

Learning to Connect — Mission of General Education

S.C.L. Chan
Hong Kong Baptist University

With the planned introduction of Liberal Studies into the Territory's senior secondary school curriculum, as one of the compulsory subjects besides English, Chinese and Mathematics, to replace the traditional areas, it is envisaged a sea change in learning and teaching will come about. In view of the proliferation and subsequent fragmentation of learning in the last twenty years, this should be a welcome strategic move. However, behind this lurks a danger – the continued fragmentation of knowledge and learning, maybe with even more fragments.

Starting from the Constructivist premise, it is argued that real learning arises as a result of making connections between different realms of human experience, knowledge and reflections. Seymour Papert, in *Children's Machine*, evoked an image of a geographical region which is originally 'cold' to the learner, 'warming up' upon contact with a 'warm' region. Moving into a new area also brings about an added capability, that of perceiving the original habitat in a new light, reframing it. Knowledge is thus not only broadened, but deepened. This is considered to be the way to build up the learner's inner world of knowledge and should be the prime rationale for introducing the curriculum area of Liberal Studies.

It is to be emphasized that the object is not to learn *all* the connections among the multifarious sub-modules in liberal studies – this is not necessary, and certainly not practical. The aim rather is to enable the learners, through taking part in active and deep learning, to build up a mental model of the connectedness of knowledge and recover the desire, confidence and ability to explore uncharted terrains. The main thing is to learn to connect.

Of special importance among the connections are those that link to one's life experiences and one's observations of the world around him/her. This brings out most effectively the student's innate desire to learn and explore.