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**Praxis of sustainable teacher professional development in gifted education: Experiences from Hong Kong**

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**ABSTRACT:**

School-based gifted education has been advocated in Hong Kong since 2000. Yet, there are not many schools that practise school-based gifted enrichment in the regular classrooms. To provide such enrichment, teachers have to understand the learning needs of all students, including the gifted, before immersing elements of gifted education into learning and implementing differentiated education to address the diverse learning needs of students in the class. Thus, teachers need to re-examine their current teaching practice and enhance their professional knowledge and skills in curriculum adaptation, differentiated instruction and assessment.

With funding from The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust, a group of gifted education specialists from the Chinese University of Hong Kong started to provide professional training and on-site support for teachers of 20 primary and secondary schools joining the **Jockey Club "Giftedness Into Flourishing Talents" Project** (Project GIFT) to try out school-based talent development and gifted education in selected subjects in 2017. Synthesizing the experiences of teacher professional development from these schools, this paper aims to draw out the praxis of sustainable teacher development in the implementation of school-based talent development and gifted education. It should be noted here that the authors, as gifted education specialists, learnt about these experiences through providing training and support to the teachers and schools.

Need analysis through questionnaire, school visit and in-class observation were first conducted to understand the challenges and difficulties that teachers faced with during their daily teaching and facilitating of students' learning. Several reasons for the limited adoption of differentiated education in regular classrooms were identified. It was found that some teachers lacked the subject content knowledge essential for constructing extended or challenging tasks for high ability/gifted students, while some did not have sufficient skills to manage differentiated instructional activities and assessment within a mixed-ability class. Moreover, teachers tended to strictly follow the teaching and learning activities provided in the school textbooks. It prevented them from incorporating theoretical-oriented knowledge of gifted education into their teaching practice. Besides, due to the pressure caused by high-stake tests, many schools required teachers to follow the school curriculum and prescribe student assignments accordingly. Therefore, very little room was left for teachers to bring in enriched learning materials and to provide appropriate, extra learning opportunities for students. Because of the same reason, teachers were less likely to use assignments as a formative assessment to scaffold students' learning.

Recognizing these difficulties confronted by frontline teachers in their pedagogical practice, gifted education specialists of Project GIFT were clearly aware of the necessity of tailored training and on-site support programs to meet the challenges and needs of teachers in each individual school. Therefore, hands-on guidance including collaborative lesson planning and post-lesson discussion, especially in terms of designing learning activities with appropriate teaching and learning approaches to cater for students' diverse strengths and needs, was included as an essential part of the training and on-site support programs provided for teachers. In addition to specific skills in implementing differentiated instruction, our programs also emphasized cultivating teachers' positive attitudes towards gifted

education, and helped them understand gifted education as an educational provision not only serving the gifted but also benefiting all students from the perspectives of multiple intelligences and talent development.

More active participation and greater improvement in learning among the students, particularly those less-able, less-engaged and the gifted, through the implementation of school-based gifted education provision strengthened teachers' belief and further motivated them in adopting differentiated education to cater for diverse learning needs of students. Witnessing students' improvement, the enhanced belief and attitudes, and positive teaching experiences became enduring motivation, and encouraged teachers to fill gaps in both knowledge and strategy in relation to practising school-based gifted education on their own.

In summary, sustainable teacher professional development in gifted education does require the continuous advancement of teachers' professional knowledge and skills, the building of their positive attitudes, the impacts on students' learning of practicing the acquired knowledge and skills, as well as recognition and appropriate support within and outside the schools.

**KEYWORDS:**

Differentiation; Hong Kong; Jockey Club "Giftedness Into Flourishing Talents" Project; school-based gifted education; sustainable teacher professional development; talent development



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