

# Aimless education aims



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IN OCTOBER 1992, the Education Commission issued the draft consultative booklet *School Education in Hongkong: A Statement of Aims*. In September 1993, the "findings" of the draft booklet were published as a statement of government policy.

But because right up until these two events, the Government of Hongkong had shown a remarkable lack of interest in the educational system of the territory, some of the claims made in the booklet bear examination.

For example, in the booklet, the Education Commission concludes that the aims reflect the views of a comprehensive section of the

Hongkong population. However, it does not explain the methodology by which these views were obtained nor how it was decided to adopt a particular course of action.

And comparing the published version with the draft, we find that apart from the polishing of a few phrases and changes in the manner of presentation, there are few if any changes from the text in the original draft.

**Nationalism and culture:** Also, there has been much criticism of the proposals contained in the booklet, both by concerned people and academics, but these do not seem to figure in the policymaking process. Nor has the booklet touched on the national or cultural aspirations of Hongkong people. Many people have said that the Hongkong education system has always been aimless; following in the footsteps of that the British. In fact, it was not until 1977 that the British Government came up with some kind of directive for its own schools.

During the run-up to 1997, introducing educational standards that do not pay due regard to cultural and national aims cannot be regarded as being part of a comprehensive educational package.

Education has to serve two purposes. First, there are the established and visible aims. Second, there are the hidden and not so obvious aims which are not written down.

As a colonial society, the Hongkong authorities would have been embarrassed to blatantly declare that the education system should serve their political purpose. Hence, the government had never attempted to set up comprehensive educational standards. Instead, it allowed education to develop along supply-and-demand lines with the government establishing what the demand should be. The administration can also mould the

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schools through legislation which gives the director of education overriding powers to control the direction of local education.

**Two categories:** In most foreign countries, education falls into two categories. First: it is society-oriented — meaning that education should develop to cater for the needs of society. *Xue Ji*, one of the Confu-

cian classics, states that education is a must for the reform of society. In the language of sociology, education aims at performing a process of socialisation of the young.

Second: individual development is given top priority and is known as the school of individual orientation. Some educators state that education should aim at developing the various talents and skills of individuals in a natural and balanced way. With the exception of enhancing individual fulfilment, there is no specific aim for education.

Usually, when a nation formulates its educational policies, the elements of both these opposing schools of thought are considered and adopted. This is in order to strike a balance between two important directions but not choosing one over the other.

Understanding civic duties is equally important in both East and West. For instance, the British proposals on aims of education announced in 1977 defined one of the aims as helping students understand how the nation achieves and maintains the living standards of its citizens.

But when one examines the local education scenario, there is nothing about developing a national awareness or identifying with the nation. Only one clause, Aim (12), is apparently relevant to social awareness. Please note that it is just social awareness, not national awareness.

Entitled: *Aim (12) Social, Political and Civic Awareness*, the relevant sentence reads: "Schools should help students to become aware of Hongkong as a society; to develop a sense of civic duty, responsibility to the family and service to the community; and to exercise tolerance in interacting with others."

Admittedly, these are worthy aims, but such equally valued aims as recognition of and identification with the nation are not included. In short, the stated aims in the booklet are Hongkong-biased.

When the territory reunites with China as a Special Administrative Region, under the principles of "One country, two systems," it will be quite inappropriate to lose the spirit of "one country."

The young of Hongkong are considered a rootless generation who have a common characteristic — a lack of a national identity. As 1997 approaches, it is time to actively introduce into the educational system a sense of nationalism which should have three main directions: recognition, emotional attachment, and behavioural acceptance. It is hoped that all students will learn to be proud of their nation's treasured traditions and the glorious history of China. W

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