

湯啓康老師的專訪報告



ANTHONY TONG KAI-HONG failed his O-levels and was kicked out of school. But he was given a second chance after moving to a new school where, he said, the teachers really cared for their students.

Among those who made the difference for him at St Mark's School in Shau Kei Wan was English teacher, the Reverend Basil Moraes, who versed his prodigies in good table manners and, to improve their English, urged them to read newspapers and listen to the BBC.

Years later he was giving similar advice in the then Education Department's campaigns to promote English. For far from failing, Mr. Tong had by then risen to close to the top of the education hierarchy, as deputy director of education.

"My experience made me realize there are two types of teacher; those who teach books and those who really care." he said

The Rev Moraes and other teachers "turned him around" to ensure he passed his O and A levels with flying colors, preparing him for entry to the University of Hong Kong, where he read math's, and then a career as a teacher.

Since then, he has followed an unusual path as a teacher turned bureaucrat. Moreover, the man who enjoys sailing in Victoria Harbour and could have opted for retirement after his spell as deputy director ended in 2002 instead chose to return to the classroom.

Today, Mr. Tong is to be found at SKH Tsang Shiu Tim Secondary school in Sha Tin, where he is implementing education reforms he helped devise. He kept a low profile mill reappearing recently to give a talk to the English Speaking Union about his experiences as a volunteer teacher in Anhui province for six months prior to taking up his post as principal

Mr. Tong told his audience how he practised what his mentors reached while teaching in Wuhu, large city in the province.

"I invited students to my flat to engage in real conversation.

English teaching in China, and all too often in Hong Kong, lacks an authentic language environment. It is all very mechanical and artificial. Even the teaching materials used are poor quality with irrelevant subject matter," he said. As a result, students lacked motivation.

In his school he tries to recreate the conditions of his own education salvation, by regularly interacting with his students. "Because of my flip flop experience I was enlightened about what a good teacher could do, It he said

Mr. Tong now sees the reforms from both the perspective of principal and a policymaker. "There is no alternative to the reforms but I think the complexity of a school can often be underestimated. For any policy to settle down and be taken on board effectively takes time, It he said.

He also has his own particular priorities. "We need to do more in Hong Kong to be outward looking," he said. "We cannot afford not to make students aware of their place in the world. Globalization is a reality whether we like it or not."

Mr. Tong said he was disappointed that the government was not doing more to push this agenda, but he was also realistic. He understood the constraints bureaucrats faced in dealing with a complex education system.

He describes himself as having once been a technocrat. "I used numbers to work out the right argument and then went after the resources," he said

But attending a course for administrative highfliers run by UC Berkeley in California in the 1980s brought about an epiphany." began to realise the nuances of dealing with people and politicking. Since then I have been pretty pragmatic and down to earth. It was a dramatic shift." he said.

At 58, Mr. Tong has lost none of the enthusiasm and commitment that first took him into educational politics. He is a good talker and a determined activist

He joined the civil service as an assistant education officer a grandiose title, he said, for a government school teacher.

Never short of an opinion, Mr. Tong was noticed in the early 70s by officials grappling with the rapid growth of Hong Kong's population. "People were coming across the border, which was open in those days. That increased the demand for school places," he said. "There were not enough public places, so a lot of private schools sprung up. There were a lot of 'fly by night' operations. I was immensely dissatisfied with the system.

"I was eventually roped in by Li Yuet Ting, the senior education officer, later to become director of education, who was starting a private school secondary section in the department. I had started the Education Action Group with some missionaries to protest against the Secondary School Entrance Exam. We plastered posters everywhere I could have lost my job. "

Instead, he took up the challenge of trying to bring about change from the inside, taking on various portfolios in the Education Department, in planning and research, rising to the directorate as a principal education officer in 1994. In 1996, he was appointed deputy director, working with directors Helen Yu Lai Ching ping and then Fanny Law Fan Chiu-fun.

Mrs. Law gave him the task of reforming the department, which included setting up the network of Regional Education Offices and overseeing the new Quality Assurance Inspectorate.

Mr. Tong is proud of his work as a bureaucrat "I think we steered things in the right direction," he said. "As well as reforming education, we needed to reshape the EMB to cope with new challenges. It

Although he points to several achievements, including his work on the EMB's Information Technology strategy and helping to establish Li Po Chung United World College. Mr. Tong maintains he always planned to return to the classroom.

However, his education interests still extend beyond his own school He is vice-chairman of the English Medium Schools Association and has been developing education ties with the mainland, for his school and others. Working with a range of agencies, including the AFS (American Field Service) International Exchanges. The Amity Foundation and The Candlelight Foundation as well as wealthy individuals, he is organizing a number of projects involving the exchange of students and teachers.

Among these is a student and teacher exchange project between seven schools in Sha Tin and five in the western Guangdong city of Shaoguan. "These schemes benefit everybody," he said. "We can learn from each other. China is developing quickly and we cannot afford to be left behind."

Mr. Tong likes to flag potential difficulties with policies at an early stage during consultations. "But once a policy is decided I'm OK with it," he said

He counsels his fellow principals to do the same but admits he has an advantage. "I can priorities with more confidence as a result of my experience," he said. "I don't feel the need to panic or to push everything at once like some of my colleagues. I see my major task as a protector of teachers. I try to explain the big picture to them so they can priorities for themselves."

Mr. Tong recognises that the current demands for paperwork remain a significant issue. But he does not want this to detract from the necessity of change.

"Some schools are dragging their heels and this can lead to an impasse as they simply feel they can't take any more," he said. "It would help if there were some minor measures being clearly communicated [by the EMB] as being of lesser priority."

Having had a foot in both camps, he said he hoped he could bridge the gap between them.