

"Preserving the Educational Heritage of Hong Kong – The Blending of Library and Museum Services"

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Abstract

The Hong Kong Institute of Education – one of the eight Government funded higher education institutions in Hong Kong – has taken the initiative to preserve the rich cultural heritage of education in Hong Kong through the establishment of The Hong Kong Museum of Education. Unique amongst tertiary education institutions in Hong Kong, the Museum has been established as a part of the Institute Library Services, and has come about through the collaborative efforts of library professionals, museum curators and academic staff. The Museum is one of a number of cultural heritage projects undertaken by the Institute to explore, interpret and disseminate research on the history of education in Hong Kong, and the Institute Library has also taken the leadership in the development of an historical research collection, a digital repository of historical educational artifact, images and documents, and a bibliography of Hong Kong education to complement and enhance the role of the Museum. The achievement of this has involved a high degree of creativity and innovation, and has entailed the integration of the roles of library professionals, museum curators and technical staff, as well as project based organizational structures which mix the responsibilities and reporting lines of these professional and technical groups. This paper reflects on the experience of the professional staff involved in this merging of academic library services and cultural heritage, the skill sets which have been required, and the way in which the specialist skills of each professional group have been blended to achieve successful outcomes. It also discusses how the diversification of the library's services to embrace cultural heritage can strengthen the Library's role and profile both within and beyond the academy.

Education in Hong Kong

The citizens of Hong Kong, both in the past and the present, have had an immensely varied experience in obtaining an education. That experience may range from the most basic tuition and an early exit from the education system, through to post-graduate study in the elite higher education institutions of Hong Kong and the world. The education may have been in Chinese or in English. It may have taken place in a traditional village school or study hall, the rooftop of a tenement building, or in the most modern of government or international schools. The school itself may have been sponsored by a range of religious organizations in Hong Kong, or have had a political affiliation or orientation. And - of course - the experience itself may have set people on the path of a love of learning, or left them with a feeling of time wasted!

No matter what the context, the receiving of an education is something which resonates in the lives and personal experience of all Hong Kong citizens. In Hong Kong, the acquiring of a “good” education has long been cherished by rich and poor alike, and education in all its aspects remains the subject of animated discussion and intense media and public scrutiny on an almost daily basis.

The Hong Kong Museum of Education

It is against this background that The Hong Kong Institute of Educationⁱ - one of the eight government funded university level institutions in Hong Kong – has established the Hong Kong Museum of Education. As the premier teacher education provider in the region, The Hong Kong Institute of Education is well positioned to play a leadership role in recording and interpreting the contribution that education has played in the overall development of Hong Kong society, drawing not only on the history of its former teacher training colleges, but also on its close connections with school systems, sponsoring bodies and other institutions which have given Hong Kong its unique education system.

Opened in May 2009, the Hong Kong Museum of Educationⁱⁱ is a new thematic museum which collects, researches, interprets and exhibits materials relating to the history and development of education in Hong Kong. Currently presenting themes such as the role and contribution of teaching to society, and the development of teacher education in Hong Kongⁱⁱⁱ, the Museum has a wide range of collections, consisting of over 20,000 items, including plaques, trophies, certificates, uniforms, teaching equipment, furniture, textbooks, yearbooks, photographs and historical

documents. Located on the Tai Po campus of the Hong Kong Institute of Education, it aims to appeal to scholars, students and the public in general, through a mix of exhibits and audio-visual presentations which document the history of education in Hong Kong in a vivid and accessible way.

In proceeding with the establishment of The Hong Kong Museum of Education, the Hong Kong Institute of Education has had the following broad objectives:

1. To establish a museum of artifacts and other material relating to the history and development of education in Hong Kong.
2. To provide a unique resource for research, and a venue for seminars, school programs and other public activities relating to the history of education in Hong Kong.
3. To develop a range of digital tools and systems to support research and interpretation of the history of education in Hong Kong.
4. To deliver programs and activities which appeal both to the general public but which also provide a link with school programs and curriculum.
5. To act as a centre for preservation and conservation of the documentary heritage of Hong Kong education, to ensure that the research resource will remain available for future generations of scholars and researchers.
6. To promote the profile and status of the Institute as the leading teacher education institution in Hong Kong, and to strengthen links with the both the professional teaching community and the public in general, through the provision of public access to the Centre.

Institutional Museums in Hong Kong

While several museums are located on the campuses of Hong Kong's tertiary institutions, as a rule these tend to be either quasi-independent units within the organizational structure of the institution, or else attached to a particular Faculty or Department. The University of Hong Kong, for example, contains three museums, being the main University Museum and Art Gallery, established in 1953^{iv}, the recently opened Stephen Hui Geological Museum^v which is attached to the University's Department of Earth Sciences, and the Jao Tsung-I Petite Ecole^{vi}, a space dedicated to the life and work of this famous Hong Kong scholar, painter and calligrapher. Likewise, the Chinese University of Hong Kong contains an Art Museum which is associated with the University's Institute of Chinese Studies^{vii}, and at Hong Kong Baptist University there is the Dr and Mrs Hung Hin Shiu Museum of Chinese

Medicine^{viii}, which is under the administration of the School of Chinese Medicine at the University. Altogether, there are over 35 museums and heritage organizations in Hong Kong, operated either independently, through institutions such as hospitals or universities, or by the Government Leisure and Cultural Services Department.^{ix} While a great many of these are specialist or thematic museums, covering topics as diverse as medical science, maritime history, tea ware and horse racing, the Hong Kong Museum of Education is the only museum which has been developed specifically as a part of an institutional library service.

The remainder of this paper explores this unique development of the Museum of Education as a part of the Hong Kong Institute of Education Library, and in particular looks at the mixture of library and museum personnel, expertise and experience which has come together to create the Museum and a number of its programs and activities. The paper draws on the first-hand experience of those involved, to examine the similarities in skills sets and the way in which library staff have directly contributed to the establishment of the Museum.

HKIED Development Strategies

The origins of the Hong Kong Museum of Education are contextually grounded in the strategic development of the Hong Kong Institute of Education. The Institute of Education was founded as a specialist teacher education institution in 1994, through the amalgamation of five former teacher training colleges and education institutes. The HKIED is celebrating its 15th anniversary in 2009, but can also claim a heritage of 70 years of teacher education in Hong Kong, with one of its former colleges – the Northcote Training College - being established in 1939. The Institute currently has a student population of 6385 students^x, across a range of programs at Bachelor, Masters and Doctor of Education levels, in addition to Associate and Post-Graduate Degrees and ancillary programs. In 2004, the Institute was granted self-accrediting status, and has in recent times moved to diversify its curriculum in line with the increasingly varied educational requirements of Hong Kong. It has recently been given the opportunity to develop both Bachelor of Arts and Postgraduate Research programs, two vital breakthroughs for the Institute's future development and its diversification into a "multi-technic" institution.

Although it is one of eight Government funded institutions of higher education in Hong Kong, The Hong Kong Institute of Education is the only one lacking a formal university designation. It is sometimes felt that this had impeded the Institute's

development, as it may have discouraged higher quality students from choosing teaching as a career, and is also hindering the Institute's efforts in a range of developmental activities such as attracting major benefactors. In response to this, in 2007, the Institute formulated a *Development Blueprint*^{xi} for the next ten years: outlining its strategies and initiatives for raising its visibility and profile, diversifying its curriculum, improving the quality of its teaching and research, and making a more concerted attempt to position itself as a multi-disciplinary university of education.

Central to this development strategy are aims to raise the profile of the Institute, and to emphasize the criticality of education - and in particular strong teacher education - to the overall economic and social development of Hong Kong. This has been articulated in the Development Blueprint in a number of strategies to build a closer relationship and engagement with the teaching community of Hong Kong (and Institute alumni), to engage with the Hong Kong public in a more direct and meaningful way on education issues, and to raise public awareness of the role and contribution of education and teacher education. These strategies have been reiterated subsequently in the Institute's recently completed strategic plan for the next triennium.

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In addition to this, another explicit developmental strategy of the Institute has been to build research capacity through a range of programs and initiatives to nurture educational research and research publishing. The Institute Library has viewed itself as integral to the development of a research program, and has embarked on a number of initiatives to actively support research and research publishing at an institutional, departmental and individual level. These have included the establishment of a number of research services^{xiii}, including literature searching, bibliographic management, and the development of a database of research publications in education, all tailored to the specific needs of individual researchers and academic staff. In addition, the Library has invested heavily in a range of research evaluation tools, and works directly with Departments and academic staff in their application and analysis. Finally, the Library has developed an institutional repository of the published output of Institute staff since the foundation of the Institute in 1994. Known as the HKIEd Research Repository^{xiv}, this was launched in January 2009, and already includes over 9000 bibliographic citations, 1300 of which include links to a full-text version. Analytical data suggests that the Repository has already had an immediate impact on promoting the visibility of the research and publishing output of Institute staff^{ffxv}.

As another strategy for supporting Institute research, in 2008 the Library also

proposed the establishment of a research collection of documents, unpublished materials and secondary publications relating to the history of education in Hong Kong, to act as both a locus and a resource for the support of research in this area. As a consequence, the initial impetus to establish the Museum of Education has arisen therefore from this dual development of both Institute level strategies to improve visibility and engage with the community, and these Library level strategies to support research. The Institute Library was regarded as the most appropriate unit of the Institute to lead the development of the Museum, as there was perceived to be a clear synergy between Library initiatives to promote educational research and the role that the Museum was expected to play in preserving and exhibiting the educational heritage of Hong Kong.

In its 15th Anniversary year too, the Institute has regarded the Museum as one of a suite of educational heritage projects designed to improve its profile and standing in the community, and to position itself more directly as the key teacher education provider in the region. A number of these projects are also being led by the Library, and have had a direct impact on both the organizational structure of the Museum, and the skills sets of personnel employed to undertake them. They are;

The Hong Kong Education Image Database: - The development of an online database of images, documents and virtual displays of historical artifacts relating to the history of Hong Kong education. This project is under the leadership of the Library, and the database - once completed - is expected to serve as both a “virtual museum” of artifacts acquired by the Museum of Education, as well as a catalogue and inventory control system for the artifacts. The database will be on open access via the Museum and Library websites.

The Hong Kong Education Research Collection: - The establishment of a research collection of both documentary and published materials relating to the history of education, teaching and educational institutions in Hong Kong. This research collection will be developed by the Library and will become part of the Library’s collections, although its relationship with the collections held by the Museum will be very close.

The Hong Kong Education Bibliography: - The creation of a searchable online database of bibliographic citations and abstracts - and where available, full-text - of all publications relating to educational research in Hong Kong. This project is also

being undertaken by the Library and intends to bring together and update earlier bibliographic work published in print.

HKIEd Conference on “Education and Heritage”: - To be held in June 2009^{xvi}, this conference will be hosted by the Institute’s Department of Mathematics, Science, Social Sciences and Technology (MSST) to explore themes relating to heritage education. The Library and Museum will play a support role in this conference, with for example the Museum acting as a venue for a number of the conference presentations.

Oral History and Heritage Conservation Projects on the Development of Education in Hong Kong: - Also undertaken by the Department of Mathematics, Science, Social Sciences and Technology, this project is an oral history of education in Hong Kong, featuring interviews with a range of local and regional educators and historians. The oral histories will be followed by the publication of a series of monographs relating to education in Hong Kong, and the publication of a proposed encyclopedia of Hong Kong education. Video footage of the oral history interviews is displayed in the Museum, and ultimately the Library is expected to play a key role in the compilation of the encyclopedia.

Roles and Reporting Lines for the HKME

Addressing such a multiplicity of tasks simultaneously requires a flexible organizational structure which emphasizes collaboration, while also recognizing the contributions that different individuals can make. The approach of the Institute of Education to this complexity has been to create project teams which focus on specific tasks while also taking a lead responsibility for a particular task. These teams can be summarized as follows;

Museum and Library Project Teams

Under the direction of the Institute Librarian, a number of positions have been created to work on the projects specifically related to the establishment of the Museum and database projects. As the skills sets, qualifications and experience is different for each project, this is not so much a project “team” as such, as a loose coalition of project personnel with different reporting lines and locations, unified chiefly by their management by the Library. Consequently, within this “team” there exist several groupings, including;

1. Museum staff, consisting of a Curator, an Assistant Librarian to manage the Hong Kong Education Image Database and the Hong Kong Education Research Collection, and three Library Assistants. These staff are located in the Museum, and the Curator reports to the Institute Librarian.
2. Bibliographic staff, consisting of an Assistant Librarian and a Library Assistant to manage the Hong Kong Education Bibliography. These staff are located in the Library and report to the Library's Head of Information Services.
3. Technical staff, to manage the underlying database structures for both the Image Database and Bibliography projects. The additional project position for this is a Systems Technician which reports to the Library's Head of Media Services and IT, and is a part of the pool of IT staff in the Library.

While each staff may have a primary reporting line as given above, it is important to understand that - of all the personnel employed by the Library for the Education Heritage projects - the Curator is the only position requiring formal qualifications and experience in museum studies or a closely allied field. The rest of the positions have been employed as librarians within the typical organizational descriptions common in Hong Kong's academic libraries, and the incumbents draw upon their expertise and experience in librarianship to implement the different heritage projects. In addition to this, some of these staff also continue to work in more traditional library roles, such as reference work, while others employed in the Museum are chiefly focused on Museum operations and activities, regardless of their professional background.

Oral History and Conference Project Teams

The education heritage oral history projects, and the "Education and Heritage" conference, have both been managed directly by the Institute's Department of Mathematics, Science, Social Sciences and Technology, chiefly through a Senior Research Fellow and two Research Assistants attached to the Department for the duration of the projects. While these are in some respects self-contained projects, a high degree of collaboration has existed between the Department, Library and latterly the Museum, as the projects and the development of the Museum began to gain momentum. For example, the Senior Research Fellow and the Head of Department have both played a critical role in the development of the Museum by researching and writing much of the text which has subsequently appeared in the Museum's displays. This has filled a major gap which neither the Museum Curator nor Library professional staff were able to fully address with their own backgrounds. In return

however, Library and Museum staff have provided significant support to the Department in the hosting of the Education and Heritage conference, with the Museum and its displays complementing many of the conference themes.

Education Heritage Advisory Committee

The projects are supported by a steering committee known as the “Education Heritage Advisory Committee”, which consists of both Institute staff members as well as external experts invited to join to share their experience. The composition of the Committee itself reflects the highly collaborative nature of the education heritage projects, blurring traditional professional boundaries. For example, aside from the Institute Librarian (as Director of the Museum and project manager) and the Museum Curator, the remainder of the Institute staff on the Advisory Board are academic staff, co-opted to the Committee on account of a proficiency or knowledge in the history, culture and sociology of education in Hong Kong. The “external” members, by comparison, come from a broad range of backgrounds and include professionals as diverse as former senior teachers and principals, a former Director of the Education Bureau of Hong Kong, the former Chair of the Hong Kong Exams and Assessment Authority, the former Chief Curator of the Hong Kong Museum of History, the Director of the Hong Kong School of Creativity and Institute of Contemporary Culture, and the Chief Curator of Museums and Heritage Buildings for the Hong Kong Leisure and Cultural Services Department.

The Role of the Library in Museum Development

One of the defining characteristics of the development of the Hong Kong Museum of Education, and of a number of the related Education Heritage projects, is that their leadership and implementation has been undertaken largely by library professionals, working in collaboration with people from a variety of other professional backgrounds. For example, the development of the Hong Kong Image Database, which will serve as both an online catalogue of the Museum’s artifacts as well an inventory management system for the Museum’s physical collections, has been under the direct management of library professionals rather than Museum curatorial staff. This is an organizational arrangement where both the Library and the Museum have input, but which clearly recognizes and builds on the previous experience of library staff in digitization and database management projects. The Image Database itself is a product which blurs the distinctions between libraries and museums, insofar as its content is being created from within the Museum under Library supervision, is

intended for access by both the education research community and the general public, and the choice between available software platforms was one in which so-called “library” and “museum” systems competed head to head, although effectively performing the same function.

This situation – where the particular skill sets and experience of Library staff have been applied where appropriate to the Museum projects – has been a common feature of all of the Heritage projects to a greater or lesser extent. It has also involved staff from a variety of backgrounds and levels in the library, including management, technical and para-professional, working “outside” of their traditional professional domain. For example, para-professional Library Assistant staff were recruited from the Institute Library to work in the Museum, and have been able to directly apply the skills and expertise they acquired in the Library to their Museum role. Staff have also been able to apply technical skills such as cataloguing and library systems management to the content creation tasks of the Image Database. As both the Library and the Museum services involve a high degree of interaction with customers, inter-personal and communication skills developed in the Library are highly relevant in the Museum as well.

However, one of the key areas where library staff saw their role as diverging from that of museum staff was in the professional “focus” of their work. While many viewed their own roles typically as mediators between different forms of “packaged” or commercially published information and an end user (in this case the staff and students of the Institute), they perceived that the role of the Museum Curator and other staff engaged directly in this work was as a creator of knowledge, researching, interpreting and producing information about the history of education in Hong Kong, and exhibiting artifacts which could complement and illustrate this. This is a role which is perceived to be the most specialized in the Museum and was in fact the only position held by a professional with a background in museum studies. As a result, this also led to a perception amongst the library professionals that while their role was more outward looking and user-oriented, that of the Curator and Museum staff was more collection focused and concentrated on visual presentation. While the experience of encompassing of library and museum services within the same organizational structure has emphasized the synergy between their roles and functions, and highlighted the adaptability of the professional librarian’s skills set, it has also thrown into relief some perceived key differences in outlook and approach.

Future Development of HKME

Having opened in May 2009, the Hong Kong Museum of Education and associated projects, such as the Hong Kong Education Image Database, are still very much in the early phase of their development. However, what has been demonstrated in this initial phase of the Museum is that – particularly in an institutional setting such as the one described above – library and information professionals can bring a particular range of skills to work alongside museum curators and researchers, to make a significant contribution to the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage. In the case of the Hong Kong Museum of Education, they have, for example, developed and implemented an image database to provide a virtual complement to the on-campus exhibits and displays of the Museum, and have employed expertise acquired from Library systems, digitization and metadata projects to achieve this.

This, however, has not been without issues of where and how this work should be “located” in the organizational structure and reporting lines of the Library and Museum, as the tasks are the same and can take place in either unit. As the Museum and its systems and services become more sophisticated, it remains to be seen also whether or not the blending of library and museum expertise which has been successful in the start-up phase of the Museum project will continue long-term, or if the increasing specialization of the Museum’s services and activities, and a ramping up of the scale of its operations and collections, will bring about a greater and more formal division and specialization in roles and responsibilities. This may be particularly the case if the Museum is successful in obtaining a larger, off-campus premises, which would not only distance it physically from the on-campus Institute Library, but may necessitate a complete separation organizationally between the Library and the Museum.

From a librarian’s perspective however, one of the significant features of the establishment of the Hong Kong Museum of Education was that its leadership and project management were entrusted to the Institute Library. This reflects a level of thinking within the Institute that perhaps views the future of the library service as both a creator of various forms of knowledge as well as a manager of information, and that the context in which the Library operates is both cultural as well as scholarly, and community based as well as staff and student focussed. It is a positive gesture about the role and position of the library in the academy, and about the range of ways in which this Library in particular can contribute to the strategic development of its parent Institute.

Notes

- i *The Hong Kong Institute of Education*, <http://www.ied.edu.hk/> (accessed 3 June, 2009)
- ii *Hong Kong Museum of Education*, <http://www.museum.ied.edu.hk/> (accessed 3 June, 2009)
- iii *Hong Kong Museum of Education – Exhibitions*, <http://www.museum.ied.edu.hk/exhibitions/education-and-heritage.html> (accessed 5 June, 2009)
- iv *The University of Hong Kong Museum and Art Gallery*, <http://www.hku.hk/hkumag/main.html> (accessed 5 June, 2009)
- v *The Stephen Hui Geological Museum*, <http://www.hku.hk/shmuseum/> (accessed 5 June, 2009)
- vi *Jao Tsung-I Petite Ecole*, <http://www.hku.hk/jaotipe/> (accessed 5 June, 2009)
- vii *Art Museum, Institute of Chinese Studies, Chinese University of Hong Kong*, <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/ics/amm>, (accessed 5 June, 2009)
- viii *Hong Kong Baptist University, School of Chinese Medicine, Dr. and Mrs Hung Hin Shiu Museum of Chinese Medicine*, <http://cmmuseum.hkbu.edu.hk/> (accessed 5 June, 2009)
- ix *International Museum Day Hong Kong 2009, Leisure and Cultural Services Department*, <http://www.lcsd.gov.hk/specials/imd2009/en/participating.php> (accessed 5 June, 2009)
- x *University Grants Committee, Facts and Figures - Academic Year 2007/08*, 25 (Hong Kong SAR: UGC, 2008).
<http://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/ugc/publication/report/figure2007/index.htm> (accessed 3 June, 2009).
- xi *The Hong Kong Institute of Education. Development Blueprint: Becoming A University of Education*. (Hong Kong SAR: HKIEd, 2007)
- xii *The Hong Kong Institute of Education – Strategic Plan 2009-2012*, <http://www.ied.edu.hk/sp2009-12/> (accessed 15 June 2009)
- xiii *The Hong Kong Institute of Education – Library Research Services*, <http://www.lib.ied.edu.hk/research/> (accessed 3 June, 2009)
- xiv *HKIEd Research Repository*, <http://repository.ied.edu.hk/about/> (accessed 3 June, 2009)
- xv Robinson, M. (2009), ‘*Promoting the Visibility of Educational Research Through an Institutional Repository*’
(<http://repository.ied.edu.hk/dspace/simple-search?query=%28%28author%3Arob%28%29%29&start=0>) (accessed 15 June 2009)
- xvi *The Hong Kong Institute of Education – Conference and Exhibition on Education and Heritage*, http://www.ied.edu.hk/ceeh2009/indexe_1.htm (accessed 15 June 2009)