

Paper on Basic Competency Assessment (BCA) & Territory-wide System Assessment (TSA)
In Response to the Public Invitation of
The Panel on Education of the HKSAR Legislative Council
For the Meeting on Monday, 8 May 2017

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1. In my work as a parent education professional and teacher/researcher of parent education at several local universities, I often come into contact with groups and individuals who have an interest in or concern for children's well-being and development. In that context, I at times encounter people who advocate abolishment of the BCA/TSA, apparently without sufficient professional knowledge and/or understanding of the purpose and functions of the BCA/TSA, or perhaps deliberately ignoring such in favour of non-professional considerations. This paper aims to urge the Panel on Education to recognize BCA/TSA as a professional matter that requires professional deliberations and decisions instead of political ones.

My credentials

Aim of paper
2. I believe that the Panel is fully aware of the purpose and functions of the BCA/TSA.

BCA/TSA purpose and functions

 - 2.1 The Education Bureau states on its official website that the assessment "... enables the Government to review education policies and provide focused support for schools. promoting "assessment for learning" providing schools with information that helps teachers identify the overall strengths and weaknesses of students and formulate plans to improve the effectiveness of learning and teaching schools will follow up through various measures, such as adjusting the teaching content, revamping the design of worksheets and assessments, and arranging after-school remedial programmes to cater for learner diversity."

Education Bureau statement
 - 2.2 The Panel's recent paper CB(4)799/16-17(03) for discussion on 10 Apr 2017 also noted that Education Bureau's Coordinating Committee on Basic Competency Assessment & Assessment Literacy "reaffirmed the intent and value of the establishment of TSA, recognised the data provided by school reports helped improve and adapt learning and teaching and the overall report facilitated the formulation of measures to support learning, etc."

BCA Coordinating Committee finding
3. It is difficult to understand why decision-makers with full access to the professional knowledge and judgement of education administrators and practitioners would wish to abolish the BCA/TSA unless they
 - 3.1 no longer wish Government education policies to be reviewed; and/or
 - 3.2 no longer wish to promote assessment for learning; and/or
 - 3.3 no longer wish schools and teachers to identify overall strengths and weaknesses of students; and/or

Implied intention of people who wish to abolish BCA/TSA

- 3.4 no longer wish schools and teachers to formulate plans to improve the effectiveness of learning and teaching; and/or
- 3.5 no longer wish to provide information to help schools improve and adapt learning and teaching; and/or
- 3.6 no longer wish to facilitate the formulation of measures to support learning;

or, they have found better way(s) to achieve the objectives mentioned in Para 3.1 to 3.6 above without the use of the BCA/TSA.

When should BCA/ TSA be abolished?

4. The BCA/TSA is not yet a perfect tool, and has issues such as problematic test items and over-drilling. But test items can be moderated and improved; and over-drilling is a mis-use (or abuse) rather than an intrinsic element of the tool. Such issues should be addressed, and the tool can be improved. It is difficult to understand why knowledgeable, informed and rational decision-makers including the CE-elect as well as some Honourable Councillors would opt to abolish this useful and functioning tool instead of opting to retain and improve it. If any of the advocates already have better systems and methods to help ensure the quality of education provided to our children, they should make these known to practitioners, academics and other professionals in the field, as well as to members of the general public. It would be very irresponsible for decision-makers to abolish a useful and functioning tool before they have found a replacement that can achieve the same purposes and has at least one thing better than what it replaces.

Should and can improve the tool, not abolish it.

If there is already something better, should make known to others.

Irresponsible to abolish before a better replacement is found.

5. On the other hand, it is NOT difficult to understand why some “laymen” might advocate or support the abolishment of BCA/TSA. After all, they have little or no understanding of the intent or value of this tool, have no first-hand knowledge of the good work that the tool has been doing, and might have been swayed or misled by over-claims peddled by people who, for one non-professional reason or another, wish to stop this tool from functioning.

Why some “laymen” support abolishment of BCA/TSA.

6. I have also met parents who sided with advocates of abolishment of the BCA/TSA simply because they wish to get rid of “pressures” for their children. As a veteran parent education worker, I am particularly worried about such parents’ possible over-protection of their children, and the long-term bad effects on those children. Many parents in Hong Kong still lack an understanding of the damaging consequences of over-protection. Over-protection deprives children of the opportunity to develop proper coping strategies in the face of pressures and adversities. Parents need to help their children learn to face healthy pressures, and at the same time make sure that the pressures are indeed healthy. Parent should not simply get rid of pressures for their children. Decision-makers have the responsibility to educate these parents instead of condoning their damaging action. The BCA/TSA issue is a good opportunity for decision-makers to contribute to parent education --- encourage parents to help their children view and treat the BCA/TSA in a healthy way.

View about the “pressure” created by BCA/TSA.

Over-protection has damaging consequences.

Should encourage parents to help their children view BCA/TSA in a healthy way.

7. In connection with the issue of “pressures” on children, I must point out that reliable information available to me seems to indicate that such pressures are not created by the BCA/TSA but by the over-drilling, and that only some schools over-drill their students. I understand that the purpose of the BCA/TSA is to collect data which will accurately reflect students’ actual developmental levels of attainment and competencies and not data which has become contaminated or biased by over-drilling. In that sense, over-drilling can be viewed as a deliberate attempt to undermine the accuracy and usefulness of the BCA/TSA as a reference tool to improve Hong Kong education. In this paper, I do not wish to speculate on the many possible intentions of those who over-drill their students or claim that over-drilling is pervasive and inevitable. Suffice to say that decision-makers should deliberate on how to control or minimize over-drilling rather than abolish the BCA/TSA.
8. I believe it is the responsibility of decision-makers to not only base their professional choices on professional grounds and considerations, but also help “laymen” to understand the rationale behind those choices. In the case of the BCA/TSA, I urge the Panel to retain and improve the tool. I also urge the Panel to communicate its professional principles and deliberations to the general public --- either through channels and mechanisms at the Panel’s disposal, or with the help and collaboration of related organisations and professionals in the field. In this connection, I have already taken an initiative and issued an open letter to some parents. A copy of the letter is attached. The Panel is welcome to distribute that letter to a wider readership or allow the messages therein to be heard by a wider audience.

Pressure on children caused by over-drilling and not by BCA/TSA.

Over-drilling is attempt to undermine BCA/ TSA.

Should control over-drilling rather than abolish BCA

Should base decisions on professional grounds, and help laymen understand

Already issued open letter to some parents -- attached.

Dated : 27 April, 2017.

給元朗家長學校成員的一封信

各位：

大家好！和已認識的成員說聲「久違了」，跟未有機會見過面的成員打個招呼。很高興大家有緣能聯繫在這一元朗家長學校的大家庭。

很懶提筆的我，第一次寫信給大家，因為感到有迫切性和大家談一下「全港性系統評估」(包括以前的「小三TSA」和新推出的「小三BCA」)

取消「小三評估」的聲音已糾纏多時，反對的聲音大到使部份議員政客認為是「主流民意」，並且要求政府「負責任」地不單只要聆聽還要跟隨。但是，評估實在是教育範疇內的事，負責任的政府跟隨的應該是專業知識，不應是政治考慮。

意見歸意見，首要是須弄清楚「小三TSA」或「小三BCA」之類的評估是甚麼一回事。

以我所知，這類評估的用意和功能是收集數據，從而得悉香港學校的兒童，整體來說，在不同階段(如小三、小六、中三、中六)的教育水平達到甚麼程度。這是政府、教育局、辦學團體、個別學校都應該想知道的，因為必須有這類資料，才可能有系統地不斷提升及改善香港的學校教育質素，才可能有系統地協助偏離或墮後的教育服務。

讓我嘗試做幾個比喻，以一些家長熟悉的例子來探討一下在決定「取消」、「擱置」還是「保留」、「優化」時，有哪些事情須要留意的呢？

嬰孩誕生之後，每隔一段日子便要到母嬰健康院檢查身體。目的很容易理解：父母很想知道孩子的發育是否正常；父母很想確保孩子健康成長；若發現成長未如理想，父母便要得到及時和適當的護理。但是，要知道這些，不單止某一個嬰孩必須接受身體檢查，還要靠健康院和其他機構有系統地檢查了很多人，收集了很多數據，才有足夠資料比對嬰孩的現況，才可知道嬰孩成長是否「正常」。嬰孩在檢查時害羞、不開心，父母不忍心嬰孩見醫務人員時有短暫的不安，就不去檢查了，對這名嬰孩好嗎？多幾個嬰孩在檢查時害羞、不開心，有關當局就應擱置有系統地收集全港嬰孩成長的資料？認為嬰孩年幼，不懂事，於是等待長大成人後才檢查身體和收集資料，我們還可以及時處理這些人年幼時未如理想的身心發展嗎？

孩子長大過程中，都應到醫療機構接受多次流感、白喉、破傷風、小兒麻痺等防疫注射。每次都有點兒痛，但現代的注射器針頭都很細小，注射人員手法也極純熟，痛楚是可以忍受的。試想：如果有些醫療機構為了使疫苗快些注入體內，私下改用粗大的注射針，孩子們當然就要抵受不必要的痛楚了。假如醫務處發現真的有醫療機構這樣做，或家長真的擔心自己兒女會受到不必要的痛楚，就應該要求政府下令取消防疫注射計劃嗎？不是只應該要求醫務處禁止任何機構使用粗大注射針嗎？英文有一句成語「**don't throw away the baby with the bathwater**」(不要把嬰兒和洗澡水一起倒掉)。若擔心系統評估會引致過份操練，不是只應要求當局禁止這種操練嗎？為何反而禁止搜集有用的資料呢？誰人會不想有關當局或辦學單位知道我們子女在某個階段達到的水平或程度呢？

提到「操練」，使我想起一種熟悉的情境：不少成年人都會定期接受身體檢查。這類檢查很多時都包括抽血測試膽固醇是「及格」還是「超標」。我多次聽過親友說：「這陣子不吃肥膩的東西，因為下星期要抽血驗膽固醇，驗完再吃。」評估前刻意做這種「小動作」，希望得出較「好」水平的驗身報告，不是自欺欺人嗎？這種不準確的「成績」對自己本人或自己的醫生有用嗎？評估學能前，刻意的操練不是很類似嗎？誰人會想有關當局或辦學單位得不到準確的評估數據呢？

篇幅已經太長，不再提其他比喻了。家長學校的課程，時常提點大家，凡事要作多方面理解、多角度思考、多層次探討。否則，簡單短暫地處理了面前的問題可能引致嚴重深遠的後果。明白系統評估的功能，就不難看到廢除這類評估是「斬腳趾避沙蟲」的做法：為了給予自己孩子短暫的「輕鬆愉快」，就放棄謀求培育自己孩子抗逆能力的機會；為了協助自己孩子避開過份操練和壓力，就放棄收集用作提升全港孩子教育水平的數據；為了可以令到某些學校不用面對自己的不足，就放棄收集需要協助的學校的資料。希望負責培育我們子女的專業人士不會這樣做，也希望家長學校的成員不想他們這樣做。

祝好。

蔡黎悅心
元朗大會堂家長學校委員會顧問
二零一七年四月六日

副本呈：教育局家庭與學校合作事宜委員會湯修齊主席