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Transition to Comprehensive Student Guidance Service in Hong Kong

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Abstract

This paper reviews the transition of student guidance service in Hong Kong from a remedial approach in the 1980s to a comprehensive approach in the 2000s and the necessary conditions for the effective transition. This comprehensive approach emphasizes systematic planning and implementation of developmental, preventive and remedial guidance programs, with high degree of participation and collaboration among teachers. A key condition for successful transition is that the direction and magnitude of change are agreed on and supported by the Education Bureau, the academics, school principals and professional bodies. It is also important for the comprehensive student guidance service to be perceived as part of and in alignment with the education and the curriculum reforms. The improvements in manpower and financial resource and professional development for the student guidance personnel, the principals and teachers are also important catalysts for the transition.

Background: The student guidance service of the 1980s

Parallel the development of student guidance in most countries and regions, student guidance service in Hong Kong also started with remedial programs for students with learning, emotional or behavioural problems. The student guidance service was introduced by the Government in 1978 (Social Welfare Department, 1977). The student guidance officers of the Education Department provided personal, educational and vocational guidance to students in primary schools, at the manning ratio of 1 student guidance officer: 3000 students in the urban areas and 1 student guidance officer: 2000 students in rural areas. In secondary schools, the guidance teachers, who also have regular teaching duties, provided the student guidance service, with professional support from school social workers. The manning ration was 1 school social worker: 3000 students.

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The Whole School Approach to Guidance of the Early 1990

In the 1980s, while the student guidance was seen as the remedial service provided by the guidance personnel, it was increasingly recognized that teachers could and should play an active role in identifying and helping the students in need of help. In 1990, the Education Commission in its Report No. 4 recommended the implementation of whole school approach to guidance. The approach emphasizes the united effort of all school personnel to create a positive learning environment enriched with care, trust and mutual respect (Education Commission, 1990).

The Grow with Guidance System of the Mid 1990s

In 1990s, while many schools adopt the whole school approach to guidance, the Education Department recognized the need to further enhance the implementation of this approach. A pilot project on “*Grow with Guidance System – Development of Whole School to Guidance*” was implemented in 8 primary and 5 secondary schools in Hong Kong from 1995/1996 to 1997/1998 school years. The project affirmed the importance of a developmental and proactive guidance curriculum, and also the collaboration of school heads, teachers, guidance personnel, psychologists and university scholars. It sowed the seed for the transition from the remedial model to the more comprehensive and developmental model of guidance service in the millennium year.

Comprehensive Student Guidance Service in the Millennium Years

Education Reform

Entering the new Millennium, student guidance coheres with the education reform and curriculum reform. According to the Reform Proposals for the Education System in Hong Kong, the overall aims of education for the 21st Century should be:

To enable every person to attain all-round development in the domains of ethics, intellect, physique, social skills and aesthetics according to his/her own attributes so that he/she is capable of life-long learning, critical and exploratory thinking, innovating and adapting to change; filled with self-confidence and a team spirit; willing to put forward continuing effort for the prosperity, progress, freedom and democracy of their society, and contribute to the future well-being of the nation and the world at large. (Education Commission, 2000)

Curriculum Reform

In the *Basic Education Curriculum Guide - Building on Strengths* prepared by the Curriculum Development Council (Curriculum Development Council 2002), all students should be entitled to the five essential learning experiences for whole-person development: moral and civic education, intellectual development, community service, physical and aesthetic development, career-related experiences. Besides, the New Senior Secondary curriculum to be implemented in September 2009 also addresses the whole-person development of students (Education & Manpower Bureau, 2005).

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In alignment with these education reform and curricular initiatives, the comprehensive student guidance service was introduced in 2002/03 to help all students to attain the basic knowledge, skills and attitude in the four areas of personal, social, academic and career development. With an emphasis on the wide scope of remedial, preventive and developmental programs, the new student guidance service model addresses the various developmental needs of students. This marked the milestone of the transition of student guidance service from remedial to preventive and further to a comprehensive and developmental model.

Preparation for the Implementation

In the process of developing the comprehensive student guidance service, officers of the Education Bureau conducted visits to and focus group discussions with school sponsoring organizations, school heads, local university scholars and professional organizations relating to student guidance, student discipline and social services. The experience of the USA in implementing the comprehensive student guidance program was also studied and Professor Norman Gysbers of University of Missouri, the expert on this area, was consulted. It is important for the Education Bureau, the academics, school principals and professional bodies to have open dialogue and agree on the rationale and magnitude of change so that the Bureau can have the support of the stakeholders to the transition and implementation of the new system of student guidance service. (Gysbers & Henderson, 2006) Besides, in preparing for and facilitating the implementation of the new approach in 2002, the Education Bureau also introduced a series of the professional development for the heads of primary schools, student guidance teachers and officers. A set of detailed guidelines on the professional and administrative aspects of the comprehensive student guidance service was issued to all primary schools (Education Bureau, 2003).

Resource

To back up the comprehensive student guidance service, the manpower and financial resource on student guidance has been substantively improved around the 2000. In primary schools, the manning ratio of student guidance personnel in September 2002 had been improved from 1 to 1 680 students to 1 for each school with 24 classes or more (around 800 students). This manning ratio was further improved to 1 for each school with 18 classes (around 600 students) in September 2006 (Education & Manpower Bureau, 2006). In secondary schools, the manning ratio was also improved to one school social worker for each secondary school starting the 2000/01 school year.

Scope of Comprehensive Student Guidance Service

The comprehensive student guidance service in Hong Kong covers four domains: Management and Organization; Supportive Service; Personal Growth Education and Responsive Service (Education & Manpower Bureau, 2003) which forms an integral part of the whole school system, being closely linked with other sub-systems.

Administrative and management support is the key to effective implementation of all guidance programs. Under management & organization, the school would:

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- (a) cultivate a positive and caring school culture,
- (b) establish a school guidance team which comprises teachers and the student guidance personnel/school social worker to formulate school guidance policy, plans and coordinates the guidance service.
- (c) set up the internal and external referral system whereby students with learning and behavioural problems are identified and provided with the appropriate services.
- (d) build a mechanism for school self-evaluation to ensure the effective implementation of the student guidance service.

Increasingly, the importance of the management and organizational support to student guidance is recognized and manifested in different large-scale guidance programs in Hong Kong. For example, when the Audit Commission of Hong Kong investigated the school attendance of schools in Hong Kong in 2007, the Commission conducted a survey to study the implementation of whole school approach for student guidance work. Of the 800 school heads responding, 771 (96%) school heads responded that their schools had adopted the whole school approach (Audit Commission Hong Kong 2007). Moreover, nearly all of them (769) pointed out that their schools had undertaken the management initiatives such as assessment of teachers' concerns and needs of students and incorporating these needs into the curriculum. The importance of management and organizational support to student guidance should not be neglected because without sufficient and effective system support such as policy backing, staff and resource management, the other three domains of the comprehensive student guidance service cannot be effectively implemented (Gysbers & Henderson, 2006).

Guidance Curriculum

Another major domain of the comprehensive student guidance service is a progressive and school-based guidance curriculum, which is referred to as personal growth education in primary schools and life education or life skills training in secondary schools. This curriculum covers 4 areas: personal development, social development, academic development and career development. In Hong Kong, all primary schools are required to schedule personal growth education in their timetable. This can be conducted in forms of classroom learning, short-term and structured courses, group activities, assemblies, cross-curricular activities etc, with an emphasis on active experiential learning. Moreover, teachers, instead of the student guidance personnel, conduct most of these lessons. By taking an active involvement in the guidance curriculum, teachers help students apply what they have learned from the guidance lessons in regular school life and in their daily interaction with peers, teachers and parents.

Besides the personal growth education, there are also other programs, which reinforce or run in parallel to the guidance curriculum. In primary schools, the Understanding Adolescent Project has been implemented in about 400 schools since 2004, in which classroom guidance activities are organized for all Primary 4 to 6 students to foster their resilience covering the areas of social skills, communication skills, problem solving,

goals setting, and optimism etc. In secondary schools, the Basic Life Skills Training run by the Health Department provides Secondary One to Three students in about 350 schools each year with classroom-based guidance sessions, covering a wide coverage of life skills including emotion management, stress management and healthy living time etc. Another program, which consists of a guidance curriculum, is the Positive Adolescent Training through Holistic Social programs (P.A.T.H.S.) implemented since 2005 in about 200 schools each year. Students participate in the classroom-based guidance activities, developed with reference to the 15 positive youth development constructs (Shek, 2006) including

1. Resilience
2. Social Competence
3. Emotional Competence
4. Cognitive Competence
5. Behavioral Competence
6. Moral Competence
7. Self-Determination
8. Self-Efficiency
9. Beliefs in the Future
10. Clear and Positive Identity
11. Spirituality
12. Bonding
13. Prosocial Involvement
14. Prosocial Norms
15. Recognition for Positive Behavior

As for the guidance curriculum, it is common to find systematic planning and organisation of the classroom activities, and the sequential design of the learning areas or competences, differentiated by class levels. Teachers are found actively engaged in planning, conducting and evaluation of the guidance lessons with professional support from the student guidance personnel or school social workers.

Supportive Service

Teachers, student guidance personnel and parents, who directly impact on the all-round development of students, play a very important role in the comprehensive student guidance service. Therefore, teachers need the support and necessary professional training, which include effective communication skills with students and parents, facilitation and debriefing skills and handling of students with problems. Similarly, the parents also require support from the student guidance system.

Responsive Service

In every school, there are students who encounter different problems which would interfere with their learning and relationship with peers at school. The issues that affect the students can be problems with the family, schoolwork and peer, cyber addiction, truancy and substance abuse etc. The responsive services are therefore needed to cater for the immediate and long-term needs of these students. In providing the individual

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support for students, the student guidance personnel need to work collaboratively with the teachers and parents.

The four domains of the comprehensive student guidance service cannot be implemented in isolation from one another. The teachers, principals and student guidance personnel should be actively involved and updated about the development and the interdependence of the domains so that they can make cross-reference and reinforce the impact of the programs or activities conducted under the four domains. For example, the student guidance personnel can connect the life skills trained in the guidance lessons to the group counseling under the responsive services. The school can also plan and arrange the professional development of teachers purposefully to enhance the teachers' competence in conducting and evaluating the guidance lessons and programs.

The Way Forward

As a life skills development project team formed jointly by lecturers from different local universities have found from a survey of 96 secondary schools and 753 guidance personnel in 2005, the scope of student guidance implemented in Hong Kong secondary schools to some extent is comprehensive including response service, guidance curriculum, individual career & educational planning and system support. (Yuen, 2006). As such, Hong Kong is keeping close track to the world's trend of transiting to the comprehensive student guidance service in the 21st century so as to respond to the developmental needs of all students in the new information era, instead of helping only a smaller number of students with emotional and behavioural problems in the traditional remedial model. Nowadays, students are confronted with a wide diversity of life challenges in the world of confusing and conflicting roles and morals, the weakening family structure and inter-personal relationship, and the fast changing knowledge-based society. Therefore, while many schools will continue to focus on the personal and social development, the demand for policy, resource and curricular support on academic and career development will gain high priority as the students, teachers and parents recognise the importance of transition of the students from schools to further studies or the world of work and that the academic competences and career aspirations are closely correlated with the motivation and capability to learn and hence academic success.

To ride along the education and curriculum reform and meet the challenges ahead, the Education Bureau, the universities, schools, the non-government organizations which have been providing the student guidance service and school social work service to schools should further collaborate in monitoring, reviewing and enhancing the comprehensive student guidance service.

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