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The Implementation of a New Integrated Social Science Syllabus: Case Studies from Brisbane Secondary Schools

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Developing integrative subjects is one of the controversial areas in recent curriculum reform proposed by the central curriculum development agency in Hong Kong. The Curriculum Development Council and the Curriculum Development Institute officials argue that curriculum integration is a trend of curriculum development in many parts of the world. To help young people better prepare for the knowledge-based society, developing curriculum integration is highly desirable. In this article, the recent experiences of developing social studies-type integrated subject in eight schools in the Brisbane area, Australia, is reported. From classroom observation and interviews with ten teachers in these schools, it is concluded that developing integrated subject in the Personal, Social and Humanities Key Learning Area would be extremely difficult, if not impossible. It is also argued that the relative advantages of adopting an integrative approach may be outweighed by the weaknesses and problems of teaching integrative subject.

Introduction

Since the new wave of education reform launched in Hong Kong in 1998 by the Curriculum Development Institute, the Curriculum Development Council has actively developed a new curriculum framework. In its recent

holistic review of the school curriculum (Curriculum Development Council, 1999), the Council has indicated curriculum integration as the major direction in which progress should be made. The subject-based curriculum is criticized as outdated and unable to meet the challenges or the potential created by the emerging era of new information technologies. The Council believes that curriculum designers and teachers should restructure and develop the school curriculum in the light of Key Learning Areas (KLAs), not traditional subjects.

In practice, this means that the humanities subjects (i.e., history, geography, economics, civics) should be integrated. One of the first steps in this direction is the proposed merger of the history and Chinese history curricula. Another more fundamental and major change would be the setting up of a new integrated humanities subject to replace geography, history, and Economics and Public Affairs (E.P.A.) courses. While the nature and content of this new "subject" is not yet clear, it is apparent that it would take the form of an integrated "social studies" course not unlike that recently published, but at the time of writing, not yet officially sanctioned, in the state of Queensland, Australia, as well as those which have been introduced in various other administrations around the world since the heyday of integrated social studies in the 1930s.

The key question to ask at this stage of Hong Kong's curriculum development is whether the proposed changes to the curriculum (didactics) will necessarily be translated into revitalized pedagogy (the art and science of teaching)? Certainly there is little, if any, international evidence to suggest that it will, while it is also apparent that most, if not all, previous attempts to introduce integrated subjects into the Hong Kong secondary school curriculum have resulted in low adoption rates and poor implementation. Will this new wave of integration be any different?

It is instructive to examine the experiences of the past decade in Queensland, Australia, as it has attempted to introduce an integrated syllabus in line with Federal Government initiatives to develop a national curriculum designed to create a "Clever Country" through the media of "Key Learning Areas." Since the new Hong Kong school curriculum is also structured in KLAs, we suggest that the experiences of Queensland can shed some light on the difficulties to be encountered in Hong Kong. In this article, we attempt to reveal how the new integrated social science subject is being implemented in eight high schools in the Southeast Queensland area, and how teachers in these schools view and react to this curriculum change. We hope that the findings will help curriculum developers and teachers to deepen

their understanding of problems involved in implementing integrative curriculum at classroom level.

The History of the "Studies of Society and Environment"

Key Learning Areas in Australia

The story of the current KLAs started in 1988. In order to attain some national consistency in education, the Australian Education Council, a body comprising the ministers of education from the eight states and territories of Australia, decided in 1988 that schooling in Australia should comprise studies within the following eight KLAs:

- The arts
- Health
- Mathematics
- Studies of society and environment
- English,
- Languages other than English
- Science
- Technology

Prominent among those involved in developing the Studies of Society and Environment (SOSE) KLA was a group of people who had long been pushing for the introduction of what they termed a "socially critical" approach to education for young people. While the intentions of the Federal Government in promoting integration were primarily motivated by economic and workforce considerations, the group given the task of developing the SOSE guidelines was heavily biased toward a curriculum designed to change society. Although they denied a Marxist influence, their thinking was strongly influenced by the work of Jürgen Habermas.

Ironically, both those who want to promote employment-related key competencies and those who want to promote a socially critical curriculum designed to draw attention to the injustices of capitalist society saw the established discipline-based subjects as inherently conservative and inimical to their cause. In a politically astute, if somewhat devious, move, the Australian Geography Teachers' Association, the History Teachers' Association, and similar associations for economics, commerce and other social science subject teachers were told that they could only make submissions to the national committee designing SOSE through the medium of a

"Peak body" representing them all. In this way, those who might have been expected to fight most strongly for separate disciplines in the curriculum were excluded from the process and those within their ranks who saw potential personal advantage in being associated with major curriculum change rose to prominence and the rumor started to spread through the education community that integration was a *fait accompli*.

In 1990, the Australian Education Council established a further series of committees, chaired by prominent members of the business community, to review the future of post-compulsory education and training. The main recommendation of these committees was that education should be based around the acquisition of seven employment-related "key competencies" for all young people together with a "consistent approach to the assessment and reporting of young peoples' achievement." The expectation of the report was that educators at all levels then could focus on the desired outcomes and develop curriculum and teaching approaches to suit (Mayer Committee, 1992). The seven key competencies identified as essential for effective participation in the emerging patterns of work and work organization were:

- collecting, analyzing and organizing information;
- communicating ideas and information;
- planning and organizing activities;
- working with others in teams;
- using mathematical ideas and techniques;
- solving problems; and
- using technology.

While the committee chair claimed that "The successful implementation of these changes is dependent on the capacity and willingness of teachers … to deliver them," Sweet (1992) commented that the report "carries very little feeling for real students, real teachers, real workplaces, or real classrooms and workshops" (p. 32).

The decade of the 1990s, therefore, was on in which many teachers and would-be teachers anticipated that a separate subject-discipline-based curriculum was doomed, and that Australia was moving swiftly toward a national curriculum, defined in terms of the eight KLAs listed above and guided by the overarching concept of "competency based education and training." While nowhere was it ever stated explicitly that the KLAs should equate with subjects on school timetables, this was the interpretation adopted by many, especially since it offered the potential of reducing the number of

subjects on school timetables and the number of subject specialist teachers required.

The consultative document setting out the broad aims and content of SOSE for Years 1–10 (Australian Education Council, Curriculum and Assessment Division, 1992) initially appeared to be supportive of much that geography educators believed to be important. It suggested that SOSE would contribute to students' understanding and development as citizens, workers and stewards of the natural environment. This view was reinforced later in the document (p. 4) where the following definitions are offered:

- Studies of society and environment involve the study of people as social beings as they interact with one another and with the natural and social environment in various places throughout time.
- The term "society" describes the complex web of human relationships, usually defined in terms of beliefs, cultural practice, nationality, and location in time and space.
- The term "environment" describes the interdependent combination of natural and social landscapes and processes.
- Although the distinction between natural and social environments is useful for study, people are part of the total environment and so the statement treats "society and environment" as a whole wherever possible.

However, the potential of the document to result in useful academic study was reduced considerably by the insistence that the traditional subject matter of geography should fall across two of the KLAs (SOSE and science), reinforced by the fact that only the consultative documents for SOSE were distributed to the geography, history and other social science communities, while science teachers' organizations received only the science documents. The result was that much of the physical geography which has traditionally been taught now appears only within the KLA of science. This severely weakened the educative potential of geography as the integrative study of patterns on the world's surface and threatened to undermine much of the vital scientific basis to environmental understanding.

The consequence of these political maneuverings was that states were faced with the task of developing syllabuses based on a fundamental model that was inherently flawed academically, and the fight between those who wanted syllabuses to promote a "clever country" of workers imbued with key employment competencies and those who want to use the school curriculum to promote their own political ideals proceeded at state level.

While New South Wales declined to integrate its social studies and has maintained, and indeed enhanced, the study of history and geography by its students through mandatory time allocations for the study of each, Victoria established an integrated SOSE course in the early 1990s and then, when it was discovered that schools still preferred to separate out the history and geography, re-established history and geography with effect from January 2000. (It should be noted that New South Wales and Victoria embrace 68% of the total Australian population.) Queensland, in the meantime, from where had come much of the socially critical push at national level, proceeded to develop its own integrated SOSE course under the auspices of the newly created Queensland Schools Curriculum Council (QSCC). Throughout the 1990s, the message received by Queensland schools, at least within the state system, was that the new integrated syllabus would be mandatory, and a noticeable decline in the fortunes of geography and history began. Little or no money was devoted to professional development in these subjects, student teachers believed that they were to enter a profession where they would be SOSE teachers rather than subject-discipline specialists, teacher training institutions developed new courses to prepare these SOSE teachers, and schools reorganized their departments and timetables with the new syllabus in mind. Throughout this period, however, there were mumblings of dissent as progressive drafts of the syllabus were sent out for public consultation. Despite (or perhaps because of) the development team adopting such ploys as asking for teacher reactions during the long Christmas vacation and studiously ignoring any suggestions or comments that sought to maintain the concept and skill development of the disciplines, dissatisfaction grew until in 1998, the then Director General of Education directed the QSCC to prepare additional "optional syllabuses" in history, geography and civics for use in Years 9 and 10 which the team obviously found distasteful. Minimal resources were devoted to this task by the QSCC and the SOSE development team, and the then Director General's intentions were thwarted by their insistence that the core learning outcomes defined for the integrated syllabus be maintained for the optional syllabuses as well. This ensured that the optional syllabuses could not be developed in the context of the emerging skills and concepts of the disciplines but would merely reflect a rather dated image of the content that these subjects represented for the development team.

By the time that the syllabus document was released in early 2000, many Queensland state schools had already revised their curricula and management structure to take the revised syllabus into account, and for perhaps

the first time in history, the state's main newspaper, *The Courier Mail*, had published the entire syllabus document for public comment and run a series of articles in which both sides of the argument were presented. At the time of writing, the Minister for Education has declined to ratify the syllabus, and an Independent Panel of Inquiry is considering how, if at all, the syllabus is to be implemented.

It is in this political and curriculum context that the current study was undertaken to discover the views of a range of teachers in SouthEast Queensland schools. The study was conducted in mid-May 2000, shortly before the matter became a matter for open public debate with the publication of the first newspaper article entitled "School Syllabus Swings to the Left," and before one of the current writers published an article entitled "Sapping Education" in the same newspaper pointing out that the issue is wider than the political world views embedded within the syllabus. Thus the teachers quoted in this article were unaware at the time of our visits to their schools that we had strong views on the syllabus and had responded to the syllabus creators during the consultation phase.

The Proposed SOSE Syllabus for Queensland

The Queensland SOSE syllabus as currently published is based on a set of four key values: democratic process, social justice, ecological and economic sustainability, and peace. Student development is reflected in a series of Level statements which broadly relate to year levels of schooling. (In Queensland, students attend primary school from Years 1 to 7, and secondary school from Years 8 to 12, with Years 11 and 12 being termed "Senior.") Year 9 (Hong Kong Secondary 3) equates with Level 5 and Year 10 (Hong Kong Secondary 4) equates with Level 6.

If the Level ratings are perceived as the vertical structure of the syllabus, then the horizontal structure is provided by four "strands." These are termed: Time, Continuity and Change; Place and Space; Culture and Identity; and Systems, Resources and Power. It may appear that "Time, Continuity and Change" equates with history, while "Place and Space" could be regarded as a euphemism for geography. However, this is not the case, as can be demonstrated by reference to both the history and geography "optional syllabuses," each of which are expected to achieve the same outcomes as the integrated syllabus, across all the strands.

For each Level and strand, there are Level statements that describe students' achievements when they have reached a particular level, and these

are supported by core learning outcomes and supplementary or optional geography learning outcomes. Thus, the Level 5 statement for "Time, Continuity and Change" taken from the Geography Optional Syllabus reads:

> Students understand relationships between events in ancient and modern settings and can formally communicate these with reference to primary and secondary sources of evidence. They also understand how ideas and the pace of change impact on different groups in different times and can use inquiry processes to evaluate historical heritages.

Core learning outcomes for Level 5 in this strand are:

- Students represent situations before and after a period of rapid change.
- Students collaborate to locate and systematically record information about the contributions of people in diverse past settings.
- Students explain the consequences of Australia's international relations on the development of a cohesive society.
- Students identify values inherent in historical sources to reveal who benefits or is disadvantaged by particular heritages.

In addition to these core learning outcomes, students in schools that elect to teach the optional geography syllabus must also achieve the following subject-specific learning outcomes:

- Students construct graphs and interpret and evaluate trends from data related to changes in rural Australia or Australia's export industries or tourism.
- Students liaise with local council or community representatives to resolve an issue of significant change in the local community.
- Students identify changes to the features of a rural place and an urban place and identify the difference and similarities in these changes.
- Students construct a log of data to record the sequence of occupancy of an Australian rural or urban center based on primary sources including aerial photos, pastoral records, museum relics, or headstones in graveyards.

The ostensibly more geographical "Place and Space" strand at Level 6 is introduced by the Level statement:

> Students understand the interactions of forces involved in the evolution of places

and can apply criteria and geographical data to advocate decisions about these interactions. They also understand representations of spatial patterns and can develop strategies to confront issue in global environments.

The core learning outcomes for Level 6 in the Place and Space strand are:

- Students use criteria and geographical skills to develop conclusions about the management of places.
- Students create proposals to resolve environmental issues in the Asia-Pacific region.
- Students initiate and undertake an environmental action research project based on fieldwork.
- Students use maps, tables, and statistical data to express predictions about the impact of change on environments.
- Students make clear the links between their values of peace and sustainability and their preferred vision of a place.

The relevant optional additional learning outcomes for the optional geography syllabus are:

- Students utilize geographical information systems to develop an understanding of the significance of some components with an system.
- Students perform a role-play centered around an environmental issue where the values of the participants are revealed.
- Students identify the characteristics that make a natural environment unique and compare these with a list developed by someone who has had a long association with that environment.
- Students undertake fieldwork to monitor the impact of a development proposal on the features of a natural and/or built environment, using indicators appropriate to environmental impact assessments.
- Students use a case study of a major geographical issue to investigate possible futures and implement practical suggestions and alternatives to achieve these.

On the basis of these intended learning outcomes, schools (and teachers) in Queensland must develop their own work program, taking into account the mission statement of their school, the particular community in which their school is placed, and the knowledge and interests of both teachers and students. Further, the work program must be developed in the context of the

stipulation that the SOSE course should be timetabled for a minimum of 180 hours over the three years 8 to 10. Given the pressures already on the curriculum in these final years of compulsory schooling, the nature of the core learning outcomes, and the temptation for schools to timetable generalist teachers for the SOSE course, it is hard to see how school administrations can be persuaded to devote any specialist time to either history or geography. However, while many of these comments are based on speculation, we believed that visits to a range of schools to speak to specialist geography teachers might be further instructive if we were to understand the ways in which the move toward SOSE might impact on the school curriculum and the education received by young people in Queensland.

The Problems of Implementing Integrative Subjects

Developing curriculum integration has been a trend in the education reform in places like Singapore, Taiwan, and China Mainland. But its goal, definition and format vary sharply. To many administrators, curriculum integration is a means to trim the overburdened curriculum, to move toward more student-centered pedagogical approaches and increase the relevance of curriculum content to the students (see for example, Curriculum Development Council, 1999). To many principals and teachers, the purpose of integrating curriculum is to reduce the number of subjects to be fitted into the school timetable. Finally, to some academics and curriculum developers (as in Australia), curriculum integration carries more deep-seated fundamental meaning. Beane (1997), for example, ties integration with the promotion of democratic values and beliefs while Jardine (1990) argues that curriculum integration is more to do with ecological and spiritual meanings. These differing understandings and intentions have serious implications for the success or failure of the integration movement.

The situation is further complicated by the diversity of integrative formats. Jacobs (1989) classifies the forms of integration in ascending order as parallel design, multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, integrated day, and complete program. Other formats such as cross-disciplinary integration and transdisciplinary integration have also been adopted by various governments or schools. For example, information technology and environmental studies are two cross-disciplinary themes in the national curriculum of England. The wide spectrum of integration and the diversity of its purposes mean that calls for its introduction mean different things to different people.

Indeed, the official curriculum recommendation in Hong Kong is to let

teachers decide the format of the proposed Personal, Social and Humanities Education (PSHE) KLA. Such freedom allows teachers to decide what to do, but on the other hand, poses serious problems to the implementation process and outcomes. Do the teachers in schools have necessary and sufficient understanding of the different choices to identify the best curriculum organization format?

Teaching involves the planning and delivery of learning activities for students to develop knowledge, concepts, skills, and values. To do this, teachers need to have a good understanding both of the didactics (subject matter or what is to be taught) and pedagogy (the art and science of teaching) of their subject (Shulman, 1987). The introduction of the benchmark examination for language teachers is based on this argument. This is also why teachers need to have certain qualification before they can teach. It would be ridiculous to ask a biology graduate without any training in physical education to be a physical education teacher, no matter how good he or she is in biology. Integrative subjects involve subject matter knowledge in a number of subjects. Most teachers are trained to teach particular subjects even though some may be able to teach two subjects because of their background. The subject matter of integrative subjects such as integrated humanities involves contents from a wide range of fields including history, economics, public affairs, political sciences, sociology, and geography. Is it reasonable to expect teachers to be knowledgeable in all these areas? Indeed, each of these fields is too broad for any individual to grasp a deep understanding of all the areas involved. History is a case in point.

Recent studies of the implementation of integrative subjects like Design and Technology (D&T) and civics education in Hong Kong have illustrated the severity of this problem (Koo, 1995; Tang, 1995). One may counter-argue that teaching junior integrative studies do not require teachers to have very deep understanding. An understanding of the textbook materials and the related references would suffice. If this argument stands, we should have set the language benchmark examination for teachers at that level. Even if we accept that teachers can survive with a minimum level of subject matter knowledge, the quality of teaching would not be as high as before. As long ago as 1980, Rice stated that "Observation of new as well as experienced teachers indicates that scholarship and teaching is more effective the higher the degree of congruence between teaching specialty and assigned teaching commitment," while the United States' National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (1989) identified five core propositions for quality teachers, two of which are: "Teachers know the subjects they

teach and how to teach those subjects," and "teachers are members of learning communities."

Re-training teachers to teach integrative studies would be extremely difficult. How could a geography teacher learn to be as good a historian from in-service training as a history teacher with a bachelor degree in the subject? As integrated humanities covers more than one subject, could teachers spare so much time and energy to pick up all the necessary knowledge?

The situation is further complicated by the fact that teachers have their own subject identity. Studies in England and Canada (Ball, 1987; Goodson, 1983, 1998) and in Hong Kong (Lam, 1991; Tang, 1995) have indicated clearly the existence of this. Teachers tend to reject teaching a subject to which they do not feel attached. Ball (1987) and Goodson (1998) both point out that this subject identity is both ideological and political. The introduction of integrative subjects threatens the status of subjects and also the status, self esteem and well-being of the teachers affected. Such factors may lead to various forms of opposition ranging from cosmetic implementation to outright rejection.

The fact that schools are loosely coupled in structure also has serious implications on the implementation of integrative subjects. Schools are divided into different subject departments. Each of which "retains some identity and separateness, and that their attachment may be circumscribed, infrequent, weak in its mutual affects, unimportant, and/or slow to respond" (Weick, 1976, p. 3). Bringing integrative subjects would mean that this loosely coupling system would have to be changed. The linkages among subject departments and the various administrative units would have to be strengthened vigorously.

Besides these implementation problems peculiar to integrative subjects, are the more generic implementation problems — namely time and resources — support? Finding time and resources for curriculum change, especially large-scale ones, has been a major problem in places where teachers' workload is heavy (Fullan, 1991; Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998). In Hong Kong, many secondary school teachers have to face their classes for more than thirty 40-minute periods per week. In addition to this face-to-face classroom teaching work are the pastoral care work, extracurricular duties, administrative duties and so on. Finding time to prepare oneself for teaching a new integrated subject and to prepare a school-based curriculum would be even more grueling than the curriculum changes of an established subject as teachers would have to face their own inadequacies in both subject and pedagogical content knowledge in which they have no passion.

Data Collection and Analysis

With all these complicating factors in mind, it was decided to study how geography teachers respond to the call for developing integrative subjects. Comparatively speaking, it could be argued that Brisbane schools and teachers are in a better position to develop curriculum integration because they have a stronger tradition of more student-centered orientation toward curriculum planning and teaching, and school-based curriculum development. The authors, holding the belief that a study of Brisbane schools would shed light on the case of Hong Kong, contacted the geography teachers in eight secondary schools in the Southeast Queensland area. They were asked to allow the researchers to observe a typical lesson in progress, followed by a half- to one-hour interview.

The schools chosen embraced both public and private sectors, and included schools across the range in academic performance and resource provision. However, the sample was generally weighted toward the better resourced and higher socio-economic contexts in the region. The teachers also varied in length of service and ranged from fresh graduates to those approaching the age of retirement.

In the interviews, teachers were asked about the way they structure and teach SOSE, their experience of developing and using materials, and their personal view of this new curriculum change. The interviews were all audio-taped with the consent of the interviewees.

The researchers analyzed the transcripts independently to identify themes from the data and then compared notes. In the process of interchange and validation, the researchers adopted mutual roles of critical friend to eliminate or at least reduce the possibilities of faulty conclusions. The experience of having two researchers from such markedly different cultures and professional contexts working on the same data has been both interesting and fruitful in facilitating theme identification and the theorizing process.

Findings

The Way the SOSE Recommendations Been Implemented

Among the eight schools studied, the way SOSE has been adopted or implemented varied sharply. While most schools had adopted SOSE in name, often introducing aspects of the final published syllabus based on earlier drafts, rumor and anticipation, only one had developed a genuinely

integrated curriculum. In reality, geography and history were still widely treated as two separate sections of the "SOSE" curriculum. Frequently, students studied history for one semester of the year and geography for the other (see Table 1).

Of the two schools that claimed to have developed an integrated curriculum, one actually had been teaching an integrated curriculum for a

Table 1 How Schools Implemented SOSE

	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10
School A (Older Co-educational public school)	◆ Half year history and half year geography, or citizenship education (which is equivalent of social studies)	◆ Choose either history, geography or citizenship education	◆ Choose either history, geography or citizenship education
School B (Co-educational Anglican school)	◆ Global studies (an integrated curriculum)		
School C (Old boys private school)	◆ History and geography		
School D (Old girls private school)	◆ History and geography	◆ Students choose among geography, history and business studies	◆ Students choose among geography, history and business studies
School E (Old co-educational public school)	◆ Half year history and half year geography		
School F (Old girls Catholic school)	◆ History and geography are taught as separate components under the name of social subject		
School G (Newer rural co-educational public school)	◆ Social studies		
School H (Relatively new co-educational Anglican school)	◆ History and geography		

number of years before the national government launched the SOSE curriculum. In the other school, the head of department admitted that:

> We haven't fully integrated our course although we call it a SOSE Course. In Year 8 in particular, it's a history type unit, a geography type and so forth. In Year 10 we get more into integrated units, so we might do a unit on urbanization or something but then look at explore the history of urbanization in a particular city or look at issues related to crime or racism or migration or so forth and I find that good that we can integrate both the history and geography. (Matthew, School G, interview)

In one of the schools that still maintained the names of history and geography in the timetable, the head of department had:

> asked that they do look at a SOSE style unit of work in each year level at the moment. (School F, interview)

The teacher further elaborated what that meant:

> We're looking at a unit at the end of the year as a Global Citizen so we might do something like, don't know, the fashion trades, like that Brian Hopper's paper. He's done the fashion label, something like that. About sweat shops and things like that." (Stephanie, School F, interview)

Such comments suggest that, at least in our case study schools, the SOSE curriculum has not been fully implemented. Despite the Government's policy and coercion, many schools and teachers have not really developed a fully integrated SOSE curriculum in their schools even though most, in particular, the public ones had adopted the name of the integrated subject.

The Attitudes of the Teachers Toward SOSE

Among the teachers interviewed are the die-hard supporters of existing disciplines. Bonnie, the head of department of a private school, presented her stance loud and clear:

> A: I don't like integration because I think it compromises, I think when you start to integrate subjects, this is in a very practical level, you put teachers into those subject areas, or the integrated subjects areas that have a bent and the integration is not complete nor is it balanced …
> Q: Is that the fault of the university for not training integrated social studies teachers?

A: No. I don't think it's anyone's fault because I think basic human nature can't be changed.
Q: And basic human nature is to go to disciplines?
A: Yes. I think so. I think also that you are still trained as a stand-up geography teacher or history teacher and when you get into a classroom, even though you are teaching SOSE you will put your particular bent on it anyhow.
Q: If we took students in and said we are going to train you from scratch in SOSE, would that work? Do you think we could train people to be good integrated SOSE teachers?
A: I'm sure you could do it yes. Whether or not in application it works, I don't know. (Bonnie, School D, interview)

There are a few teachers who held such strong view. They argued that it would not be possible to change the subject identity, the beliefs and discipline outlook of teachers. Geography teachers teach in the geography teacher manner, while history teachers work the history way. A head of department who has developed a SOSE curriculum in school and has personally taught the new subject admitted:

> My teaching of geography has got far greater depth to it than my teaching history. (Matthew, School G, interview)

His example suggests that teachers who are trained to teach a subject find it difficult to shift to teaching another subject. Even if they were forced to do so, the quality of the service would be adversely affected.

A teacher who has rich experience in teaching the SOSE subject held fairly positive view of SOSE. She said:

> The theory is fantastic. I think it's great. It would be fantastic. It would be interesting … Like they do SOSE in primary here. So that would be interesting. I don't know a lot about what they're doing here. I think it's got a lot of potential. (Amy, School D, interview)

Despite her enthusiasm for the theoretical advantages of SOSE, this teacher still felt happy to return to teaching her own subject, geography, when she moved to her present school. She saw teacher training a major stumbling block to the implementation.

> Not many of us had training or proper training in SOSE, in its, you know, proper form as such and also I think people do have their passions for different subjects so they always give that sort of, whatever the word, tainting, or whatever it is. (Amy, School D, interview)

What makes the matter worse is that teacher training for SOSE teachers is poor. She said:

> To me it wasn't a specific subject. It was very bitsy. The in-service (teacher training for SOSE teachers) I went in like went for two, quite a few years ago when it was first, all the talk about SOSE was very wishy-washy. It wasn't like this is what SOSE is. It was sort of, yes, it's a bit of this and a bit of that and a bit of a mish-mash and I think it's the problem myself. That's just my personal opinion. (Amy, School D, interview)

In the eyes of the teachers interviewed, the SOSE syllabus is a haphazard mosaic of various things. It was described as "wishy-washy," "mish-mash," "watered down version," "cannot sink into the definite."

It is also worth mentioned that one teacher in particular sees the SOSE curriculum as not strong enough in skill training. She said:

> My view is that I want the students learning the historical (and) geographical skills rather than just the social or SOSE skills and I still think there's a need for a disciplined approach. (Stephanie, School E, interview)

This concern was echoed by another teacher who argued that students suffered from inadequate skill training and would encounter difficulties later in senior forms:

> They may not have the skills either so that when you start Year 11 with a modern history student or geography student or whatever, you have to start from scratch with the skills, whereas at the moment, a lot of those skills are taught in Years 9 and 10 in particular. Just basics like correct map reading. I think if we start having people that are SOSE teachers rather than geography teachers, they lose a lot of those disciplines of correct map reading, analysis of data and things like that because they're looking at it from almost too many angles that I think they can't focus as much. (Kitty, School E, interview)

This criticism is not surprising at all as the teachers interviewed all emphasized the teaching and learning of skills in their classroom teaching. None of them adopted teacher-centered knowledge-transmission approach to their teaching. Rather, students were engaged in activities related to finding information, extracting information, analyzing information, interpreting various forms of data, and presenting skills such as drawing graphs and charts. The SOSE curriculum is, to them, different from geography curriculum, in terms of its contents rather than the form of teaching.

One teacher doubted whether students should be asked to learn the

issues covered in the SOSE curriculum, arguing that they would be better taught at senior level:

> I felt, that was my major complaint, that they were just burdening us with more issues which could be better dealt with in the Study of Society and subjects like that at senior level and/or university. (Susan, School F, interview)

In conclusion, it appears from our discussions with these teachers, all leaders in their field, keen, enthusiastic and able, that the SOSE curriculum developed in Queensland has been beset with ideological and practical difficulties at every stage. At best it is seen as second best. At worst, it is inimical to the education of young people.

Discussions

The ten teachers included in this study cannot be treated as a representative sample of social science teachers in the Brisbane area. First of all, they all had a geography background. Secondly, they were generally from schools in better positions in terms of material resources and staff development for curriculum development. Taking these two characteristics into consideration, it could be said that the "sample" was biased. Yes, it is! And the researchers did it purposely. The intention was to find teachers who should be in a better position to implement this type of integrated curriculum. Teachers with a background of geography training should be more prepared to face the new integrative subject as geography is actually a field of knowledge with a close relationship with a wide range of subjects. It has often been considered as a subject linking both arts and sciences (Graves, 1979). The reason why schools with better resource provision were preferred was that if these better-off schools could not manage the extra demand on resource, which schools could?

When discussing the findings, we should also bear in mind that Brisbane schools enjoy better resourcing than their counterparts in Hong Kong in terms of student-staff ratios. Classes are smaller, rarely with more than 30 students and often with fewer than twenty. Classrooms are more spacious, allowing more student-centered activities such as group discussion. Another favorable situation in Brisbane is that there has been a strong tradition of school-based curriculum development. Schools and teachers are used to developing their own work programs and materials. To them, the introduction of an integrative subject is merely a matter of developing another curriculum in ways similar to those adopted in the past. However, to Hong

Kong teachers, the introduction of an integrative subject is more than integrating subjects. Behind the integration movement is the urge to move toward school-based curriculum development. Instead of following the suggested curriculum issued by the Curriculum Development Council, schools and teachers need to interpret broad curriculum guidelines and develop their own curricula together with designing the necessary teaching materials. Hong Kong teachers are also required to change their teacher-centered pedagogical approach to a student-centered one so as to strengthen the teaching of generic skills. In nature, the introduction of an integrative subject in Hong Kong is more radical and complicated than the change proposed in Brisbane.

The present study reveals that teachers and schools in Brisbane were far from supportive of the introduction of SOSE. Teachers and schools have either adopted a wait-and-see stance or just tried to adopt it in name only, maintaining the teaching of separate subjects in all but name. In most schools, history and geography were still taught as two separate components even if the name of the subject has been changed to SOSE.

Most teachers did not like teaching the new subject, not because they were afraid of the extra work of designing new curricula and teaching new topics, but rather because they were concerned about the quality of teaching delivered. They frankly admitted that they could not teach non-geography topics as well as they should be. They did not have the necessary professional knowledge and subject matter knowledge to do their integrative teaching job properly. To a group of professionals, knowing oneself not able to deliver a reasonable standard of service is very discouraging. It is, therefore, not difficult to see why they did not want the change.

In-service teacher training, where it has been available, has not been successful at all in helping this group of geography teachers to pick up the new subject. Teachers find that students taking SOSE did not really learn the essential skills for further studies. This accusation suggests that integrated subjects do not necessarily bring about teaching of skills. Indeed, Gehrke, Knapp & Sirotnik (1992), after reviewing researches on social studies in the United States come to the following conclusion:

> The conservative cultural continuity approach has been maintained over some 80 years … the formal social studies curriculum in the United States is characterised by an emphasis on the transmission of information selected from the various disciplines, but mostly history; by an avoidance of controversial or sensitive topics; and by a topical organisation that leaves wide latitude to teacher for selection of content for emphasis, and subsequently allows enormous diversity in the topics actually covered … The typical class is teacher-centered,

> dependent on a single hardback textbook from one of a handful of major publishing companies, and unlikely to include much, if any, student choice of content or activity. (p. 59)

If the social studies situation in the United States was so gloomy at the start of the 1990s, and Brisbane teachers are so pessimistic about the introduction of integrated humanities type of curriculum at the start of 2000, what will happen to Hong Kong if the central curriculum development agency forcefully imposes a similar approach on the schools and teachers? The present study reveals that implementing such a school-based integrated subject in a place with a strong tradition of student-centered pedagogy is far from easy. Indeed, so many problems have been encountered that many schools and teachers have sought out various ways of ignore, delay, or heavily adapt the change so as to make it more manageable, or to buy time until the innovation is forgotten and the next educational fad is introduced. If this particular group of geography teachers in better-off Brisbane schools are either not buying the idea of integration or simply feel unable or unwilling to cope with it, it is not unreasonable to predict that a similar fate awaits the implementation of a similar integrative subject in Hong Kong.

Would it not be better to find other ways to achieve the goals of curriculum reform? To answer this question, it is necessary to look again at the original reasons for seeking change. A review of the policy documents and literature on curriculum change in Hong Kong suggests that social science curriculum developers need to face three problems:

1. The junior secondary school curriculum is too crowded. Most schools are offered four social science subjects, namely Chinese History, History, Geography, and E.P.A. With the recent addition of Computer Studies and Putonghua, the number of subjects students taking may reach up to 14 or 15. The burden on students is too heavy.
2. The overcrowded curriculum also creates serious headache when it comes to timetabling.
3. Many of the curricula of the existing social science subjects are academically oriented, outdated and/or not relevant enough to students' lives. Not enough emphasis is placed on the development of generic learning skills and essential life skills.

These problems and weaknesses can be tackled without sacrificing the existing subjects. The curricula of existing social science subjects can be

modernized to meet the interest of the students, to better promote the learning of generic skills and be more relevant to students' daily lives. The new junior secondary school curriculum implemented in 1999 is a case in point. The curriculum has adopted a problem-specific, issue-based structure. Students are led to learn essential geographical knowledge, concepts and values, and to develop learning skills such as collecting, processing, analyzing and presenting data, through the study of interesting issues and problems students would come across in their daily lives or in the media. This curriculum has been well received by school teachers (Lam & Lee, 1997) and has been commended by overseas educators (see for example, Biddle, 1999). This movement toward more integrative, process-based curricula is not limited to geography. The STS (Science-Technology-Society) approach in science subjects and the data-based approach of history are just some cases in point. If all the social science subject curricula were to move in this direction, they should be more than adequate to achieve the goals of the personal and social development stated in the PSHE KLA, and to ensure that Hong Kong young people maintain and enhance their academic excellence in a world context.

There are two ways to solve the overcrowding problems. One option would be offering three different subjects in two years of the three-year junior secondary course (see Table 2). While this may not be desirable from the point of view of continuity, when compared with the disruption of the introduction of a new integrated subject, it would be a lesser evil.

Another option would be to review the time allocation to different subjects, such as Putonghua in secondary schools. There is no doubt that all Hong Kong students should be able to communicate in our national language. At present, some of the new S1 entrants into our secondary school system have not learned Putonghua in their primary schools. Under such circumstances, it is perfectly justifiable to teach it in our junior secondary level. However, since the return of sovereignty to the motherland, all primary school students have their Putonghua lessons. With six years training in primary schools, S1 entrants should be fairly proficient in using the

Table 2 A Proposed Subject Rotation for Junior Secondary School

Year	Social subjects offered
S1	E.P.A. (2), Chinese History (2), Geography (2)
S2	E.P.A (2), Chinese History (2), History (2)
S3	History (2), Geography (2)

Note: Number in parentheses indicates number of lessons in six-day cycle.

language. Would it be necessary to ask secondary school students to learn Putonghua for five more years? This suggestion may be seen as politically incorrect. However, from an academic point of view, it is worth considering.

It is suggested that the above suggestions are more than adequate to address the pressures for change. Indeed, these suggestions would be much easier to implement and teachers would be in a better position to provide better quality teaching. Why do we need radical change if we can achieve a better result by modernizing our present subject curricula? Surely our ultimate aim is to develop an education system which enables Hong Kong students to excel in the complexities of a globalized modern world? In such a world, trying to invent new subjects that are idiosyncratic and emphasize difference rather than prepare students to use internationally validated knowledge to be citizens of the world, would seem to be the height of folly.

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