

*A*ddress by Fr Peter Newbery, MH

The Honourable Donald Tsang, Dr Leung, Professor Morris, honoured guests and students,

I must say that I felt very surprised but also greatly honoured when I received a phone call from Professor Morris asking me if I would accept the award of the Degree Doctor of Education, *honoris causa*, from the Hong Kong Institute of Education.

I was particularly pleased when I actually received the letter informing me that the degree would be conferred in recognition of the work we have been doing over the last 15 years at Youth Outreach.

Youth Outreach began life as a vague idea in my head in 1983 that we do something for the increasing numbers of kids in trouble. However, in 1989, the Hong Kong Council of Social Service ran a territory-wide survey on youth work which clearly indicated the need for some kind of "crisis intervention" service and so my vague idea began to take a more concrete shape. In 1990, I wrote down what I had in mind and consulted various people in the field of youth work and then in 1991, I began looking for someone who could work together with me on this project. This was more difficult than I had imagined. It was not easy to find someone who had the vision, the courage, the enthusiasm and the qualifications to set out on a journey along an unknown path.

Then quite by accident I happened to come across David Shum. I have actually known David since I arrived in Hong Kong, almost 40 years ago. We had been in the seminary together in 60s and 70s. He then left and got married and we had lost touch for more than a decade. During that period he had been to university and trained as a social worker and was working in an experimental youth centre in Tai Wo Hau. He said he would read the proposal that I had written up and think about it but I could see he was already interested. He took up the challenge with great energy and enthusiasm and Youth Outreach opened for business in November 1991. Since then, we have worked together as a team.

We began service with a 24-hour residential centre for boys situated in an old apartment of 1,000 square feet which we rented for one dollar per year from the Land Development Corporation (now the Urban Renewal Authority). It had formerly been a "fish ball stall" and when you turned on the taps the water came out yellow. But it was our own place!

Since then, Youth Outreach has earned a reputation for bringing in innovative and creative services. As I have just mentioned we started with Hong Kong's first residential centre that could take youngsters 24 hours a day with little or no bureaucracy. We set up Hong Kong's first 24-hour telephone hot-line for young people. We pioneered "all-night" outreaching work five years before the government began "experimenting" with the idea. We were the first agency in Hong Kong to set up our employment service as a commercial enterprise. We were also the first agency to open a 24 hours a day, seven days per week "Drop in Centre". Last year we also inaugurated Hong Kong's first "School of Hip Hop". None of this would have been possible without a dedicated band of staff, led by David, whose number has grown from two (David and myself) in 1991 to 180 this year.

Youth Outreach specialises in dealing with what were traditionally called "marginal youth". The terminology in Hong Kong has actually gone through several changes – "marginal youth" became "double out" youth (out of school; out of work). This was later changed to "double waiting" (waiting for school; waiting for work) and now the fashionable term is "hidden youth".

At Youth Outreach, we use none of these terms. We don't believe that we have any of these kinds of young people. What we have at Youth Outreach are simply "young people" who are struggling to grow up in very difficult circumstances. As they struggle, they need encouragement and support. What we are trying to do is to give them this encouragement and support and provide opportunities for their development so that they can pick themselves up again and step back out onto the road of life.

I have spent 40 years involved in youth work in Hong Kong. In Hong Kong, "youth work" is included under the remit of the Social Welfare Department. However, it is difficult to see in what sense "youth work" can be classified as "welfare". In most countries, including China, youth work is included under "education" and not "welfare".

For this reason, I am sure that you will understand how moved I was when Professor Morris phoned me to inform me of the award of the Honorary Doctorate and I said that I did not work in schools and he replied "There are many types of education".

Unfortunately, in Hong Kong's education system too often there are not "many types of education". "Education" is equated with success in public exams in a number of very restricted academic subjects. The outcome of this approach is glory for the few who make it to the front pages of the newspapers with 10 As. But for the majority it is a very stressful experience which leaves them branded as failures.

The degree of pressure that the students experience from the need to succeed in school can be seen from the fact that every year on the day that the results of the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination are published, the Education and Manpower Bureau as a matter of course also publishes the numbers of suicide telephone hotlines and counselling services. The truly shocking thing is that no one in Hong Kong seems to consider this arrangement bizarre. We prefer to hand out suicide hotline numbers rather than to change the system that makes the students consider suicide.

When reading an interview with Dr Darling-Hammond on the internet, I noticed the following quotation: "I think most young people want to be in a school where they are known and cared for. I think the goal of the school is to find their talent and develop it rather than to put in place a series of sorting mechanisms to decide who gets and who doesn't".

William Glasser, the founder of Reality Therapy has expressed a similar idea when he said "Every student should be able to say 'Someone in this school thinks what I have to say is important.'"

I was struck by a resonance between what we are doing at Youth Outreach and Dr Darling-Hammond's views on education and again by the spirit underlying the words of William Glasser. Education is about young people; not about subjects. It is about helping them to develop as people, not filling their heads with useless information.

I feel honoured to be a "Doctor of Education" at an institution which promotes these values and teaches them to its students and I offer my deepest thanks to the Hong Kong Institute of Education and its Council and staff for considering me to be qualified to join them in their educational enterprise.

Thank you.