Adjustments have to be made in recruitment, promotion and incentive schemes in employment policies. However, universities are used to collegial cultures in which disciplinary boundaries have often been tightly drawn. As the society looks up to universities for expertise, whereas universities attend to the needs of society for application of knowledge and for action in integrating theory with practice, the cultural change is converging towards collaboration and integration. Universities need to prove the relevance of their programmes and research in addressing the pressing issues of contemporary society.

### **Teaching professionalism**

Teaching and learning will undergo further quantitative and qualitative shifts in the 21st century. In addition to increased student enrolment

and new programmes with more practical relevance, teaching is no longer limited to transmitting 'pre-packaged knowledge'; and learning no longer relies on the elitist model of passive absorption of the words of the 'sage on the stage'. The interactive mode is widely preferred to the didactic mode. There is also a need to see knowledge as relative and changing, demanding constant reflection on the part of the learner. As part of this trend, teachers are expected to be more professional in curriculum design, pedagogical practice, and assessment. In addition to the familiar concern for curriculum coherence, there is growing attention as to how to empower the learner with independent learning skills for continued learning beyond university graduation. Such emphasis requires experimentation with learning modes, collaborative teaching, and systematic research into university teaching and learning as scholarly activities. It is important to recognize that the striving for interactive learner-centred approach is contextualized in the instruction-centred tradition of elitist higher education. How academics in various disciplines can adjust to a learning-centred demand of university teaching is itself a topic needing more research.

## DEVELOPING UNIVERSITY-WIDE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

New forms of knowledge are yet to be discovered through connections between disciplinary groupings. The argument for a collective quest for a new form of knowledge in addressing contemporary challenges may be made in relation to the insights into how knowledge is formed. Bowden and Marton (1998, 284) wrote:

Knowledge of a certain kind exists because we see the world in a certain way and it gains meaning when we see it through our previous experiences. New knowledge is formed by searching for it in certain ways and it is new only in relation to what is not.

This vision led to a critique of knowledge being separated from the acts and processes through which knowledge is formed, as the continuity

between learning on the individual level and learning on the collective level may not be seen at all. Such a lack of continuity was poignantly described by Palmer (1998, 51) as 'our fearful way of knowing':

The mode of knowing that dominates education creates disconnections between teachers, their subjects, and their students because it is rooted in fear. This mode, called objectivism, portrays truth as something we can achieve only by disconnecting ourselves, physically and emotionally, from the thing we want to know ... So, objectivism, driven by fear, keeps us from forging relationships with the things of the world.

To realize the continuity, the sense of community becomes crucial. Bowden and Marton (1998, 288–9) concluded by recommending 'a bold undertaking' to raise funds, gather interested academics concerning knowledge formation, advertise doctoral positions, and develop courses — all related to realizing the ideals described in their book. In a similar vein, Palmer (1998, 95) saw the mission of education as the mission of knowing, teaching and learning, where a community of truth is practised. He elucidated this as follows:

The hallmark of the community of truth is not psychological intimacy or political civility or pragmatic accountability, though it does not exclude these virtues. This model of community reaches deeper, into ontology and epistemology — into assumptions about the nature of reality and how we know it — on which all education is built. The hallmark of the community of truth is in its claim that reality is a web of communal relationships, and we can know reality only by being in community with it.

Academics in different disciplines tend to be confined by tradition, and crossing of boundaries creates the risk of losing time and/or resources. Do academics dare to take initiatives to relocate their professional roles by creating new identities in promoting learning in their university communities? What obstacles must be surmounted?

## RESOLVING TENSION BETWEEN RESEARCH AND TEACHING

With the world-wide move towards public accountability that gathered strength during the 1990s, academics live in a climate of assessment. Academics now deal with outside influences in ways which resemble those of businesses, government institutions and industries. Many academics have had to undergo a transition from the cosy state of academic autonomy to a new unknown phase, and are constantly adapting to new pressures. In these processes, academics have had to become better at impression management, but also to address multiple audiences which have expectations that are not always easily compatible. Paradoxically, while the public accountability measures are intended to look for means to justify the funding from taxpayers on matters related to quality assurance and quality improvement, tension arising from questionable or incommensurable criteria can make it hard for academics to deliver the intended products. The central concern can be located in the academics' performance and discourse on research and teaching.

Hattie and Marsh (1996) conducted a meta-analysis of 58 studies of academic performance, and concluded that the widespread belief that research and teaching are inextricably entwined is an enduring myth. With inclusion of mediating variables on teaching and research, a further study (Hattie 2002) confirmed a near-zero correlation between teaching and research. Perhaps these alarming findings can be interpreted from a recognition that policy measures used to assess research have tended to discourage a broad approach in favour of a narrow one. Rowland, in his critique (1996, 13), argues that the category distinction between teaching and research may owe more to the demands for accountability than to logical or pedagogical differences between academic roles. The two hypotheses which emerged from his study critically embraced research and teaching in a new light. Rowland added (1996, 16):

First, an approach to teaching which emphasises its interactive nature and applies to it the critical orientation of research can enhance the research by which it is informed. Secondly, that such an approach to teaching is held to be the most effective. If both are true, then it

follows that the most effective teaching is supportive of research. Narrow measures used to assess research and uninformed approaches to assessing teaching refuse to acknowledge either of these hypotheses.

Considering such hypotheses, the instrumentation for assessment of teaching and research is subject to examination. Hattie's findings nevertheless challenged policy makers and university academics to consider how to increase the circumstances in which teaching and research can meet to reward not only better teaching or better research but also the integration between them. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is often used to define the locus of reward. While tangible rewards are external to the individual, the decision to pursue these rewards must come from within. Any policy development should target the values, needs and orientations of academics, if positive intrinsic motivation is to be prompted. Improvement of key performance indicators can be an approach at policy level to stimulate intrinsic motivation, and enhance the nexus between research and teaching. This approach does not mean that university academics should leave policy makers to define, to set direction and standards for assessment of performance. As asserted by Theall (1999, 1), good motivational practice requires careful delineation of parameters of learning or working situations as well as of the goals that must be achieved. Arguably, the pivotal point of control has to come from an interaction between external and internal forces, through which the credibility of the systems of assessment can be established. In other words, a striving for broad performance indicators would need to go in parallel with active participation from those involved in renewal of organizational culture for shaping motivating learning environments.

With globalization and the interflow of systems and experiences between countries, the criteria for accountability assessment cannot remain stagnant. Hong Kong can be a case for illustration. In 1993, the University Grants Committee (UGC) moved away from a historically-based model for assessment of the public recurrent funding requirements to a more performance-based model. As part of this process, a Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) aimed to measure the output and quality of research of the UGC-funded institutions. In the first exercise, a quality



threshold which was not overly stringent was used, and the outcome was expressed in terms of the number of full-time equivalent researchers by cost centre. In the second RAE in 1996, a higher threshold was adopted and the exercise revealed that there had been an overall improvement in both the range and quality of research work being carried out. The third RAE in 1999 was conducted on lines which were basically similar to the previous one. However, the term 'active researcher' was no longer used, in order to stress that the focus was on cost centres rather than individuals. The UGC also emphasized that the research assessment did not imply an interest in research to the possible detriment of teaching quality. In recognition of the wider scope of research, the assessment included other forms of scholarship inherent in the process and/or outcome of research, with due recognition to discovery, integration and application. A further RAE had been planned for 2002, but in view of the costs of the exercise the UGC decided to postpone the next round until 2005. From a brief review of the decade, two changing trends can be identified. First, scholarship of teaching was given due recognition at the policy level, overtaking the exclusive emphasis on some traditional forms of assessable research. Second, team-work was given explicit recognition, which was rather contrary to the university tradition in which individuals were rewarded for competition and isolated pursuit of excellence.

Such trends, which have parallels elsewhere, pose both challenges and opportunities. The choice for academics can come between isolated struggles to cope with the assessment culture with a self-defeating sense of helplessness, and creation of a learning environment to generate an agenda of research from which rewards can be achieved collectively and with growing identity. There is scope for fulfilment of the university mission in harmonizing research and teaching, if academics collectively choose to stretch for breakthroughs from isolation as individuals, and as bodies with existing disciplinary boundaries. Such breakthroughs from inertia bounded by habitual thinking have been discussed extensively in literature of reform and organizational changes. They rely not so much on social interaction or administrative re-structuring, but on roots in a life of learning together. In traditional universities, promotion structures

have tended to reward excellence in terms of individual pursuits. A paradigm shift is needed from this mode to stronger collaboration rooted in a spirit of learning.

## **STRATEGIC MOVES FOR DEVELOPING LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS**

This prologue began with a review of the trends that constitute a critical agenda for adapting universities to contemporary challenges: the moves towards accountability, adaptability, mass higher education, integration with society, and the demand for teaching professionalism. The trends can be identified in Hong Kong, where the higher education sector has grown significantly over the past two decades. Sutherland (2002) reported that in 1981 only 2.2% of the population in the 17–20 age group could enter local universities; but in 2001 the proportion had reached nearly 18%. At the core of Hong Kong's future economic development is an investment for a highly educated and capable workforce, which will be significantly influenced by the target of 60% post-secondary participation in 2010. In projecting into the future, education, teaching and learning has been placed alongside research as of parallel importance. This is demonstrated in Recommendations 7 and 11 of the Sutherland Report (2002):

That the UGC and the institutions jointly assess the need for staff in the sector to develop new skills to respond effectively to technological and other changes in higher education, and jointly support initiatives addressing these needs, including the dissemination of best practices across the sector.

That, in consultation with the institutions, the UGC build on the success of the RAE in allocating research funds on the basis of research performance, and devise means to sharpen the RAE so that the highest levels of research excellence can be identified and funded accordingly.

It is worth highlighting first the emphasis on the joint work between UGC as a funding agency and higher education as recipients of funds

for promoting excellence in both teaching and research, and second the dichotomization of teaching and research.

In Hong Kong, in addition to the RAEs conducted since 1993, Teaching and Learning Quality Process Reviews (TLQPRs) have been initiated. The first was conducted in 1996 to review institutional performance, and the second was conducted in 2002 and 2003. The Review Template from the UGC included a Framework of Education Quality Work which carried a comprehensive coverage of major domains of education delivery in terms of curriculum, pedagogy and curriculum, and processes of design and implementation. In addition, the six principles for evaluation could generate a rich array of questions for the self-review process in which academic staff in university communities are confronted with a range of realities concerning the quality of teaching and learning. The challenge may seem most critical in preparation of the review, since the collective outcomes are designed to determine future funding. More importantly, new initiatives, whether self-directed or emerging from the TLQPR Panel, require continuity of effort, and will take time to mature.

Given the accountability climate, as the surveillance continues and expands, what will be the long-term consequences for the sense of professionalism and for any genuine educational improvement among teachers in higher education? Underpinning the chapters in this book are two strategic moves: first, self-challenge on cultivation of exemplary practice in promoting learning, and second, development of a learning network.

### **Cultivation of exemplary practice in promoting learning**

For exemplary practice, the authors of various chapters have taken on a moral obligation to face self-challenges on learning to improve curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. With focus on their own learning, they have created new experiences from alert and active response to changing circumstances.

Among many changing circumstances for a learning agenda, an illustration can be drawn from the student evaluation exercise in the

University of Hong Kong. In response to the 1996 TLQPR Report from the UGC, the University of Hong Kong presented a 1997 progress report which stated in the section 'Implementation Quality' (5) that:

- all teaching should be evaluated;
- evaluation results must be shared with students;
- student evaluation should be an established component of the University's quality assurance system; and
- evaluation results must be used to improve teaching.

This section was applauded in the UGC's comments on the progress report (1998):

The recommendations of the Senate Teaching Quality Committee concerning the role and treatment of student evaluations of teaching, combined with proposals for formative and summative Academic Progress Reviews would provide a good basis for a feedback loop into effective teaching and learning.

In essence, we see a strong belief in assessment. In a sense, learning opportunities may have been created from the university's alert and active response to the changing circumstances. What may be assumed as present in the background is the process of academics' professional response which requires learning — how they learn from feedback for improvement. If it is accepted that staff development involves learning, it is important to identify what kind of learning has been taking place.

It may sound strange to advocate learning in a university setting where all academics are recruited for their expertise in one way or another which demonstrates their learning capacity. However, coming from a tradition of isolated work where the reward structure has encouraged personal excellence, academics have lived in a culture of constantly proving themselves individually. Teamwork seems to be one dimension of learning called upon by the accountability movement, but is yet to be actualized against the habitual mode of individual accountability on important curriculum decisions on pedagogy and assessment.

A further challenge concerns a process of learning that requires risk-taking, especially when alternative approaches may not readily lead to

expected outcomes. In order for professional development to be rooted in learning, open sharing and collegial support are essential. This book demonstrates a professional response to accountability systems which remain fluid and yet to mature through professional discourse between funding bodies and academic institutions. It is worth emphasizing that the chapters do not claim that the authors have necessarily modelled exemplary practice to meet any standards defined officially. What is being asserted is that academics from different disciplines can generate a language of pedagogy across the campus, and for shared concerns to be open to public dialogue, for instance through documentation and publications. Instead of being a showcase for excellence in instruction, exemplary practice may eventually come in the form of clear articulation of the processes of struggles for improving quality of teaching and learning. With a substantive learning environment, the narrow focus on assessment can be transcended to stretch for the best practice. Rowland (1996, 11) points out that one head of a department which had been assessed as 'excellent' in teaching put forcefully a critique of a national move towards teaching assessment:

The teaching assessment is an absolute monster which had nothing to do with the real world at all ... It's about whether we have in place mechanisms that make sure that quality doesn't vary. So what! I'd rather take some risks I think. I'd rather have staff that make terrible mistakes but who also occasionally reach enormous heights, than have everybody worrying about paper work.

While the development of a teaching and learning quality culture has become an important agenda item for senior administration in dealing with the funding body, what is most needed may not come from experts outside the university. Building our strength from within may be a neglected focus. Palmer wrote (1998, 141):

There are no formulas for good teaching, and the advice of experts has but marginal utility. If we want to grow in our practice, we have two primary places to go: to the inner ground from which good teaching comes and to the community of fellow teachers from whom we can learn more about ourselves and our craft.

Learning in community presumes individuals' exploration of inner terrain in individual practice, but one can get lost there, practising self-delusion and running in self-serving circles. A community of collegial discourse can provide guidance. Only through collective pursuit of shared concerns can we nurture a cultural change. Even when we can accept that resources that could promote quality of teaching and learning are available from colleagues as peers, academic culture often builds barriers between colleagues. One dominant reason concerns the private nature of teaching. Considering this, a second strategic move is suggested to structure teaching ventures in a more public domain than an isolated personal or institutional experience.

### **Development of a learning network**

Massy (2000) outlined examples from best-practice institutions as:

- centrality of students' needs
- teaching and learning processes
- coherence of the student experience
- value-added student assessment
- performance evaluation and continuous improvement
- benchmarking best practice
- quality improvement resources
- communication of best practices
- collegiality and the culture of quality
- responsibility for quality processes
- rewards and investments

Given that these values have been empirically derived, they present a powerful framework for integrating teaching and learning with a research agenda that can be pursued as a broader and long-term venture in a learning network. This book can hopefully inspire further joint inquiries into scholarship of teaching and learning across disciplines and institutions. The goals should not be limited to a sharing of expertise. Rather, more dynamically through sharing of problems and addressing them together, academics can cross disciplinary boundaries, get messy,

and discover new paths of handling resources in promoting quality of teaching and learning. Associates of such a learning network can converge with loyalty to students, but not labels of the latest pedagogy or any single set of external criteria, in a form of harmony between professional and academic roles where research and teaching meet in a seamless manner. This network would at its best display continual lively discourse and debates on what matters concerning the quality of learning, for teachers and students alike. This may sound like a remote dream, when the reality is that many academics are swamped under heavy teaching loads and chased by the pressures to publish, but it should be our central objective, and this volume, we hope, shows ways in which it can be achieved.

A new beginning can be developed gradually, from a group of enthusiastic and well-informed change agents. The University of Hong Kong conceived a learning network when the limitations of a centralized model for professional learning initiated from a Centre for the Advancement of University Teaching (CAUT) became apparent. Based on a rationale for the social multiplier effect (Dickens and Flynn 2001), the CAUT proposed a distributed model to support teaching and learning development: a core of academics from different faculties being pulled together for active involvement in teaching development work in the proposed Learning Network. This may be an opportunity for academics to contribute to and benefit from co-learning, initially in structural terms, but more substantially, in professional and cultural terms. Structurally, this would involve a team of colleagues who are interested in teaching and learning in higher education, and work with colleagues from other faculties on an agenda for the Learning Network. Students would also be involved in the network. Such agendas must be jointly set up. The essence of learning and development can come from involvement of a broader community through (a) a solicitation of innovative teachers and researchers from different faculties of our university as consultants to develop curriculum and teaching facilities, and (b) a collaboration with other institutions which are interested in such contributions to higher education. As a new venture, driven by needs of our society, it will generate significant research on higher education for this century as a

promising path for making public the synergy of teaching, learning and research through publication. The Learning Network will contribute to scholarship of teaching, as aptly described by Shulman (2000, 99):

As the scholarship of teaching and learning take hold, and we generate a powerful body of work from the efforts of individual scholars, the distinction traditionally made between the methods of teaching and those of research will gradually disappear. Each will be understood as a variety of methodologically sophisticated, disciplined inquiry. Each demands activities of design, action, assessment, analysis and reflection.

## LEARNING AND LEADERSHIP

This prologue presents the challenging context for intensive research and teaching demands on university academics, and argues for resolving tension between research and teaching. Through active participation in shaping assessment criteria in policy matters, academics can remain assertive and active with a sense of control in professional practice. With a focus on learning, academics can reconcile the pressures from the inner terrain, transcend the system, and move on to a public domain, where teaching and research can be integrated in our scholarly discourse and practice. In conclusion, the chapter asserts the need of leadership in higher education. What kinds of leadership qualities do we wish to instil in our students? The essence of leadership lies in our capacity for learning, which is critical for the communities that we serve. Palmer (1998, 156) wrote:

When we talk about leadership, we have a tendency to contrast communities, which are supposed to be leaderless, with institutions, which need leaders. But it is possible to argue the opposite. Institutions can survive for a while without a leader simply by following bureaucratic rules. But community is a dynamic state of affairs that demands leadership at every turn. ... This kind of leadership can be defined with some precision: it involves offering people excuses and permissions to do things that they want to do but cannot initiate themselves.



In higher education, the essential quality of such community leadership lies in academics' courage to initiate desirable changes. Our modelling effect as teachers can be powerful in the nurturing of leaders for learning communities amongst both teachers and students. By making public the private practice of struggle to mature in professional teaching, and by asserting an agenda for collective effort, academics can build learning environments while asserting leadership. The shared professional insights, as articulated by contributors to this book, will encourage university academics in mediating between pressures and professionalism to thrive in the turbulence which may lie ahead.