

## Reflection on teacher internship in Hong Kong

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**Abstract:** The development of a highly qualified and committed teaching force is one of the core issues in ongoing worldwide educational reforms. Under the tide of change as a result of globalization (Mok & Chan, 2002), certain reforms on teacher education and professional development have been recently introduced in Hong Kong. Among these, the Advisory Committee on Teacher Education and Qualifications (ACTEQ) initiated the proposal of internship for beginning teachers in 2003. It proposed the implementation of teacher internship through mentoring so as to increase effectiveness of the beginning teachers. Although there is still no formal policy text of internship, its concept and practice have been discussed for few years as a discourse. In the school year of 2005-2006, internship is piloted in Hong Kong secondary schools where An Experimental Induction Tool Kit is invented and adopted. There is an extensive literature supports that internship of beginning teachers should be introduced through mentoring as a way of improving professional development of teachers at both individual and school levels (Bubb et.al., 2002; Hessinger, 1998; Norbeck, 1999; Weedy, 2001). Nevertheless, this paper tries to examine teacher internship from a critical approach. It attempts to identify the proposal through text analysis at first glance. Then the concept of internship is going to be explored by historical overview and international perspective in respectively. The paper aims at illuminating the theoretical and empirical foundations of internship. These foundations include epistemological foundation, rationality and power. All these provide a platform of reflection on the purpose and practice of internship. Not only does it indicate that deep contemplation is required for implementing internship among Hong Kong teachers, but also does it suggest that the proposal of internship signifies the rise of managerialism.

**Keywords:** Internship, Mentoring, Beginning Teacher

### 1 Introduction

In the new millennium, one of the core issues in ongoing worldwide educational reforms is the development of a highly qualified and committed teaching force of “the invention of 21<sup>st</sup> century schools that can educate all children well...” (Darling-Hammond, 1995:9). Hong Kong is no exception under this tide of change as a result of globalization (Mok & Welch, 2002). In order to meet the new challenges, certain reforms on teacher education and professional development have been introduced recently (Education Department, 2002; ACTEQ, 2003b). Currently, the Advisory Committee on Teacher Education and Qualifications (ACTEQ) initiates a new proposal on the internship and registration of beginning teachers (ACTEQ, 2003a; Education Commission, 2003, 2004; MingPao Daily, 9

Jan 2003; SingTao Daily, 29 May 2003). Not only does the proposal imply an important element of teacher education, but also does it form an agenda for discussion in the field of educational administration and policy.

Some may argue that internship of beginning teachers should be introduced through mentoring as a way of improving professional development of teachers at both individual and school levels (Bubb et.al., 2002; Hessinger, 1998; Norbeck, 1999; Weedy, 2001). Nevertheless, this paper tries to examine the internship from a critical approach. It attempts to identify the proposal through text analysis at first glance. Then the concept of internship is going to be explored by historical overview and international perspective in respectively. The paper aims at illuminate the theoretical and empirical foundations of internship. These foundations include epistemological foundation, rationality and power. All these provide a platform of reflection on the purpose and practice of internship. Not only does it indicate that deep contemplation is required for implementing internship among Hong Kong teachers, but also does it suggest that the proposal of internship signifies the rise of managerialism.

## **2 Identifying the subject of inquiry**

The proposal of internship for beginning teachers in Hong Kong is based on three sources of text, they include the writings of the ACTEQ (ACTEQ, 2003a; ACTEQ website), the progress reports of the Education Commission (Education Commission, 2003, 2004) as well as the interviews with Prof. Cheng Kai Ming, the Chairman of ACTEQ (MingPao News, 9 Jan 2003; SingTao Daily, 29 May 2003).

Although the proposal of internship is still not carried out, the progress report of Education Commission clearly introduces the proposal as follow:

“ACTEQ is deliberating on a proposal to introduce internship requirement on beginning teachers, who will be given mentoring support throughout the internship period and be required to meet accreditation standards prior to their professional registration” (Education Commission, 2003).

For the arrangement of the internship, it plans to be employment-based, to be applied to all teachers, both trained and untrained, seeking first-time employment. In addition, internship plans to be lasted for a continuous period of no less one academic year within the same school (ACTEQ, 2003a).

All intern teachers are going to be assessed after internship. There is an accreditation

consortium external to the schools to assess intern teachers' suitability for teaching, taking into consideration their professional development portfolio and feedback of mentors and school personnel. After the assessment, those who are unsuccessful in gaining accreditation maybe allowed a second attempt in the same or another school. If they continue to fail afterwards, they will be required to temporarily exit from the profession. To those successfully accredited intern teachers, they may not be invited to continue teaching in the school of their internship though they are considered suitable for teaching elsewhere (ACTEQ, 2003a). In other word, accredited intern teachers must seek for their own employment before and after internship.

The arrangement of internship is further elaborated by Prof. Cheng Kai Ming, the Chairman of the ACTEQ. In the press interview, he pointed out that the assessment of internship should not be based on one examination or unlimited attempts. The assessment aims at ensuring beginning teachers to meet the basic abilities of professional teachers, for example, subject matter knowledge, teaching methods, passion, love and care for student, communication skills etc. (MingPao Daily, 9 Jan 2003). Furthermore, Prof. Cheng stated that the registered teacher status would not be granted unless intern teachers meet the standards; but he predicts that only 1-3% of them fail to meet the standards. (SingTao Daily, 29 May 2003).

The proposal of internship planned to come into effect from September 2005 (ACTEQ, 2003a). Despite the fact that there is no formal and detailed document introduced until this moment, the formation of this policy discourse still deserves for tracing in order to understand the teacher education policy of Hong Kong.

### **3 The study of internship: a historical overview**

The proposal of internship is originated from the three phases of teacher induction policy of Hong Kong. The first phase is known as sink-or-swim stage. In this stage, teacher training is regarded as luxury as stated by an official report as follow,

“The high proportion of untrained teachers is not as alarming.....since this includes untrained graduate teachers who by virtue of their academic qualifications have a sound educational basis for teaching” (Education Department, 1981: 28)

On the one hand, the government conveyed that teacher training is not necessary. On the other hand, the government provided minimal and remedial induction and in-service training (Llewellyn,1982:para:3.8.19). Under these circumstances, beginning teachers must learn to swim by themselves soon; otherwise, they may sink in daily practice.

The second phase is known as institutional stage. In this stage, the government prepared an institutional framework for uplifting the status of teachers. The quality of human resource in education was not of concern until the Education Commission revealed its fifth report in 1992 under the title "The Teaching Profession", and it was "a landmark in seeking improvements in teacher education"(Cooke, 2000: 42). In this respect, pre-service teacher training became a long-term goal of teachers' professional development in Hong Kong. The fifth report recommended that systematic induction programs should be developed in schools so as to support and guide new teachers during the difficult first year (Education Commission, 1992). Therefore, this recommendation provided a rationale for implementing internship.

Since the number of university graduates and the places of pre-service teacher training have been increasing since 1990's, a significant proportion of graduates has been entering into the teaching profession with formal pre-service training (Education and Manpower Bureau, 2004). After the return of Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty in 1997, the Chief Executive decided to "require all new teachers to be trained graduates" (Policy Address, 1997: 83). One year later, he insisted on "all new teachers to be trained graduates" (Policy Address, 1998: 94). Despite the fact that the Secretary for Education and Manpower, however claimed that the above aim could hardly be achieved in near future (MingPao Daily, 31 October 2002), the goal of uplifting the qualification of new teacher is parallel to the proposal of internship.

The third phase is known as exploratory stage. Instead of seeking for quantity of trained teachers, the government makes an increasing demand on teachers' professional development. Currently, a number of related documents is published such as "Continuing Professional Development for School Excellence: Consultation Paper on Continuing Professional Development of Principals" (Education Department, 2002) and "Towards A Learning Profession: the teacher competencies framework and the continuing professional development of teachers" (ACTEQ, 2003b). Therefore, it is not a surprise that the reform tide approaches beginning teachers.

It is currently the preparation for internship as stated by an official report as follow:

"Two task forces to conduct an in-depth study on the proposal to introduce an internship system for beginning teachers." (Education Commission, 2004)

"train up more than 1000 mentors.....to lend induction support for beginning teachers." (Education Commission, 2004)

In short, the policy discourse of internship is parallel to the development of teacher education policy in Hong Kong.

#### 4 The study of internship: an international perspective

The proposal of internship can be examined from an international perspective. As the growing impact of globalization has affected educational development in many parts of the globe, governments across the world have started to review their education reform initiatives so as to enhance the global capacity of their citizens. Among diverse educational initiatives, induction of beginning teachers is viewed as an important area of concern in teacher education and professional development (Kestner, 1994).

Substantial studies indicate that teacher induction is ranked high priority in education policy of many countries (Bubb et.al., 2002; Educational Research Service, 2000; Moskowitz et al., 1997). It is supported that internship is a common type of induction practice as illustrated below:

Country	Organization	Program Type(s)
United Kingdom	One year internship is required in the Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998	Mentoring, three assessments during the year.
Taiwan	The 1994 Teacher Training Act mandated a one-year teacher internship	Internships (main component), Workshops and Guidance from University Professors.
Australia	Teacher induction is the responsibility of the territories and provinces.	Mentoring, Peer Probation, In-service training, Model Classroom Observations and Team Teaching.
Canada	Teacher induction is the responsibility of the various provinces.	Mentoring and Model Classroom Observations.
Singapore	The national government requires that schools prepare for new teachers.	Mentoring, Seminars and Meetings, Ministry of Education Handbook.
United States	Teacher induction is a state responsibility and there are programs in 26 states. Some programs are state-run and others are school district-run.	Mentoring (most prominent), Seminars and Meetings, Model Classroom Observations and Internships.

Figure 1: *Internship from an international perspective*

Hong Kong is no exception under the global tide of improving effectiveness of beginning teachers in their first year of teaching. Therefore, the proposal of internship is suggested.

## **5 Reflect on the epistemological foundation of internship**

According to Jurgen Habermas's epistemological assumption, three dimensions of approaches to knowledge or categories of processes of inquiry are suggested (Habermas, 1968). The three dimensions can be applied to examine the conception of internship.

The first dimension is empirical-analytical perspective and techno-scientific interest. In this approach, teaching is regarded as an input-output process to control. This means teaching can be identified through scientific methods. In this respect, internship should be a process of an acquisition of standardized and transferable skills to control situation. In order to achieve this goal, a clear and consensus skills and competences as well as a mechanism of evaluation must be decided so that internship bears less risk of being challenged.

The second dimension is interpretative perspective and practical cognitive interest. In this approach, the goal of knowledge is to understand and knowledge is regarded as something gained through interaction with fellow beings. Therefore, internship should be an interpretive understanding between beginning teachers and stakeholders who are mainly mentors. The implementation of internship is based on two assumptions. First, schools are professional communities of intellectuality, practicality and trust. Second, beginning teachers and stakeholders are working in communal bonds of cooperation and practical judgment. In other word, the effectiveness of internship is affected by school culture and teacher culture affects internship.

The third dimension is critical perspective and emancipatory cognitive interest. In this approach, the goal of knowledge is to be free. Knowledge is regarded as something gained through awareness of broader social context. As reflective practitioners, teachers are transformative intellectuals working for the betterment of the status quo. In order to achieve this goal, internship should be based on self-reflection with an agenda of liberating beginning teachers for betterment and critical thinking.

In application of Habermas' three dimensions to examine the proposal of internship in Hong Kong, it is revealed that the proposal does not encourage beginning teachers to be free. Instead of liberating speculative spirits, the purpose of internship is to control beginning teachers through a set of standardized, quantified and controllable skills and competencies.

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Although mentoring is highlighted during internship, the importance of mentoring is reduced by a set of rules. In addition, the effectiveness of mentoring is hesitant because of its complicated nature which involves different stakeholders. Therefore, the purpose of internship is to control rather than to understand.

## **6 Reflect on the rationality foundation of internship**

Apart from reflecting on the epistemological foundation, internship can be reflected by rationality foundation. According to Weber's typology, rationality is defined as the conscious regularity of action that serves "to master fragmented and disconnected realities" (Kalberg, 1980). Three types of rationality can be used to examine the practice of internship.

As suggested by Weber, practical rationality is based on purely pragmatic and egoistic interests. Pragmatic action is basically a precise means-end calculation (Kalberg, 1980). In a policy context, administrative and financial considerations are signs of practical rationality. In this respect, the proposal of internship is supported by practical rationality in two aspects: first, intern teachers must seek for their employment by themselves; second, internship lasts for one year. Both of the arrangements reveal clear administrative considerations of the government. In addition, internship implies a kind of employment rationality in which intern teachers are required to join the teaching force and to complete internship so that they are possible to achieve the status of registered teachers. Furthermore, intern teachers receive less salary and they are excluded from normal scale of salary. It may argue that internship is an instrument to alleviate financial pressure of the government.

The proposal of internship can also be examined by substantive rationality. As explained by Weber, substantive rationality directly orders action into patterns (Kalberg, 1980). In practice of internship, beginning teachers and mentors are united by mentoring relationship. Although mentoring may have positive outcomes, it implies the danger of role-modeling. It is disputable whether beginning teachers and mentors are equal in internship. If mentors are considered as role-models, beginning teachers' values are going to be influenced and even ignored. Consequently, mentors and schools may become engineers to manufacture beginning teachers in the same pattern.

The proposal of internship is also be challenged by communicative rationality. According to the typology of Habermas (1979, 1981), the orientation of communicative rationality is to achieve understanding and even consensus at four types of validity claim, they are rightness claim, truth claim, truthfulness claim, comprehensibility claim. Although internship seems to require understanding and consensus between mentors and beginning

teachers, its effectiveness is disputable in two aspects. At the level of understanding, there is a possibility of superficial and false understanding.

Whether it is a real understanding depends on full participation of mentors and intern teachers. If both of them give contribution sincerely, they may be gained from the relationship; otherwise, it is just a forced and unproductive mentoring relationship. Therefore, it is argued that internship seems to be too idealistic since it is hard to guarantee an enthusiastic and attentive commitment lasting for the whole period.

The second challenge is the goal of communication. The ambiguous role of intern teacher is an obstacle of communication. The role of intern teachers is defined by intern teachers themselves, the government, as well as different stakeholders of the schools such as mentors, colleagues and students. Different perceptions lead to various roles which include learner, ordinary teacher, privileged teacher, mediocre teacher etc. The diverse roles affect communication and effectiveness of internship. Suppose an intern teacher considers himself as a learner while his colleagues regards him as an inferior teacher which is bound to leave after internship, this kind of different expectations may hinder real collaboration.

There are many possible aims of internship. They include, smooth transition, training of reflective practitioner, continuation of good practice, teacher retention, teacher certification etc. It is apparent that multiple goals may lead to poor communication.

The nature of mentoring communication is crucial but it is also indefinite. In search of the role of mentor in literature, there are multiple meanings of the term of “mentor” (Anderson & Shannon, 1988; Sullivan, 1992). The diverse roles of mentor can be divided into two groups; the first group implies a supportive role which includes sponsor, encourager, counselor, friend etc, while the second group implies an instructive role which includes trainer, role model, leader etc. These two groups of mentor’s role may lead to two contradictory orientations of communication in internship.

## **7 Reflect on the power foundation of internship**

Apart from reflecting on the rationality foundation, internship can be reflected on the power foundation. There is the explicit power base of compliance with the critical first year of teaching in research findings. Substantial studies try to explore the stages of the first year (Chan, 1993; Moir, 1999; Ryan, 1986). A suggestion of the stages is illustrated as below:

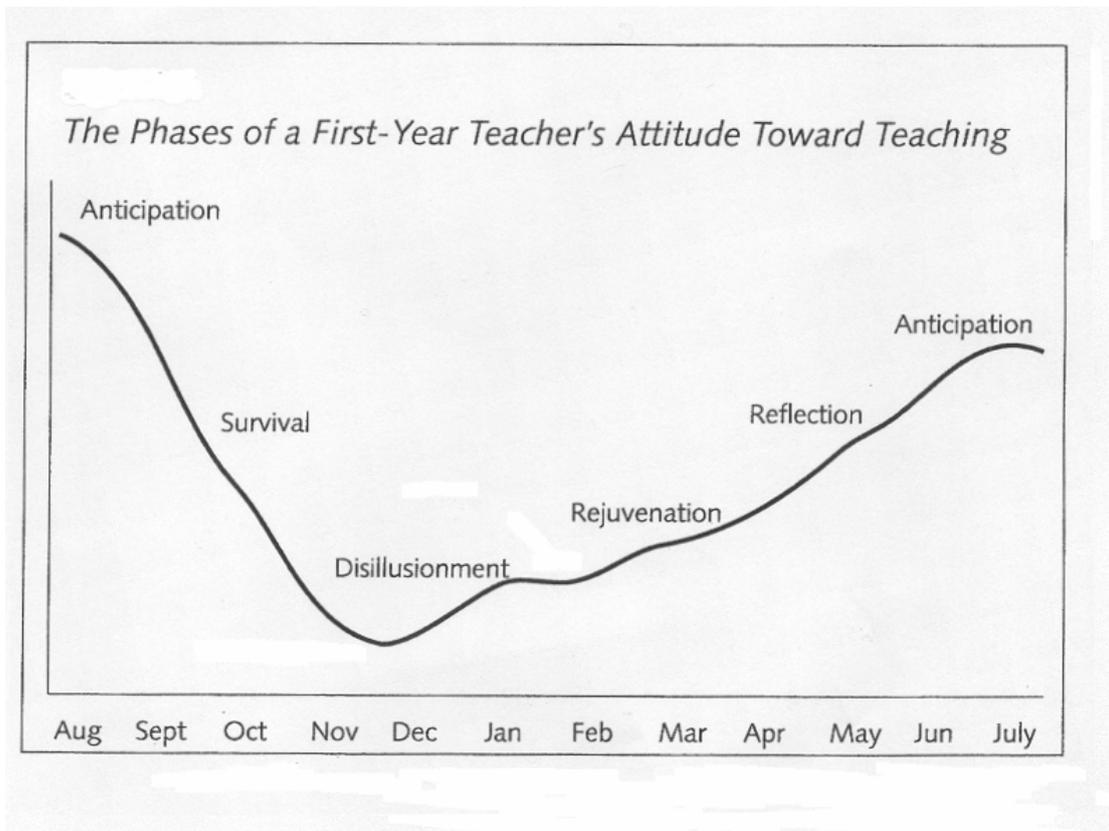


Figure 2: *The phase of a first year teacher's attitude toward teaching (Moir, 1999)*

As exhibited in the figure, Moir (1999) proposes a six-phase model indicating psychological changes of beginning teachers in their first year of teaching. In the phase of anticipation, teachers tend to romanticize the role of the teacher. Teachers at survival phase are bombarded with a variety of problems and situation they had not anticipated. Teachers at disillusionment phase are weak in morale where they question their commitment and competence. In the phase of rejuvenation, teachers accept the realities of teaching where they have more confidence and better coping skills to manage problems. Teachers at reflection phase reflect back over the year and they then think about the changes or the plan for the following year (Moir, 1999).

Despite the fact that different scholars hold various views on the number and the characteristic of stages of beginning teachers' first year, many of them try to argue that mentoring is an effective way to alleviate the pressure of first year of teaching (Chan,1993; Moir,1999; Ryan,1986). Therefore, literature and research findings can are power bases of internship.

In application of a Foucault's conception of power (Foucault, 1977), the disciplinary power at work in internship is significant in three dimensions. The first dimension is

hierarchical observation. It is clear that the different roles in internship form certain hierarchical relations, for example, intern teachers are observed by mentors, other stakeholders within schools and government, mentors are observed by other mentors and government, schools are observed by government. The hierarchical observation is more complicated since these roles are mutually observed. Consequently, an invisible gaze of panopticon is formed where different roles are intensifying pressure in practice of internship.

The second dimension is normalizing judgment. This is revealed in the proposal of internship since it is basically a standardized model to cater of diverse beginning teachers and mentors. In this respect, mentoring is standardized in many aspects such as duration, practice, activity, requirements etc. In order not to provoke disputes on registration of intern teachers, a set of standardized requirements and routines must be formulated to govern intern teachers and mentors during internship. The process of standardization is also a process of normalizing judgment. As a result, a mass production of registered teachers is possible though they receive internship in different schools.

The third dimension is examination. In practice of internship, intern teachers are exposed to examination at different levels. This kind of examination includes evaluation from mentors and students, accreditation and registration from the government. Whether intern teachers can stay or leave the teaching force, it is decided by continuous evaluation and examination during internship. Nevertheless, accreditation is merely a beginning. To those successfully accredited intern teachers, they may not be invited to continue teaching in the schools of their internship though they are considered suitable for teaching elsewhere (ACTEQ, 2003). In other word, accredited intern teachers must seek for their own employment before and after internship.

## **8 Managerialism in internship**

The idea of managerialism is dominated in Hong Kong education (Chan, 2002; Caldwell, 1997; Mok & Welch, 2002). In reflection on the theoretical basis of the proposal of internship, three major policy implications of a managerial approach can also be identified. They include, top down management, absence of professional control, loss of educational ideal.

Internship is a system of top down management. Although school-based mentoring is the focus of internship, the whole process is basically top down and is highly centralized with the government overseeing the whole process. The process of mentoring is designed and managed by the government in terms of purpose, practice, evaluation and registration.

Internship is controlled in a managerial approach while professional control is ignored. In historical context, there is a discourse which a General Teaching Council (GTC) should be established in Hong Kong to monitor the performance of beginning teachers and to carry out teacher registration (Education Commission, 1998; Yu, 2000). Nevertheless, the GTC is not established in present so that internship is managed by the government with an absence of professional participation from professional bodies and academic institutions. Although school-based mentoring is adopted as a strategy of internship, mentors and schools are underpowered in their managerial autonomy.

As a means of the government to control education, internship implies a loss of educational ideal. Education has the function of enlightenment, providing critical and creative styles of behavior and thinking patterns (Dewey, 1904). If the main purpose of education is to transmit knowledge and skills as well as in pursuit of role-modeling, it will not be able to nurture creativity and it will only maintain the status quo. In practice of internship, mentors and beginning teachers with different backgrounds are reproduced in a standardized way. In the process of standardization, beginning teachers are viewed as commodities which are manufactured in educational factories. Therefore, internship is a means of social control for the maintenance of norms and values determined by the government.

## **9 Conclusion**

With the impact of globalization, the proposal of internship for beginning teachers in Hong Kong is initiated from the international experience. There is an extensive literature reveal the benefit of mentoring for beginning teachers to be successful in their first year of teaching. On the other hand, internship can be identified as a management strategy adopted by the government for controlling educational sector. Even internship is a means of control; it is merely a means for a short duration of teachers' journey.

Nevertheless, it is widely accepted by teacher educators that teacher education should be a lifelong process, rather than being limited to a relatively short period of teaching journey (Day, 1999). After completion of internship, registered teachers should be in pursuit of in-service and continuous professional development to meet the challenges during their career cycle (Fessler & Christensen, 1992). Such concept of career cycle is ignored in the proposal of internship in which no promise has been made in the discourse.

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