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Managing for Excellence

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A Call for Articles...

The ASCD (Singapore) REVIEW Committee seeks original articles on teaching and learning...

Manuscripts should be between 2000-2500 words, typewritten (preferably Microsoft Word document) and submitted in the form of a hard copy together with a 3½ inch diskette. Photographs would be appreciated. Contributions may be addressed to:

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The themes for the forthcoming issues are:

Vol. 10 No. 2: **Teaching & Learning Maths in Singapore**
        Deadline for articles: 15 July 2001
Vol. 10 No. 3: **Project Work: Teaching, Guiding and Assessing"**
        Deadline for articles: 30 Sep 2001
Vol. 11 No. 1: **Helping the Underachievers**
        Deadline for articles: 30 Nov 2001

ASSOCIATION FOR SUPERVISION AND
CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT
(SINGAPORE)

In the past two years, the *ASCD REVIEW* has seen more articles coming from the schools. This is a good sign. It means that our teachers, normally a very busy and reticent group of people, are now ready and willing to be published – to showcase their research or projects, to exchange opinions, to discuss innovative ideas, share stories on their successes in schools and on the challenges they have faced. We have also had very good support from the teacher trainers at the National Institute of Education, NTU.

The theme for this issue, Managing for Excellence, is taken in the broadest possible sense to encompass personal reflections, managing learning, managing classrooms, managing discipline, managing pupils before and after school hours and finally managing and developing people in the school. We hope that the range of articles represented will provide you with food for thought and inspiration for the work you do in schools.

The next issue will focus on the Teaching and Learning Mathematics in Singapore and we strongly encourage you to write in to the *REVIEW* to share your thoughts and ideas on this theme with us.

If there are any themes or facets of education that you would like the *ASCD REVIEW* to feature, drop us a line via email. We look forward to learning more about your needs as a reader of the *REVIEW*.

Publication Committee

Managing for Excellence
Vol. 10 No. 1

CONTENTS

A School By Design:
The Chinese High School's Approach Educational Restructuring

Yap Meen Sheng, Hon Chiew Weng
and Koh Yong Chiah

Introduction

> "Education has a special responsibility to help each community come to
> terms with the challenges of globalisation and technological change. It aims
> to prepare the young for the future. When a child starts school at the age of
> six, that child is preparing for the world 15 or 20 years into the future, and in
> which he will live for another half century and more. What that future will be
> cannot be predicted with certainty. But with globalisation, rapid technologi-
> cal change and longer lives, that future which he is preparing for contains
> more unknowns than before. Education therefore has not just to respond to
> change but also to lead it and continually re-invent itself to remain relevant."
>
> Teo Chee Hean, Minister for Education, at 30th International Management
> Symposium at the University of St. Gallen, Switzerland, reported in The Straits
> Times, May 30, 2000.

It is against the climate of globalisation of education policy and the international
movement towards educational reforms, that The Chinese High School (CHS)
embarked on the journey of educational changes with the hope of designing the
education future of our charges. School reforms in general, and restructuring in
particular, is not new. The Anglo-American-Australian experiences have provided
a wealth of literature, researches and practices that span the last decade.This
paper aims to share CHS's experience in the implementation of the Consortium
Scheme to restructure the school and the challenges that we faced.

In the Beginning

> "Speed is God, time is the devil, and change is the sole constaint". (Vivek
> Ranadive, 1999, p.2)

The statement aptly describe CHS's intent, dilemma and belief. It also summarises
the educational evolution of the school in the last 2 decades, propelling from one
of mediocre academic standing and battered by preceeding historical events
characterised by ideological activism, to being a leading premier institution noted
for its academic excellence, innovative energy and an icon of national and com-
munity support.

Since the attainment of its independent status in 1988, the school had exercised its autonomy to spearhead a series of educational initiatives that aimed to enhance the learning and teaching outcomes. In 1998, the school decided to push the boundaries further by implementing the Consortium Scheme. Started as a pilot project on a small scale, the scheme has since taken root and permeated throughout the school. With new vigour and visionary support of the incumbent principal, the scheme will be embraced as a whole school project by year 2001. This schoolwide restructuring is concomitantly followed by a reculturing exercise, in which new directions and efforts in professional development are launched to bring about the total transformation of the school.

Old Department System (fig 1.)

| Languages | Humanities | Sciences | Mathematics |
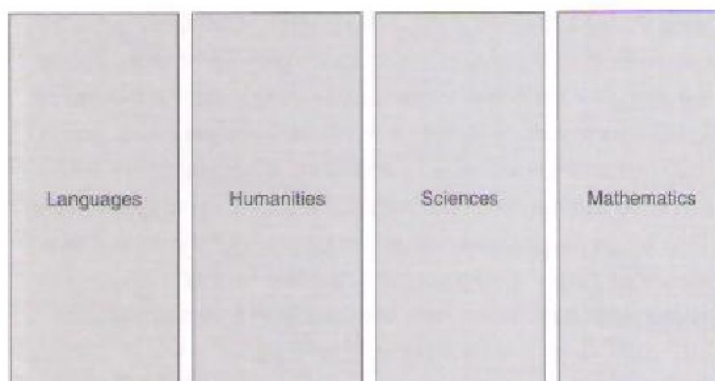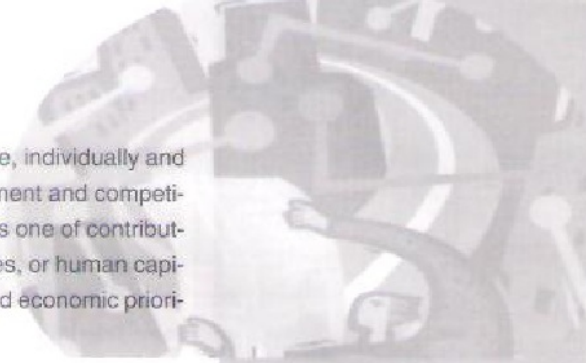
Why Restructure?

> *"A restructured school enhances the 'will' (motivation) and 'skill' (competence) for teaching and learning." (Newmann, 1993)*

Professor Clive Dimmock in his recently published book, Designing the Learning-Centred School, 2000, London: Falmer, p.9 – 12, noted 6 reasons for school restructuring:

1. Schools are functioning in turbulent educational policy environments. Policy statements underpinning school restructuring allude to the basic aim of improving student learning outcomes. According to Peter Senge, "The industrial age assembly-line model for education has shaped our schools more than we can imagine – producing generations of 'knowers' not life-long learners, people beautifully prepared for a world that no longer exists." (quoted in Comer J. P., 1999).

2. There is an incongruent relationship between schooling and the broad long-term changes taking place in society and the economy. The type of workforce needed for the future, will require school and college programmes to reflect knowledge-based, high technology competencies and skills required in a competitive global economy. Schools and the education system must be seen as

key strategic sites in which pupils can be trained to contribute, individually and collectively, to the nation's economic and industrial development and competitiveness. Therefore, the essential role of education is seen as one of contributing to the efficient development of a nation's human resources, or human capital, as major part of the effort to achieve the nation's social and economic priorities (Angus,L. in Smyth J. edited, 1993, p. 16).

3. Schools will have to shift from their established customary practices to keep pace with the continuing rise in social problems. A point supported by Michael Fullen when he argues cogently that "Schools can no longer be indifferent to the working lives that await their students when they move into the adult world... more than ever today, schools cannot shut their gates and leave the troubles of the outside world on the doorstep... Schools can no longer pretend that their walls will keep the outside world at bay" (Fullen, M., 1997, USA: Skylight Training & Publishing, Inc.).

4. There is a growing concern that too many students leave school with little or no success in learning. A problem associated with high dropout rate, absenteeism and indifference to schooling in the USA, what Marry Kalantzi would described as the cultivation of "successful failures" (Kalantzi, M., 1999).

5. The rigidity of schools in changing their core technology, that is, teaching and learning is another area of concern. The present school design owes much to the industrial model. School look much the same as they did 50 or more years ago and classroom activity described as "dull, perfunctory and disconnected from what goes on in other classrooms or in the larger community" (Elmore, R. F. et al. 1990, quoted in Dimmock, C.). This view was shared by Hargreaves: "With their single classroom, single lesson, single teacher formats, such structures are more suited to late 19th and early 20th century preoccupation with mass education in basic skills, and with rigid educational selection for future work roles that are expected to remain fixed over time, than to the complex needs of the post-industrial order"(Hargreaves, A., 1994, p. 50).

6. There is a growing awareness of social justice issues. In times of greater competition and marketisation in education, it becomes even more important to protect the rights of those whose interests are least likely to be served. Schools are increasingly expected to cater to the needs of all students through policies of inclusion at a time when the student body is growing more multicultural and diverse.

The Case of Chinese High School

"To reform schools, we must start where the children are"

(Comer, J. P. 1999, p. xxi).

At the heart of CHS's decision to restructure is the concern for the strains and constraints posed to the students by the traditional structure of the school and the

process of teaching and learning. The existing Heads of Department (HOD) System with its attending departmental structures guarded by subject boundaries, were found to be subject-centric and inflexible. This is further compounded by the competition between departments to leverage over the learning time of the pupils and whose performance is benchmarked by the present rigid academic ranking system. This invariably results in the compartmentalization of learning and teaching and the undesirable effect of isolated development of the pupils, as well as the teachers. Hargreaves noted that "stronger forms of collegiality in the teacher work culture may require modifications to the subject-specialist, departmentalized secondary school curriculum that currently isolates teachers from many of their colleagues and ties them to the balkanized domain of departmental politics and self interest" (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 62).

The rigidity of the department system, with its focus on examinations, also leads to the problem of teachers only teaching to the tests. Brain Scott in his review of the Australian system observed that "the department had not recognized the full extent of the challenge of accelerating change in today's society. Nor has it been sensitive to the fact that in the modern world we live in, school education – its curriculum, its teaching and learning process, and its delivery systems – should be in a continual state of adaptation... The inflexibility of the department structures and procedures has made it unresponsive to the real educative needs of students and teachers" (quoted in Caldwell, B. & Spinks, J. 1992, p.14-15).

Another reason for the school to restructure is the desire to breakdown the large, impersonal, bureaucratic, multi-layered and complex school organization into a simple structure that would offer collegiality, flexibility, adaptability and quick response. In the context of our present shrunken and wired world, the environment has become increasingly event-driven, survival will have to be based on 'sense and respond'. Vivek Rannadive in his book, The Power of Now, stressed the critical need for quick response in today's New Economy: "Business is no longer about return on investment but return on minutes. Yesterday's value added products or services too quickly become today's commodities. Customers expect customized products at commodity prices, immediately, and everytime you look around, there are more competitors or the old ones are gaining" (Ranadive, V.1999, p. 2-3).

In short, the present educational paradigm has been outmoded and outpaced to meet the demands of the real world. To fully engage the future we must quit from 'management by memory' – doing what has been done in the past better – and find new ways of thinking and learning. The Consortium Scheme offers this possibility.

The Consortium Scheme

Therefore, it was with much optimism that CHS decided to launch the consortium scheme – a project to reorganize the school into 5 self-managing mini-schools within the school. Each self-managing school will have a team of teachers from across the disciplines and faculties micro-managing and cross-managing a small cohort of students, for the sole purpose of implementing a holistic approach to
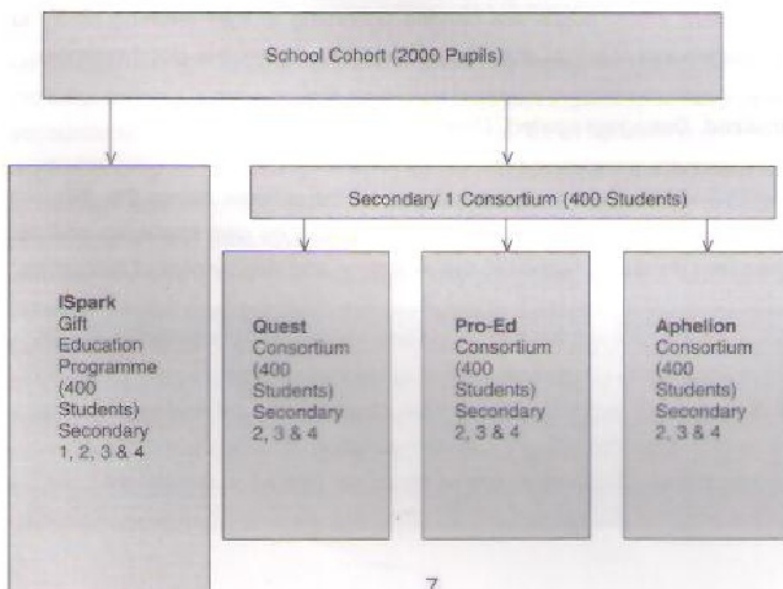
teaching and learning, and the total development (academic achievement and life success) of the pupils under their charge.

The term 'consortium' was chosen from the industry to symbolize the creation of an entity of creative synergy drawn from the collaborative pools of expertise and talents. It also represents the strategic alliance of the traditional academic departments for the purpose of achieving a unified educational objective.

The consortium can be metaphorically described as an amoeba-like organization – simple-structure, 'soft-shell', self-contained and highly responsive and adaptable to the changing environment (Koh Yong Chiah). The main strategic intent of the consortium is to allow for a high degree of autonomy within a centrally determined framework of goals, policies, priorities and standards (Caldwell, B. & Spinks, J. 1992, p. 22). Similar also to the concept of self-managing schools in the Anglo-American-Australian context, emphasis of the consortium is placed on the reconstruction of intimacy, warmth and personal trust in the building of rewarding and also productive collaborative work relationships (Hargreaves, A., 1994, p.60).

The scheme was started with the creation of the first consortium, QUEST, in December 1998 by a group of 12 voluntary teachers from various faculties, committed to search out and discuss ways to better understand and organize the curriculum, to initiate innovative changes and take creative actions to actualize these changes within the structure of the school. Perceived as a change agent in the school and a genuine 'bottom-up' initiative, QUEST received enthusiastic support from the management and the blessing of the staff. In the short period of one year, a host of new programs spawned. These ranged from the crafting of a more vigorous and dynamic curriculum; flexible timetable; a wide range of enrichment and affective education programmes; new information technology initiatives; to the implementation of new professional development programmes aimed at changing the mind-set and skills-set of the teachers.

School Organizational Structure with Consortium (fig. 3)

School Cohort (2000 Pupils)

Secondary 1 Consortium (400 Students)

ISpark Gift Education Programme (400 Students) Secondary 1, 2, 3 & 4

Quest Consortium (400 Students) Secondary 2, 3 & 4

Pro-Ed Consortium (400 Students) Secondary 2, 3 & 4

Aphelion Consortium (400 Students) Secondary 2, 3 & 4

The success of the programs and the early indications of positive learning outcome, provided the impetus and inspiration for sweeping changes in the school. By the end of 1999, 3 other consortiums were formed – ProEd, iSpark, and Aphelion, each made up of a collaborative team of voluntary teachers. The 5th consortium, the Secondary One Consortium, will be added next year, to complete the school-wide restructuring process.

Elements of a Consortium

Fast, Flat, Flexible

Being a simple horizontal organization, the consortium can react faster to the complexities and changes in the macro-environment. At the same time, it can generate new initiatives and programmes at a faster speed, avoiding the multi-layered structure of the previous hierarchical system. Decisions can be made on site and consensus arrived quickly within the team.

Prof. Clive Dimmock described this as the principle of 'subsidiarity', "that is, moving decision making to the lowest possible level in a hierarchical organisation on the grounds that the closer the point of decision making to the client, customer, or service, the better informed and more responsive the decision is likely to be (Dimmock, C., 1995, p. 294).

The decision and success of QUEST in the implementation of the laptop ownership program is good case in point. The project was planned, researched, communicated to the parents and the school, managed and put into operation within a three months duration, with a success rate of 80% individual ownership. The flexible platform offered by the consortium also positioned the organization with a continuum for change. Constructive changes were made following constant and consistent reviews and response to the needs of the students. The abandonment of the lecture system of instruction, after one year of experimentation, in favour of a tutorial system where pupils are banded according to their learning ability to facilitate independent learning and closer monitoring, is another good example.

Decentralized, Desegegregated, Delayered

The decentralized management encouraged by the scheme allows the different consortiums to design their own programs, establish their own strategies and exercise their own decisions related to the allocation and deployment of resources.

"Resources are defined broadly to include knowledge (decentralisation of decisions related to curriculum, including decisions related to the goals or ends of schooling); technology (decentralisation of decisions related to means of learning and teaching); power (decentralisation of authority of make decisions); materials (decentralisation of decisions related to the use of facili-

ties, supplies and equipment); people (decentralisation of decisions related to human resources, including professional development in matters related to learning and teaching); time (decentralisation of decisions related to the allocation of time); and finance (decentralisation of decisions related to the allocation of money)" (Caldwell, B. & Spinks, J., 1992, p. 22).

However, all these decisions are to be exercised within the framework of the larger school and the consortiums remain accountable to the central management for the manner in which resources are allocated.

One significant feature of decentralisation is putting the 'menus before mandate' (Hargreaves, A. 1994, p. 58). This results in the growth of a wide range of teaching approaches and practices, learning opportunities and choices, and a buffet of programs for both the teachers and pupils (see Appendix v). Another important development resulting from the decentralisation process is the 'devolution of authority'.

According to Hargreaves," major educational change is unlikely to be successful unless it addresses school power relationships – change that is comprehensive in scope, accompanied by significant, not superficial redistribution of existing power relationships among principals, teachers, parents and students" (Hargreaves, A., 1994, p. 49).

In the case of CHS, the desegregation and delayering of the traditional practices and structure following the devolution of authority, fostered close collaboration and partnership between the school leaders, teachers, parents and students. Joint activities, collaborative projects and learning partnerships are constructed. The formation of parent support groups by all the consortiums and the emerging student-teacher learning culture with the setting up of 10 Learning and Research Centres within the school, are testimonies to the success of the restructuring process. The emphasis placed on offering equal learning opportunity for the total development of every child under the charge of the consortiums further affirmed the school's commitment to desegregation at the classroom level.

Devolution of authority also results in broadening the system of accountability. For too long, schools in general, principals and teachers in particular, have been made accountable to the learning outcome of the students. In this new age of the knowledge economy and the rising demand for knowledge workers, students must learn to manage and be accountable for their own learning outcome. Intellectual self-determination and independent learning must take place. Parents too play an increasing important role in co-managing the outcomes with the teachers and the school. Parental participation in the academic and affective domain must increase to take advantage of their own growing literacy and professional competence in helping to prepare their children for the real world. To a large extent, CHS has been successful in effecting this aspect of educational change through the consortium scheme. The thrust of the various consortiums' programmes has been to engage both parents and the community by forming meaningful relationships and taking an active interest in the development of the children.

This is carried out in the area of moral and civic education (the community involvement projects), character building, leadership training, national education (citizenship), and technical knowledge training (industrial attachments and job experience programs). Industries are also invited to form partnership with the school to help determine the expectations and to play their role in nurturing the quality of the work force of the future.

Empowerment

Other than the above essential ingredients for success brought about by the consortium scheme, the act of empowerment is another critical factor for effecting change.

"Empowering people is the most important element in managing time within the organization. Empowered people have the necessary information to make decisions and act; they don't have to wait for multiple levels of approval. Empowered people identify problems and fix them. They'll do what it takes to keep customers happy. Empowered people don't have time for turf battles because, when everyone shares power and a common goal, turf becomes irrelevant; and teamwork, an imperative." (Smith, F., W., quoted in Krass, P. 1998, p.212)

Empowerment engenders the merging of 'visions' and 'voices' (opposing opinions), building a shared or collective vision. This is achieved by the consortium structure of lateral leadership, where the organisation functions as a team rather than through a hierarchy. Every member of the team is considered as leaders in their own area of expertise and given the liberty to exercise their own geniuses in close collaboration with their peers. The Head of consortium acts as the administrative and mediating manager, providing support and facilitating the team. Subscribing to the philosophy that 'no one is smarter than everyone', the consortium exercises collective wisdom – the source of multiple creative initiatives and exciting programs. The high degree of autonomy enjoyed by the team is another characteristics of the consortium scheme. This has a tremendous uplifting impact on their performance. Teacher initiative and resourcefulness become a common feature in the work life of the consortium. The heightened sense of ownership of programs and the charges under their care leads to collective engagement and the correspondingly strong esprit de corps and high morale amongst the teachers within the consortium. This is clearly demonstrated by some consortiums' initiative in organizing consortium-wide projects and fieldtrips, even during the prescribed curriculum time. Such endeavours will not be possible without the full support and effort of the entire team of teachers within the consortiums.

Challenges Faced

Change is a process, a journey and like all journeys it has its difficult moments. It is constantly evolving, taking into account the organization, the environment and the people making up the sum total. Restructuring and reculturing is not the end of our journey but the beginning.
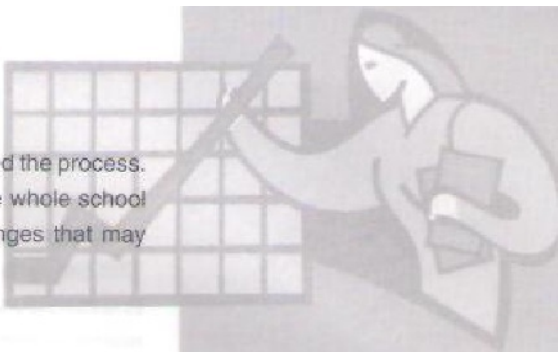
In the course of our journey, we have constantly shared and reviewed the process. Reality checks were administered and signposts set up to take the whole school through the process. We have also identified some of the challenges that may confront us:

Control and Accountability

There is a general sense of loss of control on the part of the central management. The open management system and the decentralisation that accompanied, saw the move by consortiums to embark independently on their own programs. This generated a hive of activities and an explosion of initiatives which is beyond the normal range of monitoring by the central management (Hon Chiew Weng). Accountability is also perceived to have been 'threatened' by the devolution of authority and the distribution of educational responsibilities to students, parents and the community. Conversely, we recognised that the accountability level for the school leaders and the teachers in determining the teaching and learning outcomes have increased with the change process. They are not only accountable for the educational outcomes but also accountable for the change and the outcomes of the change. Herein lies another challenge, Dimmock warned that, "outcomes are derived from inputs and processes. If teachers and schools feel they are being held to account for outcomes, while inadequate recognition is given to the quantity and quality of inputs and processes which affect those outcomes, then enthusiasm for accountability is unlikely to eventuate." (Dimmock, C.1995, p. 297).

Consistency and Convergence of Organisational Goals

With the sprouting of consortiums, each with their own mission, strategic plans and programs, there is a fear that the over-arching goals of the larger school will be ignored. Opposing goals may emerge and a 'pull away' from the centre may happen unintentionally, or otherwise. Consensus among consortiums and the forging of shared goals and vision may also be undermined by the competition between consortiums. It is therefore critical for the school to build a strong 'main frame' in which the consortiums operate. There must be an agreed set of core values, beliefs, objectives, and the desired outcomes that are centrally guarded and respected by all the consortiums to facilitate the convergence of organisational goals.

Old Department System (fig 2.)

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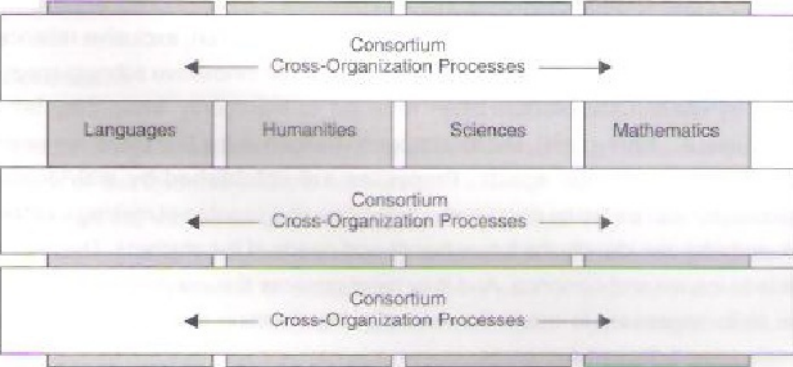
Competition and Resource Sensitivity

Another concern is the keen competition that will arise between the consortiums. This can range from the selection and recruitment of pupils and staff, to the allocation of resources. In this climate of corporate darwinism, the need to be entrepreneurial in attracting both pupils and additional funds becomes critical to the survival of the consortium. This may result in the pupils being targeted as "walking Vouchers"(Angus, L., quoted in Smyth,J., 1993, p. 18), whereby consortium level decision-making becomes dominated by financial considerations. It is also noted that "successful restructuring is unlikely if it is done cheaply. More financial, technical and administrative support at the school level are indispensable conditions for successful implementation of the restructuring process." (Dimmock, C.1995, p.299). The challenge will be for the consortiums to be creatively self-sufficient and their success in achieving 'lean production'. Competition between consortiums can also result in isolation and introverted development. This in turn may "transform internal collective confidence into collective complacency, carrying with it reduced capacity and willingness to network and learn from other kinds of expertise from outside that are not founded in immediate and trusted personal relationships." (Hargreaves, A., 1994, p.60).

Performance Management

With the restructuring of the curriculum, the introduction of new approaches to bring about the desired learning and teaching outcomes, and the redefined role of the teacher, the traditional performance indicators and assessment criteria must also change. New assessment models and assessment tools have to be developed to evaluate the suitability, quantity and quality of the programs and the performance of the teachers. Doing well for the examinations alone will no longer be the sole indicator for success for the pupils and the teachers. Total development, value-adding and the cultivation and demonstration of learning are the new imperatives.

Appropriate Leadership

Hargreaves argued that trust in processes is more critical than trust in people: "Personnel could change frequently, including leaders. Trust in individuals was no longer sufficient. When key individuals left or leaders moved on, exclusive reliance on personal trust could cause massive instability... Even innovative schools spearheaded by charismatic leaders often reverted to mediocrity when they left." (Hargreaves, A., 1994, p. 59). But for change to happen in the first place, we need leaders who are change agents. Processes are established by individuals. Consortiums must be led by people who are willing and capable of making a difference, and who can identify the future trends and needs of the students. They must be able to inspire and convince. And they must possess the vision and the managerial skills necessary to move the teams in the direction that will achieve the determined and desired outcomes.

Issue of Equity

Many of the research on restructuring of schools have pointed to the danger of compromising the value of equity and the breeding of elitism. Smyth noted that, "competitive market orientation is likely to exacerbate social inequality by de facto fostering racial, ethnic and social class differences, and favouring higher income families." (Smyth, J.,1993, p.29). This problem of socio-economic inequality is negligible in the context of CHS. This can be attributed to the high homogeneity of the school and the endeavour of the management to give equal support to all the students in the consortiums. But this intra-school phenomenon may not be replicated outside CHS.

Support from the Community

"Ambiguity and ambivalence over the purposes of restructuring have left parents, teachers, principals and others unconvinced and suspicious. Failure to explicate how restructuring might or might not improve those aspects of schooling which parents, teachers, and others value most, namely the quality of teaching and learning, remains a major block to implementation." (Dimmock, C., 1995,p. 299). Such suspicions and apathy to change can also be attributed to the fact that we are the products of the old education order, a tried and tested system. To accept the need to change is to admit that the system has failed. The accompanying implications can result in the erection of a defensive wall of prejudices against efforts to restructure. There is a need to reschool the community in order to convince them to support the change efforts by allaying anxiety and the fear of exclusion.

Transferability

Can the consortium scheme implemented by CHS be transferable? It is tempting to consider the possibility of designing a template of our model for other schools embarking on the process of restructuring. But it will be difficult, albeit not impossible. There may not be a need too. The transferability will depend very much on the cultural context of the school and the identified needs. Total transplanting of the scheme will not be appropriate or effective as it is divorced from the historical background that is peculiar to CHS. Moreover, the essence of the restructuring process is not to 'copy' but to experiment, experience and to design and build.

Conclusion

Restructuring the school is not the change itself. What have really changed are the needs of the students and the environment in which schools exist. The initiative taken by CHS will not be uncritically, nor readily accepted by some educators and researchers, who may view the reforms as succumbing to the climate of consumerism and marketisation of education, or more seriously, guilty of compromising the traditional ideals of education. Bastion warns that, " by treating education as a commercial product and schools as competitors in a marketplace, we are altering
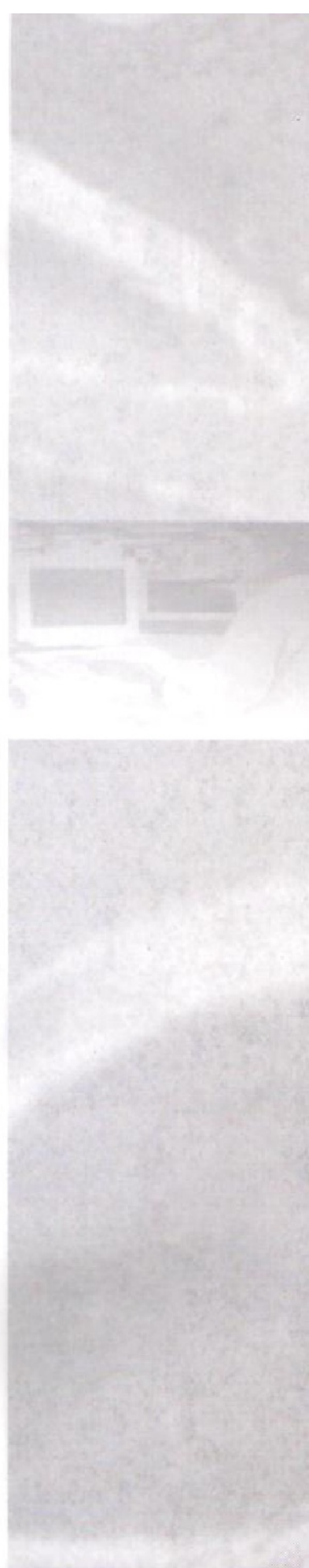
the nature of participation in what for many people is the most significant social institution after the family." (Bastion et al., quoted in Smyth, 1993, p. 4). Notwithstanding these concerns, we remain confident that our efforts, in the long run, will result in positive educational outcomes.

The findings and researches used in this study offer a very useful framework to the understanding of school reforms. More importantly, it helps to give meaning to what we are currently doing in CHS by providing the conceptual knowledge and the experiences of similar initiatives in the Anglo-American-Australian context. It gives us a cross-cultural perspective to a universal movement. In doing so, it holds up our optimism in realising that some of the problems that stand to retard the restructuring and reculturing process in the other countries, do not exist, or in much lesser gravity, in the case of Singapore and CHS. Our political and socio-economic culture; geography (size); and the strong conviction of the Government in committing huge resources to provide the best education for every citizen in the nation, is a clear advantage. It is with this confidence and the will to make a difference that CHS has garnered the audacity in leading educational changes in Singapore. We are constantly being reminded by the inspiring words of George Bernard Shaw:

*You see things; and you say 'WHY?' But I dream things that never were; and I say 'WHY NOT?'*

It is, therefore, The Chinese High School's resolution not to accept the future, but to design one.

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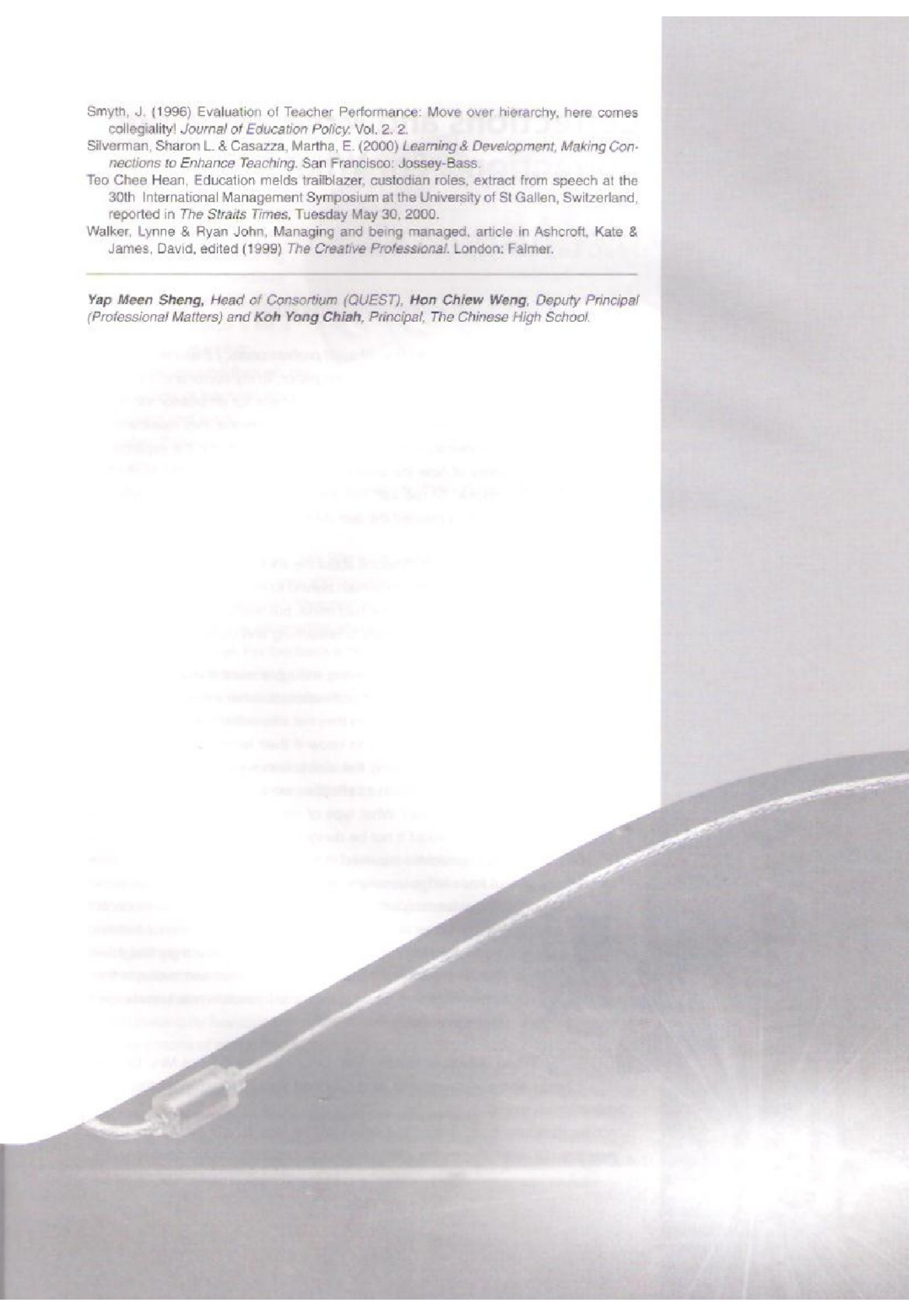
Corrections and More and More Corrections: For What?

Yeap Lay Leng & Low Guat Tin

We would like to share with you the following true story. .

> I gave a competency test to a class of adult professionals. I then invited the
> 24 adults to stay back for a review of the test paper. To my horror and dismay
> only three stayed back. Two of the three stayed back for an ulterior motive
> — to ensure that their answers were accepted by me. Hence, they repeatedly
> tried to force their answers on me. They were not interested in the explana-
> tion or in the process of how the answers were derived. Only one student
> reflected on the review. To rub salt into the wound, a few students called
> later to check if they had cleared the test (Mrs. Lim, 2001).

Mrs. Lim came to us to vent her frustrations about the adult professionals' disinterest.
Her reason for inviting the students to remain behind to review the test paper is not
one of 'kiasuism', to know how well one had done, but really it was her belief that
correction was the unlearning necessary to relearning and for re-teaching.

During our interaction, a number of worrying thoughts went through Mrs. Lim's
mind as she thought aloud: No, the adult professionals in her class were certainly
not unsuccessful learners. Then, why were they not interested to know where they
went wrong? Were they not interested to know if their learning had any gaps?
Were they not uncomfortable leaving the class with wrong concepts in their
knowledge? How could they function as effective workers when their knowledge
base was not adequate? What type of impact would they have in their
workplace? Would it not be dangerous to be training others when
they themselves wavered in their own foundation? What levels
of knowledge accuracy would be transferred to the learners?
What learning attitudes would be transferred to their students?
What types of models would they be? What then is learning
and teaching? Is not learning '...a reflective activity that draws
upon previous experience to understand and evaluate their
present, shape future action, and formulate new knowledge'?
(Institute of Education, 1996).

These questions caused Mrs. Lim to shudder! To us Mrs. Lim had
made some assumptions and she had assumed wrongly that adult
professionals would

1. not be extrinsically motivated but rather will be intrinsically motivated, that is
   they are not motivated by the carrot or stick but by their inward drive to learn;

2. share the pedagogically undisputed value of immediate corrective feedback as one of the optimal learning conditions;

3. prefer formative evaluation, where feedback is periodically provided during teaching to summative evaluation, where a judgment of a pass or a fail is made after teaching;

4. feel that learning through the correction of learners' errors is one of the most effective ways of meaningful learning and teaching;

5. realize that a good knowledge base acts as a scaffold that supports the construction of all future learning;

6. see correction as a way to consolidate learning through practice, reinforcement, re-learning, and over-learning.

Did Mrs. Lim assume wrongly? No. Were her assumptions made on sound pedagogical principles? Yes. Reviews and corrections are principles of learning referred to as 'practice and feedback'. 'Practice' is for learners to try out new content on their own. 'Feedback' is information about current behavior for the improvement of future performances. For feedback to be effective, it has to be immediate, specific, correct, and non threatening. 'The value of practice and feedback in improving learning is one of the most consistent findings from research on teaching' (Kauchak & Eggen, 1998, p. 131).

We were able to assure her (much to her relief) that she was not wrong because reviews and corrections are unquestioned pedagogical practices found in a number of learning principles.

First, 'reviews and corrections' is within heuristic thinking in problem solving. Heuristics is general exploratory strategy or procedure to search for a solution. Here individuals try to find out what went wrong. Problem solvers need to evaluate their results and check for the accuracy of their solutions before they proceed. The one distinguishing characteristic of successful problem solvers is that they note and correct, see errors constructively, and work at learning from their mistakes. Through 'reviews and corrections', teachers can turn learners' confusion and errors into understanding by having learners unlearn 'novice knowledge' – that is unlearning misconceptions of new knowledge.

Second, 'reviews and corrections' is important in assessment and evaluation. In teaching and learning, both the teachers and the learners need to know whether the former has taught effectively and the latter has learned effectively through demonstrating what they know. According to Robert Gagne (Woolfolk, 1998), a

leading instructional designer, 'appropriate feedback' is one of the optimal conditions for meaningful learning: 'Once students exhibit a response or performance, it is important that a teacher provides appropriate feedback. Good feedback means giving students accurate and detailed information about their performances, specifying what is well done, what needs improvement, and how the learners can use the feedback for improvement' (Elliot et al, 2000, p. 545).

Third, 'reviews and corrections' is embedded in 'meta-cognition', that is the ' knowledge of how to do something ...as well as the ability to evaluate and modify performance...noting and correcting...using logical approaches'; double-checking; recognizing inconsistencies, contradictions, or gaps in performance (Ornstein & Lasley, 2000, p. 200). How does one know that one has learnt, if one does not know if one is correct? As such, responding openly or 'overtly' versus 'covertly' should be encouraged as this will enable the teacher/trainer to observe if learners know the correct answers. In the movie of a true story ' Patch Adams', Dr. Patch Adams, a very successful medical practitioner rightly said that grades alone would not let you know what kind of a person you are.

As educators we are concerned about students' learning. What do students learn when they give inaccurate responses? We believe they will leave the room learning errors! 'The existence of the teacher makes possible the commission of error without irreversible harm occurring" (Elliot et al, 2000, p. 464). Therefore, a focus on learning from errors is essential in any teaching learning enterprise. Deep learners, that is, those who are intrinsically motivated, those who see studies as an end in itself, and good problem solvers will begin with a well-established knowledge base, and will use errors constructively to fine-tune the knowledge towards higher order thinking. One basis of an instructional design model is Susan Marckle's 'Principle of errorless learning' (Elliot et al, 2000) where the goal of instruction is to reduce as many errors as possible. However, when students make errors, such errors do tell us something. In short, errors are not without value! Well, here are our thoughts.

Errors:

1. *are a signal that re-teaching is necessary.*
2. *show the learning gaps that need relearning and over-learning;*
3. *expose mistakes or the wrong application of concepts and principles that need further explanation on how to arrive at the solutions;*
4. *are valuable for the evaluation of lesson planning so as to reshape the final form of instruction.*

Alvin Toffler (Azziz, 2000) has been frequently quoted for his words, 'The illiterate of the 21st century are not those who cannot read and write but those who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn' (p.1). Information explosion has shifted the world to market not only commodities but also knowledge. Today, Cope (2000) has written extensively about a knowledge profile. We know our personality profile, our learning style profile, and now it is the K-profile! Just as one trades in stocks and shares, knowledge is also seen as a commodity to be traded. In such a scenario, learning is a priority and the capacity to learn new skills is a requirement for global competition.

Deep learners, that is, those who are intrinsically motivated, those who see studies as an end in itself, and good problem solvers will begin with a well-established knowledge base, and will use errors constructively to fine-tune the knowledge towards higher order thinking.

Where else can learners find a safe place in which to err, and to learn from their mistakes? Where else but in the classrooms can learners confront errors constructively? Where can novices find an unthreatening learning environment where experts can accompany them through the learning processes? Unfortunately, today errors are seen as failures. To Biggs & Moore (1993) '...the educated person should be one who has internalized a sense of the instructiveness of error' (p.464).

When you are reading this-remember it is all right to be wrong and it is all right for your students to be wrong too! What is not all right is for us to cover up the error and not learn from it at all! To Thorndike (1931), 'Man's power to change himself, that is, to learn is perhaps the most impressive thing about him (p.3).

Why were Mrs. Lim's students not motivated to learn from their errors? Why were they indifferent to finding out if their learning had gaps? When they become practitioners, should they not ensure that their students leave the class without knowledge gaps? Would they not encourage reviews and corrections? We were concerned about this. For to us indifference will lead to mediocrity and in a land where the only resource is human resource, can we afford the luxury of indifference, mediocrity or apathy?

People who are very motivated know what they want. They have a mission – a mission that matters to them, one that compels them. Bennis (Garfield, 1987, p 37) called this 'working near the heart of things'. They are committed to that mission and that mission so consumed them that they work on. That mission inspires people to reach for the stars.

The indifference of Mrs. Lim's students could be a consequence of their having no purpose at that stage of their lives. Their view could be that they have to complete the training and to get out into the world to work. Studying is a means to an end. It is not an end in itself. They are achievement learners and not deep learners.

Until they see that learning is an end in itself, how can we create 'thinking schools and a learning nation'? The Ministry of Education wants 'our schools and institutions of higher learning [to be] learning organizations with teachers and lecturers continually seeking to improve and to challenge students to find better solutions. The national environment concomitantly will be one that promotes learning and innovations and one that upholds the fundamental values of equal opportunities and meritocracy' (Ministry of Education, 1998). People with a sense of purpose, a sense of mission push on towards their goal. Maybe, one of the teacher's tasks in school is to help the students to set goals and to see a purpose beyond studying and passing examinations. What do people with a sense of purpose really care about? If they know what matters most to them, that would be a start to drawing out their mission. The mission should in turn build up their drive to excel, a drive that is primarily from within themselves, an internal locus of control.

To conclude we would like to cite another scenario of a true event narrated by a local undergraduate in The NTU newspaper, 'The Chronicle' and entitled 'Time to bring changes to the review system (Ben Nadarajan, 2000, p. 18).

People with a sense of purpose, a sense of mission push on towards their goal. Maybe, one of the teacher's tasks in school is to help the students to set goals and to see a purpose beyond studying and passing examinations.

You see, I have been perplexed since my examination results for the last semester were released...Friends around me urged me to appeal. But I decided not to...I saw no point in paying the school $10 to review my papers. ..... what I most wanted to know would not have been answered by a review anyway...I finish each semester not knowing if I have fully mastered the objectives set out by the various courses....What did I answer correctly? What did I not? For many years right till junior college, the emphasis has been on learning from mistakes and making corrections. Remember those days when form teachers made you re-write those parts where you went wrong. I hated that then, but oh how I miss it now. How I wish our university has a system whereby the release of examination results means students get their scripts back rather than simply seeing their results flash on the computer screen or having a phone operator tell them their grades.....I do not mean a system we currently have which caters for students who just want higher grades, not those who genuinely want to find out why they did badly....perhaps it is time to take a closer look at our review system...to me, review means looking through where we went wrong and how best to avoid our mistakes the next time. The input of lecturers in this process is essential. Yes, a review should involve both parties, students and lecturers...while one party (the lecturer) apparently knows what is going on, the other (the helpless student) is left floundering and grasping at thin straws when demanding parents ask: What happened to your grades?

Hurrah to a voice of support. Ben would have attended Mrs. Lim's review session. Mrs. Lim would have loved to have him and we would not have had to write this article had we more students like Ben!

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Managing A Primary Classroom

Pearly Chai

Is This What It Should Be?

One of my former NIE students shared with me an observation she made during her school experience. The teacher she observed was harsh and strict with her pupils. When one of her pupils misbehaved, the whole class was punished... rather military like. If they made a lot of noise, she made them stand. The pupils would look to her, without fail, for permission to sit down. She was well-known for good classroom discipline and behaviour. That NIE student concluded that teachers have to put on fierce faces and not smile at all if they want to maintain good classroom discipline.

My Observation Made On Children In Such Classes

Most often they are wonderfully quiet and so well-behaved, even when their teachers are not in the classes. Their teachers can leave them alone without worrying about whether they will misbehave themselves. You could hear a pin drop because such classes are so quiet. The only noise in classrooms such as these comes from their teachers who are usually glaring and screaming at them for not adhering to instructions. Such quiet classes might seem fantastic BUT, from my experience, ...

- The children behave like robots. When they assemble in the hall for a function and are supposed to sit down, they do not use their initiative to do so. Their teachers have to bark the word, 'Sit !' before they respond accordingly.

- They are not spontaneous or very creative because everything is teacher controlled, ' Teacher says.....' . Written compositions are stereotypes.

- Learning seems to be a routine and there is no joy. They do not respond fast to questions because they are afraid of making mistakes. They are not prepared to take risks.

Sometimes I observe children in such classes shaking with fright when their teachers yell at them. It is obvious that learning is not fun and they do not see it as an exciting adventure. Often, they do not produce the best results they are capable of achieving.

What Is A Teacher's Role In Classroom Management?

Teachers should be kind, friendly, approachable but FIRM. When they say 'No', they mean it. They demand respect and set expectations. They are friends, mentors,

> *Their teachers can leave them alone without worrying about whether they will misbehave themselves. You could hear a pin drop because such classes are so quiet.*

guides, counsellors, shepherds, even surrogate parents in the classroom. I love this quote taken from a plaque.....

A teacher is:
a PUSH when you've stopped,
a GUIDE when you're searching,
a SMILE when you're sad.

Dr Haim Ginott in a publication named *Teacher and Child* has this to say about the teacher in the classroom and in my thirty-five years of teaching experience, I can certainly testify to such strong statements made......

As a teacher I am the decisive element in the classroom. It is my personal approach that creates the climate. It is my daily mood that makes the weather.

As a teacher I possess tremendous power to make a child's life miserable or joyous. I can humiliate or humour, hurt or heal.

In all situations it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated, and a child humanized or dehumanized.

What Do I Do When I Have A New Class?

I get to know the kind of pupils I have by talking to their previous teacher about them. I get to know their strengths and weaknesses. With whatever information I have about my new pupils, I can begin to organise my class. I keep an open mind though. To their previous teacher they behaved in certain ways, but they might react differently when they are in my charge. What if I were to get a new class of Primary One pupils? I would refer to the Pupil Data Base for relevant information to help me know my pupils better. Information about children is recorded when parents register them for places in the school, e.g., the languages frequently spoken at home, the kindergartens they go to, etc.

When I enter the classroom on the first day, I introduce myself and get the children to introduce themselves to me. Classroom rules are set and my expectations are explained, e.g., how bags are to be placed, where and how to place chairs, when and how to hand in assignments, neatness, etc.
Duties e.g., monitors, librarians, group leaders, etc., are discussed and allocated. I remain my natural self. I do smile and enjoy joking with the children, but I demand respect by my personality, mannerisms and tone of voice.

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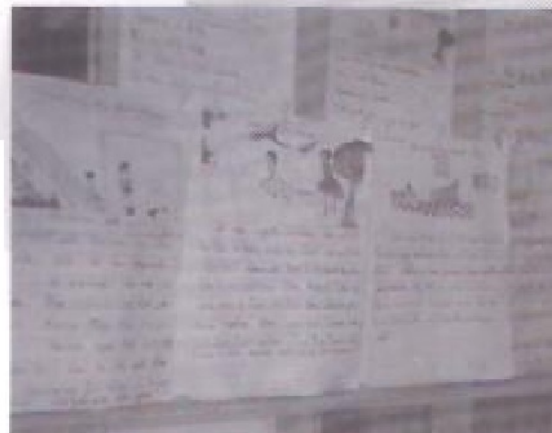
How Do I Provide The Climate For The Love Of Learning?

I encourage my pupils to approach me and share their ideas and thoughts with me and with the class. I believe in communication as a vital part of learning. I want my pupils to communicate with me, with their classmates and I with them. There is a lot of repartee going on. The classroom is a busy working place. Parents have told me that the children love school and insist that they attend school even when they are ill! My pupils have become very creative and often come up with novel solutions to problems. Each child is encouraged to express ideas in his/her own style of writing. Many create their own poems.

Fear must not be the driving force for learning. Such learning, I feel, will not last. The aim of education is to develop a love of learning from a teacher who motivates and inspires. Most often, my pupils learn because I am enthusiastic about what I want to deliver and because I encourage them to discover things for themselves.

What about noise? I accept working noise. What is a classroom without noise? The pupils are alive! Their minds are ticking! They are bursting with ideas. They want to share, as expressed by one of my former pupils......." Miss Chai, I can't. stand it! I'm going to burst! I need to tell you something. " I saw her excitement and her face was turning red.

Of course, I have to lay down rules. The pupils have to be reminded to speak softly, to take turns when giving opinions and ideas and to listen to one another. They have to learn not to shout to be heard. In time to come, they do conform to classroom rules. I am the children's friend as well as their teacher. They know where to draw the line.

I believe greatly in Cambourne's seven conditions for optimal learning in the classroom, namely: immersion, demonstration, expectations, responsibility, approximations, employment and feedback. A description for each of the conditions can be found in Ruddell & Ruddell (l995). I have found that these seven conditions have contributed to the conducive environment for learning in every class I teach.

The classroom boards, walls and doors are flooded with illustrations and print. There are lots of models for the pupils to read and from which to choose. Pupils' work is displayed. The library corner is a cosy haven for the children to go to read. There are scatter cushions to sit on and toys to cuddle. Like most classrooms in Singapore, my classroom is shared with a class from the second session. This class is a different year level from my own. Their teacher and I work on a common theme for the reading record display board. Two examples of such themes are...' Our Reading Train' and 'Come Read With The Merry Clowns Of Joy Magic Circus'. Display boards for Mathematics, Science, news, incentives, art work, Mother Tongue and pupils' creations are also shared by both classes. My colleague and I work on integrating the content for and from both classes on each display board with the belief that the children from both levels can learn from one another. Below are photo illustrations of what I have described.

Primaries
3 & 4

Primaries 1 & 2

Library Corners
Reading Record
Display Boards and
Themes shared by both sessions

Children enjoying themselves in the Library Corner

Besides flooding the classroom with print, I also immerse my pupils in the target language in a number of ways such as:

- Reading stories to them
- Listening to their news and recounts
- Giving them opportunities to listen to poetry and interprete poems using choral reading as a medium
- Conducting conversations and discussions
- Playing language games that enrich their knowledge about language

They make entries into their own 'Books Of Creations' and each pupil has a 'Let's Chat' book to communicate with me and read my responses. This strategy is outlined in a joint article written by George M Jacobs and myself (1996). Cambourne's seven conditions permeate the whole atmosphere in the classroom and when this happens the children love learning and despite the daily discipline problems, learning for the children becomes fun and, teaching for me a challenge and a joy.

Daily News Board and Board for Group Incentives
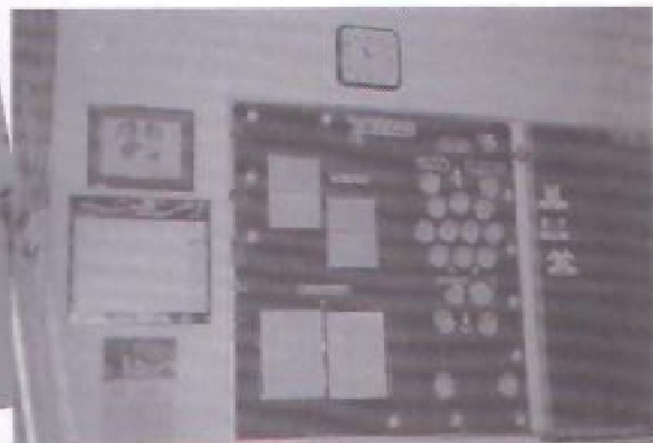
Notice Board

Art Work
Primaries 1 & 2

Art Work
Primaries 3 & 4

What About Pupils Who Do Not Hand In Their Work, Hand In Their Work late or those Who Hand In Work Below Their Capabilities?

In such cases, I speak to pupils personally and listen to their reasons for such actions. I need to know what caused them to behave in such ways. Sometimes I have to go further and call up parents. This often reveals extenuating circumstances that are beyond the control of the children. Sometimes I invite parents to work together with me to help their children. Often in so doing, we become partners and friends. We are able to see the children improving in their attitudes and work.
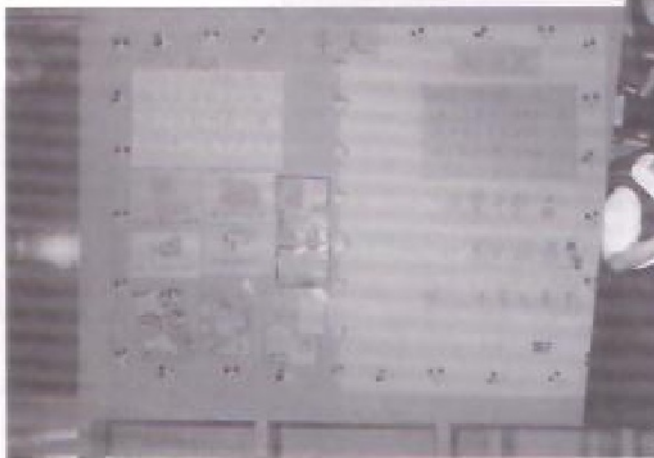
Mother Tongue
Board

In Conclusion

A positive attitude, focusing on the child-to-be rather than on the present child, creating a conducive environment for learning in the classroom and enlisting parents' cooperation are factors which support teachers in managing their primary class-rooms.

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Both sessions
sharing spaces and display
boards for English,
Mathematics and Science

Language Games

Behaviour Management – Experience and Support

Esther Tan and Cheng Yuanshan

Introduction

"He works very hard to prepare for his lessons, but what's the use? - he cannot manage the class!".... "She knows her subject matter well but is hopelessly inadequate when it comes to classroom management!". Such are observations often made by principals when asked to comment on the classroom teaching of trainee teachers attached to their schools. On the other hand, the trainee teachers themselves are also lacking in confidence – " I may have a wonderful lesson plan all worked out but all my efforts go down the drain when I am face to face with a difficult class." or "So much time and effort is spent in disciplining the class , as a result very little time is left to deliver the lesson!".

Classroom management has always been a major concern for teachers, especially trainee teachers. In fact, the transition from teacher's training college to the actual teaching job has often been referred to as the "reality shock" for novice teachers. This is because the missionary ideals formed during teacher training are often shattered by the harsh and rude reality of everyday classroom life. In a literature review of 83 international studies, Veenman concluded that "classroom discipline" was ranked as the most severe problem faced by beginning teachers (Veenman, 1984). This seems to be the case in Singapore too.

Are beginning teachers in Singapore really ill-prepared for the reality of classroom teaching? What are their perceptions of classroom discipline? Compared to experienced teachers how different are trainee teachers in managing discipline problems? In order to find answers to such questions, a study was conducted at the National Institute of Education to compare the classroom management of trainee teachers and experienced teachers.

The Sample

The research study conducted between 1999 and 2000 involved two samples of teachers. Sample A comprised 521 trainee teachers who were undergoing initial teacher education at the National Institute of Education. They were all university graduates in the one-year Postgraduate Diploma in Education Programme (PGDE). Of the 521 trainee teachers 30.7% were males and 69.3% were females. At the time of the study, these trainee teachers had completed their course work component of their training programme at the Institute which included a compulsory module on classroom management. They had also been exposed to five to six weeks of teaching practice in the schools, with 34.7% of them in primary schools, 58.5% in secondary schools, and 6.8% in junior colleges.

Sample B comprised of 299 experienced teachers with 15% of them males and 85% females. About half (51.1%) were from primary schools, 36.9% were from secondary schools and 12% were teaching in junior colleges. Over 90% of the teachers in the sample had taught in school for more than two years, some as long as 20 years. The average teaching experience of the sample was 14.77 years.

Method of Data Collection

The instrument used to collect data was a paper-and-pencil questionnaire which was adopted from the questionnaire developed by Johnson, Oswald & Adey (1993). Some of the questions were taken from another instrument developed by Tan and Cheng (1999). A total of 15 commonly used classroom management strategies were listed in the questionnaire. The respondents were asked to respond on a 4-point scale how often they used each of these strategies in classroom management and how effective they had found these strategies. They were also asked to describe other effective strategies they had used in handling discipline problems in class (e.g. disruptive behaviour) and out of class (e.g. truancy).

The Findings

Comparing the Use of Strategies in Handling Discipline Problems

Table 1 shows the teachers' mean responses on how often they had used different strategies in handling discipline problems encountered in their teaching. In the 4-point scale, 4 corresponds to "Very often", 3 to "Sometimes", 2 to "Rarely", and 1 to "Never". Thus, if a mean response is above 3, that shows the corresponding strategy had been used rather often. A mean score of below 2 indicates that the strategy was hardly used.

Table 1

Comparison between the experienced teachers and the trainee teachers in using different strategies to deal with classroom discipline problems.

Strategies	Experienced teachers Mean	Rank order	Trainee Teachers Mean	Rank order	Mean Difference
Reason with pupil in class	3.39	1	3.10	1	−0.29**
Reason with pupil outside class	3.29	2	2.68	4	−0.61**
Ignore minor disruptions	2.98	3	2.92	2	−0.06
Discuss problem with whole class	2.94	4	2.80	3	−0.14*
Seek parental involvement	2.79	5	1.55	11	−1.24**
Conference with pupil/parent	2.69	6	1.78	7	−0.91**
Remove privileges	2.60	7	2.32	5	−0.28**
Set extra work	2.14	8	1.95	6	−0.19
Send pupil for detention	1.97	9	1.57	10	−0.40**
Have pupil leave class	1.82	10	1.69	8	−0.12
Send pupil to principal/discipline master	1.77	11	1.43	13	−0.34**
Refer pupil for professional help	1.74	12	1.24	15	−0.51**
Refer pupil to another teacher	1.62	13	1.58	9	−0.03
Remove pupil from class	1.57	14	1.46	12	−0.11
Mete out physical punishment	1.43	15	1.31	14	−0.12*

From Table 1, we can see that the rank ordering of the strategies of the trainee teachers is not much different from that of the experienced teachers, especially for the top four most frequently used strategies, i.e. *reasoning with pupil in class, reasoning with pupil outside class, ignoring minor disruptions* and *discussing the problem with the whole class*. One strategy that is often used by the experienced teachers (ranked 5th) but is hardly used by the trainee teachers (ranked 11th) is *seeking parental involvement.* Being young and inexperienced, the trainee teachers probably lack the skill as well as the confidence in handling parents. At the other end of the scale, the strategies that are hardly used by both groups of teachers are *referring pupils for professional help, removing pupil from class,* and *meting out physical punishment.* One exception is the strategy referring pupil to another teacher which is more frequently resorted to by the trainee teachers (ranked 9th) but not so by the experienced teachers (ranked 13th). This is understandable as

the trainee teachers, being inexperienced, often have to seek advice from their mentor or other senior staff in the school.

When we compare the mean scores of the two groups in Table 1, a negative mean difference indicates that the trainee teachers have not used the strategy as often as the experienced teachers. As all the mean differences are negative with 9 of them showing significant differences, this means that overall, the trainee teachers do not use the strategies as often as the experienced teachers. One probable explanation is that the trainee teachers are usually given a much lighter teaching load when they are attached to schools for their teaching practicum. Since they have less exposure in the classroom, they also have less opportunities to encounter problem situations as compared to the experienced teachers having a full teaching load.

Among the few most often used strategies, the only one that both groups use as frequently (no significant difference in mean scores) is the strategy *ignoring minor disruptions*. Both groups of teachers know the wisdom of overlooking minor disruptions instead of escalating a minor problem into a major one by giving it too much undue attention. The highest negative values are related to the strategies *seeking parental involvement, conferencing with pupil/parent, reasoning with pupil outside class* and *referring pupil for professional help*. These are strategies often used by experienced teachers but they are not included in the limited repertoire of classroom management strategies of trainee teachers.

Evaluating the Effectiveness of the Strategies

In the survey, the respondents were also asked to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies based on their own personal experiences. They were asked to rate the effectiveness of these strategies on a 4-point scale with 4 corresponding to "Very effective", 3 to "Quite effective", 2 to "Effective only at times", and 1 to "Not effective at all". Table 2 shows the teachers' evaluations on the effectiveness of the different strategies they had used.

All the mean scores in Table 2 are above 2 which seems to indicate that the teachers have found the strategies effective only at times. Again the similarities in the ranking seems to show that the two groups of teachers concur in their evaluation of the effectiveness of the strategies. In fact, their ranking of the top five most effective strategies are almost identical. Topping the list are *reasoning with pupil outside class and reasoning with pupil in class*, followed by *conferencing with pupil/parent, removing privileges* and *discussing problem with the whole class*. As for the ineffective strategies, both groups seem to agree that *removing pupil from class and meting out physical punishment* are not really effective ways of disciplining pupils. They only give temporary relief to the teacher managing the class.

Table 2

Comparison between the experienced teachers and the trainee teachers in evaluating the effectiveness of the strategies.

Strategies	Experienced teachers		Trainee Teachers		Mean
	Mean	Rank order	Mean	Rank order	Difference
Reason with pupil outside class	3.00	1	2.76	1	−0.24**
Reason with pupil in class	2.90	2	2.72	2	−0.18**
Conference with pupil/parent	2.86	3	2.66	5	−0.20**
Remove privileges	2.84	4	2.68	3	−0.16*
Discuss problem with whole class	2.82	5	2.67	4	−0.15*
Seek parental involvement	2.77	6	2.54	7	−0.23**
Ignore minor disruptions	2.73	7	2.54	7	−0.19**
Send pupil to principal/discipline master	2.54	8	2.62	6	+0.08
Refer pupil for professional help	2.54	8	2.42	11	−0.12
Send pupil for detention	2.46	10	2.48	9	+0.02
Have pupil leave class	2.41	11	2.36	13	−0.05
Mete out physical punishment	2.35	12	2.16	15	−0.19*
Set extra work	2.29	13	2.41	12	+0.13
Remove pupil from class	2.15	14	2.35	14	+0.20*
Refer pupil to another teacher	2.12	15	2.43	10	+0.31**

In Table 2, a negative value of mean difference shows that the experienced teachers evaluated the strategy to be more effective, and a positive value shows the trainee teachers evaluated the strategy to be more effective. The fact that there are more significant negative mean differences (8) than positive ones (2) suggests that on the whole, the experienced teachers had found the strategies more effective than the trainee teachers. In other words, the trainee teachers had less successful experiences in using these strategies. One possible explanation is that they lacked the skill and confidence in using these strategies. Another reason could be they lacked the opportunities to use these strategies even though they realised their effectiveness. Indeed, strategies rated to be effective by the experienced teachers such as *reasoning with pupil outside class, conferencing with pupil/parent, discussing problem with the whole class* and *seeking parental involvement* all require time and effort after teaching hours and outside the classroom, sometimes even outside the school. Most trainee teachers are struggling to "survive" in the classroom, preparing detailed lesson plans and sourcing for teaching materials. Very few can afford the time and energy to look beyond the classroom and reach out to the parents. Neither is this expected of them as trainee teachers on attachment.

Implications for Teacher Education

This simple study has yielded interesting results which have implications for teacher education and the professional development of teachers.

To begin with, it is interesting to note that the trainee teachers, despite their lack of experience, are just as discerning as their experienced counterparts in choosing appropriate classroom management strategies when dealing with discipline problems. In theory, they know what should be good strategies to use but in practice they do not experience as much success in using these strategies. The lack of success could be due to lack of skill and the lack of skill stems from lack of practice.

How best can classroom management techniques be learned? At the National Institute of Education, all trainee teachers in the Postgraduate Diploma in Education programme have to undergo a compulsory module on Teaching and Classroom Management. In this module, they are introduced to all three aspects of classroom management – the preventive aspect (e.g. creating a conducive learning environment and establishing teacher-pupil rapport), the developmental aspect (e.g. setting of ground rules and effective lesson delivery) and the remedial aspect (handling discipline problems and helping needy pupils). To drive home the message, the trainee teachers are put through group discussions, role plays and case studies. They role-play problem situations in class and various approaches to handling these situations. They scrutinize case studies of classroom scenarios and brainstorm on appropriate intervention strategies. They watch video clips depicting discipline problems in class and debate on how best to handle these situations. Still, the best training ground to develop classroom management techniques is the classroom itself. Like a new mother learning to bathe her baby or a surgeon trying to perfect a new surgical procedure, the best way to develop the skill is to do the real thing in an authentic situation. It follows that the most effective way for trainee teachers to acquire classroom management skills is to be exposed to real classrooms where they can try out different strategies to pick up skills and develop confidence. Rather than criticizing them for their lack of skill, fellow teachers and principals could serve as mentors and give them encouragement and support.

As mentioned earlier, the transition from the lecture room at the teacher training college to the real classroom in schools could be a "reality shock" for many beginning teachers. Muller-Fohrbrodt and his research associates predicted four possible outcomes of reality shock for beginning teachers – change of behaviour, change of attitude, change of personality and finally leaving the teaching position. (Muller-Fohrbrodt, Cloetta and Dann, 1978). It is not uncommon nowadays to see young beginning teachers leaving the profession rather early in their teaching career, discouraged by this "reality shock" and disappointed with the lack of support given to them. Many of these young teachers had started their teaching career with high ideals and great enthusiasm. It is a loss to the teaching profession when they quit the education service, not for lack of motivation, but for lack of professional and moral support to persevere in the face of challenges and difficulties.

Recommendations

Since recruiting and retaining good teachers has always been a top priority of the Ministry of Education, something needs to be done rather urgently. On the one hand, the National Institute of Education can beef up its compulsory training modules on classroom management, expanding their content coverage to include knowledge and skills in basic counselling skills and working with parents. Presently, there are also electives on effective classroom teaching, guidance and counselling and pupil management for trainee teachers desiring more in-depth study in classroom management. Perhaps more such electives could be offered to reach out to more trainee teachers.

On the other hand, the schools can give beginning teachers the much needed professional support. A gradual involvement in teaching difficult classes and low ability groups will help new, inexperienced teachers settle into the teaching profession. Assigning beginning teachers on the staff a "mentor" or "buddy" to give professional help and moral support instead of "throwing them into the deep end of the pool" will help them survive teething problems in teaching. In fact, a whole-school approach is needed to facilitate the professional development of beginning teachers. Jones (1984) emphasizes that successful behaviour management and disciplinary practices in a school requires a school-wide policy and commitment. A well-conceptualised, sensitively implemented programme involving administrators, classroom teachers and parents can create a conducive learning environment, improve pupil learning and reduce disruptive behaviour.

Only when beginning teachers are given sufficient concrete help to overcome the "reality shock" can they be in the frame of mind to concentrate on their teaching. Only through hands-on experiences in teaching and managing pupils in the classroom can they develop pedagogical skills and build up confidence. Teacher educators at the National Institute of Education as well as principals and experienced teachers in schools can play a critical role in this crucial process. Herein lies the true partnership between NIE and the schools in teacher education.

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Developing Excellent Reading Teachers

Cheah Yin Mee

Introduction

"Reading teachers" is perhaps a misnomer in Singapore since most primary school teachers are not expected to specialise but are instead expected to teach all the major subjects. Yet, all teachers of English are first and foremost reading teachers because their first task in primary one is to teach children the alphabet and to introduce books to children. The importance of this task cannot be over emphasised because children's subsequent success in reading hinges on their ability to master the rudiments of the reading process in the lower primary. That this goal is sometimes not achieved is evident from local anecdotal accounts of normal children in P4, P6 and even secondary school who are unable to read. We should be concerned about this and ask ourselves what has gone wrong in these children's quest to learn to read, and how we as teachers can help them more effectively. The latter is the theme of this paper as it involves the professional development of teachers especially in the area of reading.

The two stages of learning to read and reading to learn must always be uppermost in our mind when we talk about teaching reading. With lower primary children, our mission is to help them learn to read. Once they have mastered the fundamentals and are able to read, we can focus more on reading to learn. However, this does not mean that in the process of teaching children how to read, we should forget about comprehension and meaning. We know for a fact that children learn better if what they read is meaningful, and we know too that the more exposure children have to books before they begin formal reading lessons, the more ready they are to learn.

Unfortunately, the trend here is to teach reading even before children have any notion of what reading is all about. Many children still come to school with very little experience of real reading, and often even before they learn how to read effectively, they are required to answer comprehension questions in full sentences. Such rush to equip children with test skills often backfires because children never have the time to make any real progress in their reading skills, and we know reading is a developmental process. Unfortunately, children also learn the hidden message that all reading is done for the sole purpose of answering questions and that reading is just schoolwork.

Much then revolves around the crucial first two years and what we do as teachers. As we move towards the introduction of a new curriculum and new textbooks, it is perhaps timely for us to discuss what constitutes appropriate training for teachers in the area of reading education.

Excellent reading teachers

In their position statement on excellent reading teachers, the International Reading Association (IRA, 2000) identified these critical qualities of knowledge and practice among excellent reading teachers:

- They understand reading and writing development, and believe all children can learn to read and write.
- They continually assess children's individual progress and relate reading instruction to children's previous experiences.
- They know a variety of ways to teach reading, when to use each method, and how to combine the methods into an effective instructional programme.
- They offer a variety of materials and texts for children to read.
- They use flexible grouping strategies to tailor instruction to individual students.
- They are good reading coaches (that is, they provide help strategically).

In addition, excellent reading teachers also share many of the characteristics of good teachers in general. These include strong content and pedagogical knowledge, effective management skills to engage children, strong motivational strategies, high expectations of children and the ability to help children who have difficulty reading. Good reading teachers are simply good teachers to begin with. This list of qualities, however, provides a good starting point for thinking about what the education of reading teachers involves.

Educating reading teachers

Teacher education is the key to better schools and better instruction. Without knowledgeable teachers, all the hi-tech equipment, the glossy textbooks, and the well-equipped classrooms will not help children to be better readers and writers. Reading is the key to the learning of all other subjects and attention should be paid to the teaching of reading in the early school years. Bond and Dykstra (1967) in dismissing the value of specific teaching methods suggested that,

> To improve reading instruction, it is necessary to train better teachers of reading rather than to expect a panacea in the form of materials.
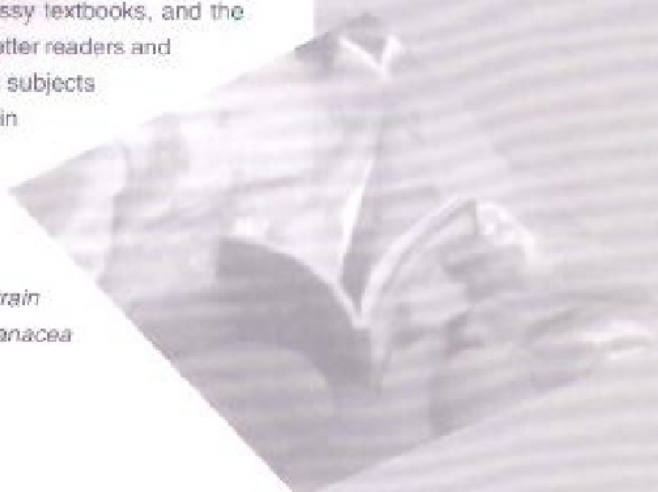
What should the education of reading teachers constitute? Based on IRA's criteria, any comprehensive course on reading education should include the following:

1.   ### Good theoretical knowledge

Although the body of research pertaining to reading instruction is formidable, it is well established that reading and writing instruction should be integrated. Clearly, a sound theoretical understanding related to reading and writing instruction is fundamental in the education of reading teachers. It is from such a knowledge base that teachers make judgements about the strategies to adopt for teaching reading. At present, teachers tend to shun anything theoretical preferring instead to learn specific techniques and methods that they can use in class. This is understandable given their need to focus on results, but in the long run, these methods will not be uniformly helpful in all their classes. Teachers need to be equipped with the knowledge of how to make adjustments to their methods when the need arises. Good practice is only possible if it is based on sound understanding.

2. Multiple approaches to teaching reading

The second most important requirement is the need to learn multiple approaches to teaching reading (IRA, 1999). Pre-service teachers are currently equipped with basic approaches for handling the textbooks rather than broad teaching reading approaches, and these will stand them in good stead for perhaps the first two years. Then they will quickly discover that they need more than what they have learnt. Indeed a teacher's true education only begins the moment he/she steps into the classroom. Adams (1990, pp 38-39) suggested that

> Given the tremendous variations from school to school and implementation to implementation, we should be very clear that the prescription of a method can never in itself guarantee the best of all possible outcomes.

This suggests that there is every reason to suspect that the few methods that teachers learn in their training may eventually be inappropriate for the class they teach. Teacher education has to first to cover more than methods; next, it has to cover a much broader range of approaches. Teachers should understand that one approach is never adequate in any situation. However, where multiple approaches are used, this eclecticism should be based on informed decisions.

3. Understanding the teaching-learning contexts

In most instances, success in teaching does not depend on methods alone or for that matter on materials. Bond and Dykstra (1967) argued that, "The tremendous range among classrooms within any method points out the importance of elements in the learning situation over and above the methods employed." An awareness of children's needs and the conditions under which they are learning to read are more important criteria for consideration. Such awareness can lead to more flexible teaching arrangements and more strategic

teaching within a class. Needless to say, such awareness is not developed away from the classroom, and it takes a certain amount of time to hone such insight. On the other hand, training that does not involve working with children in classroom situations cannot help teachers develop such awareness. Indeed, beginning teachers should be required to focus on developing insights into the many different classroom contexts in the first year as part of their in-school training.

4. Assessment of reading

Another important consideration in training reading teachers pertains to the ability to assess children's progress and to help weaker readers. At present, teaching weaker students remains a weak link in teacher education, where the target has always been the mythical average child. However, in all teaching situations, the class is never homogenous, and the ability to handle slower students remains a challenge although gifted children pose another set of problems. Many weaker readers do not need specialist help, and their problem could be temporary in nature. A knowledgeable teacher can help them over this hurdle. Thus reading teachers should be able to do simple diagnosis of reading problems, to understand the problems, and to come up with an intervention strategy. These skills must be part of the reading teacher's education.

5. Selection and evaluation of materials

The choice of teaching and reading materials is yet another issue which now becomes increasingly more urgent given the liberalisation of the textbook market. How to evaluate materials should be a core element of any training programme for all teachers. The danger of any new syllabus and new materials is always the temptation to throw the baby out with the bathwater especially with teachers who never had the luxury of a choice. Reading teachers should be taught the skills to pick and choose and to customise an instructional programme for a level or a school, independent of what textbooks prescribe. A lack of such knowledge will only result in choices based on superficial factors such as the look of the materials or to slavish dependence on what the textbooks prescribed.

Recommendations

The education of excellent reading teachers is not just the job of a training institution. Administrators, principals, parents and teachers themselves all have a part to play. IRA suggests a number of recommendations that we should consider for the Singapore context. These are:

- **Teachers must view themselves as life long learners and continually strive to improve their practice.**

The notion of life long learning has already been introduced to Singapore and teachers are encouraged to continually upgrade themselves through a variety of
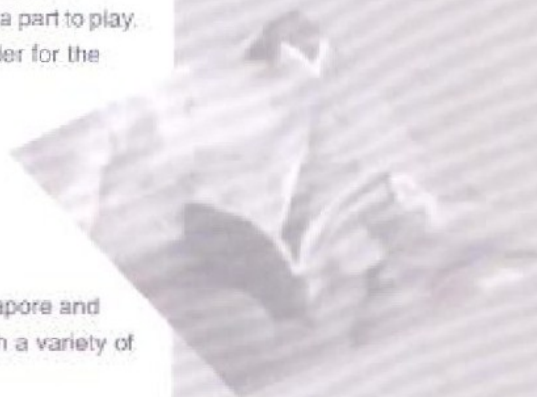
means. Reading professional materials should be a major component of teachers' life long learning strategy. Unfortunately, this is not a common practice as yet. Another useful, and increasingly popular practice, is the sharing of ideas among teachers.

> • **Administrators must be instructional leaders who support teachers' efforts to improve reading instruction.**

Principals and other administrators such as school inspectors and school supervisors should equally think of upgrading themselves so that they can provide more effective guidance to their teachers. Such upgrading should not merely be in the area of educational management but they should also be updated on issues related to teaching learning. How else can they evaluate school programmes or offer constructive help in the planning of instructional programmes?

> • **Teacher educators must provide solid knowledge base and extensive supervised practice to prepare excellent beginning reading teachers.**

Teacher educators need to have periods of school attachment to better understand the conditions and the needs of teachers in schools. Without this knowledge and understanding, training can be a purely academic exercise. The supervision process is equally important for beginning teachers because for many new teachers, their first encounter with teaching will help determine their attitude towards the profession. Unfortunately, a lack of experienced supervisors can also mean a less than satisfactory initiation. Using experienced teachers in schools to help supervise beginning teachers is a good solution only if such teachers are themselves knowledgeable and have the time for the task.

> • **Legislators and policy makers must understand the complex role of the teacher in providing reading instruction and ensure that teachers have the resources and support they need to teach reading.**

Need we say more? Perhaps it's time to ask teachers what sort of support and resources they need.

> • **Parents, community leaders and teachers must work in partnership to assure (sic) that children value reading and have many opportunities to read outside school.**

The home-school partnership is widely promoted as a significant factor in promoting literacy acquisition. Although parent support is vital, it is also important to educate

parents about the constructive ways to support their children's learning. The recent discussion in the press about parents taking over their children's project work is one example of mollycoddling rather than support. Parent education is important, and parents' support for leisure reading is needed. Again, it is unfortunate that parents still equate reading only with studying. On the other hand, going by the increasing number of loans at the public library, there is evidence that books are fast becoming a permanent feature in the child's world. This is indeed an encouraging sign.

Conclusion

It is my belief that every teacher is a reading teacher, and teachers should see this as their responsibility. How else can the children learn other subjects if they cannot read? The education of reading teachers is really two-fold; first all teachers should have a good understanding of how to help children learn to read. Next, specialist teachers should be trained to help those children with special problems in learning to read. In fact, we should be aiming towards producing more specialists in reading. For a start, one specialist can be attached to each school cluster to help with diagnostic and remedial teaching.

In the lower primary classroom, learning to read and write should be the major focus of literacy classes. Once these skills are in place, the rest of the learning can follow naturally. Unfortunately, in our haste to cover the syllabus and the textbooks, we often do everything but teach children to read. Indeed, it seems that in-service education in reading should be the next focus after grammar. But true professional development is a life-long process; ultimately, teachers must develop an interest in upgrading themselves and in continuing education to maintain the level of professionalism in teaching.

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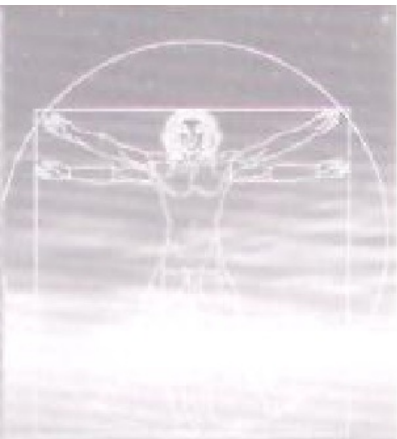
Sex Education in a Knowledge-based Society

Angeline Khoo and Lim Kam Ming

The need for sex education in our society today

A new generation of children are growing up with the Internet. Our youth today have skills to access any kind of information they want. Obtaining information about sex is no longer a problem — these can be easily obtained at the click of the mouse. While the Internet provides limitless opportunities and resources for sex education, parents and teachers are faced with new problems and challenges which involve "issues of quality, accuracy, developmental appropriateness, comprehensiveness, parent-child communication, professional development, and public perceptions of the sexuality education field" (Roffman, Shannon and Dwyer, 1997). Anyone who uses the search engine to find information about sex may find websites with explicit sexual graphics and advertisements. There is a bias of search engines towards such material (Gotlib and Fagan, 1997), and even with websites that do give information about sex, their credibility is questionable as the authorship is unknown.

What kinds of dangers exist on the Net? One of the most common fears of Singapore parents is that their children may be exposed to sex on the Net. In a recent straw-poll survey, 80% of parents in Singapore indicated that they are concerned about pornography. Their worries are exacerbated by stories in the newspapers. We read of children or teenagers being lured and raped by strangers they met in chat rooms. (Lum and Hee, 2000; Lim, 2000). A Straits Times survey conducted in 1998 found that more than a third of teenagers admitted to having watched and read pornographic material (The Straits Times, 1998).

Cyberporn can be obtained and distributed with greater ease. Not only is there greater proliferation of pornography on the Net, there is also greater variety, ranging from the mildly erotic to the all kinds of paraphilias or odd sexual practices. It is also easier for kids to conceal — the sexually explicit image on the computer screen is hidden with a swift "Alt-Tab" movement the moment a parent is around. Moreover, the child or teenager need not be actively seeking out pornographic websites. A search for an apparently innocent topic, a typographical error or mistaking a "dot com" instead of a "dot org" can yield a host of pornographic websites.

The Internet is indeed a very useful resource for sex education. However, research on the effects of pornography has not been conclusive, but one finding is clear — that exposure to pornographic material increases acceptance of interpersonal

violence and rape myths (Wallace, 1999). There is evidence that early exposure to pornography is related to subsequent rape fantasies and attitudes that are in favour of sexual violence towards women. Sexual aggression can be perceived by both men and women as sexually romantic! However, parents can take comfort that for many students, their curiosity about sex is only a passing phase. 30% of students who responded to an NTU study on Internet use in May 2000 (Kang, 2000) said that they had surfed porn sites before, but they got bored and stopped.

There is strong evidence that people on the Net tend to reveal more personal information to a stranger online than to strangers they meet face-to-face (Aftab, 2000). More personal secrets tend to be shared readily, but often the gullible newbie fails to realize that the real-life (RL) person at the other end of the terminal is far from what has been presented in virtual reality (VR). The typical pedophile takes pains to befriend, cultivate and win his victim's trust. When the online meeting progresses to an offline encounter, one often wonders why the child who suddenly realizes that the "friend" is far from the person he claimed to be on the Net, does not run away but becomes a willing victim. Perhaps it is the nature of the online relationship that has been nurtured for a long time in the Chat rooms. Or perhaps there is a strong sense of denial, the unwillingness to face reality on the victim's part. Whatever the reason, what may seem virtual and harmless becomes painfully real.

There is therefore a real need for sex education. Then the question of whose responsibility arises. There is a general consensus that this is the purview of parents as curious children often begin to ask questions at a young age, often even before they are in school. However, with the Internet, parents play a much reduced role as disseminators of knowledge (Kraut, Schelis, Mukhopadhyay, Manning and Kiesler, 1996). They face a greater challenge with teenagers who prefer to learn and discuss such matters among their peers whom they meet in school. However, according to SIECUS (Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States) report, many studies have shown that parents are uncomfortable in discussing issues such as intercourse, masturbation, homosexuality and orgasm with their children, and would appreciate help from formal programmes.

Thus, SIECUS recommends school-based sexuality programmes which "can add an important dimension to children's ongoing sexual learning". The aims of such programmes would include the following (Went, 1985):

- To generate atmosphere where questions about pubertal changes and reproduction can be asked without embarrassment

- To counteract myths and folklore and to provide accurate information about contraception, sexually-transmitted diseases and AIDS

- To help children understand they have rights, and should have control over their bodies, and to increase communication skills about these

- To help children accept their sexuality as part of their whole personality
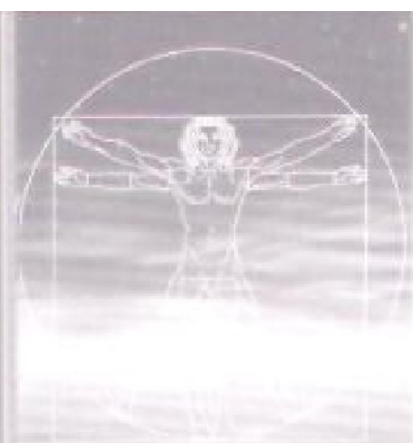
- To provide constant reassurance that body changes, physical, emotional and social, are normal and acceptable, and give help in adjusting to these changes, particularly for early developers

- To develop communication skills in personal relationships, including those necessary for getting help if things go wrong (child abuse, rape, pregnancy, etc)

The role of the teacher

It is understandable that many teachers tend to be apprehensive about talking to students about sex. Some of their concerns include fear of students asking personal questions, fear of being embarrassed, not knowing answers to some questions, handling issues of confidentiality, and facing negative responses from parents (Went, 1985). In a study of experienced Pastoral Care teachers, Soong and Khoo (1994), found that teachers found it most comfortable to talk about value questions, and were most uncomfortable with questions of a sexual nature. Older teachers are more comfortable answering these questions. In general, teachers prefer to talk about values to all girls rather than all boys or mixed classes, but male teachers are comfortable only in all boys classes.

Does the perspective of sex education of our graduate trainee teachers today differ from that of the more experienced teachers six years ago? Given the new challenges of the "wired" society, are our newly trained teachers willing to play a role in facilitating discussions about sex and sexuality in the classroom? Do they feel confident in handling issues not only about sex, but also sex on the Net?

A study on trainee-teachers' perceptions of sex education

This study examines some issues pertaining to the perceptions of sex education of PGDE teachers who have just completed their training. Some of these issues include

- knowledge of sexuality
- perceptions of the importance of sexuality topics
- responsibility for sex education
- comfort/discomfort levels
- concerns and worries

Two hundred thirty-three trainee teachers (63 men, 170 women) from the Postgraduate Diploma in Education programme completed a survey assessing their attitudes about sex education in school during a mass lecture presentation on May 8, 2000. Several items in the questionnaire were taken from a study by Soong and Khoo (1994). Topics on sexuality were categorised into biological, sexual and values questions.

Knowledge of Sexuality

One obvious gender difference in knowledge of sexuality is about gender specific issues. Male trainee teachers knew more about male sexual organs, circumcision, and nocturnal emission than do female trainee teachers whereas female trainee teachers knew more about female sexual organs and menstruation do than male trainee teachers. No gender differences were found for knowledge about other topics such as pregnancy, contraception, pornography and abortion.

Perceptions of the Importance of Sexuality Topics

There were no gender differences in terms of the trainee teachers' perceptions of the importance of informing teenagers about different sexuality topics. Older male trainee teachers thought that it was not important to teach this topic compared to younger male trainee teachers or to female trainee teachers.

Responsibility for Sex Education

Trainee teachers indicated that parents and specially-trained teachers have the greatest responsibilities for teaching sex education (see Figure 1).

Figure 1
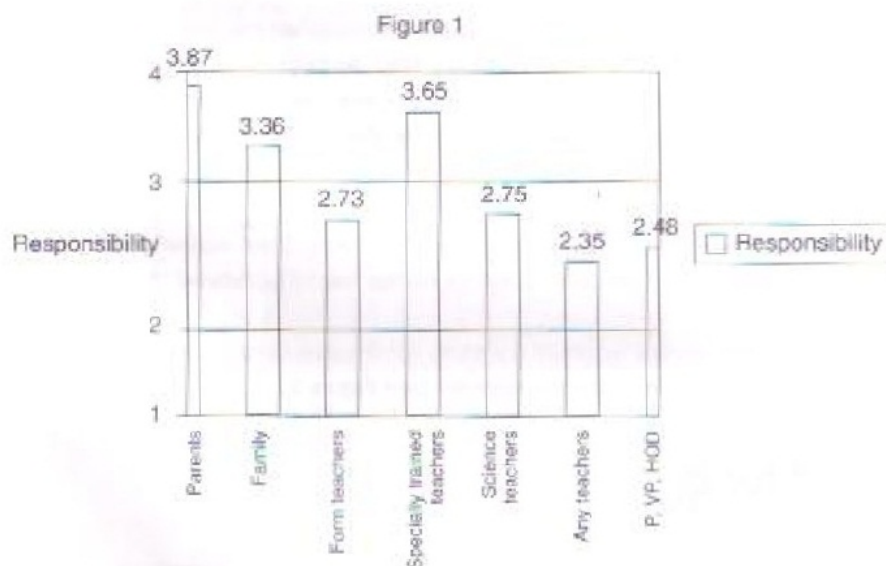
Gender Effects On Comfort/Discomfort Toward Sex Education

Women trainee teachers would be more comfortable teaching sex education in a same gender class or have no preference as compared to teaching in a mixed gender class (see Table 2).
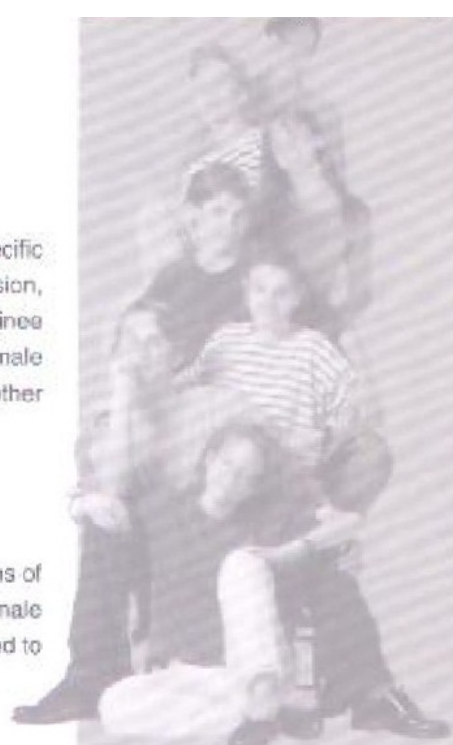
Table 2

Comfortable teaching sex education (number of trainee teachers)

	Same gender	Mixed gender	No preference	Total
Men	15	13	35	63
Women	74	17	77	168

There are no gender differences in trainee teachers perceptions in whether mixed or same gender classes would most benefit the students (see Table 3).
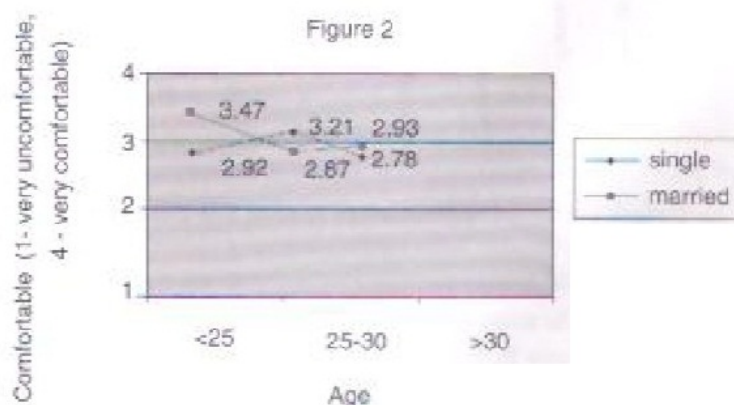
Table 3

Benefits of sex education

|	Same gender class	Mixed gender class	Total
Men	30	33	63
Women	87	79	166

Level of Comfort in Teaching Sex Education Topics

The specific possible topics in sex education were classified into three categories: 1) Biological or physiological topics (e.g., Why do boys have wet dreams?), 2) Sexual (techniques) (e.g., When a man is having sex, can he maintain his erection as long as he wants?), and 3) Moral issues (e.g., Opinion about homosexuality or lesbianism).

Male trainee teachers would be more comfortable talking about sexual techniques (mean=2.79, sd=.75) as compared to female trainee teachers (mean=2.38, sd=.78).

Younger married trainee teachers are more comfortable talking about biological issues than younger single trainee teachers (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

Younger married trainee teachers are more comfortable talking about morality issues than younger single trainee teachers (see Figure 3).

Figure 3
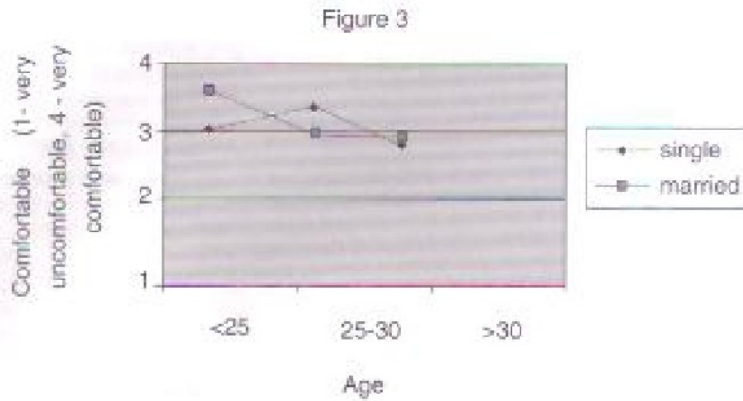
Concerns and Worries

Female trainee teachers who are below 25 years old (mean=2.55) are less worried than the older female trainees between the age of 25-30 (mean=3.02) or their male counterparts. Both male and female trainee teachers above the age of 25 are equally worried that the class would be unruly (see Figure 4).
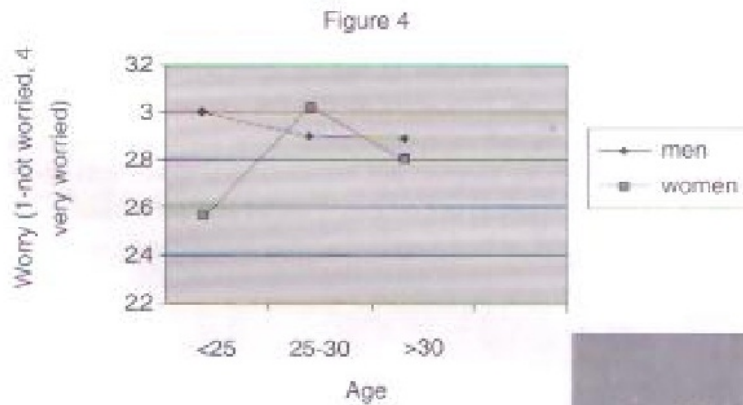
Figure 4

The younger female trainee tend to be more worried about upsetting parents than do their male counterparts (see Figure 5).

Figure 5

Implications

Training

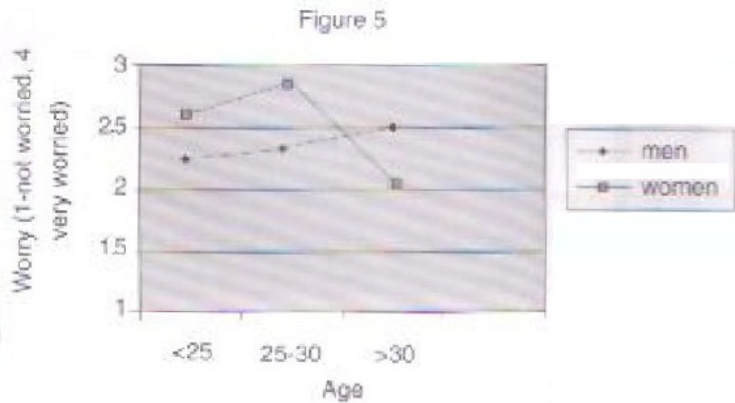There is need for sex education training for teachers. While it is not surprising to find that teacher trainees have more knowledge about the sexuality of their own gender, results suggest that more knowledge about the sexuality of the opposite gender would prove useful. Teachers would need to know the jargon of chat rooms and understand what cybersex and cyberporn are. They would need the courage to surf the pornographic websites to see for themselves what the teenager experiences on the Internet. They would need to feel comfortable discussing topics that interest students, as well as facilitating discussion on such topics as oral sex, cybersex. Issues such as abortion and homosexuality would also need to be addressed. Teachers teaching sex education would also need basic counselling skills to identify potential problems and knowledge of community resources.

Selection

Our findings suggest that if newly trained teachers, who may be considered more Internet savvy, are chosen to be sex educators, their marital status and their age are important factors to consider. In contrast to the earlier study by Soong and Khoo (1994), it is not the older teachers who are more comfortable in teaching sex education, but the younger married teachers. It would be useful to replicate this study with a sample of experienced teachers.

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A Vision for Lifelong Learning – A Personal Perspective

Mrs Jaishankar Upadhiah

Introduction

Schools are in constant search of a robust, practical and comprehensive approach for lifelong learning. Apart from the considerations of time, space and finance, the more critical factor that of customising learning to meet the needs of the learner is a critical one. In his keynote lecture to the 30th International Management Symposium, University of St Gallen, Switzerland on 26 May 2000, Minister for Education and 2nd Minister for defence, RADM Teo Chee Hean stressed the importance of having a "...system of life-long learning in place-... to constantly re-skill the population so that their skills match the demands of the economy." The idea embedded in life-long learning – that of being a perpetual student has profound implications for us as educators. The aim of this personal reflection is to define lifelong learning in a way that explores what is involved for teachers and the changes needed in attitude and behaviour to establish a lifelong learning culture in the context of schools.

The key elements in lifelong-learning will first be uncovered. This will be followed by an exploration of the characteristics of schools that foster the disposition of lifelong learning. An approach that aligns with the spirit of lifelong learning will then be recommended.

Life-long Learning

J Smith et al (2000) identify a two-part framework constituting an empirical element and an ethical element in the concept of life-long learning. The empirical element consists of features spelling out the factual nature of learning and the ethical element spells out the four principles of conduct that reflects life-long learning. At the empirical level, life-long learning relates to learning that:

- Stretches throughout the lifespan of a learner
- Includes both formal and informal learning
- Allows for some gaps and delays so long as a broad momentum is maintained.
- Is expressed through clear intention and planning on the part of the learner, which could be in the form of a personal plan or strategy for ongoing learning, which is maintained and acted upon over time.

At the ethical level, lifelong learners will in addition live by four basic principles:

- Personal commitment where the learner takes a personal interest in his learning and is responsible for carrying it through successfully.
- Social commitment where learners share their learning with others and encourage the application of the learning in their daily lives.
- Respect for others' learning where the learner understands the rights of all learners and are able to express their views freely
- Respect for truth, a fundamental aspect of learning where the learner is prepared to change any opinion in the light of evidence and rational argument.

Implications for Schools

A school that nurtures the spirit of lifelong learning will comprise of pupils, teachers, and management personnel who are committed to both the empirical and ethical principles described earlier. It would manifest characteristics of the lifelong learning organisation as mentioned by Tobin (1998):

- There is no hogging of knowledge
- Everyone sets top priority to sharing of information whatever their information
- There is a "no-blame" culture where people are given time and space to work and reflect together in reflecting on mistakes and experience
- There is an open communication system where members experience, knowledge and ideas are collected and organised
- There is an internal decentralized training, which complements the system for information management.
- There is also a system of individual learning catering for the individual's self-initiated learning.

Considering the factors above, the progress towards a lifelong learning culture has pertinent implications for all areas of education. The teacher is the key to responding to the many changes brought about by an education that is ability driven. In an era where knowledge is power, lifelong learning must be the dominant paradigm.

Real learning as mentioned by Senge, "...gets to the heart of what it means to be human:

- Through learning we re-create ourselves.
- Through learning we become able to do something we never were able to do.
- Through learning we perceive the world and our relationship to it.
- Through learning we extend our capacity to create, to be part of the generative process of life."

In a school where everyone is a learner, passionate in the art and practice of "collective learning", the teachers learn from their pupils as much as the pupils learn from their teachers. It is a place where learning is a way of life!

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The Teacher's Craft

J.M. Nathan

To be a teacher does not mean simply to affirm that such a thing is so, or to deliver a lecture, etc. No, to be a teacher in the right sense is to be a learner.
— Soren Kierkegaard

I often ask my students in the foundation and in-service programmes to share some of their motivations to become teachers, and I cajole them to make up a "story" if the truth is too banal like "the money seemed good", "it is probably a more stable job than others", or "the routine allows me to do other things".

But there are some who find this exercise too difficult because they had forgotten their motivation(s), and some others who feel that it's no longer relevant or is besides the point – they feel that what they had initially felt teaching was really about, or what they could do as teachers, had become unimportant because they never got a chance to perform their rightful roles, or, that there is too much to do already, that it doesn't matter what they think or what they should be doing as teachers.

What Any Schoolteacher Knows

Let me put the importance of all this another way: what any schoolteacher knows is that in general, the survival of our society is threatened by an increasing number of unprecedented problems, which promises to multiply in the future, and for which we do not have sufficient nor creative solutions. Thus the need to take the Desired Outcomes of Education (which inspires the "Thinking Schools Learning Nation" credo) seriously. What we also know is that some of our problems are the unintended consequences of other regulations and rules that we had set in place to handle other problems. What everyone else is wondering is whether something can be done to improve the situation.

Most of our problems are related to "progress" – the teenage gang/drug problem, the decline of births, the decline of "right" values, the housing problem, the parking problem and the water-supply problem. This also means the crowded-city and transportation problem, the garbage-disposal problem (otherwise also known as the 'killer-litter' problem), the traffic problem, the "me-first" problem, the "what-you-can-get-away-with" problem, the "who-am-I" problem, and the "what-does-it-all-mean" problem.

Now, there is one problem under which all of the foregoing may be subsumed: it is the "What, if anything, can we do about these problems?" problem, and that is what I am trying to discuss.

Can Schools Improve Our Situation?

If we think about it for a moment, we would realise that all of us as educators still carry that romantic idea, somewhere inside, that we believe that we can improve the human condition through education. Of course we are not so starry-eyed as to believe that all of the problems we have enumerated are susceptible to solution – through education or anything else. But school is one institution that is inflicted on everybody and what happens in school can make a difference – for good or ill.

I said "inflicted" because the way classrooms are currently conducted does very little, and quite probably nothing, to enhance our chance of mutual survival; that is, to help us solve any or even some of the problems that have been mentioned. One way of thinking about our present situation is to ask teachers what kind of business they think they are engaged in. The importance of this question arises because the abilities and attitudes required to deal adequately with change are those of the highest priority and that it is not beyond our ingenuity to design school or classroom environments which can help young people to master concepts necessary for survival in an even more rapidly changing world. The institution we call "school" is what it is because we made it that way. And if it's not doing what needs to be done, it can be changed; it must be changed.

How Teachers Are Central In The Change Equation

Anyone interested in change has to realise that real change can only come from below; that is, there can be no significant innovation in education that does not have at its centre the attitudes of teachers, and it is an illusion to think otherwise. The beliefs, feelings, and assumptions of teachers are the air of the learning environment; they determine the quality of life within it. When the air is polluted, the student is poisoned, unless, of course, he holds his breath. (Not breathing is widely used by students as a defence against intellectual poison, but it mostly results, as you can imagine, in suicide by suffocation.)

If we take it as axiomatic that the attitudes of teachers are the most important characteristic of the classroom environment (since the attitudes of the teacher are reflected in his behaviour), then, as I've said earlier, it becomes crucial to know what teachers believe to be their job. Then we can move a step backwards to ask, "What is the necessary business of the schools?". The answer to this question depends on where you see Singapore heading as a whole. I'm trying to argue that given where Singapore is at the moment, poised to ride the waves of electronic technology and communications, to become a knowledge-based economy, we need to develop adequate manpower resources for survival and flourishing. But some of you may say that the "survival" vocabulary has been replaced by the "efficiency-driven" idiom, and now an "ability-driven" vocabulary is in place. We don't need to quibble over vocabularies, but it should suffice to say that the need to have an "ability-driven" idiom is precisely because of the need for our society to survive and flourish in the next millennium. The old paradigms and idioms are dinosaurs. You

can't do something new by doing the same thing better. And if we don't come up with anything new, our very perfection (like the dinosaurs) will be the reason for our extinction, to put it crudely.

What Business Are Teachers In?

But the trouble is that most teachers have the idea that they are in some other sort of business. Some still believe, for example, that they are in the "information dissemination" business. This was a reasonable business up to the 1970s. The signs that their business is failing are abundant, but they keep at it all the more diligently. George Santayana once said that that a fanatic is someone who redoubles his efforts when he has forgotten his aim. In this case, even if the aim has not been forgotten, it is simply irrelevant. But the effort has been redoubled anyway.

Why Teachers Need To Switch To The Right Business

There are some teachers who think they are in the "transmission of our cultural heritage" business, which is not an unreasonable business if you are concerned with humanity as a whole. The trouble is that most teachers find the last ten years of the "information/knowledge explosion" too distressing to deal with, which is exactly why they are in the wrong business. Their students find the changes wrought in the last ten years distressing – and confusing – too, especially the last five years, and they need help. While they have to live with TV, film, compact discs, digital videos, and move in and out of the virtual worlds and cyberspace, their teachers are still talking as if the only medium on the scene is the printing press. While they have to understand psychedelics and psychology, globalisation, world cultures and local culture, anthropology and anthropomorphism, birth control and biochemistry, their teachers are teaching "subjects" as if these don't relate to anything. While they need to find new roles for themselves in the brave new world of the future, their teachers, as some writers have documented so painfully, are acting almost entirely as shills, shaping them up to be functionaries in one bureaucracy or another.

Unless our teachers can switch to the right business, their clientele will go elsewhere, or merely become captive audiences (which is a greater possibility with compulsory education), or go into a severe case of "future shock", to use a relatively well-worn phrase. Future shock occurs when the world you were educated to believe in doesn't exist. Your images of reality are apparitions that disappear on contact. There are several ways of responding to such a condition, one of which is to withdraw and allow oneself to be overcome by a sense of impotence. More commonly, one continues to act as if his apparitions were substantial, relentlessly pursuing a course of action that he knows will fail him. You may have noticed that there are scores of political, social and religious leaders who are clearly suffering from advanced cases of future shock. They repeat over and over again the words that are supposed to represent the world about them. But nothing seems to work out. And then they repeat the words again and again.
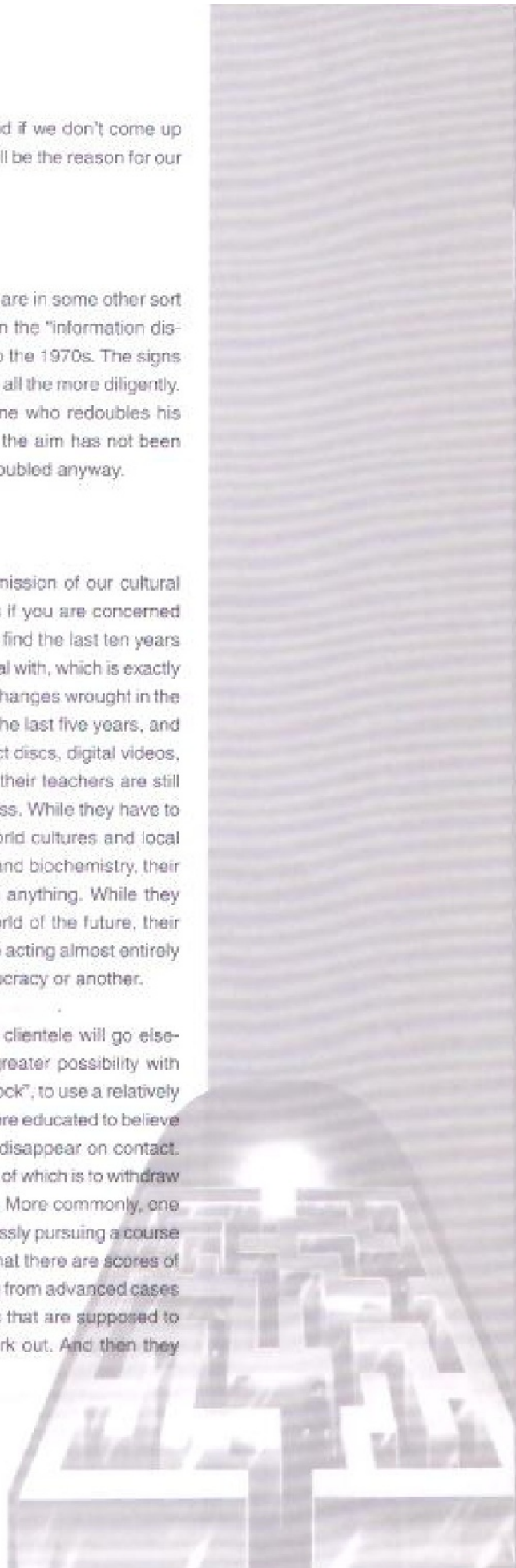
The Need To Make Teaching And Learning Relevant

Alfred Korzybski used a somewhat different metaphor to describe what we have been calling "future shock". He likened one's language to a map. The map is intended to describe the territory that we call "reality", i.e. the world outside of our skins. When there is a close correspondence between map and territory, there tends to be a high degree of effective functioning, especially when it relates to survival. When there is little correspondence between map and territory, there is a strong tendency for entropy to make substantial gains. In this context, the terrifying question, "What did you learn in school today?" assumes immense importance for all of us. We just may not survive another generation of inadvertent entropy helpers.

What is the necessary business of teachers and schools? To create eager consumers? To transmit the dead ideas, values, metaphors and information of five years ago? To create smoothly functioning bureaucrats? These aims are truly subversive since they undermine our chances of surviving as a viable, flourishing society. And they do their work in the name of convention and standard practice. We should demand to see the schools go into the anti-entropy business.

What we as educators must come to realise is that the new education is new, not because it offers more of anything, but because it enters into an entirely new "business"; fundamentally it is an education that develops in youth a competence in applying the best available strategies for survival in a world filled with unprecedented changes, uncertainties and opportunities. There will be some difficulty persuading teachers that this is their rightful business. But then, teachers have always been somewhat ambivalent about what it is they do for a living.

Metaphors Of The Mind

An excellent case in point concerns their conceptions of the human mind. For example there is the type of teacher who believes he is in the lighting business. We may call him the Lamplighter. When he is asked what he is trying to do with his students, his reply is something like this: "I want to illuminate their minds, to allow some light to penetrate the darkness." Then there is the Gardener. He says, "I want to cultivate their minds, to fertilise them, so that the seeds I plant will flourish." There is also the Personnel Manager, who wants nothing more than to keep his students' minds busy, to make them efficient and industrious. The Muscle Builder wants to strengthen flabby minds, and the Bucket Filler wants to fill them up.

How should we then talk about "the human mind" and our always imperfect attempts to do something to it? Should we put on the lights or dump fertiliser or keep it busy or toughen it up or pump it full? Or maybe we should try, as the Potter does, to mould the mind? Or as the Dietician, to feed it? Or as the Builder, to provide it with a sturdy foundation?

Although it is tempting, it is not my intention here to ridicule any of these metaphors of the mind. After all, it is not possible to talk about "the mind" in any terms other than metaphorical. Even the words "the mind" are subtly metaphoric. Think of those words for a moment. Why the mind? Why a noun? Why a thing? Even John Dewey and several others have observed that we would come much closer to actuality if we spoke of "minding" (as a process) rather than of "the mind" (as a thing). In teaching or fostering critical or creative thinking, Art Costa and others have constantly combated with the prevalent tendency by emphasising the process of thinking.

## Becoming Conscious Of Our Labels – The Map Is Not The Territory

Increasingly there is a sense among researchers that the various "thing" metaphors of the mind are inept and misleading. They imply a static and segmented entity codified in a system of polarised categories that hardly seem to represent what really happens when we think or learn or act. There are "the emotions", "the intellect", "the spirit", "the IQ". There is "smartness" and "dumbness", "discipline" and "instruction", as if there were things inside of us that corresponded to one or the other. We find ourselves making such statements as, "The school deals with the child's intellect, the home with his emotions, and his religion with his spirit". (And the hospital with his liver?)

But in spite of these categories, people "happen" as wholes in process. Their "minding" processes are simultaneous functions, not discrete compartments. We have never met anyone who was thinking, who was not at the same time also emoting, spiritualising, and for that matter, livering. When the old progressive educationists spoke of teaching "the whole child", they were not being idealistic. They were being descriptive.

You Can't Teach Parts Of A Child

Teachers have no other alternative than to teach the whole child. The fact that teachers exclude "the emotions" and "the spirit" from their lessons does not, of course, mean that those processes are unaffected by what the teacher does. Plato said that, in order for education to accomplish its purpose, reason must have an adequate emotional base, and Dewey spoke often of "collateral learning", by which he meant most of the learning that occurs while the teacher is dealing with "the intellect". Naturally, these are the most enduring of learning, probably because they are not programmed, syllabused, tested, and graded. The effect of the teacher's isolation of the "intellect" is that certain important features of human beings tend to go unnoticed. For example, the curricula of most schools – especially those single-mindedly pursuing the intellect – do not seem to recognise the fact that boys are different from girls. And the price we all pay for this omission is incalculable.

What we need is to recover the idea that teachers are here to educate students. Contrary to conventional classroom practice, what that means is that in the lessons conducted by the teacher, the student is not a passive "recipient"; he becomes an
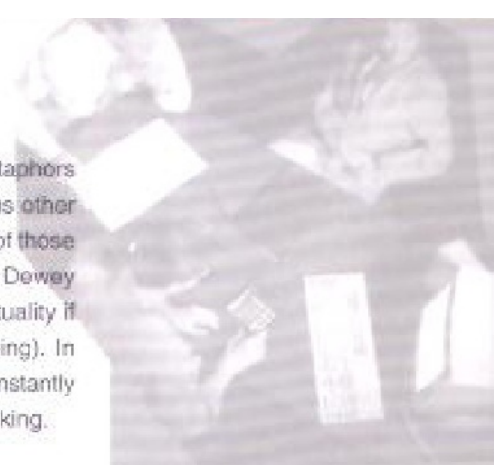
active producer of knowledge. The word "educate" is closely related to the word "educe". In the oldest pedagogic sense of the term, this meant drawing out the potential of a person or something latent. We can, after all, learn only in relation to what we already know. Again, contrary to common misconceptions, this means that if we don't know very much, our capability for learning is not very much. This idea – virtually by itself – requires a major revision in most of the metaphors that shape school policies and procedures.

Teaching As A Craft

One option for the teacher is to think of what he or she does as a craft. A craftsman has his tools, no doubt, but his work is also never done. Think of the potter, the sculptor, or the painter. In one sense, their efforts culminate in something; but in another more important sense, even that "something" is "in process"; it is merely in transition, it is never truly "definitive". That is why we see that constant, persevering, unwavering dedication that he brings to his craft. Which distinguishes the best craftsmen from the hoi polloi. The teacher must become increasingly conscious of his craft, and to this end, must cultivate his character as well as his tools.

The Craft Of The New Teacher

Applied to teaching, the attitudes of the teacher for the new education may be seen in his actions:

* The teacher rarely tells the students what he thinks they ought to know.

* His basic mode of discourse with students is questioning. While he uses both convergent and divergent questions, he regards the latter as the more important tool.

* Generally, he does not accept a single statement as an answer to a question. In fact, he has a persisting aversion to anyone, any syllabus, any text that offers the right answer.

* He encourages student-student interaction as opposed to student-teacher interaction.

* He rarely summarises the positions taken by students on the learning that occurs. He recognises that the act of summary or "closure" tends to have the effect of ending further thought. Because he regards learning as a process, not a terminal event, his "summaries" are apt to be stated as hypotheses, tendencies and directions. He assumes that no one ever learns once and for all how to write, or how to read, or what were the causes of the Second World War.

* Generally, each of his lessons poses a problem for students. Almost all of his questions, proposed activities and assignments are aimed at having his students

clarify a problem, make observations relevant to the solution of the problem, and make generalisations based on their observations. His goal is to engage students in those activities which produce knowledge:

* He measures his success in terms of behavioural changes in students: the frequency with which they ask questions; the increase in the relevance and cogency of their questions; the frequency and conviction of their challenges to assertions made by other students or teachers or textbooks; the relevance and clarity of the standards on which they base their challenges; their willingness to suspend judgements when they have insufficient data; their willingness to modify or otherwise change their position when data warrant such change; the increase in their skill in observing, classifying, generalising, etc.; the increase in their tolerance for diverse answers; their ability to apply generalisations, attitudes and information to novel situations.

These behaviours and attitudes amount to a definition of a different role for teachers from that which has been traditionally assumed. This means the teacher has to redefine what his necessary business is. And since teaching is a craft — that process of refining one's craft – is never at an end.

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Looking Beyond The Cane!

Koh Boon Long, Victor Giam Chong Guan, and
Mary Koh Oi Lin

Introduction

Schools are institutions for transmitting knowledge and socialising young individuals and, part of the learning usually involved some form of punishment and reward. Although punishment is frequently used as a deterrent or as a means of reforming pupils, it is often assumed to be merely negative reinforcement.

Two secondary schools, with differing pupil enrolments, explored data to identify the common pupil discipline problems and work out appropriate strategies for early intervention. The schools preferred this proactive approach to managing pupil discipline instead of the general punitive measures such as detention, suspension and caning, and pupil counselling currently used.

Method

Existing school discipline data, mainly the Behaviour Tracking System (BETA) from both schools, were analyzed and used to identify

(a) Critical levels where there is a higher incidence of delinquent behaviour
(b) Common types of offences committed by stream and gender.

Results from both schools were compared to determine if there was any difference in the behavioural problems encountered.

Findings

Analysis of the data from both schools indicated that

(a) Secondary Three was the level with the highest percentage of offences.
(b) the main categories of offences committed at Secondary Three level across streams were

- **misconduct** (disruptive behaviour, not handing up schoolwork) for all three streams for
- **attendance** for all three streams in Bedok Town Secondary (latecoming, arriving late for class) but only the Express stream in Christ Church Secondary (skipping class, arriving late for class).

(c) the percentage of offences committed by girls increased at the upper levels, mainly in offences for attendance (arriving late for class) and misconduct respectively.

Discussion

The behavioural problems highlighted in the findings could be attributed to pupils having low self-esteem, lacking self-discipline and sense of belonging. Several proactive strategies were explored to manage pupil discipline, emphasizing preventive rather than punitive measures. These included

1 Setting Boundaries for Pupils

Pupils need clear rules and limits with consequences to inculcate responsibility. However, these rules must be made clear to both staff and pupils and enforcement of the consequences should be prompt and consistent. It is also necessary to monitor and review processes and end results to assess the general state of discipline and make improvements.

2 Adopting a Problem-Solving Approach

Pupils are helped to

- examine their own misbehaviour
- reflect on consequences of their actions and impact on others
- consider alternative behaviour
- make right choice of action in future.

(Samples of the forms used are available in Annex 12 and 13 of the "Guidelines for School Discipline" by the Psychological and Guidance Services Branch, Ministry of Education).

3 Implementing Affective Developmental Programmes

Based on the findings of this study, several lifeskills competencies were identified to address the behavioural problems highlighted. The following are recommended:

- developing personal responsibility
- managing emotions
- making choices
- inculcating values
- coping with peer pressure
- time management
- study skills

To enable schools to manage pupils' behaviour better, it would be necessary to include these lifeskills competencies in their lower secondary Pastoral Care Programme. A useful source of reference is the "Personal Effectiveness" modules found in the "Lifeskills for Effective Living" Package developed by the Psychological and Guidance Services Branch. In addition, schools could explore the possibility of greater pupil involvement in decision making processes eg drawing up class rules, developing school cheers. This would help to promote a stronger sense of belonging to the school.
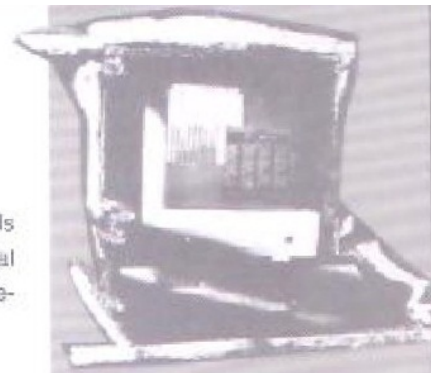
4 Using Positive Reinforcement

Use of positive reinforcements serve to foster a caring school climate than punitive measures which tend to be viewed as negative. Examples of the positive reinforcers that could be applied are

- consistent and caring behaviours by teachers;
- positive feedback on appropriate behaviour such as encouraging comments, a smile; notes of encouragement; acknowledgement of specific efforts with a clear statement of what was done well;
- public recognition of pupils' achievements such as
  - commendations/recognition at assemblies, special occasions, on school notice boards or in school publications;
  - merit certificates and awards (eg certificates for best-behaved class, awards for consistent good behaviour)
  - on-going contacts with parents/guardians through written/verbal communication of pupils' improved behaviour.

Conclusion

Schools need to examine alternative innovative strategies to better manage pupil behaviour. Existing punitive measures, commonly used as deterrents, only serve to treat the 'symptoms' of the behavioural problems at the event level. In contrast, treatment measures would leave a more lasting effect if the root cause of these problems could be identified and appropriate approaches developed. It is therefore worthwhile for schools to explore proactive approaches for improved pupil discipline and behaviour.

Koh Boon Long, is the Principal of Bedok Town Secondary School, **Victor Giam Chong Guan** is the Principal of Christ Church Secondary School and **Mary Koh Oi Lin**, is the Principal of Evergreen Secondary School

Managing Beyond School Hours in Yu Neng Primary

Tan Kah Teo

Taking care of students beyond school hours is not a new idea and a number of schools do have some form of arrangement made to take care of latch-key children under pastoral care programmes. What is new in Yu Neng Primary was the opportunity to start a structured programme run by full time staff, complete with an air-conditioned centre equipped with art and computer rooms, showers and a pantry. It was also a project which involved working closely with the community, with funding from sources other than the Ministry of Education.

It all began in 1998 when pupils were seen hanging around playgrounds long after school was over, still in their uniforms. Others were spending time and money on video games at arcades and some were getting into mischief in the Bedok neighbourhood. The children all had one thing in common – there was no one at home to supervise them.

The school then conducted a needs assessment through a pupil survey to see how many Yu Neng pupils were latch-key children who returned to empty homes. The survey also surfaced the idea of having a before- and after-school care centre to gauge the demand for such a centre in the neighbourhood. The survey covered all the pupils staying in the Bedok area which is where the school is located.

Some parents responded positively and were very keen on the idea of a student care centre. At the time, the Marine Parade Community Development Council (CDC) was also ready to help fund such a centre. With the help of the CDC, permission was obtained from the HDB to build on the void deck of Block 508, Bedok Avenue North Street 3, just three minutes from the school. While the Marine Parade CDC paid 75 percent of the cost of building the centre, the remaining 25 percent came from the Metta Welfare Association. The first batch of pupils enrolled on 1st September 1998. The Centre was officially opened by the Member of Parliament for East Coast GRC, Mr Chew Heng Ching on 18th April 1999.

The school arranged for regular volunteers to help at the Centre. Two are parents providing tuition for weak students and three are teachers. These teachers act as liaison persons meeting the centre staff once a week to discuss pupils' work and to help in maintaining the Centre's resources such as software programmes, teaching aids etc. In addition, the school also arranged for some bright P6 pupils to tutor some of the very weak pupils as part of the school's CIP programme.

The Centre is run by a Management Committee which meets once a month to discuss the progress of the centre. The committee members represent the Kaki Bukit Community Centre, the School Advisory Committee, the Alumni Association and the Metta Welfare Association. The day-to-day running of the Centre is under the Centre Supervisor with the help of 4 full-time staff, 6 part-time workers as well as the volunteers who see their role as "a mix of playing parent, teacher, nanny and friend" as explained by Ms T. Bazarinah, the Centre Supervisor.

The Centre also provides enrichment activities such as Drama lessons, Art classes and musical activities at no extra charge. The Centre charges a nominal fee of $210 per month for each pupil and this account covers the daily lunch, tea-break and regular work under supervision. The children also go swimming once a week and weak pupils are given extra help in the form of tuition. The full-time staff at the Centre is paid from the monthly fee collection from the pupils. The pupils have their lunch at the school tuck shop, using lunch coupons worth $1.50 to redeem their food from any stall. The Centre has a special arrangement with the tuck shop vendors who have to provide a well-balanced lunch.

Children in the morning session come to the centre after lunch and stay from 1.30p.m. to 6.00 p.m. when they are picked up by their parents after work. Children in the afternoon session come in as early as 7.00 a.m. when the centre opens and, after a snack, start on their homework. They also have a time-table for art, speech and drama, reading, rest and play. On finishing their homework, they get dressed and ready for lunch in school, which is a short 3-minute walk away.

The centre's staff function as a link between the teachers and home. If it is noted that a child cannot understand his schoolwork, the centre staff may see his teacher. Or, if a teacher cannot get a boy to hand in his work, the centre is informed and the centre staff will then inform the parents when they come to pick-up the child.

The success of the Centre may be measured by looking at the overwhelming response – the increasing number of pupils who have been put on the waiting list to enrol at the Centre. Another way is to track the pupils' academic results and improvement in their general behaviour at the centre and in class. Although not every pupil showed improvement in their examination results, about 70 to 80 percent of the Centre's first intake did show some form of improvement when their CA1 and SA1 performances were compared. Their academic results have improved as they are now supervised and gainfully occupied for a greater part of their day.

The Centre started with 60 students and after less than 3 months, the number rose to 80. Enrolment since then has reached 120 pupils – the maximum and the Centre is unable to take in any more pupils. The school is currently working with Marine Parade CDC and the Metta Welfare Association to set up a second centre.

Tan Kah Teo is the Principal of Yu Neng Primary School.
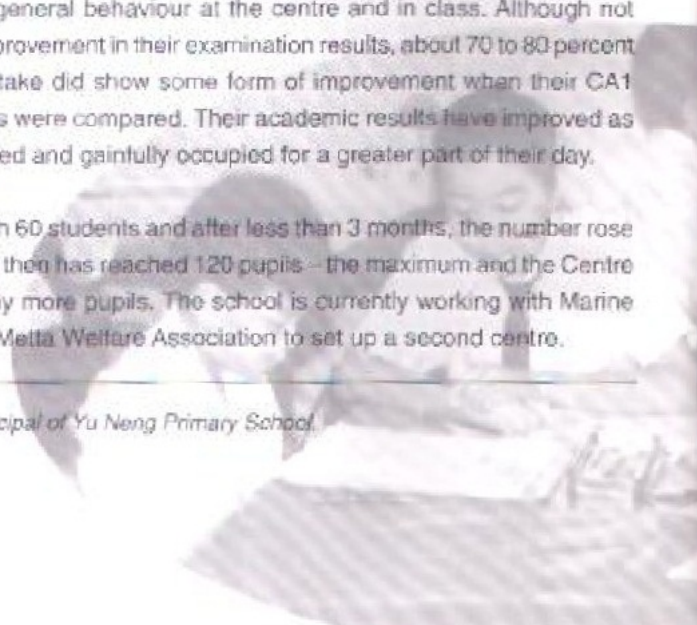
Schools as PDS Leaders

Neil Riley

Three schools took the lead in adopting the People Developer standard and results have already started showing.

Three Singapore schools have successfully achieved the People Developer standard. Zhangde Primary School in Bukit Merah was the first to win the award last March. It has since been followed by Pioneer Primary School in Jurong West and Anderson Secondary School in Ang Mo Kio, the only secondary school to have achieved the standard.

Though the schools already shared a belief in training and upgrading staff skills, all involved felt that the programme offered by the People Developer course was more systematic and organised.

Selling the concept

The first step was for the principals at each school to sell the People Developer concept to the staff. "I embarked on a 'soft-sell' approach to 'buy in' by sharing the benefits of being a People Developer organisation," said Zhangde principal, Ms Elsie Lim.

"At our regular meetings and sharing sessions, I stressed that the rationale was to bring out the best in the staff so as to increase their capacity to contribute positively to the school."

The schools then set goals and sub goals and canvassed feedback. "One thing that was different was the communication and talking about our duties. Much more communication has been generated as a result of People Developer," said Anderson Secondary School principal, Ms Low Khah Gek.

Through staff surveys, personal goals and needs were determined, then senior management at the schools looked at these as well as the schools' activities goals and opportunities. They then strove to match the different goals and decided what training courses would be suitable for each member of staff.

"Everybody has been trained. On People Developer, everybody must receive at least 40 hours training per year and most of us have exceeded that," Ms Low added.

> *"On People Developer, everybody must receive at least 40 hours training per year and most of us have exceeded that."*
> — Ms Low Khah Gek, Principal, Anderson Secondary School

Training took place both on courses held outside the schools and on courses held in the schools. Pioneer Primary principal Ms Shirley Ho-Woo explained that at her school, training was also through exposure.

"We would sit down in a circle – we call it a 'learning circle' – and talk about problem areas and share success stories and tips. We would then go away to practice what we had learned and later come back to share our successes and failures."

At Pioneer, teachers grouped by interest or common problem met with a facilitator and outside experts were available if needed.

For new staff, induction courses were held and mentors were chosen to guide them through their settling in. Mentors were also used for more established staff, though on a less formal basis.

Big house problems

When every member of staff is undergoing intensive training as well as performing regular duties, problems are bound to occur. At one point, communication was an issue at Pioneer.

"The school is very large. We have over 2,400 pupils, so getting every piece of news was difficult. We had to implement a lot of measures to enhance communication," Ms Ho-Woo explained.

At Zhangde Primary, time was often a major constraint in implementing PD and school holidays had to be used to catch up.

"Having the time to meet to review the systems was another challenge. Schools do not have a HR manager, so I had to double may role as one," Ms Lim said, adding that if she were to go through the process again, she would appoint a human resource manager to coordinate the various systems.

In some cases, the benefits of participating in the People Developer are obvious. This year, Anderson Secondary has done well academically as well as non-academically.

In the GCE O levels, it was the top neighbourhood school – a position it has held since 1992. In the top 10 schools, it was ranked ninth with other mainly independent or aided schools.

In last year's results, its students exceeded expectations and the school was awarded the Ministry of Education Value Added Award. In the recent APEC Science Festival, Anderson received a gold award and came overall second in the MIND Sports Olympiad.

"Morale is high. From the feedback I get, people are proud to be part of the school."
– Ms Shirley Ho-Woo, Principal, Pioneer Primary School

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In the fourth Inter School Law Quiz organised by Temasek Polytechnic, the school was champion – the first time a neighbourhood school had won.

At the other two schools, the results may not be so immediately obvious, but both report an overall boost in morale. "Morale is high and it is a happy school. From feedback I get, people are proud to be part of the school," said Ms Ho-Woo.

Non-academic staff

And Ms Low believes that non-academic staff now feel more involved. "They feel that more discussion is going on and feel more included the school's programme. And when we announce any achievement by the school, they feel part of it."

Ms Ho-Woo and the other principals all recommended the People Developer. "Other schools should try it. The investment means a lot more work, but it's so systematic and you will reap a lot of rewards," said Ms Ho-Woo.

All three schools now intend to sustain, review and refine their People Developer standard, and also aim to go on to the Singapore Quality Award.

*Note: This article first appeared in The Straits Times Supplement on People Excellence 2000 November 13, 2000. **Neil Riley** is a freelance writer.*

China's Education Minister, Ms Chen (centre) at Anderson Secondary School in May, 2000. With her is Senior Minister of State for Education, Aline Wong (right).

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Teachers' Clipboard...

"Far away there in the sunshine are my highest aspirations." I may not reach them, but I can look up and see their beauty, believe in them and try to follow where they lead."

- Louisa May Alcott -

"I am only one; but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something; I will not refuse to do the something I can do."

- Helen Keller -

"I never notice what has been done. I only see what remains to be done."

- Madam Curie -