Supporting the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Hong Kong

Carmel McNaught and Cecilia Ka Wai Chun

The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Received: 21 November 2021; Accepted: 8 February 2023

The paper traces the evolution of the Centre for Learning Enhancement And Research (CLEAR) at The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) from early 2002 to the end of 2021. The University needed a centre to support both institutional and local (department and faculty) needs and aspirations for enhancing teaching and learning. Five key strategies adopted by CLEAR are: embedding the practice of existing teachers into policy development, localizing quality-assurance processes, relating professional-development activities to career development, involving students, and producing research evidence from within the Hong Kong context. The evidence base that supports these strategies, and the cultural and community factors involved, will be woven into an evidence-based narrative that spans 20 years.

INTRODUCTION

This paper is a narrative about how a scholarly approach to teaching and learning was embedded into the policies and practices of a university in Hong Kong. The paper reports on the establishment of an academic-development centre at The Chinese University of Hong Kong. The two authors are former and present directors of that centre and our evidence is presented through an overview of a substantial record of publication of the work done in the centre. We present this work within the framework of the scholarship of teaching and learning as a scholarly approach to academic development demands an evidence-based approach to decision-making about policies and practices. As we hope to demonstrate that, if logically defensible application of theoretical models and robust evaluation evidence are used, then consensus about action and continual improvement becomes possible.

Establishing the credibility of a centrally located academic-development centre in a research-intensive university is tricky at the best of times! Part of the challenge is that staff in the academic-development centre have three constituencies – teachers (and students) in individual departments; management at faculty level (deans and associate deans); and the university chancellery. Across this wide spectrum, there is a strong diversity of views about educational needs and aspirations, and how these might best be supported. Within Asia, there are additional tensions which come from varying cultural perspectives about education and its role in societal development. In this paper, we explain how one such centre was established in Hong Kong, the theoretical basis that informed its strategies, and how evaluation evidence of impact was gathered and fed back into ongoing activities.

As we reflect over the last two decades, it is clear that our endeavours were driven by this question:

> **How can a university establish an academic-development centre in a Chinese context which nurtures local cultural practices within a broader international perspective on teaching and learning?**

The University Grants Committee (UGC) of Hong Kong is a non-statutory advisory committee responsible for advising the Government of Hong Kong on the development and funding of higher-education institutions. There are eight UGC-funded universities. The Quality Assurance Council (QAC) within the UGC has oversight of the funds allocated to enhancing the quality of teaching and learning. See Postiglione and Jung (2017) for a comprehensive overview of the higher-education system in Hong Kong.

This paper is set in the context of The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), a comprehensive research university. CUHK's philosophy and mission is to produce well-rounded graduates, well-trained in their major subjects and, in addition, possessing a range of generic skills and values appropriate to the 21st century (a short list of which is often termed the 4Cs: critical thinking, creativity, collaboration and communication). Bilingual proficiency (in Chinese, both Cantonese and Putonghua, and English), an understanding of Chinese culture and an appreciation of other cultures are core components of the curriculum's desired outcomes, designed to prepare students globally as citizens and leaders. Articulate rhetoric about policy is one thing; however, a key question for every university is whether appropriate and effective policies, processes and support structures exist to ensure that its mission is enacted and achieved.

The Centre for Learning Enhancement And Research (CLEAR; https://www.cuhk.edu.hk/clear/) was established in 2002 as an academic centre that would support both institutional and local (department and faculty) educational needs and aspirations. From the outset, CLEAR was expected to fulfil four roles: (1) contribution to university policy and quality assurance of teaching and learning; (2) professional development related to teaching and learning; (3) a variety of activities related to learning design in programmes and courses; and (4) scholarly research in higher education, with an emphasis on learning in a Chinese context. An evidence-based narrative across this four-pronged set of roles is detailed in this paper.

Within this paper are a number of suggestions that we believe could be of value to other academic-development centres, not only in Asia but in many other national contexts. There are eight suggestions; these are inserted in the text and also grouped together in the final summary. There is no hierarchical order

https://doi.org/10.20429/ijsotl.2023.17103

implied in these suggestions; they are noted in the text to place each suggestion in an appropriate context. Obviously, many of the suggestions are linked.

With such a broad remit, it was essential for CLEAR to establish good working relationships across other support units in the University as well as with staff in the eight discipline faculties at the University. An early publication on this vital relationship-building is in McNaught (2005). In addition, over time, staff in CLEAR co-published with staff in the Library (e.g., McNaught et al., 2004), in the Information Technology Services Centre (ITSC) (e.g., Lam et al., 2011), with colleagues in faculties (e.g., Burd et al., 2004), with colleagues in middle management in faculties (e.g., McNaught et al., 2013), and with senior management (e.g., Lok et al., 2016). The relationships established through shared research and writing are powerful ones.

Suggestions for academic development in other contexts:

1. Be centrally located, and report to senior management.

2. Have formal liaisons with all academic units—and hence all disciplines—and also other support centres in the University.

Globally, there is a wide range in the models underlying academic-development units, and often the design and purpose of such units is not clear to academics and administrators in the wider institution. Shifts in the role of academic-development units towards being more central to institutional needs were highlighted by Gibbs (2013). The rise of evidence-based quality audits has supported this shift as funding is often informed by quality audits; this is true in Hong Kong where the UGC provides generous university funding but requires evidence for outcomes. In addition, Loads and Campbell (2015) investigated the existence of transformative and even disruptive pedagogies that might be supported within the 'innovation' remit that many academic-development units have as a function. Successful academic-development units need to fulfil several roles and, not surprisingly, this multifaceted charter can create confusion as to the purposes of such units. Indeed, there is often dissension between academic developers in different units within the same university (Thomas & Cordiner, 2014). A fragmented mode of operation can result as Directors of academic-development units try to please many constituents in a 'just in time' fashion. This scatter-gun approach led Kek and Hammer (2015) to decry the ad hoc nature of much academic-development work and called for clearer theoretical frameworks to underlie the area. The complexity of academic-development work was nicely highlighted by Sutherland (2018) in her conclusion that: 'A more holistic approach to academic development would pay attention to the *whole of the academic role*, the *whole institution*, and the *whole person*.' The first author (McNaught, 2020) has explored these tensions and concluded that the failure of many academic-development centres is often due to an over-reliance on 'edutainment' and small-scale, single-case studies, and that a shift to adopting models of inclusive peer support and collaboration as key drivers in all activities is much more productive. The narrative in this paper is concerned with how this shift might be enabled within a university which sees itself as contributing to both knowledge on a global scale and the importance of Chinese culture. In essence, the paper describes an evaluation study across 20 years, where the phases of work build on the cumulative evidence across several projects and small research studies.

KEY PRINCIPLES UNDERLYING THE WORK OF CLEAR

While the literature cited above is post-2002, similar ideas have been around for decades. So, right from the outset, it was apparent to the team in CLEAR that we needed to be broadly inclusive of all members of the university community (students, teachers, management) in designing the role and strategies for CLEAR. Two key principles underpinned the work of establishing CLEAR. The first was that academic-development work must be relevant to local beliefs and practices, both disciplinary conventions and being in a university setting with a strong Chinese culture; and the second was that evidence-based and theoretically sound strategies for facilitating change were essential. It should be noted that each of the published papers which reported on the projects and research studies that contributed to the narrative in this paper had ethics clearance in accordance with the ethics requirements for universities in Hong Kong.

Local adoption and relevance through conversational communities

To ensure local adoption and relevance, accepted principles and practices were refined in grounded research with input from award-winning CUHK teachers (Kember et al., 2006; Kember & McNaught, 2007), with evidence to show that our 'local' principles of effective teaching were closely aligned with practice in Australia (e.g., Hicks et al., 2010), the UK (e.g., Fry et al., 2014) and the US (e.g., Bain, 2004; Ambrose et al., 2010). The references cited here are relatively recent ones, indicating the durability of the universal principles of scholarly teaching and learning cited below. The enactment of these principles in the work of CLEAR is thus of international interest. These principles, listed in Kember et al. (2006) where 18 award-winning CUHK teachers are co-authors, are summarized in Table 1.

Teaching awards are taken seriously at CUHK; award-winning teachers often sit on teaching and learning committees at both the faculty and central levels, and have direct input to policy (McNaught, 2010).

However, in Asia, the implementation of these universal principles is subtly different. It is the nuance in the details about how these principles are enacted in practice that can be understood by considering how the concept of 'face' plays out in designing for learning and looking for evidence that such designs are effective; a detailed account is in McNaught (2012). One of the strengths of face in Chinese culture is respect and concern for others; one of its challenges is the avoidance of risk-taking (Fan, 2000; Watkins & Biggs, 2001). As a result, the concept of community is a relatively comfortable one in a Chinese context if the purpose of the endeavour is clear and the rules for mediating conflict are clear and not confrontational. Thus, peer support and collaboration are important in all activities – what Bennett (2003) described as the development of conversational communities; 'conversation' as the 'essential metaphor' for university life. As noted above, one successful endeavour was co-publishing with colleagues right across the University.

Of course, in all complex educational ecosystems there are uneasy tensions which can spill over into conflict. For example, the

Table 1. **Universal principles of scholarly teaching and learning (after Kember et al., 2006)**	
Category	**Principles**
Planning teaching and courses	Articulate expected learning outcomes. Select appropriate learning activities and content. Seek feedback from students continuously. Flexibly adapt plans in the light of students' responses.
What is taught	Teach key concepts, rather than detail. Support independent learning. Present conflicting theories to develop more sophisticated beliefs about knowledge.
How it is taught	Develop a relationship with students. Ensure interaction in class between teachers and students. Use a variety of teaching methods. Use a variety of assessment strategies, which are valid tests of the planned learning outcomes.
Motivating students	Have high expectations of students. Display enthusiasm. Employ a variety of active-learning approaches. Make classes enjoyable. Use relevant and interesting material. Reward achievements.
Development as a teacher	Learn from past teachers. Exchange ideas with colleagues. Attend workshops. Reflect on student feedback. Seek synergies between teaching and research.

concept of student-centredness is a contested one. Many academics have reservations about students' capacity to make informed judgements about their learning needs and are also concerned about a perceived increase in students' demands as clients in an economic exchange (e.g., Murphy et al., 2017; Nixon et al., 2016). However, we take the view that learning needs to be gauged, in the words of John Biggs, by what the student does (Biggs, 1999; Biggs & Tang, 2011). In all academic-development work there is a continual tension between this view of student-centredness – with its sense of tailoring to individual student needs – and a desire to develop and control institutional processes that would keep the system working smoothly and produce desired metrics for the performance of the academic-development unit and for the university in external quality-assurance audits and the ever-growing reliance on university league tables. So, while CLEAR advocated student autonomy and published about handing responsibility to students for their learning and using them as co-designers in technology-enabled course redesigns (e.g., McNaught et al., 2007; Lam et al., 2009), there was also a strong focus on having a central role in CUHK's quality-assurance processes (McNaught & Young, 2011; McNaught, 2013, 2009a&b). This dual nature is, in our view, essential to survival in modern universities; our constituents are individual teachers (and the students they teach), as well as middle (at department and faculty levels) and senior university management.

Just as teachers have a dual role—they do all they can to assist students in their learning and then act as judges in the assessment process—academic staff in CLEAR were able to support programmes and department/ faculty units in assembling documents needed for quality-assurance processes and then sit on panels during the review process. We ran mock audit sessions that were valued. In 2008, the Hong Kong government instituted audits of teaching and learning at all universities with a clear search for evidence of student learning outcomes (Table 2, cited below). CUHK was the first university to be audited and the reputational stakes were high. It was pleasing to receive this feedback in the audit report. A "key agent and major strategic resource is the expertise and services of CLEAR".

Conceptual-change theory within communities

Conceptual-change theory underpins all the academic-development work conducted by CLEAR. The pioneering work of Lewin (1952) on bringing about social change through group decision-making focused on considering how to change deep-seated beliefs. He suggested a three-step procedure: unfreezing, moving and then freezing at the new position. Others have subsequently utilized this work in educational contexts, mostly in science education. Nussbaum and Novick (1982) described a similar three-phase process for bringing about conceptual change as follows:

1. A process for diagnosing existing conceptual frameworks and revealing them to those involved
2. A period of disequilibrium and conceptual conflict which makes the person(s) dissatisfied with existing conceptions
3. A reforming or reconstruction phase in which a new conceptual framework is formed.

There is now a substantial literature on conceptual change that explores the complexity of this framework (e.g., Vosniadou, 2013) and the challenges of addressing the affective and philosophical implications of identifying conceptual change. We do not underestimate these challenges but, in this paper, are reporting on how this framework was one that enabled us to work across the quality-assurance, professional-development and research aspects of CLEAR's work. Two valuable overview articles about conceptual-change theory were written by Özdemir and Clark (2007) and Strike and Posner (1992).

The first phase requires accurate and reliable data. In CUHK's quality-assurance framework, the development of a suite of evaluation questionnaires was an early and essential activity in CLEAR. In addition, the research aspect of our brief as an academic centre has produced evidence to inform understanding educational issues, and the planning and implementation of a wide range of educational projects. Staff members in CLEAR were on academic terms of service; so, research and publication were an integral part of our work and resulted in an accumulation of accessible papers on almost all aspects of teaching and learning at CUHK.

Bearing in mind the need to avoid confrontational situations in a Chinese context, the second phase was an especially challeng-

ing one but the establishment of annual, strictly confidential meetings with each department in the University enabled planning of

Suggestions for academic development in other contexts:

3. Have a staff complement that is on academic terms of service.

4. Produce peer-reviewed publications that contribute to higher education, both regionally and globally.

local projects that addressed particular educational concerns. The data for each meeting consisted of students' perceptions in that department of their progress on the scales of the Student Experience Questionnaire (SEQ) which is described in detail below. The data for each department was compared to that for the faculty as a whole and for the whole university; data was presented visually (an example is in McNaught, Leung, & Kember, 2006). These meetings annually in 70+ departments were a major work commitment for the senior academics in CLEAR but this investment of time paid off in terms of being able to plan tailored professional-development activities. As noted below, the progressive shift towards faculty/ department-based activities has strengthened the value of locally relevant activities. Also, these meetings supported good working relationships across the University through adherence to strict confidentiality; the value of trust cannot be underplayed.

The existence of generously funded Teaching Development Grants in Hong Kong has been a great boon in establishing projects across the University which, if designed strategically, can contribute to student learning as well as servicing institutional and governmental metrics (McNaught, 2009a). As noted above, CLEAR is an academic unit with staff on academic terms of service. This is seen as important if collegial conversations are to occur about problems in teaching and learning. Academic developers need to have 'street cred', to be seen as colleagues with sound teaching and research experience (McNaught, 2020).

In the third phase, the complete overhaul of Hong Kong's undergraduate system to enact a (normative) four-year undergraduate curriculum from 2012 was a strong impetus for all programmes to update and clearly articulate their educational approach. Another opportunity for reconstruction occurred when professional programmes (e.g., business, engineering, law, medicine, nursing, pharmacy) were seeking accreditation or re-accreditation, staff in CLEAR were able to support mock meetings and, in some cases, review of documentation.

DEVELOPMENT OF HONG KONG'S AND CUHK'S QUALITY-ASSURANCE CULTURE

In a generously funded higher-education system, such as exists in Hong Kong, it is reasonable for the government to demand evidence of value for money invested in universities. Table 2 is an annotated timeline of events since the mid-1990s showing a gradual, but clearly directed, increase in government intervention to ensure that the Hong Kong universities (especially at undergraduate level) have an outcomes-based approach (OBA) to teaching and learning (mandated by government) that is not merely output-driven but is based on indicators that are recognized as pertaining to student learning (McNaught & Young, 2011). The table shows the responsiveness that CUHK had to directives and suggestions emanating from the UGC. The art of academic development is to strategize within mandated constraints so that both students' learning needs and institutional needs are met and enhanced.

CUHK's first Teaching and Learning policy, formulated by the Senate Committee on Teaching and Learning (SCTL) with the support of CLEAR and launched in 2004, emphasizes quality enhancement rather than quality control. This Integrated Framework document (http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/english/teaching/internal-quality-assurance.html) has as its main objective "to ensure that teachers and programmes engage in reflection about teaching and learning, that such reflection is rooted in evidence and leads to action for improvement, and that incentives be provided for such efforts." The Integrated Framework received a commendation in the 2008 QAC audit of CUHK.

The principles underlying the Integrated Framework have an outcomes-based approach (OBA): curriculum elements (choice of content, learning activities, assessment strategies and evaluation practices) should align with desired learning outcomes to ensure fitness for purpose (Biggs & Tang, 2011). This curriculum-alignment model is incorporated into procedures for course (or subject/ unit/ module) development, course review, programme development and programme review. Feedback for evaluation is central as it informs reflection upon practice. Review outcomes impact budget allocation to departments, albeit indirectly and modestly. Up to 10% of a departmental budget can be affected but, in most cases, this is used only as a motivation for compliance.

Ongoing cycles of reflection are captured in action plans for each programme which are refined through a series of review and reporting activities, including a brief annual progress report on teaching and learning, a three-year cycle of internal course reviews; and a major programme review every six years involving a self-evaluation document and review by a panel (appointed by SCTL) that included an external examiner in early cycles to ensure international quality standards. The panel's report leads to an action plan to deal with challenges and improve the quality of teaching and learning within the programme.

At both course and programme level, there are cycles of reflection and action. These cycles are shown in Figure 1. It is important to note that student feedback is essential to the conversations that CLEAR has with colleagues in individual departments. Evaluation Services in CLEAR administers a suite of questionnaires; see https://www.cuhk.edu.hk/clear/enhance/evaluation.html. More detail about a key questionnaire – the Student Experience Questionnaire (SEQ) – is below. There is support available for enacting the action plans – for example UGC-funded Teaching Development Grants (McNaught, 2009a) and internal courseware-development grants. All grants to support teaching and learning at CUHK are required to have an evaluation plan so that teachers are directed and supported to seek evidence of enhanced student learning.

The Student Experience Questionnaire (SEQ) was originally developed in 2003 (McNaught, Leung, & Kember, 2006; Kember & Leung, 2009), and is administered to first- and final-year undergraduate students. The final version of the questionnaire includes scales seeking students' feedback on nine aspects of the teaching and learning environment. There are also scales seeking students' perceptions of the influence of the environment on the development of seven generic capabilities, broadly covering the 4Cs.

Table 2. **Timeline of important quality initiatives in Hong Kong and at CUHK**	
Year	**Initiatives. (*CUHK initiatives in italics.*) Main focus on undergraduate experience.**
1994	The UGC initiates sector-wide Teaching Development Grants.
1997	First Teaching and Learning Quality Process Reviews (TLQPRs) at all UGC-funded institutions. These were process reviews and not overtly outcomes-driven.
2002	*Establishment of CLEAR at CUHK and the development of survey instruments of students' educational experiences.*
2003	Second round of TLQPRs. Outcomes of good practice from the two rounds of TLQPRs were disseminated widely across Hong Kong. Regional changes are discussed in Lee and Gopinathan (2003).
2003	*CUHK's Senate Committee on Teaching and Learning (SCTL) was formed.*
2003	*First administration of Student Experience Survey (SEQ) at CUHK.*
2004	Major UGC report (UGC, 2004) clearly articulated an accent on institutional accountability.
2004	*CUHK's first formal Teaching and Learning policy adopted based on principles emanating from research in CLEAR.*
2005	*The eLearning Service established as a collaboration between CLEAR and the Information Technology Services Centre (ITSC).*
2005	An outcomes-based approach (OBA) specifically mentioned by the UGC as being the direction for higher education.
2006	The QAC established; its focus is on teaching and learning, and not on whole-of-institution audits: http://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/qac/
2008	*First QAC audit with a clear search for evidence of student learning outcomes.*
2009	*Integration of the Independent Learning Centre (ILC) within CLEAR to streamline student support.*
2010	*Adoption of the policy 'Assessment of student learning in taught programmes' (rationale in Lok et al., 2016).*
2012	Double cohort and the new (normative) four-year undergraduate curriculum across all universities in HK. Universities received funding for the curriculum, infrastructure and recruitment implications of this dramatic change.
2012	*CUHK Shenzhen campus established on the Chinese Mainland.*
2012	*Entry Class Questionnaire (ECQ) for student background information, self-perceived capabilities and expectation of university studies.*
2014	*First Year Experience Questionnaire (FYEQ) for student views of their experience of the first-year university studies.*
2014	*Quality Manual at CUHK was compiled to provide an integrated access to all QA processes: http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/clear/qm/*
2015	*Second QAC audit (at CUHK).*
2016	*Establishment of the Centre for eLearning Innovation and Technology (ELITE) within CLEAR.*
2016	*CLEAR as member of the eLearning Task Force co-chaired by Vice-Chancellor and Provost.*
2016	*Undergraduate Exit Questionnaire (UEQ) (mirroring the ECQ) for students' perception and evaluation of their undergraduate experience at CUHK, plans after graduation, and reflections on learning outcomes.*
2018	*Slight revisions of the assessment policy.*

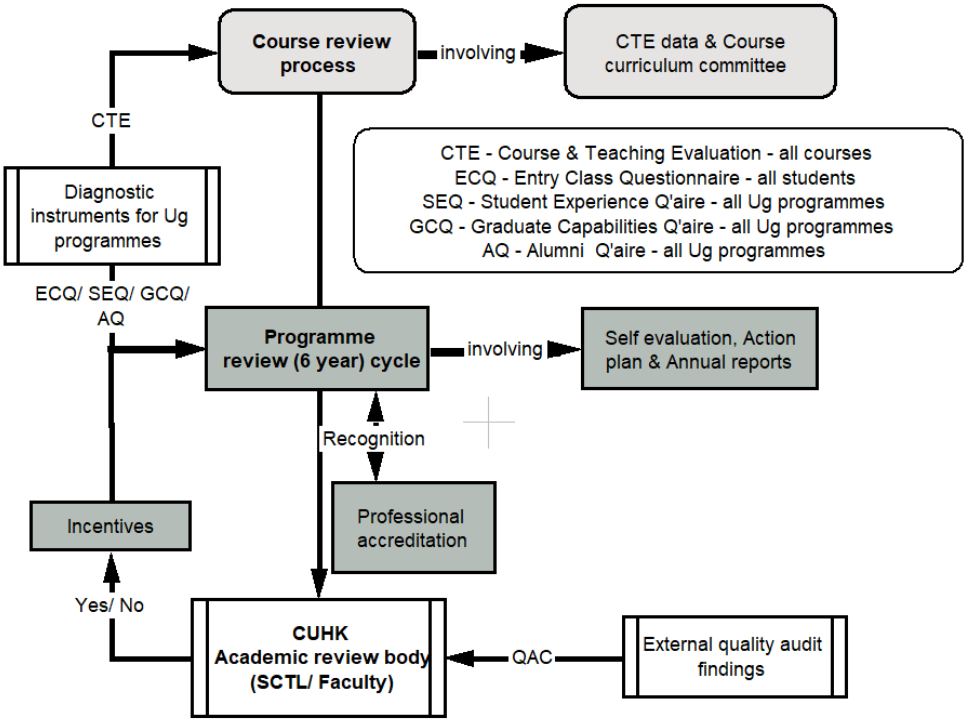

Figure 1. **Cycles of reflection and action at both undergraduate course and programme level (after McNaught, 2009b)**

The process of annual programme monitoring driven by standard data sets presented in time series using SEQ (and other) data is represented in Figure 2.

As in many universities, student survey data (self-perceptions of capability development, views about the teaching and learning environment, feedback on university education, etc.) are used as an indicator of whether academic-development support is enhancing student learning. SEQ scores on all scales have risen over time, though it would not be sensible to attribute this only to CLEAR's endeavours. Of more interest is the structural-equation model that is derived from SEQ data which shows a positive relationship between the design of the teaching and learning environment (along the lines of the principles noted in Table 1) and the development of generic capabilities (Kember & Leung, 2005).

How the design for programme reviews associated with the Integrated Framework fits the three-stage conceptual-change model is shown in Table 3.

REFLECTION ON THE STRUCTURE OF CLEAR

After such a long (in the normal lifetimes of academic-development units) period of existence, it is important to take stock. As Bolander Laksov & McGrath (2020) noted, shortcomings can act as a catalyst for learning if serious reflection takes place. *Has our use of conceptual-change theory been of value in guiding institutional change? What did we do well that could be further enhanced? Where might useful changes be made?*

In 2012, the first author retired; since then, there have been two Directors coming from different backgrounds and experience; the second author is the current Director. Our test of sustainability is how smoothly evolutionary changes occur to an established model and set of processes. As noted at the begin-

Table 3. **Programme reviews and the three-stage conceptual-change model (after Kember et al., 2006)**

Stage	Planned activity
Evidence of the need for change	The course-review and programme-review guides outline how quality-assurance evidence can be collected using questionnaires, student panels and forums, reflections of teachers, assessment results, and peer review from colleagues.
Confronting the situation	A consideration of the programme-review report by a meeting of the programme-review panel with teachers responsible for the programme is integral to the process. Confidentiality and collegiality are emphasized.
Reconstruction of a new approach	The reviews are cyclical, which encourages progressive trials and evaluation.

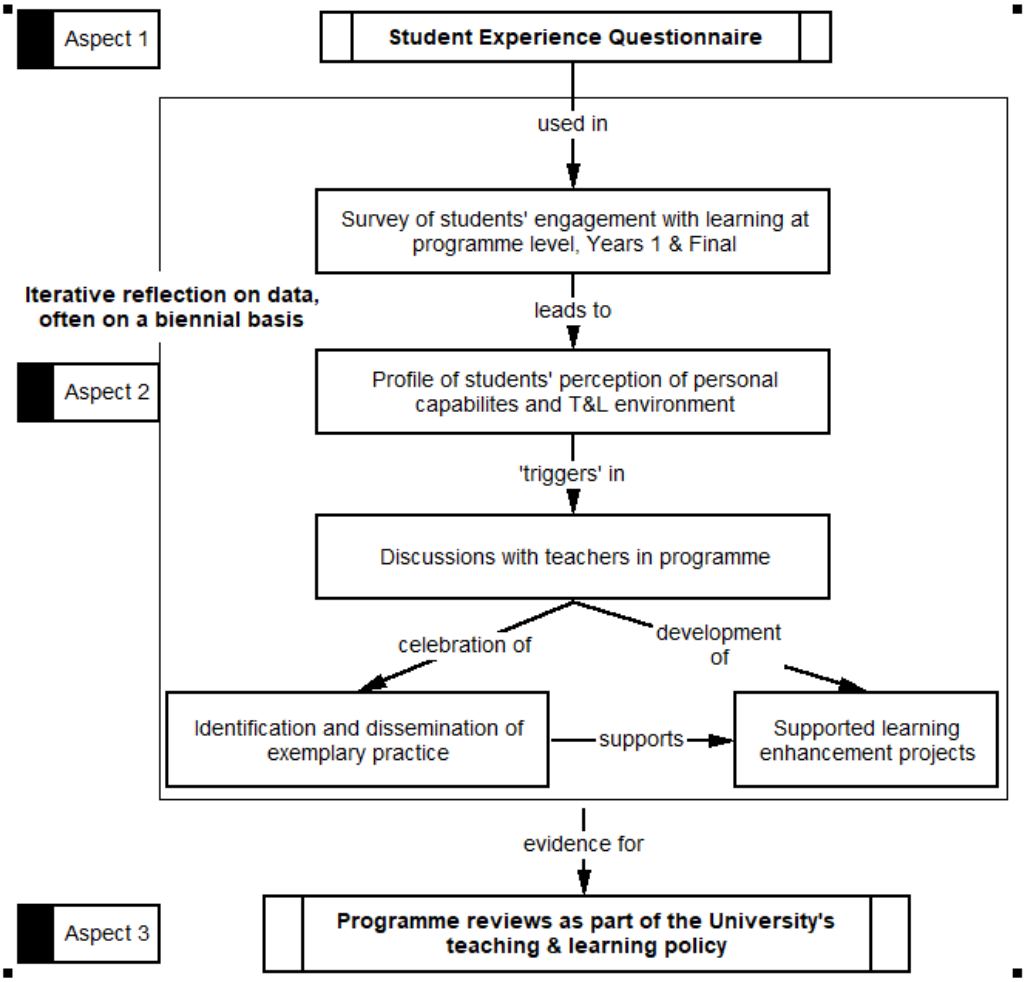

Figure 2. **Use of the Student Experience Questionnaire (after McNaught, Leung, & Kember, 2006)**

ning of this paper, academic-development units are susceptible to radical restructuring. This is stressful, and often results in inefficient re-inventing of the wheel once the dust settles. The strong research base in CLEAR is ongoing and supports stability. The role, responsibilities, strategies and activities still stand, although with some evolutionary tweaks.

Suggestions for academic development in other contexts:

5. Engage with all members of the University community, including senior management, teachers and students.

6. Have active input to teaching and learning policy.

In CLEAR the number of academic and administrative staff funded centrally by the University is small (less than ten); however, approximately 20 to 30 reseach or project staff are funded from grants obtained by CLEAR academics. This model of a 'lean' central university budget supplemented by grants reduces concerns at faculty level that money is being diverted from teaching and research in departments. In addition, CLEAR staff are able to assist both individual teachers and heads of department in articulating their educational endeavours in the most favourable light and these consultations have served as excellent relationship-building activities. An increased focus on collaborative activities is a trend to continue.

There are tangible benefits for teachers who engage in professional-development and collaborative activities in CLEAR (Table 4). Basic professional development is mandatory for all new academic and teaching staff at Assistant Professor level and below, and for postgraduate students who act as teaching assistants. The evidence-based principles of scholarly teaching and learning (Table 1) informed the development of the professional-development course for teachers which, throughout all its iterations, had four key elements:

1. Understanding the teaching context at CUHK.
2. Planning courses, aligning the curriculum to achieve learning outcomes.
3. Teaching larger and smaller classes. As most of CUHK's teachers and students are working in a second or other language, a focus on presentation skills, use of technology in face-to-face and online modes, and strategies for ensuring meaningful interactions are important.
4. Assessment and evaluation using a framework based on the Structure of the Observed Learning Outcomes (SOLO) taxonomy (Biggs & Collis, 1982; Biggs & Tang, 2011; see McNaught, Lam, & Cheng, 2006, for a detailed explanation of SOLO categories used at CUHK).

Full details of the current professional-development course structure for teachers are at https://www.cuhk.edu.hk/clear/prodev/pdc.html. The postgraduate staff-development programme is focused more closely on the nature of the teaching in each department, with a strong focus on presentation skills and making cogent explanations.

There has been a shift from centrally controlled activities to locally relevant sessions, usually involving the input from teachers of the respective faculties. So, while mandatory professional development remains as a key feature of CLEAR's activities, it has a more flexible design and is significantly enhanced by optional, locally situated and collaborative workshops. This shift to more equal and collegial partnerships across the University is in line with the Debowski's (2014) call for a shift from "agents of change to partners in arms".

A second change, in line with supporting localized aspects of university-wide themes, has been a shift from face-to-face formal workshops and courses to increased use of multiple modes of delivery by CLEAR through online resources, collaborative projects and consultations. The move towards more faculty-based and flexible professional development is seen as an enhancement.

Table 4. **Design of the mandatory professional-development course for teaching staff and the three-stage, conceptual-change model (after Kember et al., 2006)**

Stage	Planned activity
Evidence of the need for change	Activities are based on the existing course outlines and assessment items used by teachers in the course. When a mismatch exists between current practice and an aligned curriculum, it will become obvious.
Confronting the situation	The use of video vignettes of award-winning CUHK teachers supports transmissive teachers to reflect, as it shows that teachers judged exemplary have different practices to their own. Videos include teachers from all faculties showing practices very different to transmission.
Reconstruction of a new approach	There is flexibility in assessment for the course. Two examples: 1. A project where a small group takes on teaching about a form of teaching. The method of teaching is expected to be congruent with the form of teaching. Teachers are exposed to case-based and problem-based learning, role plays, debates, field work, peer tutoring and appropriate uses of eLearning. Peer assessment is used. 2. A detailed reflective portfolio on an individual's own teaching over several weeks. In addition, a community of practice is built up as far as possible during the course, so that individual teachers' isolation is reduced.

A third arena of change occurred in the area of academic promotion. In the mid-2000s, the criteria for the teaching and learning component of an application for promotion were broadened considerably and the development of teaching portfolios suggested (http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/clear/tnl/teaching_portfolios.pdf, developed by CLEAR). Previously, CTE scores were considered as a threshold requirement, though research performance in the discipline of the faculties was the main determinant for promotion. As in all research-intensive universities, research still carries most weight. However, the shift in personnel policy over the last decade has enabled teaching performance and a scholarly approach to innovation to gain recognition. Metrics on teaching-related publications are now used in QA audits and this has raised the status of work in the scholarship of teaching and learning.

The fourth change is a very significant shift towards working directly with students on teaching and learning issues which directly affect them, such as focus groups on assessment, thus enabling the student voice to have a direct input to university policy.

Essentially, all these shifts can be seen as a move from an almost exclusive focus on quality assurance (QA) towards one of quality enhancement (QE). An awareness of the differences between QA and QE was an important driver in the shift towards being inclusive of the wider CUHK community, includ-

ing students. Williams (2016) explored the QA/QE relationship, noting the need to move beyond an external monitoring perspective towards an approach that seeks to focus on building valued academic careers for teachers and hence improving student learning. When CLEAR was established, the University had no teaching and learning policy; many good practices but no firm policy. The establishment of CLEAR was partly driven by quality initiatives emanating from the Hong Kong government, as shown in Table 2. However, once an acceptable QA system was in place, attention could turn more to QE. Indeed, a focus on QE, in our view, results in better quality of teaching and learning which are reflected in QA metrics. Our experience has been that a robust QA system supports a focus on QE which, in turn, feeds into a stable QA system. Indeed, a symbiotic relationship.

Figure 3 summarizes the evolution of CLEAR's structure and activities, together with the evaluation criteria that were used for iterative improvement. More than 100 peer-reviewed papers on higher education in Hong Kong have been published based on evaluation data obtained through the work of CLEAR.

Suggestions for academic development in other contexts:

7. Have a combination of mandatory and optional professional-development activities.

8. Have a strong focus on research and evidence for any advice that is proffered.

Obviously, closely linked to suggestion 4: Produce peer-reviewed publications that contribute to higher education, both regionally and globally.

On reflection, we are not sure that many staff at CUHK see the centrality of conceptual-change theory in all of CUHK's QA and QE endeavours! Evaluation data suggests that the CUHK teachers recognize that the professional-development courses 'stretch' them towards looking for better teaching strategies. In addition, CUHK obtains favourable QA reports from external reviews, both from central government and from professional accreditation bodies. While, as academic developers, we see the value in a guiding theoretical framework, we need to acknowledge that our partners in educational processes at the University will take a more pragmatic view about decisions on policies and activities. Academic development is a 'messy' (Thomas & Cordiner, 2014) business; this is one reason that longitudinal narratives are important in order to see what strategies emerge that can stand the test of time, while evolving to suit changing circumstances.

One other reflection that might be of value to other academic-development centres is the necessity to establish and maintain good relationships with senior management. Our experience supports these three pieces of advice.

1. Keep data on all activities of the academic-development centre and report regularly to senior management as a matter of course. Do not wait till a crisis arises.
2. Research metrics are valued in universities. See all activities as instantiations of the scholarship of teaching and learning that result in some written publication. This means research and writing are essential activities in an academic-development centre. Time must be allocated for this.
3. Being seen as helpful by teachers and administrators in departments and faculties pays off enormously. Having heads of department and deans of faculties onside is wonderful protection when times are tough and there are calls for budget cuts or dramatic restructuring.

Adapting to crisis

Hong Kong and CUHK are now under stress. The "double whammy" of societal unrest, with a particular focus at CUHK in 2019, followed by the ongoing outbreak of the virus Covid-19, is tragic. How has CLEAR been able to support CUHK during these turbulent times? In answering that, the experience of the SARS crisis in 2003 is pertinent. At that time, CUHK was essentially a face-to-face university with only the beginnings of online teaching and learning; however, the University needed to go online, essentially overnight! Good working relationships existed between CLEAR and ITSC, and so CLEAR was able to support teachers in their endeavours to go online. This was documented in a form of narrative research about pedagogy in a time of crisis, both in a local journal (Chan et al., 2003; McNaught, 2003) and internationally (Holroyd & McNaught, 2008; McNaught, 2004). In 2021, the use of technology is widespread but the need for rapid, flexible support in crisis remains, and is enacted. One key project relates to e-assessment. A major online conference (eLearning Forum Asia 2020, http://elfasia.org/2020/) in December 2020 enabled CLEAR to provide local and regional support for scholarship and practice. In due course, how universities in Hong Kong will adapt to a changing societal context will become the focus of much

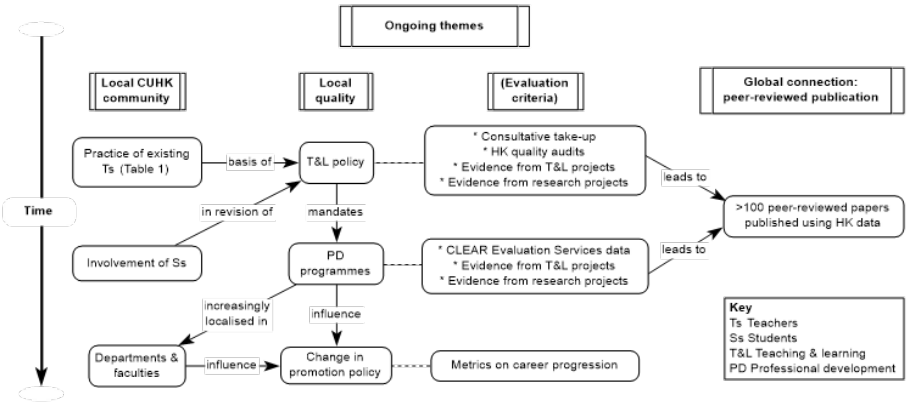

Figure 3. **Evolution of CLEAR's structure and activities with their evaluation criteria**

research and writing. This paper may contribute a useful baseline for future research.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

In this paper on 20 years' experience of developing and working with the four-pronged model (policy, professional development, support for learning design and scholarly research) we have described how a centrally located academic-development centre can support the development of policy and processes that sit comfortably at the intersection of Chinese culture with an international perspective on teaching and learning. Chinese culture operates well with clearly defined structures and rules; what some see as a bureaucratic stance is often a strategy for clarifying roles and avoiding interpersonal conflict. Clear roles within an organization can support a sense of collaborative community action. This dual arrangement of clear structure and collaboration is essential to successful academic development in Asia and elsewhere.

Once the CUHK community accepted that our locally grounded principles of teaching and learning were also applicable universally, that there was a body of accepted educational knowledge that was synergistic with existing CUHK practices, there was much stronger acceptance of new policies and processes, and interest in scholarly educational projects and student engagement. Given that the core principles are indeed universal, it is our belief that this narrative across 20 years has value beyond the borders of Asia.

Reflecting on our experience of developing and working with our four-pronged model over 20 years, we extracted eight suggestions that other academic-development centres may like to consider. We have cross-referenced this summary at various places in the paper.

1. Be centrally located and report to senior management.
2. Have formal liaisons with all academic units – and hence all disciplines – and also other support centres in the University.
3. Have a staff complement that is on academic terms of service.
4. Produce peer-reviewed publications that contribute to higher education, both regionally and globally.
5. Engage with all members of the University community, including senior management, teachers and students.
6. Have active input to teaching and learning policy.
7. Have a combination of mandatory and optional professional-development activities.
8. Have a strong focus on research and evidence for any advice that is proffered.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors acknowledge the teachers and students with whom we have worked. Generous funding from the University Grants Commission in Hong Kong over the years is also acknowledged.

CONTACT

Carmel McNaught <carmel.mcnaught@cuhk.edu.hk>

REFERENCES

Ambrose, S. A., Bridges, M. W., DiPietro M., Lovett, M. C., & Norman, M. K. (2010). *How learning works*. Jossey-Bass.

Bain, K. (2004). *What the best college teachers do*. Harvard University Press.

Bennett, J. B. (2003). *Academic life. Hospitality, ethics, and spirituality*. Anker Publishing.

Biggs, J. (1999). What the student does: Teaching for enhanced learning. *Higher Education Research & Development*, *18*(1), 57–75. https://doi.org/10.1080/0729436990180105

Biggs, J. B., & Collis, K. F. (1982). *Evaluating the quality of learning: The SOLO taxonomy* (structure of the observed learning outcome). Academic Press.

Biggs, J. B., & Tang, C. (2011). *Teaching for quality learning at university: What the student does* (4th ed.). Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press.

Bolander Laksov, K., & McGrath, C. (2020). Failure as a catalyst for learning: Towards deliberate reflection in academic development work. *International Journal for Academic Development*, 25(1), 1–4. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1360144X.2020.1717783

Burd, D. A. R., Chiu, T., & McNaught, C. (2004). Plastic surgery in the undergraduate curriculum: The importance of considering students' perceptions. *British Journal of Plastic Surgery*, *57*(8), 773–779. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bjps.2004.05.017

Chan, D., McNaught, C., & Cheng, R. (Eds.). (2003). Narratives of teaching and learning in the time of SARS. *Education Research Journal*, *18*(2).

Debowski, S. (2014). From agents of change to partners in arms: the emerging academic developer role. *International Journal for Academic Development*, *19*(1), 50–56. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1360144X.2013.862621

Fan, Y. (2000). A classification of Chinese culture. *Cross Cultural Management, 7*(2) 3–10. http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/13527600010797057

Fry, H., Ketteridge, S., & Marshall, S. (2014). *A handbook for teaching and learning in higher education: Enhancing academic practice* (4th ed.). Routledge.

Gibbs, G. (2013). Reflections on the changing nature of educational development. *International Journal for Academic Development*, *18*(1), 4–14. https://doi.org/10.1080/1360144X.2013.751691

Hicks, M., Smigiel, H., Wilson, G., & Luzeckyj, A. (2010). *Preparing academics to teach in higher education*. Australian Learning and Teaching Council. https://tinyurl.com/hicksetal2010

Holroyd, E., & McNaught, C. (2008). The SARS crisis: Reflections of Hong Kong nurses. *International Nursing Review*, *55*, 27–33. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1466-7657.2007.00586.x

Kek, M. Y. C. A., & Hammer, S. (2015), Theorising academic development as an academic discipline? Exploring academic developers' ways of knowing, theorising and use of methods. In M. Tight (Ed.). *Theory and method in higher education research* (Vol. 1) (pp. 235–255). Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Kember, D., & Leung, D. Y. P. (2009). Development of a questionnaire for assessing students' perceptions of teaching and learning environment and its use in quality assurance. *Learning Environments Research*, *12*(1), 15–29. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10984-008-9050-7

Kember, D., & Leung, D. Y. P. (2005). The influence of the teaching and learning environment on the development of generic capabilities needed for a knowledge-based society. *Learning Environments Research*, *8*(3), 245–266. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10984-005-1566-5

Kember, D., & McNaught, C. (2007). *Enhancing university teaching: Lessons from research into award-winning teachers*. Routledge.

Kember, D., Ma, R., McNaught, C., & 18 exemplary teachers. (2006). *Excellent university teaching*. Chinese University Press.

Lam, P., Au Yeung, M., Cheung, E., & McNaught, C. (2009). Using the development of eLearning material as challenging and authentic learning experiences for students. In R. Atkinson & C. McBeath (Eds.), *Same places, different spaces* (pp. 548–556). Proceedings of the 26th annual ASCILITE 2009 conference, University of Auckland, 6–9 December. http://www.ascilite.org/conferences/auckland09/procs/lam.pdf

Lam, P., Lo, J., Lee, J., & McNaught, C. (2011). Evaluations of online learning activities based on LMS logs. In A. Azevedo & R. Babo (Eds.), *Higher education institutions and learning management systems: Adoption and standardization* (pp. 75–93). Information Science Reference.

Lee, M. H., & Gopinathan, S. (2003). Reforming university education in Hong Kong and Singapore. *Higher Education Research & Development, 22*(3), 167–182. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360304108

Lewin, K. (1952). Group decision and social change. In G. E. Swanson, T. M. Newcomb & F. E. Hartley (Eds.), *Readings in social psychology* (pp. 459–473). Holt.

Loads, D., & Campbell, F. (2015). Fresh thinking about academic development: Authentic, transformative, disruptive? *International Journal for Academic Development, 20*(4), 355–369. https://doi.org/10.1080/1360144X.2015.1083866

Lok, B., McNaught, C., & Young, K. (2016). Criterion-referenced and norm-referenced assessments: Compatibility and complementarity. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education, 41*(3), 450–465. https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2015.1022136

McNaught, C. (2020). A narrative across 28 years in academic development. *International Journal for Academic Development*, *25*(1), 83–87. https://doi.org/10.1080/1360144X.2019.1701476

McNaught, C. (2013). Quality audits in Hong Kong: Seeking evidence of quality enhancement. In M. Shah & S. Nair (Eds.), *External quality audits: Has it improved quality assurance in universities?* (pp. 81–98). Woodhead Publishing Limited.

McNaught, C. (2012). SoTL at cultural interfaces: Exploring nuance in learning designs at a Chinese university. *International Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, 6*(2). https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1334&context=ij-sotl

McNaught, C. (2010). A Chinese perspective on university teaching awards: Using teaching awards to develop university policy. In P. Tremp (Ed). *"Ausgezeichnete lehre!" Lehrpreis an Hochschulen* (pp. 57–69). Waxmann Verlag GmbH

McNaught, C. (2009a). Ensuring that external funding for teaching development grants supports internal quality assurance processes. Proceedings of the Australian Universities Quality Forum 2009 *Internal and external quality assurance: Tensions and synergies* (pp. 122–129), Alice Springs, Australia, 1–3 July 2009. Australian Universities Quality Agency Occasional Publications Number 19.

McNaught, C. (2009b).). 以促进教与学为目标的质量保障程序设计 (More than a paper trail: Developing quality-assurance processes that enhance teaching and support student learning). 首都经济贸易大学学报, (Journal of Capital University of Economics and Business) *11*(5), 16–22.

McNaught, C. (2005). Integrating teaching and learning principles with IT infrastructure and policy. In K. Fraser (Ed.), *Education development and leadership in higher education. Developing an effective institutional strategy* (pp. 108–128). Routledge Falmer.

McNaught, C. (2004). Using narrative to understand the convergence of distance and campus-based learning during the time of SARS in Hong Kong. *Educational Media International*, *41*(3), 183–193. https://doi.org/10.1080/09523980410001680806

McNaught, C. (2003). Using narrative to explore the relationships between crisis, innovation and pedagogy. *Education Research Journal*, *18*(2), 111–124.

McNaught, C., Lam, P., & Cheng, K-F. (2007). Using the design phase of e-learning in higher education as an authentic learning experience for students. *International Journal of Learning*, *13*(12), 101–110.

McNaught, C., Cheng, K. F., & Lam, P. (2006). Developing evidence-based criteria for the design and use of online forums in higher education in Hong Kong. In N. Lambropoulos & P. Zaphiris (Eds.), *User-centered design of online learning communities* (pp. 161–184). Information Science Publishing.

McNaught, C., Leung, D., & Kember, D. (2006). Report on the Student Engagement Project. Working Paper 2. Hong Kong: CLEAR, CUHK. http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/clear/research/WP2_McNLK_2006.pdf

McNaught, C., Lok, B., Yin, H., Lee, J. C-K. & Song, H. (2013). Different regions, Diverse classrooms? A study of primary classrooms in China. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, *34*(3), 319–336. https://doi.org/10.1080/02188791.2013.860005

McNaught, C., Storey, C., & Leung, S. (2004). Embedding information literacy into the curriculum: A case study of existing practice and future possibilities at a Hong Kong university. *Journal of Library & Information Science*, *30*(1), 5–13.

McNaught, C., & Young, K. (2011). Ensuring quality in undergraduate curriculum reform: experience in Hong Kong. Proceedings of the Australian Universities Quality Forum (AUQF) 2011 Demonstrating quality. Melbourne, Australia, 29 June – 1 July. Australian Universities Quality Agency.

Murphy, B., Nixon, S., Brooman, S., & Fearon, D. (2017). "I am wary of giving too much power to students:" Addressing the "but" in the principle of staff-student partnership. *International Journal for Students as Partners*, *1*(1), 1–16. https://doi.org/10.15173/ijsap.v1i1.3055

Nixon, E., Scullion, R., & Hearn, R. (2016). Her majesty the student: Marketised higher education and the narcissistic (dis)satisfactions of the student-consumer. *Studies in Higher Education*, *43*(6), 927–943. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2016.1196353

Nussbaum, J., & Novick, S. (1982). Alternative frameworks, conceptual conflict and accommodation: Toward a principled teaching strategy. *Instructional Science*, *11*, 183–200. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00414279

Özdemir, G., & Clark, D. B. (2007). An overview of conceptual change theories. *Eurasia Journal of Mathematics, Science & Technology Education*, *3*(4), 351–361.Postiglione, G.A., & Jung, J. (2017). The changing academic profession in Hong Kong: Challenges and future. In G.A. Postiglione & J. Jung (Eds.). *The changing academic profession in Hong Kong*, (pp. 3–14). Springer.

Strike, K.A., & Posner, G. J. (1992). A revisionist theory of conceptual change. In R.A. Duschl & R. J. Hamilton (Eds.). *Philosophy of science, cognitive psychology, and educational theory and practice* (pp. 147–176). SUNY Press.

Sutherland, K.A. (2018). Holistic academic development: Is it time to think more broadly about the academic development project? *International Journal for Academic Development*, *23*(4), 261–273. https://doi.org/10.1080/1360144X.2018.1524571

Thomas, S., & Cordiner, M. (2014). The 'messy' business of academic developers leading other academic developers: Critical reflection on a curriculum realignment exercise. *International Journal for Academic Development*, *19*(4), 293–304. https://doi.org/10.1080/1360144X.2014.895732

Watkins, D., & Biggs, J. B. (Eds.). (2001). *Teaching the Chinese learner: Psychological and pedagogical perspectives*. Comparative Education Research Centre, University of Hong Kong.

Williams, J. (2016) Quality assurance and quality enhancement: is there a relationship? *Quality in Higher Education*, *22*(2), 97–102. https://doi.org/10.1080/13538322.2016.1227207

University Grants Committee (2004). Hong Kong higher education. To make a difference. To move with the times. Hong Kong: UGC. https://www.ugc.edu.hk/doc/eng/ugc/publication/report/policy_document_e.pdf

Vosniadou, S. (Ed.). (2013). *International handbook of research on conceptual change* (2nd ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203154472