

## **TUF Special Speakers Series – Summary Note**

**Date: 5<sup>th</sup> July 2011**

**Speaker: Professor Cheng Yin Cheong**

**Objective: Global Education System and Trends**

### **About the Speaker**

Professor Yin Cheong CHENG is the Vice President (Research and Development) and Chair Professor of Leadership and Change, The Hong Kong Institute of Education. Prof. Cheng holds a doctorate from Harvard University. He has had extensive experiences in both education and research as a teacher, vice-principal, consultant, and researcher. He has undertaken a number of research projects on education effectiveness, leadership development, paradigm shift, teacher education, education quality, and school management reform with the support of Competitive Earmarked Research Grants from the Research Grants Council. Professor Cheng has published 20 academic books and over 200 book chapters and journal articles in Australia, Hong Kong, Korea, Mainland, Netherlands, Germany, Slovenia, Israel, Taiwan, Thailand, USA, and UK.

### **Why Education Reform?**

Due to the influence of globalization, many manufacturers have shifted their production plants to low-cost locations. Creating new industries and jobs are of prime importance under the current economic structure. Currently Hong Kong is developing high-value-added industries especially in the financial and service sectors. As such, transformation of institutional education is necessary in response to such rapid social and economic changes.

### **Market-oriented Education and Examination**

The Hong Kong society generally believes in the function of market and keen on creating competition. Attaining academic credentials or professional qualifications is considered a pre-requisite before entering the job market. Such competitive and utilitarian environment gave rise to a pre-dominantly spoon-fed and examination-driven education system in Hong Kong.

The system of examination has its merits. The single standard of examination helps to differentiate winners and losers. In the past, students from poor families entered top secondary schools and universities through getting good results in public examinations. The system provided opportunities for poor students to move upward in the society. Asia countries like China, Taiwan, the South Korea, and Singapore adopted the system of public examination in the past 40-50 years.

Lacking of creativity is the major defeat of examination. The conventional education system is not able to produce creative professionals. Education reform, therefore, is necessary to meet the new challenges posed by our economic and social changes.

## **Challenges of Education Reform**

Asian countries face a series of challenges when undergoing education reform. The core reason is that most governments continued to adopt the traditional ways to achieve new objectives. For example, it is impossible to carry out reform without increasing the budget and downsizing number of students in each class.

## **Education Models in Different Countries**

In Finland, cost on education is much higher. The country maintains small-class teaching and hires top quality teachers. In the South Korea, teachers are generally being highly respected. Salaries of teachers in the South Korea are as high as 140% of the GDP; while the figures are about 90% in Finland, Hong Kong, and Japan. In US, the salary is about 80% of the local GDP. Teachers in Hong Kong are amongst those 18% of students who are qualified to enter universities. Generally speaking, qualities of teachers in Hong Kong are acceptable.

Education philosophy is very different between the Finland and Hong Kong. Hong Kong students are good at exams and are trained to work under stress. However, teachers in Finland put their focus on nurturing students rather than creating competition.

## **The Art of Teaching**

The essence of teaching is to teach the philosophy of life. A teacher should be able to provide positive views, feel the hearts of students, influence students through the use of language and their way of thinking.

Students from poor families rely heavily on teachers. Teachers should work together as a team to change the values of students. Teaching underprivileged students is a very meaningful job. Teachers should perform their tasks with passion and vision.

## **On Mother-tongue Teaching**

The policy of mother-tongue teaching is problematic because it creates class segregation. Under the current system, underprivileged students are more likely to enter Chinese Medium-of-Instruction (CMI) schools, while students from middle-class families go to English Medium-of-Instruction (EMI) schools. Some argues that mother-tongue teaching is beneficial to students. Ironically, results have shown that mass failure of candidates in public examinations is from CMI schools. The government should establish a comprehensive and long-term planning on mother-tongue teaching policy.

*\*Remark: The seminar was conducted in Chinese. The synopsis is summerised by TUF who will be responsible for the accuracy of the content.*