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Career Education and Vocational Training in Hong Kong: Implications for School-Based Career Counselling

Authors

Mantak YUEN* Flora S.Y. YAU Joe Y.C. TSUI Shirley SHAO

Centre for Advancement in Inclusive and Special Education

Faculty of Education, The University of Hong Kong

Joseph C.T. TSANG Brian S.F. LEE

Hong Kong Association of Careers Masters and Guidance Masters

*Corresponding Author's Email: mtyuen@gmail.com

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Abstract

The authors provide an overview of past and present trends in career guidance, career education, and vocational training in Hong Kong. Particular attention is given to evaluating career education policies and how these have evolved and affected practices in secondary schools over the past few decades. Topics also covered within the paper include students who drop out, mentor systems, teacher training, vocational training vs. university education, and parent involvement. Two representative case studies are used to illustrate successful programmes. The future development of career education and vocational training in Hong Kong is anticipated, and implications for school-based career counselling practices are considered.

Keywords: career counselling, career education, Hong Kong, policies, vocational training

Introduction

The broad term ‘career guidance and counselling’ refers in most developed countries to the services and activities intended to assist individuals of any age and at any point throughout their lives to make sound educational and occupational choices and to manage their careers (OECD, 2004b). In schools, the domain of career guidance and counselling includes provision of career education sessions, individual advice and support to students, the provision of information on career paths and work opportunities, and sometimes also involves work experience and internships. Policy-makers in most OECD countries perceive career guidance and counselling services to be indispensable for enhancing the efficiency of an education system in preparing students for the contemporary labour market (OECD, 2004b). For over a decade in most developed countries, new policies have been introduced relating to organization, management, delivery of services, and funding for career guidance and counseling.

Globalization and technological advancements have led to rapid changes in social structures and job markets. For this reason, it has become impossible to equip school leavers with a single set of skills that will last them throughout their lifetime careers. Instead, encouraging life-long learning and career adaptability are advocated in order to better prepare people to meet the real employment challenges in Western and Asian countries (OECD, 2004b, Van Esbroeck, 2008).

The adoption of life-long learning strategies in OECD countries, with an emphasis on employability in today’s labour market, poses new challenges for career guidance personnel (OECD, 2004a). In order to provide the necessary skills, knowledge and attitudes for life-long learning, career guidance today must now go beyond a conventional ‘merely giving jobs information’ approach to ensure that students acquire the necessary insights and skills to make informed decisions on a career path (OECD, 2003).

In Hong Kong, prior to the year 2000, career guidance and counselling services had traditionally focused mainly on career information dissemination. Even though there were some activities and programmes related to career planning in provided in some secondary schools, these were often criticized as very superficial, with over-reliance on large-scale single input programmes, such as career talks and group visits (Ho, 2014; Leung 2002). Career guidance services were limited to merely helping secondary school students solve their immediate transition problems, such as choosing electives for the following year or arranging a job interview. Career education as a subject in its own right did not exist, and personalized career counseling for individuals was not provided (Ho, 2014). With the launch of Hong Kong's Education Reform in the early 2000s, and a goal of achieving 'whole-person development', 'learning to learn' and 'life-long learning capabilities', career guidance and counseling services had an important new role to play.

This paper provides an overview of the development and provision of career education, career guidance and counselling services in secondary schools resulting from the Education Reform. To provide a context for what follows, the education system in Hong Kong is first described and vocational education and transition support are discussed. Career education policies at secondary school level are elucidated, with examples of successful programs in career education, vocational training and job preparation. Finally, implications for school-based career guidance and counselling services are discussed.

School education system in Hong Kong

During the years when Hong Kong was a British colony, the education system was naturally modeled very closely on the British system, and at present it still retains some of those

characteristics. However, Hong Kong underwent a major curriculum reform in 2009, aligning the structure and teaching approaches with those operating in most developed countries.

The biggest change was a move to extend secondary schooling to six years, and undergraduate education to four years (Education Bureau, 2016). This represented an effort to transform the system from a highly selective one to a system that can cater for all students, enabling them to realize their full potential (Lee, Pavlova & Maclean, 2016). ‘Learner-centered and whole-person development’ are guiding principles espoused in the new curriculum framework, designed to cater for different abilities, interests and aspirations (Education Bureau, 2001). In Hong Kong, there are nine years of compulsory schooling, six in primary school and three in junior secondary school. Together with the free provision of kindergarten, primary and secondary schooling, it is expected that the majority of students will receive 15 years of education starting in the 2017/18 school year.

Kindergartens

In Hong Kong, kindergartens and nursery centres provide education for children aged from three to five years (Education Bureau, 2016). The aims of kindergarten education in Hong Kong are:

- to nurture children to attain all-round development in domains of ethics, intellect, physique, social skills and aesthetics;
- to develop good habits so as to prepare them for life; and
- to stimulate children’s interest in learning and cultivate in them positive learning attitudes that lay the foundation for their future learning.

With effect from the academic year 2017/2018, kindergarten education is now fully subsidized by the Government (Education Bureau, 2016).

Primary Education

Primary schooling in Hong Kong starts at the age six, followed by six years of schooling at the primary level (Education Bureau, 2016). Most primary schools adopt whole-day operations, with a minority having either AM or PM operation mode. This AM or PM structure was implemented in the past to accommodate the very high number of children requiring primary education (Education Bureau, 2016). Chinese is the medium of instruction in most primary schools.

Secondary Education

There are three main types of local secondary schools – *government schools*, which are fully operated by the Hong Kong Government; *aided schools*, which are fully subvented by the Government but run by voluntary bodies or school sponsoring bodies; and *private schools*, some of which receive financial assistance from the Government. Government and aided schools deliver a curriculum stipulated by the Government. They offer free six-year secondary education. In addition, there are some international schools that offer non-local curricula, and primarily serve non-Chinese speaking students and foreign residents or expatriates.

A recent curriculum and assessment reform has removed one public exam in senior secondary schools (Education Bureau, 2016). Coupled with the waiving of education fees, this reform is a move that will make a full twelve-year primary and secondary education much more accessible for a greater number of students.

Post-secondary Education

At present in Hong Kong there are 20 local degree-awarding tertiary institutions, including universities and other post-secondary institutions (9 publicly-funded and 11 self-financing) (Education Bureau, 2016). Apart from the undergraduate programmes offered by these tertiary institutions, students can also choose from a wide diversity of sub-degree programmes, as well as opting for various continuing education and vocational programmes that best suit their interests and abilities.

In the academic year 2014/15, 46% of secondary school leavers met the minimum entrance requirements and were eligible for pursuing undergraduate studies in publicly-funded and self-financing institutions. Taking sub-degree places into account, nearly 70% of secondary school graduates are eligible for post-secondary education.

Vocational and Professional Education and Training (VPET)

Vocational and professional education and training (VPET) plays a pivotal role in broadening the learning opportunities for school leavers, as well as nurturing the requisite human capital in support of Hong Kong's development. At present, the majority of VPET programmes are run by the Vocational Training Council (VTC; 2017) which, through its member institutions, provides around 250,000 training places each year. These institutions offer pre-employment and in-service education and training to people of different education levels.

There are also other post-secondary education institutions offering more than 170 self-financing higher diploma programmes, in which at least 60% of the curriculum consists of specialized content related to specific disciplines, professions and vocational skills. Other education providers such as the Construction Industry Council, Clothing Industry Training Authority, and the Employment Retraining Council offer various vocational and professional

education and training programmes for secondary school leavers, enabling them to devise their own pathways according to their abilities and aspirations.

School dropout rates

The term ‘school dropout’ refers here to children who leave compulsory schooling without completing Secondary 3 (equivalent to Grade 8). The school dropout rate in Hong Kong increased over the decade before 2013, but still remains at a fairly low level (Table 1). The highest drop-out rate in post-school programmes has tended to be in sub-degree courses.

Table 1: School dropout rates of Hong Kong students from 2004-2013 (SIHK, 2017)

Year	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
%	0.18	0.20	0.29	0.29	0.30	0.31	0.34	0.31	0.31	0.32

Youth transition to adulthood

Since the launch of the New Senior Secondary Structure in 2009, students in Hong Kong now have more post-secondary study opportunities before they join the workforce and become more independent as adults. This required a paradigm shift away from a focus on selecting only a minority of high-achievers for further education in university. Emphasis is now placed on preparing *all* students across a spectrum of abilities to select a variety of possible ways to continue their education. Students are now able to choose from multiple pathways during and after their secondary education.

According to figures from the Hong Kong Association of Career Masters and Guidance Masters (HKACMGM), collected for analyzing the pathways of secondary school graduates in

2016, the total number of Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) candidates sitting the examination was about 67,000. This included both day school candidates and private candidates, while the total number of the available places for further local studies was 74,650 (vocational training programs, 7,420; sub-degree programmes, 31,000; bachelor degree programmes, 24,230; and Yi Jin diploma/ foundation studies diploma in vocational studies, 11,300).

The report of the Education Bureau on enrolment in 2015-2016 shows that the number of Secondary 6 (equivalent to Grade 12) students decreased significantly from 70,799 in 2011 to 57,714 in 2015. However, the number of available places in subvention degree programmes and sub-degree programmes in tertiary education offered by universities or other tertiary institutions remained the same (or in some cases even increased). This included the Study Subsidy Scheme for Designated Professions/Sectors (SSSDP) launched as a new initiative under the 2014 HK Policy Address. The aim is to subsidize about 1,000 students per cohort, enabling them to pursue designated full-time locally accredited self-financing undergraduate programmes in selected disciplines. Quotas of SSSDP students are to increase to 2,776 places in the 2018/19 academic year. With a new HKSAR Chief Executive elected in July 2017, the Government is now committed to a pledge for offering subsidies to eligible secondary graduates who meet the minimum entry requirements for university degree programmes in self-financing tertiary institutions. Students who study a degree programme in any self-financing tertiary institutions would have an annual subsidy of HK\$30,000.

For a few years, there has been a trend of having more places available for post-secondary education than the number of secondary school leavers requiring them. The New Senior Secondary Structure has also supported an increase in affordable pathways for further study in

other countries, such as China and Taiwan. This may result eventually in a further slight decline in the number of leavers seeking courses within Hong Kong.

Secondary school leavers no longer have to face immediate decisions regarding work or study at the time of high school graduation; but they do face the challenge of making appropriate course selections in tertiary education. In this respect, they are usually overloaded with information. The high drop-out rate from sub-degree programmes in recent years suggests that senior secondary students probably do not give enough careful consideration to their career choices. Only after they have started attending a course do they then find out is not what they want; and this seems to occur far too often. For this reason, career guidance must play a major role in preparing students more effectively for their transition from senior secondary to post-secondary education.

Today it can be said that the study opportunities for post-secondary education students in Hong Kong are very good, due to Government financial support. Children in Hong Kong are, therefore, hopeful of further education upon secondary schooling regardless of any family financial constraints. In tertiary education, regardless of whether students are taking a University Grants Committee (UGC) programme or a self-financed programme, they can apply for financial assistance under the Tertiary Student Finance Scheme (TSFS). This grant and loan scheme can cover tuition fees, academic expenses and compulsory union fees to support a 2-year study period in a sub-degree programme or a 4-year study period in an undergraduate programme.

Students' motivation and pressure to undertake further studies stems mainly from the traditional cultural belief of Asian parents that young people *should* undertake further study after high school, to better themselves and rise in social status. In the Asian culture there is also strong

parental influence on students' career decision-making, under a belief that good fortune in future careers is the result of obtaining higher education qualifications. Their child pursuing an undergraduate degree qualification is the common expectation of most parents in Hong Kong, no matter what ability and aspirations the child may have. Even when a student has low academic attainment, many parents still believe that child should study hard to meet the admission requirements of universities. Not many parents today accept their child opting for vocational training or a routine job after secondary schooling.

It is worth noting that figures in a 2015 *Secondary 6 Students' Pathway Survey* conducted by the Education Bureau (2016) covering 58,747 (96%) graduates of all local secondary day schools in Hong Kong, revealed that 51,583 (87.8%) were pursuing full-time study; 6.4% were engaging in full-time employment; and 3.8% were engaging in part-time employment or part-time study. The figures reported in the 2016 *Secondary 6 Students' Pathway Survey* (updated in February 2017) were found to be similar. Within a student and graduate population of 54,107, it was discovered that 48,101 (88.9%) were pursuing full-time study while only 3,064 (5.7%) were engaging in full-time employment; and 2,084 (3.8%) were engaging in part-time employment or part-time study.

Employment rate

Given the facts above concerning opportunities for study and advancement, it is not difficult to understand the low unemployment rate reported for individuals aged 15 to 24 in Hong Kong. This is a better situation than exists in many other countries. Among the 60 countries that supply Trading Economics (2014) with data, youth unemployment in Hong Kong (5.5%) is ranked as

the 4th lowest country (as of 1 April 2017), with only Thailand (5.2%), Japan (4.9%) and Kazakhstan (4.2%) having lower rates.

Career education policies at the secondary school level

Career guidance was first introduced in the secondary school sector in the 1960s. Each secondary school had a ‘career master/ mistress’ who provided the career service for the whole school. This person was usually the only teacher in the school who had received formal professional training in career guidance in a school context. Other than the nominated careers master/mistress, there were sometimes other teachers at school who were assigned the role as career guidance teachers under the direction of a ‘career guidance committee’ in the school. However, career guidance was not seen as a priority, and in the early years it was only treated as a minor service to students (Ho, 2014). This was because helping students plan a career path was not seen as an ‘academic’ subject, and there was no overarching career education policy nor guidelines from the Government. Such a policy did not emerge until 2014. For a long time, there was no clear framework for providing career guidance and intervention measures; nor was there any substantial administrative and resource support available for career guidance teachers in schools.

Under these challenging circumstances, Hong Kong Association of Careers Masters (HKACM) was established (later renamed as the Hong Kong Association of Careers Masters and Guidance Masters in 1986) to support frontline teachers. It gradually evolved into a professional body to promote knowledge, skills and positive career guidance practices in secondary schools through teacher training programmes. Over the decades starting from 1960s to 2000, active participants of HKACMGM shared a strong identity as career teachers, built a strong network, and among themselves shared practical strategies and essential information about the labour

market. Whenever possible, teachers made good use of further study opportunities, as well as promoting sound practices in conducting career guidance in schools. Li (2007) summarized the five roles of Hong Kong career teachers as:

- *careers information officer* – to collect, update and disseminate information of all kinds on possible vocations and further studies;
- *educator* – to initiate comprehensive and relevant careers programmes for students; integrate and infuse academic knowledge and careers skills into the school curriculum; and to initiate staff development opportunities in career guidance training for non-careers teachers;
- *career counselor* – to counsel students individually or in groups, identifying their strengths, problems and needs in relation to possible career paths; and to inculcate appropriate attitudes towards work;
- *career consultant* – to advise students regarding specific aspects of the world of work and a chosen career path;
- *coordinator* – to forge strong partnerships among career teachers within the school and to include other subject teachers and school administration; to liaise with other stakeholders (parents, employers, institutes of higher learning, community organizations) in order to harness social capital for their students.

The New Senior Secondary Curriculum Reform in 2009 led to fundamental changes in the public examination system and increased post-secondary pathways for students. This created unprecedented opportunities for career education in Hong Kong. The new *Senior Secondary*

Curriculum Guide (Curriculum Development Council, 2009) stipulated seven learning goals, one of which is to enable students ‘to understand their own career/ academic aspirations and develop positive attitudes towards work and learning.’ The guide also specified five necessary dimensions of career guidance in secondary schools, namely: individual student planning, self-understanding, career exploration and work-related experiences, a guidance program for further studies, and remedial and accelerated counseling for individual students.

The new senior secondary academic structure also broke the convention of streaming secondary students into either science or the arts, because under the new system there was the freedom for students to choose two or three elective subjects covering a mix of sciences, arts and humanities. Student could follow their own interests and abilities. Career teachers could make use of this opportunity to help students make informed decisions for their future, with reference to multiple post-secondary pathways available to them.

Out of these opportunities, schools were much better able to create a research-based career guidance curriculum that enabled them to conduct effective career lessons and to provide individual interventions. The career guidance curriculum aimed to equip students with career-related insights such as self-understanding (recognizing their own personal talents and aptitudes), exploration of possible study and work opportunities, making sensible career choices, and personal goal setting. Teachers were now in a much better position to manage career education efficiently and to review progress regularly.

In light of this, the Hong Kong Association of Careers Masters and Guidance Masters (HKACMGM), in collaboration with the Curriculum Development Institute of the Education Bureau, developed two ‘individual student planning tools’ (ISP), namely *Finding Your Colors of*

Life: NSS Subject Choices and the Development of Career Aspirations for junior secondary level (Ho, Leung & Chui, 2010) and *Career Mapping: Career Development Tool for Senior Secondary Students* (Ho, Leung & Chui, 2010). These resources also served to enrich Hong Kong's career development curriculum that is attuned to the local contextual and cultural climate.

With over 100 sessions of teacher training workshops on the use of ISP tools, HKACMGM strived to promote career and life planning under the framework of a “Comprehensive School Guidance Program” developed by Norman Gysbers in the USA (Gysbers, 2003, 2008). This represented a new paradigm for career guidance and education in secondary schools in Hong Kong. It was evident that career teachers could now appreciate that career guidance was a means of empowering all students, and that their mission was to enable all students to make informed and responsible choices in alignment with their interests, abilities, beliefs and aspirations.

Since 2012, the transition to the new academic structure has generally been smooth, by virtue of the dedication of frontline teachers. According to the *Progress Report on the New Academic Structure Review* (Education Bureau, 2013), the practices that foster all students' understanding of their own career aspirations were on the right track. To better support these endeavors, in 2014 the Hong Kong Government pledged in the Policy Address to help nurture young minds through Career and Life Planning Education' (CLP) by injecting an additional recurrent grant into all public sector secondary schools. The grant was roughly equivalent to a full-time teaching salary.

In addition to this financial support, a *Career and Life Planning Guide* was provided, which set out career and life planning education as a distinct and essential service, to be seen as an integral part of the curriculum in all secondary schools. In line with policies that came before it, it is stated that CLP should equip students with the knowledge, skills and attitudes to make wise choices of career path in accordance with their interests, abilities and orientations. CLP should also connect students' career and academic aspirations with whole-person development and life-long learning (Education Bureau, 2014). The government required secondary schools for the first time to have at least 2 professionally trained career teachers as coordinators of CLP initiatives at school.

All these advances signified a milestone in career guidance and education in Hong Kong; and from 2014 onward there has been an increased awareness among school administrators and all teachers of the importance of career and life planning. Findings from a survey of career teachers in schools indicated that their views on recommendations in the CLP policy were positive (HKACMGM, 2014).

Based on visits to about 380 schools by the officers of the Education Bureau in the 2014/15 and 2015/16 school year, most schools have included life planning education as a major concern in their schools, with clearly defined objectives, implementation strategies and a monitoring or evaluation mechanism. About 80 per cent of the schools spent most of the CLP Grant on employment of additional staff (teachers and teaching assistants) (Legislative Council Secretariat, 2016).

In 2015, the Caring School Award Scheme, jointly organized by the Hong Kong Christian Service and the HKACMGM and co-organized by EDB, presented an award named *Best Schools*

in Promoting Career and Life Planning. This has further enhanced the profile of career education – not only in secondary schools, but also beginning with age-appropriate exploration of the ‘world of work’ in primary schools. Since the implementation of the comprehensive student guidance program in primary schools in 2002/03 school year, age-appropriate career development topics have been part of the guidance curriculum, alongside personal, social and academic development, for all students in primary schools.

However, on the down side, the quality of career education policies and practices still differ markedly from school to school. For example, some school principals used the additional financial resources earmarked for CLP for other purposes, such as employing or retaining ‘surplus teachers’ who had no connection with the delivery of career education. Also, due to mounting pressure from the Government for schools to deliver high quality career guidance services, some leaders of a career guidance team, (usually careers masters and mistresses) felt overwhelmed and have stepped down from their posts. Their successors often lack professional training and experience and also have a less than solid understanding of CLP. Rather than designing and implementing a comprehensive programme they fell back on the conventional low-level career guidance practice of simply disseminating information about jobs and further study options. Some even relied on outside service programmes offered by Non-Government Organizations. Such NGO provisions often lack substantive knowledge of effective career guidance practices and they fail to provide follow-up services. When programmes are of poor quality, students are unlikely to develop a positive outlook on career and life planning, and regard it as trivial. They are still left to bear the brunt of looking for jobs without having the necessary insights, and at the same time may be grappling with problems stemming from their life situations.

Ho and Leung (2016) reviewed the emergence of career guidance in Hong Kong. Two surveys were sent to teachers and career masters/mistresses to investigate their perceptions of career education in the context of policy initiatives, as well as the general trends and limitations of actualizing the policy initiatives in schools. Positive responses regarding the principles and rationale of the CLP policy were received. Providing opportunities and support for career development and life planning in a person-centered approach to students was generally regarded as the most important function of career guidance, indicating an emergence of a shared mission among career teachers in secondary schools (Ho & Leung, 2016). However, work intensification in schools and lack of support from school leaders were expressed as obstacles that impeded the quality of career guidance services and continuous professional development of career teachers (Ho & Leung, 2016). Therefore, strategies, including formulation of localized career assessment tools, professional development of career teachers as specialists, and solicitation of support from school leaders were recommended to improve the current situation in schools.

Vocational training and work education policies for youth

Vocational education has long played a pivotal role in equipping people with the skills and technical knowledge for specific professions, trades and industries (Task Force on Promotion of Vocational Education, 2015). Yet, to many students, parents (and even some teachers), vocational education is always viewed as inferior to purely academic education. To combat this view, June 2014 saw the founding of a Task Force on Promotion of Vocational Education in Hong Kong. Its terms of reference were to arouse public awareness of the value of vocational education and to increase its acceptance in the community. Other countries too, including Australia and the UK, are recognizing that vocational training is ultimately of great economic and employment value to the community; and for some students it is a much better option for

future career path than university education.

Vocational education began long ago in Hong Kong, when the first junior technical school was found on Caroline Hill in 1939. Targeting primary school leavers, young people were trained to be apprentices in engineering firms through a 3-year curriculum covering mainly technical training content. Thereafter, in 1969 another type of vocational school, ‘prevocational school’, provided primary school leavers with an alternative choice to attending mainstream secondary schools. These prevocational schools provided students who were below age 14 with a 3-year curriculum comprising 50% academic training and 50% practical subjects (Legislative Council Secretariat, 2015). From the 1970s to 1990s these schools provided vocational training as well as the basic junior secondary education, with the aim of preparing students for employment or for further study in technical institutes. However, the general public perceived many of the students who studied in technical and prevocational schools to be poorly motivated and with no aspiration to attain higher academic study.

The rapid rate of growth in technological and economic development, and the need for new knowledge and skills required in the job market, led to a review of the functions and curricula of the two types of vocational schools. One change that then occurred was to extend their education from three years to five years in the 1980s, and then to seven years in the 1990s. Their students were no longer expected to go to work immediately after their graduation, and as an essential part of the curriculum they were prepared for taking two well-recognized public examinations; the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) and the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination (HKAL). As a result, their curricula have become very similar to those in mainstream secondary schools, and the students had the equal opportunity to compete for degree and sub-degree programmes with students in mainstream schools. The role of these separate

schools offering vocational training to secondary age students, therefore, became ambiguous, in both their function and their curricula.

Since the introduction of the New Academic Secondary structure in 2000, vocational education has reaffirmed its importance and role in secondary education. Students would learn more about and develop a positive attitude towards vocational education through career guidance. As stated in the Reform Proposals for the Education System in Hong Kong, one of the objectives of secondary education is to enable students to have a balanced and comprehensive learning experience in both academic and vocational areas, as well as in the arts and sports domains, "... to prepare them for employment, for learning and for life". More specifically, it is stated that: "Compared with basic education, senior secondary education should provide students with more work-related experiences, enhance their knowledge about the working life, help them develop a positive attitude towards work, and help them explore their own aptitudes and abilities to prepare them for future employment" (Education Commission, 2000, p.32).

Vocational education has now been integrated into the senior curriculum in several ways. First, elective career-oriented subjects (termed Applied Learning: ApL) contain content covering theories and practices in different professions and industries (Education Bureau, 2017). ApL is intended to enrich the senior curriculum by providing students with wider choices for their study path. Second, schools are required to arrange 'Other Learning Experiences' for students, which should include career-related experiences for whole-person development. The career-related experiences may involve career talks, workplace visits, job shadowing, mentorship programmes, 'job tasting' and so on. Through these activities, students can be helped to understand the working world, and the skills, knowledge and attitudes required. Third, much more attention has been paid to well-structured career education in recent years. It can now be said that career

guidance is not simply a service but an integral part of the new secondary curriculum. Students experience personal growth by acquiring knowledge about themselves; and by developing skills and insights that help them identify and manage their career plans (Education Bureau, 2006).

The government in Hong Kong is committed to provide quality, flexible and diversified study pathways with multiple entry and exit points for secondary school leavers. Different vocational training programmes have been (and are being) introduced to cater for a wider range of students' abilities, interests and aspirations. Among all sub-degree programmes, 60% of the curricula are devoted to specialized content in specific disciplines or professions. The Vocational Training Council (VTC), a statutory organization dedicated to the development of vocational education and training, takes up the largest share to provide vocational training programmes for school leavers from Secondary 3-6 levels, but also provides post-secondary programmes through their 13-member institutions. In addition, through the joint effort of government, VTC, different tertiary institutes and the business sector, other programmes are available that cater for diverse needs of students, such as apprenticeship schemes and the self-explanatory Retail Earn and Learn programme.

Career-related policies and practices for drop-out youth

In recent years in Hong Kong, around 1,000 school dropouts or non-completion cases have been recorded annually. While some of these young people would resume their study at mainstream school after counseling, including career counseling, some of them would likely benefit from vocational education. To help this group of individuals, the Government, NGOs and industries collaborate to provide cross-sector support programmes to assist in bridging the school-to-work gap. These programmes offer skills training, general or industry-specific employment training

and support, work experience, and counselling services. The government and non-government organizations that support dropout youth include the Vocational Training Council (VTC), Youth Employment Start (YES) of Labour Department, Employment Retraining Board (ERB), and other industry-specific training bodies.

From the perspective of the education system, the high dropout rate may reflect a structural deficiency in the school system, which is perhaps providing too little support and guidance for students. It may also reflect a poor balance between academic and vocational components (Lai & Wong, 2016). The mainstream curriculum may be failing to cater for the learning needs of certain students, and they may fail to see how study will help them on a career path.

The drop-out figure has prompted a rethinking of how to incorporate vocational elements into mainstream curriculum at an operational level. Compared with the systems in place in the USA, Australia, Finland, Norway, Germany and Denmark (where vocational options are embedded successfully in mainstream schooling), the current Hong Kong curriculum needs to enhance vocational elements so that the less academically-oriented students in secondary schools can stay in education.

Examples of successful programs in career education, vocational training, and job education

Hong Kong still follows the British model wherein career guidance teachers are also full-time subject teachers. The teacher-student interaction that then occurs under this model enables teachers to gain a deeper knowledge of each student's characteristics and aspirations. As pointed out by Yuen, Chan, & Lee (2014), this strong teacher-student rapport is instrumental in boosting the effectiveness of career guidance and life planning education in Hong Kong. However, the

teachers concerned are also swamped by other heavy teaching duties, and this reduces their opportunity for much individual counseling and guidance.

When teachers deliver the career curriculum in lessons or workshops, the main media and resources used are *Finding Your Colours of Life* and *Career Mapping*. These resources have had a circulation of over 400,000 copies since 2009. The two books provide the curriculum and activities in accordance with a 'career and life planning cycle' that involves: self-understanding, linking career and life aspirations with academic studies, career decision-making and management, and self-evaluation and adjustment. Examples of the curriculum components include games, discussions, vocational card sorts, and self-reflection exercises. Many career guidance teachers add in PowerPoint slides, videos and school-based worksheets as supplementary materials.

At a different level, career counseling is conducted by career guidance teachers for students dealing with transitions. When conducting career interviews, especially in senior forms, teachers will refer to students' career portfolios, self-account essays and career assessment reports to review cases in a holistic manner. The purpose of career counseling has shifted from a problem-solving approach to a constructive and humanistic one that assists students to achieve self-reflection and self-exploration. For example, through recounting students' life stories their strengths, weaknesses and aspirations can be revealed. Schools with a well-established career support system can offer each student around two career individual interview sessions per year (30 minutes per session) in junior forms and more than three sessions per year in senior forms.

In some schools, class teachers (homeroom teachers) play a pivotal role in assisting careers teachers in conducting career lessons and career interviews. It is observed that such an

arrangement conveys a strong message to students that their teachers are not only concerned about their academic performance, but also care about their careers and future.

Mentorship Schemes

Mentorship schemes have been gaining popularity in secondary schools in Hong Kong and can be used as an additional dimension in career education. Schools have tapped into a rich resource of mentors including parents, alumni and business volunteers. An example of a mentorship scheme is that operating in Ying Wa College. It involves a cross-curricular initiative and collaborating with alumni. Harnessing the 200-year history of the school, the scheme has a strong alumni mentor team of over 100 mentors. The scheme aims to help students gain insights into their possible career paths through interacting with alumni from different career clusters (McMahon & Patton, 2015). The programme also promotes a bond between the students and alumni, which can form the cornerstone of a support system for the students in their career planning and their transition from school to work.

What sets this programme apart from the conventional practices in other schools is that it has a strong curriculum subject element. Teachers make use of the elective module ‘Learning English through workplace communication’ to require S.5 students to produce a ‘career research project’. Before students meet their mentors on ‘Career Day’, they have to conduct research on job specifications in areas of their interest. English teachers teach them research skills and how to formulate interview questions, as well as writing self-reflection essays at the final stage of the scheme. Career teachers, on the other hand, prepare students for the programme with lessons covering topics such as the world of work, work values, ideal jobs, and exploration of talent and career interests. They also explain the aims and learning objectives of the programme to students

and to alumni mentors. Recruitment of mentors, grouping and matching of mentors and mentees (as well as the logistics of the scheme) are supported by the Old Boys' Association and the Student Council of the school.

On the programme day, mentors and mentees are grouped according to their career interests. Each group consists of around 2-3 mentors and 6-8 mentees. This provides a supportive environment in which students feel more at ease in the company of their peers. Students discuss freely with mentors, comparing their research findings with accounts from 'real people' in the specific fields. In addition, they can learn from different sources within the same career clusters, widening their horizons. Students are also encouraged to share their concerns about studies, and their future life goals, with the mentors.

Post-program functions, like workplace visits and job shadowing, are offered, eliciting participation on a voluntary basis. By the end of school term, the students submit their career research projects to their English teachers. As a round-up to the activity, a few student representatives give a post-programme presentation during a school assembly.

Summer Career-related Experience Scheme organized by the HKACMGM

This scheme is organized every year to provide senior secondary school students in Hong Kong with summer work experiences. It takes place for 3-5 weeks in July and August. First launched in 1974, the scheme aims to strengthen career-mindedness and self-understanding of local youngsters and develop their employability skills. In 2016, with the support of around 10 organizations ranging from NGOs such as Agency for Volunteer Service, public libraries and hospitals to private firms, the scheme has provided work experience in different jobs for over 160 students in S.5 and S.6 (HKACMGM, 2016).

The students need to complete formal application and the selection interviews are conducted by HKACMGM personnel and school teachers. Students receive on-site training and take up jobs at placements that are compatible with their abilities. Those who achieve 80% attendance or higher are awarded an attendance certificate and cash bonus (from the subvention of the Education Bureau). Students are also required to complete a short self-reflection journal during their placements.

A certificate ceremony is held annually in September where students deliver an oral presentation on what they have gained from their experience. Participants over the years have expressed a view that the scheme has given them invaluable opportunities to have a foretaste of the world of work. This has enhanced their confidence to embark on the next chapter of their lives. Many of them continued their studies in disciplines related to the job placements in the scheme, which powerfully testifies to its far-reaching impact in nurturing youngsters' career aspirations (Tsang, 2016).

Future development of career education and vocational training in Hong Kong

Career education, when planned and delivered effectively, is an indispensable learning experience for all students. To ensure the high quality of career guidance and education, a framework that supports the on-going professional development of career teachers should be set up. In addition, a culture of evidence-based career guidance and education should be instilled in all schools. The Education Bureau, with the partnership of the HKACMGM, academics and Non-Government Organizations should collaborate and strengthen their leadership and their monitoring of Career and Life Planning programmes in schools. It is also important to reinforce

the role of Career and Life Planning programmes by promoting the values and knowledge of these programmes to the public – including parents, business sectors and the media.

Much effort has been made by the Government, statutory organizations, tertiary institutes and industries in formulating policies, creating the task force on promotion of vocational education, and devising a qualification framework. However, the traditional Chinese attitude that values academic pursuit over vocational education still prevails in Hong Kong (Task Force on Promotion of Vocational Education, 2015). Vocational education still needs to gain greater acceptance as a valuable career pathway; and it needs to be geared accurately to the current economic and employment situation in Hong Kong. First, the government should match trainee supply to actual demand by regularly consulting with industries to ascertain the nature of employees required. Second, the qualification framework (QF) can stipulate programmes that are accredited to ensure that students receive quality education that will lead ultimately to employment and promotion. Lastly, effective career education can help students explore different career opportunities, plan career paths more skillfully, and make informed choices. Career education for parents and the public is also crucial, because Chinese parents and family still exert a major influence and pressure on their children's career decisions.

Implications for school-based career guidance and counselling services

The new academic structure in Hong Kong stresses students' uniqueness and the need to provide them with multiple pathways to achieve their goals (Education Bureau, 2015). This direction has become slightly more easily achieved by the increase in post-secondary education opportunities and the extra funding support from the Government. Career education and guidance programmes

in school need to take into account the specific educational context, the *Career and Life Planning Guide*, and the current policies as describe above (Ho & Leung, 2016).

Teachers' Professional Development

The planning and implementation of school-based career counselling programmes would not be effective without a whole-school approach. All teachers, including class teachers, subject teachers, career guidance teachers have to take up roles in providing career guidance and counselling of their students. Ongoing professional development of teachers is therefore required. At present, the Education Bureau in Hong Kong commissions tertiary institutes to provide two courses for secondary teachers, namely the Basic Course on Career and Life Planning for Secondary Teachers (20 contact hours) and the Certificate Course on Career and Life Planning for Secondary Teachers (100 contact hours). According to the Government, about 80% of all public sector and direct subsidy scheme secondary schools (including special schools) now have at least two teachers trained in career and life planning (Legislative Council Secretariat, 2016). It is presumed that these teachers have taken the Basic and/or Certificate Courses on Career and Life Planning.

In view of the fact that most if not all teachers are vested with the responsibility to provide some level of career guidance and counselling for students, the provision of professional training for teachers in career and life planning should be increased. This is particularly the case with those teachers providing coordination and professional support for other teachers in the school. There should also be a policy that requires a certain percentage of teachers in each secondary school to have completed the Basic Course and Certificate Course on Career and Life Planning for Secondary Teachers.

Individual Student Planning and Group and Individual Counselling

The positive initiatives of increasing financial support for students' post-secondary education and strengthening the role of vocational education by the government will allow many young people to extend their schooling before joining the work force. At the same time, the education reform, with resources and support from the government, also provides senior secondary students with flexible and diversified study pathways, with multiple entry and exit points. The creation of various options for further study at younger ages has been the most important function of career guidance (Ho & Leung, 2016). In addition, individual student planning (ISP) has become indispensable for addressing the unique needs of students and to cater for individual differences.

From a career teacher's perspective, the results from a survey administered by the HKACMGM in 2010 indicated that individual and group counseling are regarded as vital components in supporting students; and career guidance should be implemented as a whole-school approach that includes curriculum planning and individual transition planning (Ho & Leung, 2016). In view of the importance of group and individual counseling, career masters/mistresses should have a thorough training in conducting such counseling sessions, especially for students who are preparing to leave school (Form 6), or who must decide upon career-related subject selections (Form 3).

While group or individual counseling is seen to be valued most by students, this form of service places considerable demand on counselors' time and energy. Group and individual counseling means that teachers need to receive specific training in the appropriate use of different assessment tools; and they require additional counseling skills for helping students with different concerns. Teachers also need to be well informed with up-to-date career information in order to

provide relevant and accurate help to students. Career teachers should devise effective ways for information dissemination (e.g., online and in print) that can be easily accessed by students. At the same time, 'how to search for career information' should be included in the career education curriculum.

To implement all of above, career teachers have to be given support from their school management. This applies particularly to their own professional development, and to obtaining adequate resources for implementing career education and guidance. However, it is common for them to meet obstacles such as a limited number of training programmes, or for the school management to be reluctant to release them for in-service training. Teachers who plan to attend training are often requested to settle the issue of replacement teaching for themselves. They can either find a time at which they have no lessons or they should arrange to swap lessons with other colleagues. All these obstacles discourage teachers from going for training and attend seminars. In addition, the special CLP grant that is supposed to be used for career guidance purposes (including releasing a teacher for professional training) is often used instead by schools to solve other unrelated staffing problems.

Without full support in terms of policy and resources from the schools, career education and guidance can only be implemented partially and inadequately. To this end, school management and school heads should observe the existing policies and deploy resources to support the development of effective career education and guidance in school.

School Context and Using of External Resources

Equally important as individual/group counseling, career guidance should be implemented in a whole-school approach, including curriculum planning and individual transition planning

(Ho & Leung, 2016). The mentorship programme described above, organized by a well-established secondary school, also demonstrates good practice by using a whole-school approach involving different subject teachers, alumni, and parents. On the one hand, it creates opportunities for students to access people from various careers and professions. This helps students become fully aware of different possibilities for their career choices. On the other hand, students can extend their learning outside the classroom and obtain more up-to-date information on the job market. This may also help them clarify their personal goals within their personal action plans.

However, the success of that programme was due largely to the meticulous planning of career teachers, unfailing support of teachers from other disciplines, and collaboration among alumni, parents and business volunteers. Schools with less (or without) alumni support might consider drawing on external resources from outside school, such as the annual “Summer Work Experience” programme organized by the HKACMGM, the business partnership scheme introduced by the Career and Guidance team in the Education Bureau, or even explore collaboration opportunities with some business partners to offer students opportunities of career exploration.

Effective learning can only be obtained through careful planning and design of the programme and through follow-up work. This again requires much of teachers’ time and effort and adequate support from school management.

Parent education

Last but not least, with career and life planning education emphasizing the empowering of young people with the skills, knowledge and attitudes to make informed choices, parents should

also be encouraged to join with schools to support their children in identifying their life goals. Schools might consider conducting career education also with parents for helping their children's career development and preparation for transition from secondary school to tertiary education or work.

Conclusion

The introduction of the new academic structure marked not only the era of education reform in Hong Kong, but also helped accelerate the development of career guidance and counseling services. Compared to Western countries and Asian countries like Taiwan and Singapore, career guidance and counselling services started rather later in Hong Kong. However, new HK Government policies on funding, professional training of career guidance teachers, and publication of implementation guides for secondary schools, have ensured that provision of career guidance and counseling services have now made a great leap forward.

As mentioned already, there are still areas that can continue to improve in current career guidance and counseling in Hong Kong schools; but practices have already evolved much more towards the model advocated by OECD (2004a). Services have shifted from being available mainly to selected groups of students and only at a specific time in their school life to being much more widely available to all and over a longer period of time. This accords well with the ideals espoused by OECD. Services need to shift from an approach largely focused upon helping people make immediate and lasting decisions on career matters, to a much broader approach that encourages development of career self-management skills in the students. This continues to be the aim for career education in Hong Kong.

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