

HKMLC Queen Maud Secondary School
(<http://www.qmss.edu.hk/>)

10th Asia-Pacific Conference on Giftedness 2008
**Promoting School-based Gifted Education by QMSS in
Hong Kong**

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ABSTRACT

Delivering school-based gifted education in a secondary school had not been popular in Hong Kong before the turn of the millennium due to the lack of both experience and human resources. In the year 2000, HKMLC Queen Maud Secondary School (QMSS), possessing the vision of providing gifted education, took a small step forward at school-based level. Ever since then, QMSS has been one of the two leading schools in the Hong Kong Cluster School Gifted Education Project sponsored by the Quality Education Fund and launched with the Curriculum Development Institute, Education Bureau (EDB). From 2002 onwards, with the support of EDB's Gifted Education Section, the school has taken part in different "Seed Projects" which encourage injection of creativity, critical thinking and communication skills in curriculum and instruction.

QMSS develops its gifted education in a 3-tier structure, the first of which involves students of the same junior secondary level being shuffled at regular school time for Languages, Mathematics, Science and Humanities, Thinking Skills Education, Project Learning Education, Life and Affective Education, as well as Leadership Training. The second level is to expose a selected group of higher ability learners to a series of extended learning and training outside the normal curriculum, while the third level establishes a pool of outstanding students for further development outside school. Such domains as academic, aesthetic and affective are covered in all three levels. In the past few years, with the enthusiasm and collaboration of the Principal and teachers, the potential of gifted and talented students has been gradually realized.

**CHALLENGES FACED AND RESISTANCE IN DELIVERING GIFTED
EDUCATION**

It is usually difficult to deliver gifted education programs at school in Hong Kong, as the concept of "giftedness" is not popular in Hong Kong. Teachers may not agree with the importance of gifted education. Due to the common belief that only a small proportion of

students are gifted inside a school, not all teachers agree to put resources and effort in gifted education. Students who are academically poorly performers are felt to be more deserving of more attention and resources by the school. Some teachers may think gifted education cause serious labelling effect among students. Moreover, teachers may think that they are not “gifted” so they are not confident in teaching gifted children. The formal teachers' professional training does not include how to deliver gifted education. Therefore, it is not easy for a school to start gifted education in a school. Delivering gifted education in regular classes causes an increase in work pressure and workload. It also causes extra workload since gifted students are demanding in their learning needs. Teachers have to work very hard to design appropriate program for them. Differentiated curriculum and instruction causes lots of administration work as well. Therefore, there may not be agreement among teachers in a school on how to take care of gifted students.

BACKGROUND OF DELIVERING GIFTED EDUCATION IN QMSS

Since 2000, HKMLC Queen Maud Secondary School (QMSS) has been one of the two leading schools in the Hong Kong Cluster School Gifted Education Project, sponsored by the Quality Education Fund and launched with the Gifted Education Section, Curriculum & Development Institute, Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB)¹. QMSS functioned as a Cyber University, where students from Sai Kung District took HKUST credit courses via video-conferencing in QMSS, sponsored by Quality Education Fund and launched together with the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology.

From 2002 onwards, the school has continued to join many “Seed Projects” launched by the Gifted Education Section, EMB. A variety of seed projects in gifted education were carried out. These include “The action research on developing students’ scientific thinking and process ability”, “Program on remarkable project-based learning, developing teaching materials with EMB for teacher training program in primary school gifted education in the areas of common knowledge and science”, “Action research for the school-based outstanding leaders training program on campus developing generic skills of students through project based learning”, “Action research on problem-solving strategies in Mathematics teaching”, “An advanced action research for the assessment of the individual, society and humanities of junior secondary level” ...etc

In 2003, QMSS co-organized a “Program for the gifted and their Parents in the East Kowloon District” with the Hong Kong Association for Parents of Gifted Children (HKAPGC), a non-profit making organization established in 1992. The Association is composed of parents whose gifted children have passed the IQ test and concerns about the government policy on the development of gifted children in Hong Kong. The program run by the above organizations was the first of its kind in Hong Kong whereby a school makes use of different community resources together with the help of the government to

¹ Education and Manpower Bureau was renamed as Education Bureau (EDB) on 1st July, 2007

promote gifted education. The program is targeted at both gifted youths and their parents, focusing on the development of intellectual as well as affective aspects.

Every year, the program targets 128 children aged between 10 and 14, the program focuses on the training of fundamental thinking abilities, such as creative and critical thinking, creative leadership, as well as affective education, leadership and social service, creativity in Chinese writing, English performing arts, problem-solving skills in Mathematics and exploration in Science. Special features include evaluations before and after training, establishing a learning portfolio and having experience-sharing ceremony at the end of the program.

REACHING CONSENSUS ON DELIVERING GIFTED EDUCATION

Usually, there is increase of teachers' workload caused by delivering gifted education, lack of appropriate resources ready for teachers' immediate use and sometimes there is lack of professional knowledge and training among teachers regarding GE, the views among the teaching staff on whether a school should take care of gifted students may be incoherent. In QMSS, a lot of discussions on gifted education has been aroused at different levels of school organisation. A consensus among teaching staff was achieved in 2002 on delivering school-based GE that is crucial to the GE development in QMSS. Since a school has a wide range of works covered, we do not expect all teachers to be involved in gifted education. What we need is to form a devoted and effective working team with professionalism that covers the representatives of key learning areas, while the role of school is to provide appropriate training for panel chairpersons and relevant teachers responsible for promoting GE.

MISSION AND BELIEF OF DELIVERING GIFTED EDUCATION IN QMSS

“We believe that every child has his/her own potential, and our school has a mission to help our students discover their potential and fully develop their giftedness.” The school adopts a broad definition of giftedness, using multiple intelligences. We think that the gifted children are highly valuable assets of our society. There is a need for us to provide them with a challenging learning environment to enrich their learning experience and to better manage their knowledge and potential.

REASONS FOR DELIVERING GIFTED EDUCATION IN QMSS

As pointed out by the Third International Mathematics and Science Studies (ITMSS) in 1997, the top 10% students in Hong Kong were ranked the lowest amongst the academically brilliant students in other Asian countries. Similarly, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which is an international survey conducted by EMB and Hong Kong Institute of Educational Research for the purpose of monitoring the quality of education in Hong Kong, reported that the percentage of Hong Kong students

in the top performance in domains of mathematical, linguistic and reading literacy was comparatively lower than other 41 countries². It reminded us that both the schools and the parents in Hong Kong have not stressed the gifted education in the past many years. Actually, we emphasized “catching up” rather than “jumping the leap” in helping children’s academic study in Hong Kong, which remains largely a traditional Chinese society. In 2003, there was an increasing awareness among teachers in QMSS on the importance of providing gifted education under the present Hong Kong education system. We identified that the year 2003 was the appropriate time to develop gifted education in our school. In addition to suitable timing, the commitment, professional ability and the confidence of the Principal and the teachers towards gifted education turned the vision of characterizing the development of gifted education in our school a reality.

THE SCHOOL FACTORS ON SCHOOL-BASED GIFTED EDUCATION THAT WORK

Running school-based education is not easy and not popular in Hong Kong education context. There should be five important factors that determine the success of implementing school-based gifted education effectively in a school. They are (1) defining GE and rationalising the aims of gifted education adopted by the school; (2) overcoming the resistance by getting consensus among staff on GE; (3) forming an effective working team with teachers’ enthusiasm and professionalism on GE; (4) determining the policies and domains of a school-based model of GE that can work; and (5) delivering effective curriculum leadership and teaching methods on GE.

DEFINITION OF GIFTED EDUCATION BEING ADOPTED IN QMSS

What does it mean by gifted students? According to the traditional viewpoint, a child who scores over 130 points in an IQ test run by a qualified education psychologist is defined as a gifted child. With this viewpoint, there should be only a very limited number of exceptional gifted children in the society. However, the IQ test is no longer regarded as a sole measurement of giftedness. According to the multiple intelligences concept initiated by Professor Howard Gardner of Harvard University, individuals can be defined as gifted in certain areas if they show talents in linguistic, spatial, logical-mathematical, naturalist, musical, bodily-kinaesthetic, intrapersonal and interpersonal aspects (Gardner, 1983). The Education Commission Report No. 4 (ECR4) adopted a broad definition of gifted children who are described as children with exceptional achievement or potential in one or more of the following: a high level of measured intelligence; specific academic aptitude in a subject area; creative thinking; superior talent in visual and performing arts; natural leadership of peers – high ability to move others to achieve common goals; and psychomotor ability – outstanding performance or ingenuity in athletics, mechanical skills or other areas requiring gross or fine motor coordination (Education Commission, 1990).

² HKPISA (<http://www.fed.cuhk.edu.hk/~hkpisa/>)

Thus, our school adopts the broad sense of GE as the concept of multiple intelligences, the school believes that every child has his or her own giftedness on some of the eight aspects. The aims of GE are (1) for academically high achievers – we hope to help them to provide appropriate education and training specific to their special needs; (2) for other learners containing different potential – designing curricula and activities regarding multiple intelligences. It is our responsibility to help them by providing well-designed curriculum and activities specific to their special learning needs.

FORMATION OF AN EFFECTIVE WORKING TEAM

The team involves the different layers of school organization hierarchy, from Principal to frontline teachers. The role of the different members guarantees GE can be carried out in a whole-school approach. In fact, the task has obtained great attention in school. The main key to the success of school-based GE is the enthusiasm and teaching professionalism of the team members.

The Principal is to formulate the vision and mission on GE, to support GE development; to manage the teaching load of relevant teachers; to help teachers gain awareness of GE and understand the needs of gifted students; head of Curriculum Development Team is to make GE policy, to give direction on school-based GE development; to direct the overall design on GE curriculum and teaching materials; the GE coordinator is to assist head of Curriculum Development Team in co-ordinating and implementing GE policies; panel chairpersons of key learning areas are to implement GE policies and design curriculum at panel level; and the subject teachers in delivering gifted education is to run GE at class level and/or other learning experience (OLE) level.

OBTAINING PROFESSIONAL TRAINING FROM EXPERTS

First of all, we explored the availability of resources by seeking assistance from the external professional bodies in the community, such as the Gifted Education Section in EDB. Moreover, curriculum experts in different universities and the business sector would like to offer assistance such as providing teacher training programs or media sponsorship respectively. The Principal had to make wise use of the limited human resources provided by the teaching and support staff in order to run the gifted education program successfully. The teachers involved in the program were the pioneers in steering the development of school-based gifted education. The professional development of the teachers was ultimately the most important task among all kinds of reparation. Our teachers were encouraged to apply their designed teaching materials to teach the elites inside regular classes in extracted groups after school.

DETERMINATION OF A SCHOOL-BASED GIFTED EDUCATION MODEL IN QMSS THAT CAN WORK OUT

While considering how to establish a school-based GE model that can work out, three essential questions have been and are continuously gone through and reviewed, including (1) what are the core elements of GE teaching?; (2) what are the domains of GE covered and which subjects are involved?; and (3) how many levels of differentiated curriculum and instruction?

Renzulli (1986) pointed out

Above average, although not necessarily superior, ability; task commitment, and creativity. Importantly, no one component of this three-part model can, on its own, make for high levels of accomplishment. Rather, it is the interaction between the three clusters that leads to creative-productive giftedness.

Adopting this fairly well-defined set of three traits, QMSS has built a three-tier structure since 2003, in which three different levels hit various needs of gifted students. For these levels, injection of three core GE elements into its curriculum and instruction is highlighted, creative thinking, critical thinking and leadership training skills included. These skills are passed through three domains, they are academic (inc. aesthetic), affective aspects and other learning experience.

LEVELS OF QMSS SCHOOL-BASED GIFTED EDUCATION

Level One: Whole-class

“The First Level of delivering gifted education” is for the whole class at regular school time schedule. For one half of this level which focuses mainly on generic skills, Thinking Skills Education is designed for all Secondary One students, aiming to cultivate their basic creative and critical thinking abilities and to create a bridge to the upcoming subject taught in New Senior Secondary system, Liberal Studies. Project Learning Training is for all Secondary Two students, aiming to train students’ elementary research skills. Besides, Life Education Curriculum is across three junior secondary forms so as to provide affective education for gifted children. On top of these school-based developed curricula, a leadership training and social service program is offered to Secondary Two students.

For another half of this level which is designated for skills specific to academic subjects, Language, Mathematics and Science Elite Classes for gifted and talented students are provided through which gifted elements, including creativity, high-order thinking skills, and personal and social skills, can be further promoted, and the curriculum contents can be accelerated, broadened and deepened. In order to accommodate for the learning need of more able students, curriculum will be trimmed and compacted one-fifth or one-fourth of the normal learning time for the elite classes, so that the learning efficiency and effectiveness can be increased (Feldhusen, Proctor & Black, 1986). Acceleration of elite class curricula means completing the normal teaching schedule earlier so that more rooms

can be created for teaching a deeper, richer and wider syllabus. Widening of elite class curricula points to going beyond the syllabus. Last but not least, deepening of elite class curricula stresses the importance of teaching those parts that are difficult to learn.

Level Two (Pull-out)

“The Second Level of moving gifted education” is getting the extracted group to the pullout programs or enrichment courses designed for them outside regular school time. For the first half of this level, designation of programs involving creative thinking, critical thinking, leadership training and public speaking abilities is delivered on OLE days, after school hours and during holidays. Advanced English Public Speaking Program, with the theme “How to Speak Like a Leader”, is designed for linguistically intelligent students.

For another half of this level, the school intends to promote pullout programs on subject specific areas, which are carried out outside normal teaching hours. Gifted and high-ability students are highly encouraged to participate in One-Student-One-Aesthetic or OLE Training Program which such subjects as Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Languages are in place to satisfy gifted students’ greater appetite for learning knowledge and skills in their specialties.

Level Three: Off-site Support

“The Third Level of delivering gifted education” is recommending outstanding students to enrichment courses run by the EDB and other tertiary institutes. There are a number of special school-based gifted education curricula and programs pertaining to both general and specific areas and different domains which have been developed in our school with the support of the Gifted Education Section, EDB and other tertiary institutions. The nomination of this group of exceptionally gifted students is based upon students’ performance on both academic and non-academic aspects, or by the recommendation of subject teachers and panel chairpersons. Curriculum Development Team would make the final decision on list of eligible students attending such courses.

DOMAINS OF QMSS SCHOOL-BASED GIFTED EDUCATION

There are three aspects of school-based gifted education launched inside and outside the school, carried out on the whole class and the extracted group basis. They are delivering GE in the academic aspect, the affective aspect and the community service aspect.

Firstly, our gifted education is delivered in the academic aspect. School-based elite class teaching is carried out in Science and Mathematics, Chinese and English language at all junior secondary levels. We have done a wide range of research, exploratory designs and practice in learning and teaching, such as Investigative Science Experimental Design,

Independent Learning Program, Learning Habits Portfolio, Creative Writing Program, Problem-solving in Mathematics, and so on.

Secondly, the school delivers GE in affective education aspect, in order to provide the whole-person development to the gifted. Having recognized different forms of overexcitability such as psychomotor overexcitability, sensual overexcitability, intellectual overexcitability, imaginal overexcitability and emotional overexcitability, we have paid special attention to the design of the curriculum that caters for their needs in both emotional and psychological developments (Dabrowski, 1967, 1972).

Thirdly, the school delivers GE in the community service aspect. In September 2003, the School together with the Hong Kong Association for Parents of Gifted Children, a non-profit making organization established in 1993, co-organized the Programs for the Gifted and Talented and their parents in East Kowloon District in Hong Kong while the Gifted Education Section of EMB acted as the curriculum advisor in this program. The program is the first of its kind in Hong Kong where a school makes use of the availability of different community resources accompanied by the help of the government to promote gifted education. The program itself cares about the needs for both the gifted youths and their parents, focusing on the development of intellectual as well as affective aspects.

IDENTIFICATION AND SELECTION MECHANISM OF GIFTED STUDENTS

As mentioned beforehand the school adopts the concept of multiple intelligences initiated by Professor Howard Gardner. We do not insist on a formal Q test as a pre-requisite for the identification of a gifted student before sorting them for the program since the traditional IQ test is expensive to most families and may be biased culturally.

Consequently, not many students were known as “Gifted” by formal IQ test. However, they are identified as “Gifted” by academic and non-academic performance. Academically top 10% students, together with students who have joined and won awards in international or local competition events would raise their opportunities to be nominated (Gagné, 2002). Apart from them, students who perform well in their continuous assessment and are considered brilliant based on teachers’ observation would be suitable. Parents’ nomination and students’ self-nomination are also regarded as important pieces of information. Last but not least, an online system of multiple intelligences tests, which is named as “Whole Person Development Portfolio”, is developed to reveal students’ strengths.

TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN GIFTED EDUCATION

Basically, the school agrees that staff development is the foundation for all kinds of preparations. Continuously moved by the stress on implementing gifted education, teachers have received a series of training offered by several experts from EMB and

tertiary institutions during 2003-2005. The training workshops were free-of-charge as they were to support the program offered by school to the gifted on a voluntary basis. The training helped our teachers grasp the knowledge and skills needed to nurture and support the gifted students as well as to adopt the right attitude and make a commitment towards gifted education.

To cite some examples, demonstration of effective teaching by experts in the fields of creativity, critical thinking and leadership were included in the training which were school-based and diversified in the delivery method and the training duration, thus increasing the confidence and teaching professionalism of our teachers in implementing gifted education. Initiated by the school aiming to serve the community and provide the opportunities to polish teachers' abilities in cultivating students' creativity and critical thinking, the East Kowloon GE Program acts as a teaching practicum to teachers being trained up to lead and deliver gifted education.

Moreover, further strengthening teachers' professional knowledge and skills in GE is done through collaborative lesson preparations in the key learning areas of Languages, Mathematics, Science and Humanities.

As a result of receiving such training, teachers changed progressively from not having much experience and confidence at the early stage to becoming more confident and willing in dealing with gifted children at the present stage. Notable development on the teachers' professional growth in different GE aspects has been shown.

ENSURING THE SUCCESS OF SCHOOL-BASED GIFTED EDUCATION

So as to understand more about stakeholders' responses about the effectiveness of school-based gifted education in QMSS, several indicators are taken into consideration, they include teachers' observation on students' answering questions with outstanding ideas or opinions, response of students to new events, such as creative ideas and opinions, by students' nodding heads while listening, outstanding performance in students' work and the formal tests and examinations, collecting assignments and feedback of students and filling in the Learning Journal filled in by them in order to record how they learn effectively and how they respond to challenges.

Students and parents in QMSS generally welcome the arrangement of different domains and levels of gifted education delivered as they find they can learn more in depth and breadth if they are offered more learning opportunities. In general, there is no complaint from parents since basic learning materials, the range and depth of examination for all classes of the same form are in conformity. The major difference is on the accelerated, broadened and deepened part of the teaching and learning.

On the other hand, teachers' written and oral expressions are also recorded to reflect the evaluation from the viewpoint of teachers. A log book is to be kept and filled in by teachers to record the flow of teaching and process of students' learning. A written report is required to be handed to Head of Curriculum Development Team at the end of each term and each academic year, which is used to reflect the success or failure of GE teaching. Such practice becomes helpful and essential information when subsequent teachers are in-charge of the elite classes in the following years. Other measures include teachers' oral feedback and reflection during formal discussion, together with interviews with teachers by GE coordinator or Principal.

In the past few years, most teachers welcome the GE policy that is able to help students learn more and learn successfully. They revealed that most students appreciate opportunities to deal with parts taught through the accelerated, broadened and deepened approach and received recognition of having their outstanding work or achievements mounted on board or website, and are capable of completing more challenging tasks in assignments or in quizzes.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF GIFTED EDUCATION

The development of gifted education can be sustained through the following measures. The school regards the concerns on gifted education as quality and all-round education, and to make the development of gifted education as one of the school's characteristics. The school continues to emphasize the importance of helping elites learn better, keep obtaining the consensus from different school stakeholders and delegating appropriate personnel to achieve task performance. The school ensures the policy of implementing three levels of GE in the normal school-based curriculum can be achieved while reserving room for adjustment of the policy to be made. The school makes use of various opportunities to share the achievement of school-based GE, such as during anniversary events or visits from other schools and teachers. The school engages creativity training as a theme for a number of students' OLE programs or activities. Moreover, the school keeps a strong connection with GE bodies outside school.

On the other hand, fully understanding the current situation, including strengths and weaknesses, of QMSS is key to guaranteeing the sustainable development of its gifted education.

STRENGTHS OR SPECIALTIES

A long history of promoting gifted education and an increasing maturity of attitude towards GE has been developed. The framework of policy for the levels and domains involved as well as the strategies for GE has been built as well.

Teachers are enthusiastic in teaching and are willing to accept challenges faced in GE. All teachers have received the school-based elementary GE training, while some teachers have received advanced training courses in various areas in GE who formed a core team to lead or organize other teachers to develop the school-based GE program. Those teachers are professional in designing and delivering GE curriculum.

With the collaboration of government, universities, communities and overseas educational bodies, the school has established a strong network and resources to support high achievers to realize their gifts into talents.

LIMITATIONS OR DIFFICULTIES

The government stressed the responsibility of school running gifted education in a school-based approach. Actually, a lot of problems needed to be addressed. For instance, time constraints faced by the teachers act as one of the major barriers. Coping with Hong Kong Education Reform, teachers nowadays are busier in tackling rapid changes in the education environment which has seriously slowed down the pace and the extent of the development of gifted education.

Secondly, shortage of recognized tools for identifying gifted students makes assessing giftedness of a student difficult. Since a formal IQ test is no longer solely required for the identification of a gifted student before sorting them for the program as the traditional IQ test is expensive to most families and may be biased culturally, the identification and the process of selection would be consequently be affected.

Ultimately, difficulty in assessing students' performance before and after the program often exists. Undoubtedly, if the length of the program is less than 3 months, the effectiveness of program will be undermined by the insufficient time to carry out in-depth observations. Furthermore, we also lack adequate tools to make accurate measurement of the performance on participants' creativity and critical thinking.

FURTHER DEVELOPMENT AND EXPANSION

We need to look into broadening GE programs to cater for diverse needs of gifted students, deepening the contents of GE programs to enhance the effectiveness of helping the high achievers to learn better and deeper, increasing the force of staff development on GE aspects and carrying out research on the effectiveness of GE are future expansion ways towards more successful and effective school-based gifted education.

More specifically, development of more valuable school-based curricula that can help both teachers and students is one of our future concerns. Teacher's further development on gifted education, like gaining experience of GE from other neighbouring countries, is also of some use. Besides, there have been calls for the publication of a guidebook to share

the experiences on running school-based GE as a milestone to mark the school's GE development by 2010 during the school's 60th Anniversary. The book will cover useful and practical information on formulation of GE policies, identification of gifted children, skills of teaching project learning, skills of dealing with emotional problems of gifted children, and so on.

MOVING FORWARDS AND CONCLUSION

The conclusion to the school's attainment in professional development in gifted education is that it was indeed a fruitful journey. In 2005, the school marked the milestone of achievement in providing gifted education inside school and the community by publishing "A Memorial Magazine on the 55th Anniversary -- Disclosing the road of professionalism towards Gifted Education from 2001-2005 in QMSS". As the 10th Asia-Pacific Conference on Giftedness 2008 is being held in Singapore, we look forward to overcoming the wave of challenges and are excited at the prospect of global gifted education in coming years.

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RELATED WEB SITES:

Gifted Education Section, Curriculum Development Institute, Education Bureau.

<http://www.edb.gov.hk/cd/ge>

Guidelines on School-based Gifted Development Programmes.

http://resources.edb.gov.hk/gifted/Curriculum_Guide

HKPISA - Programme for International Student Assessment, Hong Kong Institute of Educational Research, The Chinese University of Hong Kong.

<http://www.fed.cuhk.edu.hk/~hkpisa>

Hong Kong Association for Parents of Gifted Children.

<http://www.gifted.org.hk>