

The Liaison Group of Professional Training Programmes for Educational Psychologists in Hong Kong

There are two professional training programmes that prepare educational psychologists in Hong Kong. One is in the University of Hong Kong and the other one is in the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. The two programmes have formed a liaison group. Today I am speaking from the capacity as the spokesperson of this liaison group.

In the last two decades, Hong Kong has suffered from serious shortage of educational psychologists and there is no room for the improvement of the ratio between educational psychologists and schools. Given the fact that many schools are left without any school-based educational psychological services, a school is indeed very blessed if it is only visited twice a month by a school-based educational psychologist. Nevertheless, the serious shortage of educational psychologists has been dramatically resolved in the recent years. This important change is attributed to the concerted effort among different parties in the profession. Of course, some dedicated officials in the Education Bureau have contributed to this concerted effort. In 2007 the Education Bureau invited Professor Peter Farrell from the University of Manchester to conduct a critical review of educational psychology services in Hong Kong. In his report, Professor Farrell pointed out that Hong Kong must solve the problem of serious shortage as soon as possible. In response to this request, the University Grant Council increased the quota of the training programme at the University of Hong Kong from 13 in 2006 to 20 in 2008, and then to 25 in 2012. The quota was doubled within a short period of 6 years. More importantly, the Hong Kong Polytechnic University started a second training programme for Hong Kong in 2009. The quota of this new programme is 15. Currently, the two programmes all together have 40 students. As the training takes two years, the average number of graduates for every year is 20. With this rate, we can produce 100 educational psychologists in 5 years and 200 educational psychologists in 10 years. In addition, there are at least 2 to 3 educational psychologists coming back to Hong Kong after they have received training overseas. These graduates from local and overseas institutes have completely solved the problem of shortage.

As the Education Bureau promised, all public primary and secondary schools will be covered by school-based educational psychology services in 2016/17 school year. Hong Kong has about 569 primary schools and 510 secondary schools. If the current ratio of educational psychologist to school remains to be 1 to 7.5, only 145 educational psychologists will be needed. If the ratio is improved to 1 to 4, an extra of 127 educational psychologists will be needed. With the current capacity of the two training programmes in Hong Kong, this objective can be achieved within 6 or 7 years. The shortage of educational psychologists is no longer the obstacle for the improvement of services. Now the conditions for service improvement are ready. It is simply up to the government to make the right move. According to the recommendation of the National Association of School Psychologists in the United States, the ratio of educational psychologists to students should not be over 1 to 1,000. Although this is the standard of a developed country, many countries with gross

domestic product per capita lower than that of Hong Kong have ratio under 1 to 2,000. Hong Kong is an affluent city. We should have given a fair share to our children.

In fact, school-based educational psychological services are not only needed by primary and secondary schools. In the Hong Kong education system, inclusive education has most problems in preschool years. Currently the Government provides 6,300 places of preschool special education services but the children requiring such services are much more than the quota. In 2013, 7,000 children were waiting for these services. On average the waiting time is from one and half years to three years. I think the parents of children with special needs in the audience are most familiar with this plight. Early identification and intervention are the basic principles in special education. It is a shame that Hong Kong has no school-based educational psychology services in preschool education. It is heartbreaking to see children with special needs miss the most important stage in intervention. If educational psychologists can provide school-based services to children with special needs in preschool, the situations of these children will be much better.

Currently Hong Kong has the right conditions and capacity to improve school-based educational psychology services. On behalf of the professional training programmes in the two universities, I would urge the Government to take this opportunity to improve the service ratio and seriously consider extending school-based educational psychology services to pre school education.