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Teacher's Benefit and Professional Development in Macau

Background

Since the ending of Macao's gaming monopoly and the implementation of free traveler policy by Central Government, Macao's economy expands powerfully and the society develops rapidly. But many crises are behind the booming economy. These crises include the shortage of professionals and widening gap between the rich and the poor. Shortage of professionals affects the diversified development of Macao's industry. Even the leading industry has difficulties in employing related talents. Therefore if we cannot ensure a perfect system for training talents within a short period of time, we shall not be able to maintain the present powerful development trend for long. The great worsening phenomenon between the poor and the rich was the reason of increasing street demonstration in these few years. The investigation (2007) by the Macao Government and Hong Kong- Macao scholars on Composite Living Quality of Macao Resident revealed that many Macao citizens (especially those of low qualification) felt their chance to improve their own social-economic status had decreased. This was also one of the reasons for the increased complaints in Macao in recent years.

In fact under the challenge of globalization, many regions and countries faced the same problems. But all these regions and countries tried to solve the problems by enhancing their places' educational quality. The Government of Special Administration Region understood the needs of this and, therefore suggested that the comprehensive and continual improvement of Macao depended on the development of educational quality. So after the reverting to Chinese sovereignty, Macao's investment in educational resources was in an increasing trend. For example the investment amount increased from 18 billion in the year 2000 to 22 billion in 2005 which was 14.9% of the total yearly expenditure of the Government. In that year 12 billion of this 22 billion was invested in the areas of non-tertiary education (The Education and Youth Affairs Bureau, 2006). In the meantime, it continually invited local and overseas academic organizations to carry out related research, including "The opinion and expectation from parents on educational reform, school education and children's grow-up" from The Chinese University of Hong Kong and "Research on the situation of professional development of teaching staff in Macao" carried out by Beijing Normal University. Besides, the Government now and then greatly promoted educational reform to be in line with social development, e.g. offering free education for infants in 1st and 2nd classes in the academic year 2005/2006; cancelling supplementary service fee in academic year 2006/2007 and implementations of free education for 15 years (extend to secondary schools) comprehensively in academic year 2007/2008. Also the policy address in the year 2008 suggested two important plans to aim at – increasing the job entry age of card dealer from 18 to 21; increasing the number and subsidy amount for students entering university and establishing student loan scheme that did not impose any restrictions regarding family income to encourage more students to receive higher education.

In order to promote the reform of the educational system, the Government of Special Administrative Region arranged many consultations according to different related areas of education. For example, the recent implementation on "Important explanation on the structure of teaching staff in private schools (preliminary suggestions)" revealed that Macao Government paid great attention to the development of Macao educational career.

Problems on Macao Education

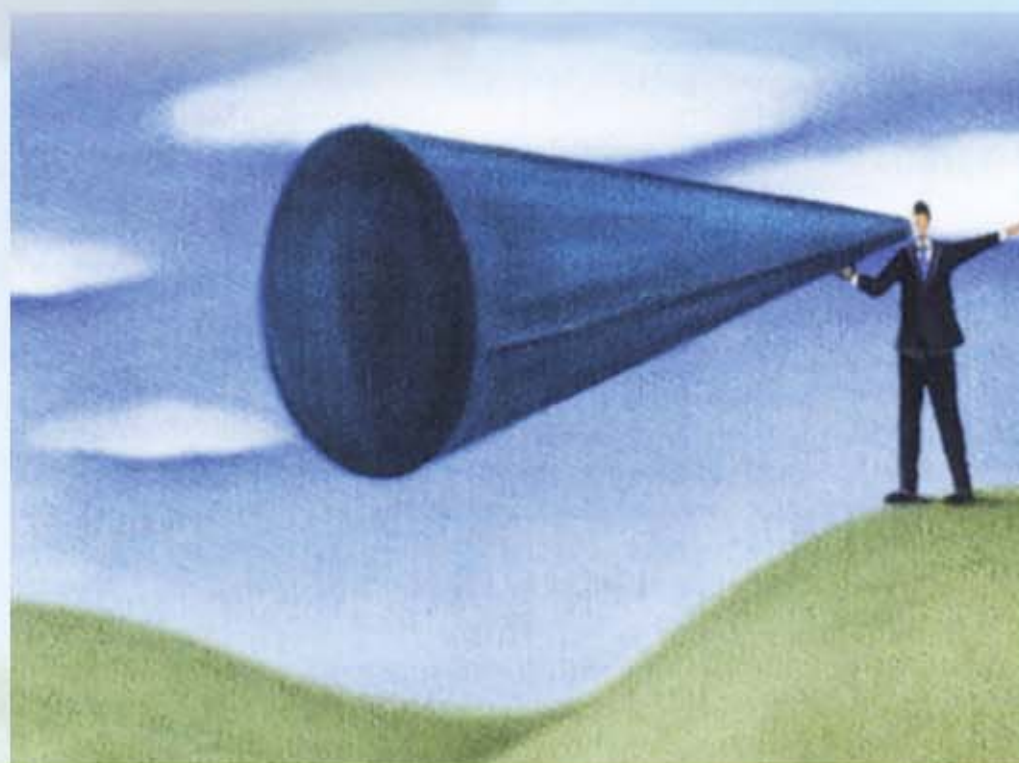
Although the Government was aggressive to increase the expenditure on public education, yet it seemed that it still could not promote the special region's educational development and enhance the educational quality. The phenomenon was reflected through data in details. Between the academic years 2001/2002 and 2004/2005 the percentage of repeated class for Macao secondary school students is 11%. The percentage for completion of secondary school was 66% (The Education and Youth Affairs Bureau, 2006). Also during the six academic years, from 1999/2000 to 2004/2005, the dropout rate of Macao students was

about 4.2% to 5.0%. There was no sign of decrease (The Education and Youth Affairs Bureau, 2006). Of course, there were many reasons leading to the unsatisfactory above indicators. But the public and Government's continually suggestions on educational system reform should be one of the effective ways for improving education besides increasing expenditure. Let us look at the experiences on educational reform of different countries in the world. The point that the professional levels of teacher determine the educational system level was broadly recognized by all places in the world (e.g. China, Hong Kong, Finland and America etc.). In recent years, Macao society developed rapidly and teachers faced problems which were more complicated than before. For example, in a street demonstration last year, an interviewed teacher reflected that he lacked confidence in the future. He also revealed that once a student expressed to him that generally the income earned from gaming industry was much more than that of teacher. Might be this could show that the teacher was discontent with his salary. It was this discontent emotion which affected the whole educational system gradually, e.g. teacher's morale dropped and a high percentage of teacher left the school; in addition, there were more and more demands from parents and job pressure for teachers was ever-increasing (Beijing Normal University, 2006; The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2006). To face up this challenge, many educational scholars and related research organizations suggested teachers to start from professionalism.

Teachers' professionalism

In fact, recently the educational department launched the consultation paper-«the system framework of teaching staff in private schools (preliminary suggestion)». This paper suggested to solicit consultations about teacher professionalism from public, including: 1) to establish "the teaching staff's professional committee" to promote the development of teaching staff's professional system; 2) to plan and unify the salary and benefit of teachers, thus clearly setting up the system for teachers' grading and promotional system, establishing provident fund and revising the weekly class hour upper limit and ensuring health care service for the teaching staff from this system; 3) to raise the admission qualification of teachers by suggesting that a teacher should hold a bachelor degree and related recognized qualification; 4) to add a part on "professional development and training", thus regulating the educational administration bureau to provide conditions and resources for the professional development of teaching staff by subsidizing the schools to carry on collation training, arranging teaching staff to carry on further study on temporary suspension of scholastic activity and further

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study on school leave, and specifying that the present direct allowance for development be changed to allowance for professional development. As a whole, all these suggestions were very identical to the present development trend of educational reform in all places (e.g. Hong Kong, Taiwan and America etc.) in the world (Educational Association of the Republic of China, 2002; Chen Mei Yu, 1996).

Since this article only mentioned about the benefit and professionalism of teachers, this article only discussed the parts on "plan and unify the salary and benefit of teachers" and "to add 'professional development and training'". The article recognized the interactive relationship between the above two and at last proposed some suggestions for reference by related departments.

Plan and unify the salary and benefit of teacher

The writer very much agrees to this principle, because it needs time to develop all professionals. Especially for those who take education as their life-long career, physical salary and benefit cannot be lacked. But there is no detail on how to set up the index (maybe it is related to the nature of consultation papers). Now the mobility rate of teacher is high. According to information shared from some friends in educational field, the reasons can be divided to inside the educational cycle and outside educational cycle. Teachers in educational field point out that most of the secondary and primary schools in Macao are private schools. Teachers are employed on a contract basis which therefore increase the mobility of teachers (especially teachers of low qualification); as for outside the field of teacher, it is reasonable, because the rapid development of Macao requires urgently persons of high qualification. The average qualification of teachers is generally higher than other career fields. They are easily the targets solicited by other career fields. In fact, there are many teachers already moved to other career fields. Therefore, "plan and unify the teacher salary and benefit" can reduce the vicious competition between schools and at the meantime enhance teacher's employment benefits to a competitive level compared with other professional fields.

But there is a part in the consultation paper which the writer does not understand – "Why compare the teacher's benefit with labor?" I believe that most of us agree that the labor benefit is to provide a fundamental working security for general worker, e.g. legally, there is a minimum number of holidays for general worker each year. Unless the Macao Government does not recognize that teacher is a professional career, otherwise, I am afraid this comparison will cause misunderstanding to the public. The writer suggests that the Government refers to the salary and benefit of other professional fields and formulates a constructive salary index for the professional development of teacher. This kind of handling is not new, just like the investigation of salary level for civil servant employed in Hong Kong. It ensures the quality of civil servant and also stabilizes the civil servant system in Hong Kong.

To increase the part "professional development and training"

The writer also agrees very much to this principle. The consultation paper mainly talks about the further study for teacher which may be regarded as a measurement in the system. For example, teachers need to plan for the continual development of their profession whilst educational administration bureau and schools need to provide conditions for teachers. This can enhance the self-recognition of teachers – professionally respected by others, thus encouraging teachers to develop teaching as their life-long career. But do not forget that teachers' working hour is long; workload is heavy. Do all teachers have the chance to participate in this? Perhaps we may consider set up a teacher or teacher's organizational platforms (sharing of knowledge and feelings). Each teacher, replacing school as it used to be, will be a unit of exchange. This can help establish the professional image of teachers, just like The Law Society of Macao, Macao Society of Registered Accountants and The Macao Society of Architects etc. In the meantime, it enhances the exchange of teachers' knowledge; also can be regarded as a part of professional development and training to release the job pressure of teachers and reduce their feeling of fighting alone. Take an example from Hong Kong which has brought in plans and organizations, allowing teachers and subject organizations to exchange their teaching skills; even providing support to teachers in the form of money and encouraging them to bring in new teaching methods. Among these, the writer is familiar with – "Hong Kong Teacher's Centre" and "Hong Kong Education City" (www.hkedcity.net) which are successful educational platforms. Of which, "Hong Kong Teacher's Centre" inspires the professional spirit of teachers and gathers educational related organizations and persons to encourage one another and to set continual life-long learning as their targets. The "Hong Kong Education City" is the biggest one stop profession educational website, encompassing information, resources, interactive associations and internet services. In the meantime it gathers schools, families, government departments, organizations and teaching societies to build a platform for collaborative learning, interactive sharing and creativity boosting (Hong Kong Education City, 2008).

In Macao, the educational reform is a long, long way. The writer hopes that the related governmental departments and related persons can refer to the above suggestions and models to design or suggest some plans more suitable for the situation of Macao to promote the professional developments of teachers.

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