Higher Education and Teacher Preparation in Japan and Hong Kong

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<Abstract>

This paper compares the development and placement of teacher education within the tertiary sectors of Japan and Hong Kong. Historically both places initiated formal teacher education separate from university training as part of binary systems, and later moved teacher training to the university sector. Here Hong Kong lags behind Japan, having only recently moved towards creating an all-graduate, all-trained teaching force. Both places retain mono-technical teacher training institutions along side teacher training within comprehensive universities. Both societies are involved in major educational and curriculum reforms in order to respond to both the economic challenges of globalization, and social ills attributed in part to the failure of their educational systems. These reforms are closely linked to the quality (knowledge, skills and attitudes) of teachers. In this regard both Japan and Hong Kong have instituted teacher education reforms. At the same time, demographic realities have significantly lowered the demand for teachers. This has led both governments to try to reduce the size of publicly supported teacher education programs, primarily through pressure for consolidation of existing programs. Research on mergers indicates that these processes are more costly than usually expected, and may not result in the economy and efficiency that often drives the process to begin with. This paper concludes that it is important to initiate merger processes with care, and not to sacrifice other important goals (such as innovative approaches to the production of high quality teachers) in the course of consolidation.

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Worldwide there is little debate over the need for a high quality teaching force. Darling-Hammond and Cobb (1995) report that within APEC, members see the professional preparation and development of "quality teachers" as a major aim for teacher education. These quality teachers are seen as having some combination of the following attributes: pedagogical content; subject area knowledge; skills and attitudes for effective teaching; understanding of human growth and child development; effective communication skills; a strong sense of ethics; and a capacity for lifelong learning (Darling-Hammond & Cobb, 1995, p. 4). Herein lies the significance of a trained teaching profession. Abundant research is now available to confirm what anecdotal evidence has suggested was true all along, namely that good teaching is the single most important element in determining student achievement (Grosso de Leon, 2001). A comprehensive review of research in the U.S. indicates that teachers' knowledge, skills, and preparation matter for student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2000). It would thus seem to go without saying that teachers should be among the most knowledgeable and skilled in a society, and that they should have more education (in most cases a first degree at minimum) than is the mode within their society. The National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) in the U.S. suggests that four dimensions go into the training of competent teachers:

1) *general studies* – the study of subjects and ideas to be of value to all persons;
2) *content studies* – the study of the content in the academic area in which one plans to teach and how to teach that content;
3) *professional/pedagogical studies* – the study of what teachers should know about teaching and learning; and
4) *integrative studies* – the clinical dimension of study, putting together what one has learned in the real world of the classroom on and off campus. (Cruickshank, 1996, p. 4)

Based on this list, it would also seem apparent that teaching is a profession that requires types of knowledge and skills that cannot be totally acquired on the job, and that the lack of pre-service education and train-

ing can put students at risk.

While acknowledging the continued existence of some recalcitrant critics of the professional training teachers, the goal of a fully trained professional teaching force is now almost universally embraced. At the same time there has been and continues to be considerable debate about how a trained profession should best be achieved. In a recent summary of teacher education practices in APEC countries (Cobb, 1999), three general approaches were identified:

1) Sub-degree certificate or diploma programs in normal colleges, normal schools, and colleges of education established for the purpose of training teachers. These programs are usually for elementary teachers and emphasize pedagogical preparation more than subject area preparation in programs that are generally 2-4 years in length.
2) Bachelor's degree programs, usually 3-4 years in length, housed at general, multipurpose universities, with greater emphasis on subject matter preparation, and relatively less on pedagogy.
3) Master's degree and/or 5th year programs of one or two years' duration designed for graduates with a bachelor's degree who receive a master's degree or postgraduate diploma.

1. The Present Study

This paper reports some of the findings from a comparative study of the development and placement of teacher education within Hong Kong and Japan. Despite the obvious difference of size between Hong Kong and Japan (a population of 7 million versus a population of 127 million), there are interesting similarities. Of course, both Hong Kong and Japan share similar influences derived from Chinese, and in particular, Confucian historical traditions. These influences include placing a high value on education and educational achievement. They also share some significant contemporary trends. First, both places are experiencing

demographic changes, characterized by low fertility rates and an ageing population, that directly affect the demand for teachers. Current estimates indicate that Hong Kong now has the lowest birthrate in the world (<1.0), while Japan's is among the lowest at about 1.4. Second, both places are experiencing economic difficulties characterized by the bursting of economic bubbles, reduced property values, deflation, and record unemployment rates (>5% in Japan and >7% in Hong Kong.). This economic situation has, in turn, led to increasing fiscal deficits as the government revenues are far below government expenditures. Third, in recent years both Hong and Japan have launched major educational reforms designed to respond to the perceived failures of their educational systems and to make highly rigid and competitive educational systems more open, flexible, adaptable, and "humanized." These reforms include significant changes both to school curricula and to the systems of preparing teachers.

2. Teacher Education in Hong Kong and Japan: A Brief Review

The development of higher education and the incorporation of teacher education into a university system came rather late in Hong Kong. For most of the British colonial period (1841-1997), higher education in Hong Kong is best described as small and elitist, perhaps consistent with the limited educational goals of a colonial regime. From the establishment of Hong Kong University by the British colonial authorities in 1910 until 1963 there was only one university, and only two until 1988. In the run-up of the return of Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty in 1997, this number was expanded to eight. Prior to the 1980s places were provided for only about 2% of the age cohort to attend university, while today it is 18%. It is also conservatively estimated that another 10% of the age group goes overseas for higher education.

As was the case in the development of higher education, the field of teacher education in Hong Kong got a rather late start. This parallels a comparatively slow expansion of elementary and secondary education

until Hong Kong had begun a period of rapid and dramatic economic growth in the 1960s and 1970s. Hong Kong implemented six-year compulsory primary education only in 1971 and nine-year compulsory education in 1978. Although due credit must be given to the government for successfully meeting the challenge of expanding the infrastructure of education to implement these policies, the expansion was not matched by concerns for quality. For too long the curriculum, based on outdated UK models combined with some local elements, was designed for a highly select and elite student body consistent with a much smaller and selective system.

Despite these shortcomings the government did dramatically increase access to schooling in the 1980s. Expansion of the compulsory educational system in turn created a need for more teachers. In order to meet this increased demand for teachers, over the last 30 years Hong Kong has been involved in a struggle first to expand and more recently to upgrade teacher preparation. Cooke (2000) has provided us with a comprehensive review of this often painfully slow process. In 1939 Hong Kong got its first teacher training college, but it was not degree granting. This provision gradually expanded to five sub-degree teachers colleges that produced most of Hong Kong's primary teachers and about one-third of all secondary teachers in two or three year courses. In 1994 these five teacher training colleges were combined into a single tertiary institution, the Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIEd), with the purpose of upgrading teacher education. Currently, the Institute is a monotechnical institution devoted to teacher training. Its closest equivalent in Japan would be a national university of education. In addition, over time the Hong Kong University, Chinese University and what later became Baptist University and Open University developed faculties of education that provide a variety of teacher training programs at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

In 1997 in his first official speech, Mr. Tung Chee Hwa, the incoming Chief Executive of the newly installed post-colonial Special Administrative Region government, stated that one of his goals was the eventual

creation of an all-graduate and all-trained teaching profession. Six years later the SAR government has not achieved this goal, and at times seems to have drifted away from this policy by allowing schools to hire untrained graduates. According to government figures, currently 9.2% of primary teachers and 13.4% of secondary teachers are still untrained. Moreover, while the number of graduate teachers has risen in recent years because of the provision of part-time degree courses for in-service teachers, in 2001 only 47% of primary teachers had bachelor's degrees, while the comparable figure for secondary teachers was 88%.

In 2003 Hong Kong's Advisory Committee on Teacher Education and Qualifications (ACTEQ), provided a set of more specific targets for government policy on teacher training. The chairman reported that his committee and the government have arrived at a consensus to set up the following professional standards for entering the teacher profession in five years:

a. New teachers to be both graduate and trained (except in some subjects like English where this is difficult to achieve).
b. One-two years of internship before being registered as a teacher and,
c. Continuing professional development for all teachers ("Five years from now," 2003).

At the same time as these policy directives for teacher education are being considered and/or implemented, the government has launched a wide-ranging and ambitious set of reforms to improve the quality of schooling with the rationale of improving the future competitiveness of Hong Kong (Education Commission, 2000). In very brief terms, these curriculum reforms include a major effort to weaken the boundaries of traditional school subjects and to reorganize the curriculum around eight Key Learning Areas (KLAs) consisting of overarching themes, issues, ideas and values. According to Elliott and Morris (2001), for successful implementation these reforms will require parallel reconstruction of

teacher education. Yet, the issues of how and where these teachers will be trained are still matters of some debate. I will return to this issue later, but let us take a brief look at teacher education in Japan.

With a long established international reputation for producing excellent teachers, Japan is often looked to as a model of educational practice. With reference to trained and degree graduate teachers, the situation in Japan is more advanced than that in Hong Kong. Nearly all teachers in Japan are trained, though exceptions are allowed in certain special cases. Though graduates of junior colleges can still receive teacher qualifications, 90% of Japanese teachers now have bachelor's degrees (compared to 19% in 1956). The development and upgrading of teacher education in Japan after World War II was initially shaped by the educational vision of the occupation government. Prior to World War II, in Japan teacher education was separate from the comprehensive universities, i.e., part of a binary system of normal schools that was for the most part derived from French and German models. An 1872 Meiji decree established a system of teacher training, and from this time on a normal school was provided for elementary teacher training in each prefecture. In certain districts, Higher Normal Schools were also established; these focused mainly on the training of middle school teachers (Okuya, 1989).

Early in the Occupation period the U.S. Educational Mission recommended that the teacher training curriculum should be composed of three areas: general education, professional education, and specialist education. It also recommended that normal schools should be reconstituted as four-year universities of teacher training, and that teacher training should also be provided at comprehensive universities (*Report of the United States Education Mission to Japan*, 1946). In addition, in large part to rectify abuses that occurred in the prewar system, the U.S. occupation government introduced an open system of teacher education that put heavy emphasis on liberal arts education to support Japan's re-emerging democratic system.

Under the open system policy, Japan created multiple types of teacher training institutions. By 1989, 84% of all national, public and private universities were approved to provide teacher training (Okuya, 1989). Alongside universities and colleges with teacher education programs housed either in faculties of education or within subject departments, Japan retains certain university-level mono-technical institutions for teacher training (universities of education). As mentioned above some two-year colleges and some technical institutions still provide teacher training, but 90% of teachers are degree holders. This percentage is expected to increase in Japan's competitive job market for teachers. The open system helped Japan to meet the demand for teachers, created in large part by the expansion of secondary education. Enrollment of middle school graduates in high school increased from 57.7% in 1960 to 94% in 1979, while high school graduates' entry rates into college rose from 10.3 to 37.4% in the same period (Shimahara, 2002, p.40).

The rapid expansion of teacher education opportunities in Japan, not surprisingly, produced its own problems and critics. There was a perceived lowering of certification standards, and a noticeable trend on the part of students to acquire, as a formality, the minimum number of credits required for a teaching qualification, simply as an option for facing the labor market. At the same time many providers of teacher training set only the minimum standards required by the government, including a very short period of teaching practice (2-4 weeks) and professional preparation that was training in name only.

By the 1980s criticism of teacher education was exacerbated by a series of social conditions connected to young people and schools that shocked and continue to hold the Japanese public's attention (Shimahara, 2002). These include student suicide, bullying and school violence, extended truancy and school absenteeism (sometimes referred to as school refusal or school phobia), and *gakyu hokai*, a popular journalistic term for classroom chaos or rebellion. Against this background the government under Prime Minister Nakasone undertook a major restructuring initiative in the middle of 1980s, which included the establishment of the National

Council on Educational Reform (NCER). Reformers pointed to teachers as a major part of the problem, and what the Japanese call *shishitsu*, the quality of teachers, became a central issue in the reform campaign. This led to several waves of teacher education reforms in the 1980s and 1990s that have been well documented elsewhere (see e.g., Shimahara, 2002; Sato and Asunama, 2000; Takakura & Ono, 2002; Moriyoshi, 1999; Kobayashi, Hawley, & Hawley, 1993). These reforms can be divided into four basic areas: enhanced course requirements, a hierarchical certificate system, strengthening of practical competence, and expansion of in-service training programs (Sato & Asanuma, 2000).

Unfortunately perhaps, the implementation of teaching training reforms coincided with a dramatic drop in opportunities for entry into the teaching profession that began about one decade ago. In the mid-1990s roughly 25% of teacher education graduates came from universities of education, 55% from general universities, 15% from junior colleges, and 5% from graduate schools (Lopez Tinajero, 1998, p. 335). Graduates who obtain teaching qualifications at universities or colleges apply through their institutions or individually to prefectural boards of education for the issuance of teaching certificates, which are valid nationwide and for life. But these teaching certificates are no guarantee of employment as teachers. Graduates who are certified and want to become teachers must take the prefectural recruitment examinations. The results of the examination are only honored in one prefecture (not transferable), and are valid for one year.

Whatever training course teacher education candidates now pursue, the stark reality is that not many get teaching jobs in Japan. The number of new teaching posts declined from 33,615 in 1989 to 14,178 in 1998. This represented an overall decline of 57% in the demand for teachers, and as much as 67% in the case of elementary teachers. In 1998, for example, there were 154,716 candidates who took the exams for teaching jobs. Of these candidates, only 18,529 were successful (11.9%) in passing the examination, and 14,178 (9.1%) eventually obtained teaching posts.

The ratio of successful candidates to teaching job seekers went from 1:4 in 1990 to nearly 1:11 in 1998. (For educational statistics, see Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology website, http://www.mext.go.jp/english/statist/index.htm). Even the 48 national faculties of education (excluding private universities) placed only 12% of their graduates in full-time teaching, while 22% obtained part-time posts. It should be also noted that the competition for teaching jobs varies considerably depending on the level of school and the subject, and on geographical location. In 1998 the overall ratio of successful candidates to applicants ranged from 1:4.8 in Kawasaki City and Ehime, to 1:17.6 in Oita (http:book.jiji.com). In any case, the overall situation of the low ratio of employment to training in Japan has led the government to propose a dramatic reduction in the number of publicly supported teacher training programs, a policy that will be discussed in the next section.

3. Teacher Education in Hong Kong and Japan: The Demographic Imperative

Despite the obvious differences in history and scope between Hong Kong and Japan, the above review does indicate some commonalities in the development of teacher education. Both systems have undergone tremendous expansion in periods of economic growth and high demand for teachers, and then struggled to match expansion with improved quality and appropriate training. The public in both societies are involved in unprecedented criticism of the education systems and teachers, and their perceived failures often receive sensational treatment in the press. While both societies still hold teachers in relatively high esteem compared to their counterparts in other parts of the world, the general raising of educational levels among the general population has closed the distance in educational achievement between teachers and parents. Thus, it appears that the community is less willing to attribute to teachers the power and authority they once had. At the same time because of the reduced opportunities for social mobility due to economic slowdowns, education systems in both places are being called to task for pro-

ducing non-performing graduates (though by international standards levels of achievement are still quite high in fields like math and science). The education systems and teachers are blamed for not adequately coping with the growing social problems of youth, such as youth suicide. In both places reforms have been put in place both to reform elementary and secondary education and to upgrade the training of teachers.

However, these reforms are at risk in both Hong Kong and Japan. The underlying reality affecting both systems of education is demographic, i.e., that in both Hong Kong and Japan, there will be fewer kindergarten, primary and secondary students for the foreseeable future. Without a change in the teaching hours or reduced class size, the demand for teachers will decrease. In Japan lower student numbers has resulted in some dramatic reductions in class size, as much as half in some cases from the normal classes of 35-40 students in junior and senior high schools. Even with these adjustments the supply greatly outstrips the demand for teachers. As we have seen this situation has already occurred in Japan, and is beginning to happen in Hong Kong.

Another commonality is that in both places, despite the increasing difficulty of getting a teaching job, the relatively secure and high pay of teaching continue to attract applicants in larger numbers than the systems can absorb. In Japan since 1974 teachers have received a salary 25 percent higher than those of civil servants. While not comparable to this situation, the initial teaching salaries of Hong Kong teachers are considerably more than, and in some cases almost double, the salary that the average new university graduate in the social sciences can expect. Also, a relatively high proportion of new teacher education graduates in Hong Kong are still being employed as teachers. A Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIEd) survey of its Bachelors of Education graduates in 2001 indicated that 91.8% had secured full-time jobs; in 2002 this figure appears to be about the same. As enviable as these employment figures might be to Japan, it is anticipated that they cannot be maintained. Though the situation of over-supply is not expected to reach the severe

proportion as in Japan, more students than in the past will find it difficult to find a teaching post. In sum, as the number of students in primary and secondary education decline, the issue then becomes how does one best accomplish a reduction in the number of places for the training of teachers either through downsizing and/or reallocation of program numbers to areas of continuing need.

Here Hong Kong and Japan appear to diverge. Because the government fixes the number of university places for students in Hong Kong, the numbers can be realigned by the University Grants Committee by reallocation of first year first degree and postgraduate admissions in line with anticipated needs of teachers in the planning for the future. The government has already initiated a process of moving the number of teacher education students away from areas and subjects where there is an oversupply to subjects where this is still high demand, such as English. It is anticipated that there will be a gradual overall reduction of the numbers being trained as teachers. In Japan's "open system," because there are so many private providers of teacher education, the reduction in numbers cannot be done with such directness, and the divergence between demand and supply is much greater.

In Japan logic suggests the need for a dramatic reduction in and/or consolidation of teacher training programs, and government policy makers have recognized and encouraged this approach. Of 48 national universities of education 32 have teacher training programs for 200 students or less. In 2001 the government announced that it was officially ending the policy of one teacher training provider in each prefecture, and a Ministry of Education panel stated that the overall number of public teacher education should be cut to less than half the current number ("Too many teacher training colleges," 2001). However, to date there has been little action to implement this policy. For one thing the history of Japan's tertiary institutions, including universities and faculties of education, is much longer and more geographically based than would be the comparable case in Hong Kong. The policy of training teachers for each

prefecture for local schools is deeply rooted, and there is strong resistance to closing such institutions. Some private universities and two-year colleges have dropped their teacher training programs, but as we have seen, programs continue to produce significantly more potential teachers than the available teaching posts.

Despite resistance from teacher education providers, the handwriting is on the wall. Undoubtedly there will be some reduction in the number of places in teacher training programs in both Hong Kong and Japan. In Japan the Ministry of Education has proposed a reduction in teacher education places through institutional consolidation or mergers. It seems that the number of teacher education providers will decline, though the time frame is unclear. So far the Ministry of Education has encouraged and recommended reduction through consolidation or merger of existing programs without forcing it. As the government's fiscal difficulties mount, however, the pressure for reduction in and consolidation of teacher training programs is likely to grow. Though the problem of low demand for teachers has been in existence for more than ten years, the government's inability to effectuate change seems to mirror its ineffectiveness in resolving Japan's banking crisis, but unfortunately, like the banking crisis, it won't simply go away. In Hong Kong, where there is more direct leverage over university admissions, a reduction in teacher education graduates will most probably be accomplished by reducing student admissions in areas where over-supply of teachers is predicted, while shifting some numbers (though not as many) to areas of need (e.g., English teachers). However, even in Hong Kong there is pressure for institutional consolidation, and in the following section I discuss the proposed patterns for implementing institutional consolidation in each place.

4. The Growing Movement for Consolidation of Teacher Education Programs

Turning first to the Japan case, I would like to cite five different examples of proposed patterns of consolidation of teacher education pro-

grams involving national universities of education and faculties of education. Here I draw primarily on face-to-face interviews with or written submissions from university administrators and professors. In the first example, and a well-publicized one, three neighboring prefectural level institutions in areas of low population density with small student bodies have been urged to merge by the Ministry of Education, but so far local resistance has prevented this from happening. The resistance, I was told, was for at least two reasons. First, there is a strong preference to have local institutions train teachers from the local area to teach in their communities. Secondly, if any of the institutions were to in fact close, it could have major economic repercussions in their host communities. In a second example, a national university of education with declining enrolment proposed a merger with four other teacher education providers in geographic proximity. The other institutions did not regard this initiative favorably, fearing loss of autonomy. So to date no merger agreement has been reached. However, one university president reported that there has been a temporary respite in government pressure for mergers. Since the government launched its plan to turn national universities into independent administrative institutions (incorporation) in the next two years, Ministry attention has been drawn away from the merger issue, and seems to be on hold at least until 2004.

In the third case, it was reported that another national university of education in a major urban center was urged to consider consolidation with a number of professional schools outside the field of education that were geographically proximate. (Japan has other mono-technical professional training institutions besides teacher education in areas like law, economics, and engineering.) This is still under discussion, but I was told that it appears unlikely. In a fourth case, a prefectural level university of education approached the nearby and prestigious national university about a merger. I was told two conflicting versions of the outcome of this initiative. Initially, I was told that the offer had been rebuffed by the prestigious university, but a later informant, highly placed in the national university, told me it was still under discussion. Upon reflection both

might be true in a Japanese context. Though not enthusiastic about such a merger, it might be politic for the national university not to break off discussions, and certainly not to state so publicly.

The fifth Japan example is not strictly a case of merger or consolidation, but rather one of redefinition or refocusing of the institutional mission to accommodate the changing environment. In this case, a national university of education already consisted of five campuses and felt no merger pressure. The university president said that his challenge was rather to seek consolidated and efficient governance among campuses that prior to 1966 had been separate. For example, each campus still maintained its own admissions system. Perhaps of more interest here is the fact that in order to maintain its enrollment in the face of the declining need for teachers, this university of education now offers five education degrees not specifically linked to teacher certification: lifelong education, art and culture (i.e., liberal arts), global education, regional and environmental education, and information and social education. I found a similar list at another national university of education, with one additional program, human welfare education.

This expansion of these universities' mission to areas of education beyond traditional teacher education to an expanded vision of education provision very closely mirrors the type of "university of education" that Hayhoe advocates as a vehicle both to upgrade teacher education and to meet the needs of the knowledge society in new ways. In her vision, (a university of education)

> provides an environment supportive to teacher formation as a primary goal, and makes it possible to guarantee a supply of teachers. It also makes possible the development of fields such as adult education, the training of trainers, lifelong learning, and profession-specific education (Hayhoe, 2002, p. 17).

Hayhoe, in fact, argues that this type of "university of education" would be the most culturally relevant and preferred path of development for

the existing Hong Kong Institute of Education. In other words, the Institute would redefine its mission into a broader notion of educational provision beyond teacher training to meet the changing educational needs of the society in many sectors. However desirable, this preferred scenario seems to now be unlikely in the Hong Kong context. In Hong Kong the same trend of declining numbers of young children entering school has led not only to a push for reduction of teacher training places, but even to a questioning of the place of teacher education with the university system. The debate has been whether teacher education is better placed in terms of quality within a comprehensive university rather than in a mono-technical tertiary institution like the Institute of Education. Because the comprehensive universities within Hong Kong have a stronger "brand name" than the eight-year old Institute of Education, it is not even so much a matter of debate but rather of reliance on strongly held perceptions of institutional power and prestige that predate the existence of the Institute.

In contrast, in my interviews and documentary research in Japan, the issue of consolidation or merger was never linked to the quality issue, but only to the issue of declining student numbers. There was no mention of doing away with the universities of education as mono-technical institutions, though I have mentioned that in Japan some universities of education have successfully expanded their scope beyond teacher training. Nor was there mention in Japan of doing away with the open system in which there are multiple tracks to teacher preparation that can draw on different strengths and meet different needs. The role of the universities of education as one track to teacher preparation seemed unchallenged, perhaps due to their long history with roots going back to the Meiji period. Though the government may want fewer providers of teacher education, it continues to publicly support an open and mixed system of teacher education providers, including both universities of education and faculties of education within comprehensive universities.

Such is not the case in Hong Kong, where the Hong Kong Institute of

Education, a mono-technical degree level and postgraduate diploma teacher training institution, was created out of a consolidation of five sub-degree teachers' colleges just eight years ago, and its state of the art campus opened only six years ago. As the major provider of training for early childhood, primary, and some secondary subject teachers in Hong Kong within a single institution, it has some 8,500 full and part-time students in all, or about 5,200 full-time equivalent students. Thus, from a Japanese perspective, Hong Kong has achieved a remarkable economy of scale in teacher training (though it has distinct advantages in this regard related to its smaller size and concentration of population).

Still, in the face of large and growing deficits and the changing demographics, the Hong Kong government is seeking ways to cut the costs of higher education. Based on emerging government policy, the very existence of the Institute as an independent institution is at risk, and some time in the next few years, it is likely to be merged with a comprehensive university. Recently with pressure from the new Secretary of Education and Manpower, the pressure for the Institute to merge with another university has increased. The government policy appears to be to downsize the number of universities overall, as all universities have been asked to consider finding "partners."

Various rationales have been provided for such mergers, including the vision of creating one or more world-class mega-universities by combining smaller institutions. Yet, there has also been a not so subtle sub-text that the quality of teacher training is better achieved at a comprehensive university than at a mono-technical institution like the Institute of Education. This is based more on common perceptions (or misperceptions) than any data because the Institute has actually had little chance to prove the worth of its degree graduates who have only recently begun to enter the teaching force in significant but increasing numbers. In any case, as a very new institution, the Institute's prestige is quite low compared to the older and more established universities that have large and more vocal alumni. This makes it more vulnerable to the

merger pressure than other tertiary institutions in Hong Kong. Despite the rhetoric of quality, the real impetus behind the merger movement in Hong Kong is more about lowering costs and reducing government deficits than about improving teacher education.

5. Lessons from Mergers

While mergers or program consolidation may thus appeal to governments as a solution to economic and fiscal woes and declining enrollments, there are considerable obstacles involved. Often seen as a cost-saving measure, institutional mergers in places like the UK and Australia have shown little cost-saving, and in the short-run often result in initially higher costs connected to the process of unifying systems and compensating staff made redundant. According to Fielder and Markham (1997), experience in the merger of 30 institutions in the UK indicates that the rationale behind any merger should be strategic and academic and not predicated on the prospect of cost savings. They further recommend three principles for the merger process

- Allow enough time for the merger process. Time is necessary for both thorough evaluations of the situation and to build trust and good relationships between the institutions
- Do not underestimate the costs and time involved in such areas as integration of administrative systems and procedures and their associated technology
- Prepare for the massive demands that will be made on management before, during and after the merger.

In a Norwegian case study, Skodvin and Stensaker (1998) reiterate that merging costs more money and time than is usually planned for because of the development costs associated with establishing new forms of collaboration. More importantly they also argue that in the current economic climate the search for economy and efficiency overshadows the often stated policy objectives of increased collaboration and innovation through mergers. In particular, the opportunity to innovate

through merger is missed. In this regard Lang (2002) cites evidence that the most successful cross-sectoral mergers occur when the process is "transformative," that is, that all parties in the merger, including the dominant partner, see the benefit of a merger as an opportunity to bring about internal change and to pursue new opportunities previously unavailable. The governments of Hong Kong and Japan would do well to consider these findings in their movement towards mergers.

6. Concluding Remarks

Despite obvious differences of scale between the two societies, Japan and Hong Kong share certain trends in teacher education. However, Hong Kong has lagged behind Japan in upgrading teacher preparation, having only recently moved towards creating an all-graduate, all-trained teaching force. Historically both places initiated formal teacher education separate from university training as part of a binary system. While both places have now relocated teacher training within the university sector, both also retain mono-technical teacher training institutions alongside teacher training within comprehensive universities. Japan maintains a separate system of universities of education, and Hong Kong has an Institute of Education. Both societies are involved in major educational and curriculum reforms in order to respond to both the economic challenges of globalization, and social ills attributed in part to the failure of their educational systems. These reforms are closely linked to the quality (knowledge, skills and attitudes) of the teaching force, and in this regard both Japan and Hong Kong have both attempted major reforms in teacher preparation. At the same time, demographic realities in both places now suggest that there will be significantly lower demand for teachers than in the past. This has led both governments to consider reduction of the number of places for teacher training in publicly supported universities, primarily through pressure for the merger or consolidation of existing institutions. The research on mergers indicate that these processes are more costly than usually expected, and may not result in the economy and efficiency that often drives the process to

begin with. In this regard, it is important to initiate merger processes with care, and not to sacrifice other important goals (such as innovative approaches to the production of high quality teachers) in the course of consolidation.

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