

ADDRESS BY PROFESSOR BRIAN CALDWELL
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION, *honoris causa*

Chancellor the Honourable Leung Chun-ying, Council Chairman Mr Pang Yiu-kai and members of the Council, Acting President Professor Cheng Yin-cheong, staff, students and friends of The Hong Kong Institute of Education,

It is a pleasure to speak on behalf of the five recipients of honorary doctorates to express our appreciation for the honour you have bestowed on us: Dr Rebecca Lee Lok-sze, Mr Edwin Leong Siu-hung, Professor Geoff Whitty and Professor Zhong Binglin. We come from different fields and from different parts of the world. Our diversity conveys to all that the Institute is global in its outlook and global for those like us who are proud to be your ambassadors.

The Institute has accomplished much in its short history. It has had a profound impact on education in Hong Kong, but your leaders and academic staff have built a formidable reputation on the international stage. In my field of education policy and education leadership, I can say that scholars everywhere not only know of your work but hold it in the highest esteem. I mention in particular the leadership of your Acting President Professor Cheng Yin-cheong, who is President of the World Educational Research Association (WERA).

Let me speak personally about my association with Hong Kong. This is my thirty-fourth visit in exactly 25 years. Hong Kong is my home away from home. My visits were most frequent in the 1990s when I was asked to help build the capacity of school leaders to take on more authority and responsibility through workshops, conferences and seminars. These were exciting but challenging times and throughout my engagement I had the highest respect – more than that – the highest admiration – for participants for their commitment to the well-being of students, staff and community of Hong Kong.

I realised after a time that Hong Kong had become the educational cross-roads of the world in sharing research, policy and practice. Every conference was a 'who's who' in education. As invited international speakers, we realised what was happening: Hong Kong was drawing ideas from everywhere as its plans for the future took shape. But those of us who had the privilege to attend took as much from our participation as we shared. There are hundreds of researchers, policymakers and practitioners who have learned from the Hong Kong experience. May this scholarly exchange continue to flourish!

There is another very special reason why we honour the work of The Hong Kong Institute of Education. Hong Kong now is one of the five top-performing school systems in the world, as indicated by its results in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) administered by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). As you may know, two school systems from China are in the top 5 – Hong Kong and Shanghai. This is a remarkable achievement. Given the importance of education to social and economic well-being, this is further evidence of why many international observers believe that the 21st century is Asia's Century if indeed it is not China's Century.

Why do I make mention of this in my remarks today? It is because achievement on this scale is due in large part to the quality of teachers. Of course, the values parents and the community at large place on education are important. So too is the quality of policymaking on the part of government and its agencies. So too is the level of funding that supports the work of schools. But research is confirming again and again that teachers are the most important factor in explaining the success of students.

It is in this respect that I pay tribute to the work of The Hong Kong Institute of Education because of your premier role in preparing teachers for schools in Hong Kong. You have done your work outstandingly well.

I conclude with a challenge. The world of education is changing more rapidly now than at any time in the history of humankind. Advances in technology will drive much of this change. Schools have an important role to play to ensure the best possible alignment of education, economy and society in a time of unprecedented change. For the people of Hong Kong some things will not and should not change. The value you place on education and schooling will continue. However, we know that schools will be quite different institutions in 5, 10 and 20 years' time. Increasingly, students can learn at any place and at any time. What will schools be like under these conditions? We cannot be sure, but we can do much to help shape the outcome. It may be that Hong Kong can continue to be at the international cross-roads as the future unfolds. I am sure it will be.

Finally, on behalf of fellow recipients, thank you again for the honour. We wish all associated with the Institute the very best for the future.