

Career Guidance and Counseling in an International School in Hong Kong: Literature Review and a School Counselor's Reflection

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This reflection paper explores aspects of a career guidance and counseling program operating in an international school in Hong Kong. The aim of the program is to ensure that all students receive an education that develops knowledge, skills, attitudes and values important for life, so that they are in a sound position to make informed decisions concerning their futures. The school counselor established the program to help all students realize their full potential. Relevant background information on the school is provided to establish the context, and a description is given of how career education is delivered through a structured program with the collaboration of teachers. Pertinent literature is reviewed, and two main themes are identified to support the analysis of the program in terms of relevance and effectiveness. Recommendations for improvement are made, based on the strengths and challenges identified in the program. The counselor's reflections indicate that career education can be embedded in the curriculum topic of Personal, Social and Health

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Education (PSHE), and can be linked closely to pre-university counseling. This may constitute a viable and effective approach for schools in similar settings. The information and thoughts recorded in this paper may help fill a gap in the data available on career guidance and counseling in international schools.

Keywords: career guidance; counseling; international schools; Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE)

The purpose of this paper is to review the career guidance and counseling program operating in an international school in Hong Kong, and to suggest what additional steps could be taken to strengthen the program. The main intention is to determine the effectiveness of the program and its outcomes. At the same time, the applicability of this program for use in other schools will be considered. Currently there is very little information available on career guidance and counseling programs in international schools in Hong Kong, so this paper may help to fill a gap in the available literature.

First, a brief review of the relevant literature is provided. Two main themes are used to support and direct the analysis of the career guidance and counseling program in an international school in Hong Kong. Second, relevant background information on the school is provided. The career guidance and counseling program is discussed.

Literature Review

The selected literature can be considered under two main themes related to career guidance and counseling, namely (a) the concept of comprehensive career guidance and counseling programs, and (b) local and international contexts of guidance and counseling. The main points covering each of these themes are summarized below.

Comprehensive Career Guidance and Counseling Programs

In 2005, Gysbers provided an overview of the origin, evolution and status of comprehensive school guidance programs in the United States. He emphasized the major role that career development concepts and practices play within these programs in schools. According to Gysbers (2005), a comprehensive program always requires a systematic, developmental curriculum that features career competencies from Kindergarten to Grade 12. The outcome by Grade 12 is that all students will have made realistic life career plans covering their education and future career path. These plans are not intended to force students to make early career decisions, but rather to ensure that they have the necessary knowledge and understanding to avoid making academic or career decisions that they may later regret.

Gysbers (2008) stressed the need to question what areas of knowledge, skills and attitudes students must acquire, and queried what is the best delivery system or method to achieve this. He questioned if the “personal service approach,” which responds only to individual requests for help, was adequate, because it deals only with very short-term decision-making and does not provide a comprehensive proactive program to pave the way for occupational and longer-term career choices.

Some students may need guidance when it comes to matching their interests and abilities to possible types of employment and professions. Certain senior students may need to seek additional help from the school counselor to handle excessive parental pressure that they should aim for a certain career or choice of universities. This pressure of meeting parental expectations is quite common in Chinese families (Leung, Hou, Gati, & Li, 2011). In comprehensive guidance programs, it is important to involve parents to ensure that family and school have a shared understanding of a student’s needs.

Gysbers and Henderson (1997) also recommended that a truly comprehensive career guidance curriculum should provide individual and group counseling services to students who have special needs. Often, the transition for these students from school to work, or to further study, can be problematic (Gold, Fabian, & Luecking, 2013). A comprehensive service seeks to address these problems by facilitating their passage to study, training, or employment.

The topic of Individual Student Planning (ISP) was covered by Cohen (2001) and Severn (2004). Cohen stressed that children must learn to understand and plan their life with a view beyond graduation. The purpose of ISP within a comprehensive guidance program is to provide all students with activities to help them assess, plan, monitor, and manage their personal, social, academic, and career development in a positive manner. Severn noted that guidance curriculum is the foundation of ISP that empowers students to take control of their future. Students must take ownership of their decisions in order to achieve their goals.

Schools in Hong Kong have been strongly influenced by Gysbers's (2008) work, and most of the programs and services in operation in Hong Kong have drawn on his model. Ho (2008) discussed a career education curriculum developed by the Hong Kong Association of Careers Masters and Guidance Masters that shows the effort in localizing ISP from Gysbers's comprehensive guidance program. The works of Gysbers, Yagi, as well as Lee and Yang were examined, together with an overview of development of career education in Hong Kong, including problems and opportunities in promoting career education and recommendations on future development of career education and guidance locally.

Local and International Contexts of Career Guidance and Counseling

Gysbers (2008) examined career guidance and counseling programs and practices from around the world from 1990 to 2010, in primary and secondary education settings. He noted that in some situations career guidance and counseling is considered as a personal service, while in other places it is regarded as a curriculum or a program.

Yuen (2006) reviewed the Hong Kong Education and Manpower Bureau policy documents on school guidance and counseling, and also presented data from a survey of how the implementation of guidance activities and time allocation in secondary schools are perceived by the guidance personnel. Most respondents in the survey had received some training in guidance and counseling. This survey was the first step in assessing the status of comprehensive guidance and counseling program in Hong Kong. It clearly indicates that school counseling has evolved from a strictly remedial approach to a more preventive thus comprehensive approach, so as to adopt proactive intervention to prevent problems and difficulties. The survey found that a guidance curriculum, individual planning, responsive services, and systems support have been implemented in secondary schools, although not yet to a high level. Teachers, coordinators and social workers assume multiple roles and are actively involved in guidance activities, and this can become a workload issue.

An earlier study by Yuen (2002) found that in Hong Kong, teachers specifically titled as “guidance teachers” perform the roles of school counselors, but all other classroom teachers are also regarded as part of school “counseling team.” All teachers, in other words, are expected to provide guidance activities. In Hong Kong, this model is referred to as the whole-school approach to counseling.

Lee and Yang (2008) noted that in South Korea, school counselors are crucial for fostering the emotional and social development of students. School counselors work closely with other organizations and individuals to promote personal, social, academic, and career development of students. They use interviews, counseling sessions, interest and aptitude assessment tests, and other methods to evaluate and advise students. They also operate career information centers and career education programs.

Herr and Cramer (1992) pointed out that educational experiences in schools are important for helping students' career development and their readiness for adulthood. However, there are no fixed rules to follow when implementing career education activities in the school curriculum, so learning outcomes are hard to measure. This degree of flexibility can be useful in allowing schools to adapt career education to local conditions; however, there is also a tendency for important career-related skills to be overlooked if the teaching is not compulsory and clearly specified. The current position in most countries is that generic employability skills such as diligence, reliability, initiative, and punctuality should be encouraged and developed in any subject lessons.

The work of Hartung, Porfeli, and Vondracek (2008) indicates that vocational development commences informally in childhood, and involves developmental tasks, transitions, and change. They noted that career counselors who take a developmental perspective realize that children must accrue an array of experiences that promote foundational competencies for exploring self and occupations, and eventually making career decisions. Hartung et al. also stressed the importance of learning the basics of career adaptability in order to meet the challenges of the modern world of work. Hartung et al. believe that career guidance should equip students with the abilities to "envision a future, make

educational and vocational decisions, explore self and occupations, and problem solve” (p. 1).

The work of Leung (2005) embodies assumptions derived from developmental career theories, and various commonly used career and life planning strategies. He stressed that “life planning” is a very important mission for every person, so counselors must help students plan purposefully, and encourage them to apply their abilities and talents to different roles in life, now and in the future.

A study conducted by Chan, Lau, and Yuen (2011) noted four domains of life skills that students need to develop, namely academic, personal, social, and career. The term “life skills” refers to the essential abilities, knowledge, attitudes, values, and behaviors that must be acquired for independent and successful functioning in society. It was believed that schools in Hong Kong should give due attention to supporting students’ development in these areas.

Background of the School

The school is a private, non-profit international school established in 2002. It provides continuity in education for students aged 3 to 18. The school follows the British National Curriculum, with modifications where necessary to fit the needs of students in Hong Kong. The school offers English as the main medium of instruction, but up to 25% of the curriculum is taught in Putonghua for the benefit of the local Chinese-speaking students.

In the school year 2014–2015, there were approximately 850 students enrolled, with 500 in the primary school and 350 in the secondary school. While the majority of students are of Chinese ethnic origin, there are seven nationalities represented in the school.

The school prepares students for The International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) in Years 10 and 11, followed by International Baccalaureate (IB) in Years 12 and 13. Students choose their IGCSE and IB subjects toward the end of Year 9 and Year 11 respectively. The first cohort of IB Diploma students graduated in 2009. The past cohorts of graduates attained an almost 100% university placement rate, with 51% going to local universities in Hong Kong and others opting for study in the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, and Canada.

The school offers a school-based guidance and counseling services, and in 2014–2015 approximately 45% of the secondary school students made use of these services. Pre-university counseling, which provides help and advice in planning a future study path, is compulsory for all IB students.

Comprehensive School Counseling Program

Comprehensive guidance programs usually contain a “guidance curriculum” with age-appropriate topics and activities, individual planning, responsive services, and systems support. This school helps students adjust to their various personal and developmental needs while progressing from early adolescence through young adulthood. Its counseling services are divided into three areas: personal counseling, academic support, and education planning. The third area puts emphasis on career education and pre-university counseling. All these services are delivered through a structured program with the collaboration of all teachers. The school counselor works closely with teachers and with parents.

The school counseling program of this school has a focus on helping all students build life skills while also developing their interests and talents. All students are encouraged to adopt their own personal plans

for current and future development, including career and study path planning for secondary school students. Students with special educational needs learn in a supportive inclusive environment, with the school counseling program contributing to this where necessary.

How PSHE and Career Guidance Are Related

From primary years onwards, the school provides career awareness education within the curriculum area known as Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE). PSHE helps students acquire the knowledge and skills to lead healthy and independent lives. The concept of interdependence is nurtured through learning positive values, good citizenship, and global outlook. All these are related to intrapersonal development to help increase students' sense of self-efficacy and to put them more in control of their own lives. This aspect is vital for educational planning and subsequent career development. Unlike other subjects, PSHE is not geared toward a particular discipline or branch of knowledge. Instead, the curriculum equips students with general knowledge, understanding, attitudes and practical skills that can contribute to a healthy, fulfilling and responsible life. The topics taught within PSHE contribute to personal development by helping students recognize, accept, and shape their own identities. This "self-knowledge" is important as a basis for later career-related decision-making.

Age-appropriate materials and topics on careers and the world of work are linked to personal, social, and health topics when appropriate. The program is planned and coordinated by the school counselor and delivered by homeroom teachers. The school counselor has created three interconnected websites covering PSHE, university counseling, and personal counseling, accessible via the school's intranet. The career guidance component occupies a 45-minute timetabled lesson each week for students in Year 7 to Year 11. Over time, the students acquire awareness of what is involved in particular types of employment and

this is helpful later when they plan possible study paths. As a component of PSHE for the older students, invited guest speakers from various professions provide career talks to help students explore possible career routes. They also discuss topics such as employability skills, and take part in enterprise opportunities.

In the United Kingdom, where PSHE [referring to “Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education” in the U.K.] is not a compulsory subject in the revised National Curriculum, it is still regarded as an important part of a balanced education, and it contributes to the personal and career development of all students. It is stated in the official guidelines that “All schools should make provision for PSHE, drawing on good practice” (PSHE Association, 2015). The value of PSHE in encouraging students to make positive educational and career choices is supported by Willis, Clague, and Coldwell (2013) and Macdonald (2009).

In this school, PSHE contributes an essential “whole person” aspect to career guidance and counseling for Year 7 to Year 11 students; and the content relating to careers is developmentally appropriate. For the IB students in Years 12 and 13, the pre-university counseling is considered to be action-based by involving the students in career-related activities that require informed decision-making. These activities draw upon knowledge accumulated in previous years through PSHE.

Reflections on the Whole-school Approach of the School

It is through the PSHE framework that the case school helps develop students’ comprehensive life skills and delivers career education. The program endeavors to span students’ personal, social, and academic development over the school years, leading ultimately to pre-university and career counseling. This is in line with the model, as proposed by Gysbers and Henderson (1997) and Gysbers (2005), to embody

guidance activities delivered over time that can facilitate students' all-round development in a coordinated manner. Gysbers (2005) pointed out that students' career development unfolds best when it interacts and is intertwined with academic development and personal and social development. A major focus of the program is to help all students develop their potential talents and abilities.

The comprehensive counseling program in the school incorporates career education from Year 7 to Year 11, with action-taking emphasis in Years 12 and 13; but as Gysbers and Henderson (1997) and Hartung et al. (2008) suggest, the foundation for this actually begins in the early years of primary education. Students in this school begin to develop career and occupation awareness through PSHE lessons in the primary school, and later explore their future education and career paths from Year 7 onwards. Over the years, all students are provided with guidance and counseling activities to assist them in planning, monitoring, and managing their personal, social, academic, and career development (Cohen, 2001). The school counselor stresses the importance of students' learning to take ownership of their future by developing personal plans; this corresponds to the ISP component recommended in any comprehensive guidance and counseling program. Additional personal attention is given to students who have special educational needs.

Career guidance and counseling in this school is both a personal service and a program. This combined approach addresses the concern expressed by Gysbers (2008) that a personal service model used alone is inadequate. The combined model is similar to that adopted in Korea, as outlined by Lee and Yang (2008), where the school counselor has a crucial role in coordinating a whole-school approach to promote personal, social, academic, and career development of all students. In both cases, the active involvement of all teachers is an obvious strength within the model. In the case school, homeroom teachers refer students

to the counselor when they have questions or problems relating to career issues. Students also seek advice from the counselor on course options, and parents are also encouraged to consult the counselor. This school has an IGCSE exam officer and an IB coordinator to answer questions about examinations and options available, and will refer students and parents to the counselor when it comes to making choices related to a career path.

In the Hong Kong education system, the recommended involvement of all teachers in a teamwork approach to guidance was found to be common in all documents reviewed by Yuen (2006), who pointed out that school counseling in Hong Kong was normally implemented by teams of classroom teachers. This was found to have positive effects on the quality of teachers' care for students, students' life skills development, and the academic achievement of junior secondary students (Chan et al., 2011). However, the coordination and monitoring of a whole-school approach can be difficult, because the staff involved require constant support offered from the school counselor (Gysbers & Henderson, 2006). In addition, some students require special assistance to deal with developmental problems or learning barriers.

It can be seen from the above outline that the program operating in the case school does incorporate key features of the comprehensive guidance and counseling programs in the United States, as noted by Gysbers (2008). This is true in several aspects — content, organizational framework, resources, development, management, and accountability. This program is based on the belief that all students need assistance with the four domains of life skills, namely academic, personal, social, and career (Chan et al., 2011), and it should be structured purposefully to offer developmentally appropriate knowledge and skills to all students (Leung, 2005). Any program of this type should also have an ongoing

management and evaluation component to ensure continual improvement of outcomes.

This school program meets the criteria for an effective comprehensive program, as reflected in the literature, in the following respects:

- the program is offered to all students without exception;
- the program is delivered over the school years, with different emphases according to age and ability;
- different kinds of generic and employability skills are included in subject lessons;
- students are encouraged and helped to take ownership of their lives in different aspects, including at secondary school level university application and subsequent career planning;
- PSHE program provides the integrated medium through which personal and career-related knowledge and skills can be developed over time and in context;
- the program is conceived and managed by the counselor, who also provides ongoing support to the teachers;
- the approach is not only a reactive “personal service” model.

In terms of continuing to strengthen the program, it is recommended that the school should increase subject teachers’ depth of knowledge on careers and career pathways. They could then make more links to this information within the general curriculum and in PSHE. Subject teachers’ greater involvement in career orientation could also help students understand the subject requirements in subsequent career paths and for higher education.

The program in the upper secondary school years could be strengthened by the introduction of job shadowing and internship opportunities. Such non-school-based activities, with community

support to provide learning opportunities, could help enrich career exploration experiences. This corresponds with the work of Hartung et al. (2008), which noted that the developmental perspective realizes that children have to accrue a broad range of experiences to promote competencies for exploring self, occupations, and eventually making career decisions.

Conclusion

This reflection paper supports the view that it is important for schools to help students develop the understanding, knowledge, and skills they need from early teens to adulthood — with career guidance and counseling being one of the fundamentals for student development. Chan et al. (2011) noted four domains of life skills that students need to develop, namely academic, personal, social, and career, as covered by this case school. The term “life skills” refers to the essential abilities, knowledge, attitudes, values, and behaviors that must be acquired for independent and successful functioning in society. It was believed that schools in Hong Kong should give due attention to supporting students’ development in these areas. This echoes the earlier work of Leung (2005), which stressed that “life planning” is a very important mission for every person, so counselors must help students plan purposefully, and encourage them to apply their abilities and talents to different roles in life, now and in the future.

In the delivery of career guidance and counseling to students, there is no single model of practice suitable for all schools and to cover all aspects. This degree of flexibility actually allows the case school to adapt comprehensive school guidance programs, including career guidance and counseling, to local conditions. Also, there are no fixed rules to follow when it comes to implementing careers education activities in the school curriculum, and learning outcomes are thus hard

to measure (Herr & Cramer, 1992). However, the model reviewed here, drawing on principles from programs being operated overseas, has proved to be reasonably effective in the case school. In particular, it appears that career education embedded in PSHE and with links to pre-university counseling is a viable and effective strategy. This approach may be appropriate for adoption in similar schools in Hong Kong, where the expectation is already established that all teachers contribute to this important area of student development.

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香港一所國際學校有關事業諮商及輔導的實踐：
文獻回顧與學校諮商師的反思

本文旨在透過學校諮商師的反思，探討香港一所國際學校有關事業諮商與輔導的實踐綱領。該校諮商師為確保所有學生能充分發揮潛能，在「個人、社會與健康教育」課程中，融入事業教育，使學生能從知識、技巧、正確態度和價值觀，為未來（包括升學及就業）作出知情決策。現有文獻缺乏探討有關國際學校事業諮商與輔導的實踐，本反思文章希望可以就此填補一些空隙。

關鍵詞：事業諮商；輔導；國際學校；個人、社會與健康教育