From SET to STELT: Seeking the Meaning of Learning as a Community for Curriculum Development

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This chapter is concerned with how teacher education can respond professionally to the call for educational reform. It reports on a three-year study of curriculum development in preparing student-teachers for the move towards a learning profession, and seeks the meaning of the synergy of teaching and learning through a journey of building relationships for co-learning as a community. An innovation emerged in terms of ‘students-and-teacher evaluation of learning-and-teaching’ (STELT). Amidst the traditional boundaries held in the system of Students’ Evaluation of Teaching (SET), the lived curriculum revealed dissonance between the call for reform and the unchanged system of evaluation. The structural condition of vulnerability for educators and the power from within are visited. The study demonstrated a quest for learning in an institutional structure that holds teachers accountable for both the existing system and the call for reform. The chapter concludes with iteration of challenges and opportunities for learning as a community.

A Professional Response to the Educational Reform Climate
Change is a prominent concern in the education literature. International comparative works (e.g. Darling-Hammond & Cobb 1995; Crossley & Watson 2003; Hershock, Mason & Hawkins 2007) show that broad social changes inevitably demand changes in education systems, including those parts that prepare teachers for the teaching profession. In Hong Kong, the reversion of sovereignty to China in 1997 brought an end to the colonial era. Since then, there has been vibrant public discourse about a series of official documents which brought comprehensive review of systems and blueprints for educational reforms (e.g. Education Department 1999; Curriculum Development Council 2001; Curriculum Development Council 2002). With their frontline responsibilities for students,
teachers in Hong Kong, as elsewhere, are expected to be change agents. The Advisory Committee on Teacher Education & Qualifications recommended a generic Teacher Competencies Framework to improve the professional quality of teachers and to build a learning profession (ACTEQ 2003). Policy makers observed that the intended outcomes of the proposed reforms would critically depend on teachers’ responses to the expectations implied in these documents. Underlying the expected changing roles for the desired reforms was a question concerning teachers’ capacity for professional learning that may have been assumed but was not directly addressed in policy documents. Internationally, the concept of educating teachers for change has been addressed (see e.g. Fullan 1993; O’Hair & Odell 1995; Stigler & Hiebert 1999). Equally, the vision of schools as learning organisations to combat reform failures has been well articulated (see e.g. Fullan 1993; Hargreaves 1994). If teachers are to accomplish a mission in leading changes, they need to play roles that require them to be active not only within but also beyond the classroom. The initial teacher education they receive should prepare them for continual professional learning. In essence, this professional education should open the horizon of student-teachers to enhance their lifelong pursuit as teacher-students.

As a teacher educator within the sector of higher education, I can see parallel in the climate for demanding quality of teaching and learning with the exercises of Teaching and Learning Quality Process Reviews (TLQPRs), first initiated in 1996. The challenge may seem most critical in preparation of the review, since future funding is determined by the collective outcomes. Under the accountability climate, I am concerned with the long-term consequences for genuine educational impact. A primary strategic response, as recommended in an earlier project (Kwo, Moore & Jones 2004, pp.11-14), is about self-challenge on cultivation of exemplary practice in promoting learning. Such exemplary practice does not necessarily mean a showcase for excellence in instruction, but essentially a clear articulation of struggles for improving the quality of teaching and learning and generation of a language of pedagogy for scholarly dialogues. Such a move must take hold of scholarship of teaching and learning. As described by Shulman (2000, p.99), 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. In a professional