

IMPLEMENTING AN ELEVEN YEAR THROUGH-TRAIN MODEL TO COMPLETE PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION: AN INNOVATIVE CURRICULUM DESIGN, AND OPTIMIZING THE ROLES OF SUBJECT SPECIALISTS IN THE EARLY LEARNING STAGES

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When the sovereignty of Hong Kong was returned to China in 1997 after 99 years of British Colonial Government, the whole world raised its eyebrows to see how Hong Kong continues to function as an international city in the orient under the ideology of “One Country, Two Systems”, especially in her political, economical, educational and social perspectives

In response to the increasing global competitiveness and rapid changes, the Hong Kong Education and Manpower Bureau has brought about a holistic review of the educational system and started off a series of education reforms in year 2000, with an inclination to develop itself into a knowledge-based society.

One important education reform in Hong Kong is giving the schools more space and autonomy to mount school-based developments. Logos Academy of Hong Kong has taken advantage of this golden opportunity to undertake different school-based curriculum innovative measures. Especially, our school has started an **Eleven-year Through-Train** program in September 2002.

In the Through-Train program, in order to take on board a shortened period of schooling while upholding the curriculum rigor, we have to construct a new road map for learning. One of the key innovative measures of our school is to re-delineate the roles of Homeroom Teachers and Subject Specialists, starting in some early learning stages (For age groups 6-9). Would it work?

In some countries such as the United States, Australia and Japan, many Infant School Homeroom Teachers may teach their children most of the learning areas in their Homerooms, in addition to the pastoral care functions. Situational analysis has revealed that many Homeroom teachers are nearly overwhelmed by the pastoral care of their young students, and find it difficult to give the time and attention they feel curriculum matters should require.

In many schools in Hong Kong, teachers are “Jack of all trades”. Many teachers are required to take up teaching duties of different subject areas, even some subject matters are unfamiliar to them. For example, a Music teacher may also be responsible for teaching English while a Mathematic teacher may have to take up some Social Studies lessons. If Homeroom Teachers are responsible for teaching most subjects for their homeroom children regardless of their specialty, an advantage is that the teachers would come to know their children better. It is also easily understood that for young children, subject contents do NOT seem to matter significantly. However, it may be advocated that if teachers can teach according to their specialty, the students can progress more significantly in their learning. How far is this true?

In Logos Academy, within the eleven-years of Through-Train program, the school is striving to bestow a broad and balanced curriculum, and especially to provide an enabling environment for students to learn all the essential concepts, master all the generic study skills, and extend their potentials. In order to uphold both curriculum rigor and pastoral care in the school, quality learning and teaching as well as quality campus life are strengthened and intertwined, instead of having our curriculum scheduling bound by some rigid time allocation for different subject areas.

In strengthening curriculum rigor in the school, among many different key attributes, we critically review our challenges and brainstorm feasible strategies. An innovative measure is to delineate clearly the roles of “Homeroom Teachers” and “Subject Specialists”. “Homeroom Teachers” will no longer teach most of the academic subjects for their respective Homeroom classes. They will undertake mainly pastoral care functions whilst different subject specialists are deployed to teach different subject areas accordingly.

In strengthening pastoral care of the children, a daily “Celebration” period is scheduled in the class Time-table. This period is taken by all the Homeroom teachers with their Homeroom classes respectively, to celebrate the fruit of learning and to undertake different pastoral care functions. At the same time, Morning Devotion, Assembly and Family Life education are slot in to provide a total positive and caring campus life.

As regards the deployment of the best subject specialists to teach their subject expertise, one of our most innovative measures is to have well-qualified subject specialists teaching children right from Foundation Stage 1 (6-year-olds) to the secondary level (13-year-olds) presently -- and have the subject specialists teaching ALL the classes within the same year-band. i.e. a subject specialist would have the chance to teach all children in different stages, and so the teachers are committed for the growth and well-being of the children in their eleven years of schooling in Logos Academy.

In adopting the “Subject Specialists across The Year Band Approach”, the teachers are also committed for the continuity in developing a holistic school-based curriculum framework for the children. Some alternatives in curriculum organization, such as modular or integration approach, cross-curricular links, co-teaching, and co-curricular activities inside and outside the classrooms, etc. may be experimented and adopted.

As each subject teacher will teach all the classes within a year-band, in some subjects like English Studies, two or three teachers will share the teaching load according to their specialties. For example, in Foundation Stage Year 1 for the 6-7 year-olds, under the thematic approach, the theme “Animals” was jointly taught by three Subject Specialists in English. Teacher A undertook Listening and Speaking and Role Play / Drama for all the classes, while Teacher B covered the English Usage aspects, and Teacher C focused on Reading and Word Recognition areas for the same cohort of children in that Year-band.

HKCCU Logos Academy			
2003 – 2004 Foundation Stage Year 1 Terms 4 and 5			
English (Age Group : 6-7)			
Teacher Week (Dates)	Ms. Lynette Pang	Mr. Ivan So	Ms. Agnes So
1 (10.3 – 19.3.2004)	My Animal Wheel Consonant blends: st, sl, sk, sn, sm, sp, sc, sw Long vowels revision (magic e) Name of some common animals Study the animal names, characteristics and habitat	Singing in the Farm Vocabulary (animals / action verbs) Singing Word recognition Drawing	Role Play: An Animal Party - animal songs - names of animals in the Party - simple description of animals orally
2 (22.3 – 26.3.2004)	On- going Grammar Revision In-depth study of the language structures learnt previously Riddle Writing	Be a Good Reader Series Reading strategies before, while and after reading Reading story books Write about what they have read	Listening to Animal Stories Talking about animals 'My favourite animal'
3 (29.3 – 2.4.2004)	Progressive training in becoming an independent writer		
Easter Holidays	-----	-----	-----
4 (19.4 – 23.4.2004)	On- going Grammar Revision In-depth study of the language structures learnt previously Riddle writing Progressive training in becoming an independent writer	Exploring New Genres - Animal Riddles - Animated stories - Comics - Logical prediction skills - Sound out words by looking for similar parts. Use of imperative to give instructions - Question: "Will you help me?" (in the forest)	On the farm - animal riddles (listen & read)

In this "Subject Specialist across The Year Band" approach, it would allow different teachers to teach the children the way they have always wanted to teach, and it has brought them into productive working relationships with other colleagues in the Subject Panel. This in turn allows students to enjoy the expertise of different teachers because subject specialists are able to provide students with a wider scope and more penetrating depth in the subject area. Thus students are able to enjoy multiple-teacher expertise.

It is a common practice in Hong Kong to assign two to three teachers to teach the same subject to different classes within the same year-band. This may create some undue "comparison" and "competitiveness" between the different classes. After putting in practice for two years, evidence has shown that by using this "Subject Specialists across The Year Band Approach", the inter-teacher

difference between classes of the same year level has been diminished. The teachers in Logos Academy can maximize their subject expertise without pain because the practice fits closely with their own expertise, and the effectiveness of teaching and learning across the whole year-band may be better monitored and evaluated.

As regards the impact on learning and teaching, evidence has shown that with this “Subject Specialist across The Year Band” approach, the curriculum rigor has been strengthened and children have made much more remarkable progress in specific learning areas. Moreover, since more than one teacher are teaching the same class of children in the same subject area, it has created a need for the teachers involved to have good communication and collaboration.

How about catering for learning diversity? Since the subject specialist teaches all the children in the same year band horizontally, and different grades / year levels vertically, he/she will be in a better position to design and organize necessary follow-up actions (including enhancement, enrichment or remedial work) more efficiently. From time to time, Peer Tutoring will be used – creating a win-win situation for both the student tutors and tutees.

As regards the impact on the teachers, it has also created space and opportunities for co-teaching and joint projects. This has in turn facilitated professional development of teachers in their subject specialty. For example, peer observation sessions among colleagues are voluntary and common, whereas micro-teaching demonstrations, analysis and discussions are organized for different subject panels from time to time.

What is the response of parents to this “Subject Specialists a cross The Year Band Approach”? How much do the parents understand and support this innovative initiative? In Logos Academy, we mount an “Open Class Initiative” for our parents every year. In the current academic year (2004-05), a total of thirty Open Class Sessions will be organized. Parents, as the school’s most valuable partners, are invited to observe real-time the on-going lessons of different teachers. At the end of each Open Class Session, our participating teachers, curriculum specialists and Principal will analyze and consolidate the pedagogical attributes of the lesson, and entertain questions from the parents. Parents are also invited to give their written feedback and comments.

Through this Open Class Initiative, our parents understand much better the different teaching styles of the teachers, and also the different learning styles of the children. The video clips of the lessons are also used for professional development of teachers, especially for “micro-teaching” tutorial purposes. Hence, the dynamics of the school-based curriculum development have created a subtle driving force for strengthening the ever-improving professional development of the teachers.

In connection with the “Subject Specialists across The Year Band Approach”, the planning and the design of the school-based curriculum will rely on team-teaching as the backbone. In the light of enjoying collective wisdom and concerted efforts in the day to day learning and teaching of the school, Logos Academy is able to offer whole-person education through a coherent and flexible curriculum framework. The effective use of lesson time and the optimal utilization of learning time will also provide opportunities and the best learning environment for students to fully stretch their multiple intelligences and develop a global vision and pluralist values.

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