

Fusion of Horizons: Implications for a Hermeneutical Learning Community Approach of Implementing Liberal Studies in Hong Kong

John Tak-Shing LAM

*Department of Curriculum and Instruction,
The Hong Kong Institute of Education*

Liberal Studies (LS) has recently been confirmed to be offered as an independent core subject in the local senior secondary school curriculum in 2009. There had been some controversy concerning its status as an independent core subject to be publicly examined in the coming proposed public examination in Secondary 6. This article argues that the new subject, pedagogically and epistemologically considered, should be implemented in a whole-school approach. Both from a curriculum development perspective and a philosophical perspective, the whole-school curriculum development approach is seen as more desirable, if not more feasible, when compared with an independent subject approach and a collaborative team teaching approach. The curriculum development perspective is drawn from the findings and advice given by Nias, Southworth, and Campbell (1992) in their study on whole-school curriculum development model and its advantages. They found that the success of a whole-school curriculum development approach hinges on four sets of conditions, namely institutional values, school's structures, resources, and leadership. The philosophical perspective is premised on Gadamer's (1989) notion of "fusion of horizons" and Bakhtin's (1981) "heteroglossia," both of which lay emphasis on the desirability of developing a community of multi-vocality, multi-faceted interpretation, and projection of multiple

possibilities. The ultimate argument of this article is to suggest that LS should adopt a whole-school approach of curriculum development that incorporates the two notions of “fusion of horizons” and “heteroglossia” to transform the school into a hermeneutical learning community. It is because only in a hermeneutical learning community context can we generate the maximal conditions for collating and harnessing the wide array of LS-related teacher consciousness and competences among the whole school’s staff for the good of the teaching and learning of the subject.

Introduction

Understanding is a process of communication between two or more people opening up to each other and understanding a subject matter at hand. (Gadamer, 1989, p. 385)

I live in a world of others’ words. (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 143)

The newly introduced Liberal Studies (LS) subject has never been short of heated debate and close ideological contestation between opposing camps of ideas in local educational and academic arena since it was introduced to the public for consultation. Though most local education practitioners and academics would support its rationale of fostering students’ independent and critical thinking, they think that there is some room for improvement for the new core subject of secondary school. Two of the significant criticisms they level at it are: (1) it should be a cross-curricular initiative instead of its present independent subject status, and (2) it should not be made a compulsory subject for open examination due to its epistemological nature.

Recently, its fate has been sealed. In the recently issued second consultation draft of the *Proposed New Senior Secondary Curriculum and Assessment Frameworks* (Curriculum Development Council & Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority, 2005), LS is going to be implemented as a core independent subject for all secondary students as well as a compulsory public examination subject in 2009. This article will only discuss the issues of the subject status and the implementation method of LS, but not the examination issue. This article is also couched from a conceptual perspective instead of from an empirical one as the new subject is presently only at its early stage of

implementation. Any attempt to do a full-blown empirical study of the phenomenon would suffer from the lack of in-depth conceptual and practical knowledge of the phenomenon among the teachers and schools practicing it.

The topic will be addressed both from a philosophical as well as a curriculum development perspective. Philosophically speaking, it is postulated that a whole-school approach could provide the most desirable dialogical and multi-vocal “habitus”¹ for the development of the subject. This kind of habitus which is marked by co-construction, communication, and collusion of a multiplicity of LS-related pedagogical practice and professional thinking among LS teachers will be to the benefit of LS teachers’ own professional development as well as of the learning needs of their students. The philosophical underpinnings will be mainly drawn on Bakhtin’s (1981) notion of “heteroglossia” and Gadamer’s (1989) “fusion of horizons.” And from a curriculum development standpoint, Nias, Southworth, and Campbell (1992) gave us advice on ways to implement a whole-school curriculum and its advantages. Their recommendations will be used as a pivotal reference to argue for a whole-school development model for the new subject. One or two local examples of whole-school approach of curriculum development will be cited as an illustrative description of one of the many ways that the new subject can be implemented in and benefited from a whole-school context.

The Present Status of LS

The new subject has attracted a lot of attention from local academics and education practitioners but few of them have addressed the issue from the following curriculum perspective:

1. The best way to implement it as a subject or a curriculum — that is, as an independent subject or on an inter-disciplinary or even whole-school approach;
2. The school milieu factors that would facilitate the successful implementation of the subject;
3. The kind of teachers’ curriculum competences and personal/professional traits required for the subject.

From a curriculum development perspective, some educational programs or courses of study should be offered on an independent

subject basis whereas other programs should be better taught on an inter-disciplinary or a whole-school approach. Bernstein (1971) identified two kinds of school curriculum: one is called “collection codes” and the other “integrated codes.” In Morris’s (1998) analysis of local secondary school curriculum, he drew distinction between the two genres of school curriculum. The first one is characterized by a strong boundary between subjects and a low degree of control of the curriculum by teachers and pupils. An “integrated code” possesses the opposite features. A “collection code” curriculum is one associated with a disciplinary mode of conceptualizing knowledge and which emphasizes public knowledge more. An “integrated code” curriculum, however, usually dwells on a “progressive” mode of conceptualizing knowledge that is very often personal, interdisciplinary, and experiential in nature. Locally, whether LS should be introduced as an independent subject or as an inter-disciplinary initiative has been an issue of great contention among local education practitioners and academics. D. W. Chan (2005) remarks that “Liberal Studies as a disciplinary or interdisciplinary subject is not well defined, and there is no consensus view that commands wide acceptance among educators in Hong Kong” (p. 3).

In this article, it is argued that given that the essential conditions conducive to a whole-school initiative are present, a whole-school curriculum development approach can yield better curriculum outcomes and promise a higher rate of success for LS than when it is taught by two subject experts or a team of teachers. Secondly, different subjects or courses of study require different teacher competences and consciousness. LS, as a subject that calls for critical and analytical frame of mind for students, is skewed toward acculturating in students personal traits and values such as open-mindedness, social awareness, and adaptability to change (Curriculum Development Council & Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority, 2005, p. 2). The subject also emphasizes life-long learning skills for the good of the students, such as critical thinking skills, creativity, problem-solving skills, communication skills, and information skills (Curriculum Development Council & Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority, 2005, p. 4). This article argues that not only students have to be imbued with these same competences and personal traits, LS teachers should also harbor these competences and consciousness for the good of their pedagogy. Tsang (2006) also reminds us that Liberal Studies should be

seen as a kind of mind-liberating education for both teachers and students, and not just a mere disciplinary training of a body of knowledge and skills. Teacher education training institutions, the Curriculum Development Institute, and in fact the whole education community should pay due concern to nurturing and strengthening such pedagogical competences and consciousness among LS teachers. Thirdly, for any new curriculum practice to take root in a school curriculum, corresponding school organizational measures have to be taken. Dimmock (1995) argued that quality learning and teaching should involve appropriate consideration or reconsideration of practices in the realms of a school's management, leadership, resource allocation, and culture/climate (p. 8). For example, for an inter-disciplinary curriculum initiative, a school should establish a collaborative ethos and mechanism to collate and harness the wide array of expertise and curriculum perspectives of the team of teaching staff. Also for a whole-school curriculum project, opening of positions of curriculum leader in the school manpower hierarchy might also be considered as conducive to securing whole-school support from the Head, the teaching staff, and even the ancillary staff. Such are but a few of the examples to show how a school's organizational structure should attune to its curriculum development and initiatives.

The Three Approaches of Implementation

From the author's own observation and projection, the new subject can be implemented in either one of the following modes:

1. The subject is taught by two teachers (one with training in the science discipline and one preferably in the humanities), each with his or her own specialism to contribute to the teaching;
2. The subject is taught by a team of teachers, working in a collaborative and inter-disciplinary manner, with ample opportunities for peer learning, sharing, and experimenting;
3. The subject is implemented on a whole-school approach, with teachers from all disciplines supporting the values and missions embedded in the subject.

It is argued that a whole-school approach could address the issues mentioned above concerning school milieu factors and teachers' competences and personal traits/attitudes. There are both pros and cons

for schools to consider when they want to adopt any one of the three implementation modes for LS. The schools, for example, should consider their teachers' readiness in terms of the required curriculum competences and consciousness, their school governance style, their school organizational structure, manpower allocation, and most important of all, their previous experience in implementing LS-related subjects like Integrated Humanities, and Personal, Social and Humanistic Education. It is conjectured here that schools that have offered these subjects before are in a better position to implement LS. The author's personal observation and personal communication with some local school heads have shown that most schools with previous experiences in offering those LS-related subjects are adopting the second approach. It is beyond this article to probe into the reasons why most schools adopt this approach, but it might be that the kind of collaborative teaching team method used for Integrated Humanities is also appropriate for LS. As regards the whole-school approach, it is here alluded to as a systematic, top-down or bottom-up attempt to enlist the support of whole-school personnel in pursuing some practices or visions that have gained a consensual status. Curriculum-wise, it is usually in the form of inter-disciplinary teaching and learning acts to be effected and supported by all staff across the whole-school curriculum. The curriculum idea may be generated from individual teachers or from a teaching team or a school curriculum committee but it must have the blessing of the majority of the school staff, if not all. There is a general reserved feeling in the conversations with the few school heads that it could not easily be implemented without attuning the various school factors to this implementation approach. The heads also had difficulty pinpointing the advantages and hurdles that could ensue if they want to set the stage for this whole-school initiative. In the following, the pros and cons of each of the three approaches will be illuminated.

The Pros and Cons

There are some enabling as well as disabling factors in every approach. The first approach hinges heavily on the expertise and close cooperation of the teachers. Success of the approach might depend on the degree of close inter-dependence and complementary support between the two teachers in terms of their expertise in pedagogical content knowledge and the subject content knowledge. Possible

limitations lie firstly in the limited scope of personal horizons and pedagogical knowledge (or we can call them teachers' curriculum consciousness and competences) that can be exchanged between the two teachers in the teaching process when compared with the other two approaches. Secondly, the difficulty of enlisting inter-disciplinary support from other teaching staff outside the disciplinary department might constitute a problem to a curriculum endeavor that needs concerted and whole-school effort. Thirdly, the quality of the duo teaching team might be easily hampered when one of them leaves the job or the team. And fourthly, the subject departmental structure emphasizes discrete subject knowledge rather than cross-disciplinary knowledge (Hargreaves, 1994; Talbert & McLaughlin, 1992) and curtails dialogue and collaboration among teachers from different subject areas (Dimmock, 1995; Hargreaves, 1994; Johnson, 1990). There is the possibility that it will culminate into what Hargreaves (1994) calls a "balkanization"² state which can diminish whole-school culture, inter-departmental collaboration initiatives, and pedagogical change (Dellar, 1996).

The second approach boasts of creating firstly optimal learning opportunities for collaborative planning, teaching, lesson observation, and post-lesson review among a group of LS teachers. This kind of team work will also provide fertile ground for teachers' personal "prejudices" (to use the hermeneutical term for personal beliefs, theory, or ideational predispositions) and horizons to disseminate among the group, with the result that individual horizons could be broadened or enhanced in the end. Also, this "learning community" approach of learning to teach the subject will benefit both novice and experienced teachers and also the quality of teaching can be sustained easily due to the synergistic mutual cover-up nature of the learning circle even when one team member has to leave the team. On the downside, when compared to a whole-school approach, the second approach of inter-disciplinary collaboration still falls short of gaining more support from the staff (for example the whole school's staff) outside the LS department. They still need more support and leadership from the school's top management or personal charisma to ensure that their inter-disciplinary LS activities are met with the cooperation and support from the whole school's staff.

The third approach entails a whole-school participation and cooperation. A whole-school curriculum development approach is defined by Nias et al. (1992) as:

a dynamic, even restless, process in which beliefs and values are translated into action, but in which a common commitment to learning also means that both principles and practices are continuously reviewed and reinterpreted. Put another way, it can be defined as a set of individual and collective learning activities which is inspired by, and takes place within, a framework of common educational beliefs, values, intentions and actions, but which also enriches or extends the scope and shared understanding of that framework. (p. 157)

They posit that a whole-school development approach is perceived to have the following attributes (Nias et al., 1992, p. 56):

- A strong sense of community;
- Staff sharing the same educational beliefs and aims and interpreting them in similar ways in their own classrooms;
- Teachers exercising autonomy in their classrooms, able to play an individual role in the school and call upon another's expertise;
- Staff relating well to one another;
- Staff able to work together;
- Teachers' knowledge of the school not limited to matters of immediate concern to themselves or their classes; and
- Staff valuing the leadership of the headteacher.

Teachers are learners too. It can be seen that the above definition spells out the significance of the mutual "learning what" and the "learning how" for teachers in the process of whole-school curriculum development. Nias et al. (1992) also point out that for a whole-school curriculum to be successfully developed and implemented, four factors are of critical importance, namely institutional visions, school formal and informal structures, resources, and leadership. This will be elaborated in the following sections. The advantages as well as the limitations of a whole-school curriculum development approach will also be elucidated in the final section. To argue from a philosophical stance, this article would posit that Gadamer's (1989) notion of "fusion of horizons" and Bakhtin's (1981) "heteroglossia" would foreground the importance of adopting a whole-school approach for LS because the two notions precipitate a favorable habitus for the subject. It is because the multi-vocal, mutually "give-and-take" dialogical nature embedded in the two notions is conducive to the development of LS teachers' epistemological and pedagogical expertise and consciousness. Before we dwell on the ideational features of the two notions, the readers will

be introduced to the recent context of curriculum development in Hong Kong in which the seed of LS curriculum will find its testing ground.

Local Curriculum Reform Context and Lessons Learnt

Successful curriculum reforms require school restructuring in the form of adopting adaptable and flexible leadership, management, and organizational structures at the school level (Murphy, 1991; O'Donoghue & Dimmock, 1998). One of the reasons that led to the failure of Target-oriented curriculum (TOC) and other curriculum initiatives in Hong Kong is that the curriculum and school management had, for the most of the time, been executed separately (Dimmock & Lee, 2000). Curriculum decision-making was also hampered by an absence of a whole-school participation and teachers' participation.

Despite the failure of the TOC reform, it seemed that some lessons had been learnt. Lo (1998) reported that after TOC, some schools began to focus on the creation of new organizational and administrative infrastructure, linking the school's curriculum development with the school's management ethos and structure. There have been some successful attempts in some schools after the TOC reform to engineer conditions that are conducive to curriculum change at the school level. K. K. Chan (1998) suggested in one case study that one of the pathways to successful curriculum change at school level is to adopt a whole-school policy to facilitate the curriculum initiative and to adapt staff development and administrative structures to that end. The following case study of a local school done by Chiu and Mak (2006) will illuminate in details how a whole-school policy can facilitate a curriculum initiative.

The case school recently decided to supplement the implementation of its LS curriculum with a whole-school project learning scheme and an extensive inquiry reading project, thinking that the former can give a better groundwork of learning capabilities for students learning LS and that the latter can provide the students with essential content knowledge to be transformed into relevant and significant line of thought and inquiry focus for learning LS. The school's management board supported this by providing manpower allocation and re-scheduling of the timetable in order that all teaching staff of the school can lead 2–3 groups of students doing LS project learning. It even hired an expert

teacher from outside to be the Project Learning Coordinator and provided training to all teaching staff on the use of “mindmapping” and “theme-based teaching.” The report also remarked that with this whole-school approach, it was easier to arrange teachers’ exchange visits to other schools to learn how they go about with teaching LS. And to better enhance students’ interests in extensive inquiry reading, the school governance took the initiative to change it from a one-hour-per-week mode to a mode of three 20-minute sessions per week to make inquiry reading more sustainable and engaging for students’ learning. All the teaching staff were made responsible for giving support to students in their group on the writing of their project learning report. It can be seen that this school manifested all the essential conditions and supporting elements for a whole-school curriculum development as mentioned by Nias et al. (1992), namely: (1) institutional visions, (2) formal and informal support structures, (3) resources, and (4) leadership.

On a larger scale, the findings of the final report of the Accelerated School Project (ASP) in Hong Kong (Lee et al., 2002) also reveals that some schools successfully transform themselves because of the change in their institutional structures and procedures. The report refers to it as the “Big Wheels” of school transformation which involves a systematic process of five steps, namely: (1) stock-taking of the school’s situations, strengths, challenges, and areas for improvement; (2) forging a shared vision; (3) setting priorities; (4) setting up school governance structures; and (5) the systematic inquiry process of findings ways for achieving the school’s self-perfection. All these findings point to the importance of a whole-school approach for it breeds the very essential “internal” conditions or habitus for the success of any whole-school project.

Fusions of Horizons and Hermeneutics

Four major notions of hermeneutics that are considered relevant to the argument for a whole-school learning community approach for the implementation of LS curriculum will be discussed here. Their implications for the success of LS will also be illuminated. The first one concerns the advantages of sharing our personal prejudices. In the eyes of hermeneutists, every person has his or her own prejudices which may work to his or her own advantages or disadvantages. Our prejudices

are shaped by our history and traditions. These traditionally derived categories and concepts supply the conceptual “lenses” with which we see the world. Without them, one cannot begin to understand the world at all, but with them, one’s understanding will always be incomplete or monolithic. In this connection, our tradition is therefore both enabling and constraining. Gadamer (1989) liked to use the metaphors “perspectives” and “horizons” to stand for this kind of understanding and explanation. Nevertheless, there are bound to be different interpretations and understanding toward an object of interest between different people, parties, and cultures. The fact that hermeneutists believe in the polyphony of voices and interpretations has turned this kind of tension into an advantage by positing that there are never *better* or *worse* answers but it is always beneficial to let us know of the existence of and the rationales behind these differences because they would bring us to a new “horizon” in seeing the issue. That is what Gadamer (1989) meant when he said:

The hermeneutic task consists in not covering up this tension by attempting a naïve assimilation of the two but in consciously bringing it out. (p. 306)

The second notion is that personal prejudices can only be *compared* but not *evaluated*. As the hermeneutists believe that there is no single universal Truth or the best Solution or the most appropriate Perception existing in this world, there is no point in illuminating and evaluating the strengths or weaknesses of any particular view or text (language or written). Atkins (1988), quoting Bernstein, reminded us that:

As Bernstein (1983, p.107–108) points out, hermeneutic philosophies go beyond relativism because, although they agree that different traditions or forms of life may be incommensurable, they are more concerned with how they can be rationally compared, if not evaluated. (p. 443)

In this sense, hermeneutics is *comparative* and not *evaluative*. This is in keeping with the pedagogical and epistemological nature of LS in which different personal perspectives and prejudices (students and teachers alike) should be upheld and respected, instead of being evaluated, discriminated, coercively channeled or marginalized.

The third notion concerns the imaginative productivity of the hermeneutical notion of “projection of multiple possibilities.” Hermeneutics implies that each of us can have our own interpretation or understanding of a phenomenon. Each time one interprets a text (oral text, written text, or a human experience), one is not reproducing the original meanings of the text itself, but rather is producing new meanings to add to the surplus of information or ideas already abound. In this case, interpretation is *productive* and not *reproductive*. The American philosopher Greene (2003) also urged us to use our imagination to allow us to think of things as if they could be otherwise:

it is the capacity that allows a looking through the windows of the actual towards alternative realities. (p. 63)

In this connection, for the case of LS, hermeneutics calls for a multiple interpretation of meanings and imaginative use of students’ as well as teachers’ projected capability to project ways of addressing issues and problems that are of interest in LS.

Fourthly, the hermeneutical notion of “fusion of horizons” is also considered as important to the pedagogy of LS. In the hermeneutical tradition, it is perceived that the others would help us see our partiality or our blind spots. At the same time, each of us has something to offer to the others when it comes to understanding things. In our words, we have a kind of give-and-take situation. Whatever prejudices or preconceptions we bring to our conversation will have to stand up to scrutiny when they encounter others’ prejudices. And whatever that emerges in our conversation, it will move beyond where we started off when the conversation began. In the end, what is most important is not a consensual conformity of ideas between the two conversational parties, but rather a kind of mutual enlargement of the horizons of both parties which may still remain different. In other words, hermeneutics does not aim for a sense of complete identity in which “I” become “the other” and “the other” becomes “I.” The reason is because only this kind of genuine dialogue with “the other” can alter us by making us discard the very prejudices that we have harbored and which also constructed our very self and reconstituted the truth we have established to connect our self to the rest of the world. Gadamer (1989) called this the “fusion of horizons.”

Bakhtin's *Carnival* and *Heteroglossia*

It is here that the author would like to draw parallel reference between hermeneutics and Bakhtin's (1981) notion of "heteroglossia." Bakhtin also believed that different human groups speak differently because they conceive of experience differently. In defining "heteroglossia," Morson (1998) drew our attention to the fact that each profession, generation, locale, ethnic group and people with their countless shifting identities will have their own characteristic vocabularies, ways of addressing others' styles and phenomena because they think and understand the world in their own way. Sandywell (1998) posited that it is this "unfinalizability" of speech that reflects the multi-temporalized texture of social existence (p. 197). In the following, Bakhtin succinctly portrayed the advantages of a multi-vocal dialogical community context:

Thus at any given moment of its historical existence, language is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth, all given a bodily form. These "languages" of heteroglossia intersect each other in a variety of ways, forming new socially typifying "languages." (p. 291)

To achieve a *heteroglot* state of dialogue and community, the false impression of stability and unity created by established authorities and official ideologies should be shattered first of all. And instead a "carnival" state should be rebuilt in its place which will create "conditions of fluidity and ambiguity that elevates change and becoming" (Burkitt, 1998, p. 176). The carnivalesque is in brief a celebration of dialogue and community. It liberates people and brings them together and induces them to participate in communal living (Jung, 1998). Gardiner (1992) also remarked that:

Carnival broke down the formalities of hierarchy and the inherited differences between different social classes, ages and castes, replacing established traditions and canons with a "free and familiar" social interaction based on the principles of mutual cooperation, solidarity and equality. (p. 52)

The three principles of *cooperation*, *solidarity* and *equality* exactly spell out the kind of school ethos and organizational structure that the author has been trying to portray here in arguing for a whole-school approach for LS.

In the following, the author shall outline features of a whole-school approach of implementing LS that is built on the premises of Gadamer's (1989) "fusion of horizons" and Bakhtin's (1981) "heteroglossia." The author would like to argue that it is better to outline here the general principles of implementing a whole-school hermeneutical dialogical community model for LS instead of pinpointing steadfast steps, or strategies or procedures because of the multi-faceted dimensions and possibilities that could be projected from a whole-school model.

A Whole-School Hermeneutical Learning Community Approach

As mentioned above, Nias et al. (1992) stressed the importance of institutional visions, school structures, resources, and leadership as the facilitating or inhibiting factors for whole-school curriculum development. For school structures, they can be formal or informal school structures. Informal structures like informal gatherings, after-school classroom conversations, and "breakfast talk time" often complement formal meetings and structures. Formal structures include teaching and/or planning teams, critical friends, small curriculum working parties, frequent and regular staff meetings, INSET (in-service teacher training) meetings or days, school projects, exchange visits, open evenings and assemblies. They argue that school structures must build in the following three principles in order that a whole school curriculum can flourish — *interaction*, *communication* and *decision-making*. In a nutshell, the three principles constitute, according to Nias et al., favorable conditions for a whole-school attempt to acculturate the two ethos of "learning what" and "learning how" which are critical to the success of a whole-school curriculum development. To encapsulate, teachers should be given the opportunity and support to demonstrate any personal "good" practice of teaching LS. These "good" practices are then disseminated or demonstrated before the department or school staff for sharing and reciprocal feedback through the school's support. Teachers' professional learning and growth can only turn into

the benefit of the whole school when the three principles of *interaction*, *communication* and *decision-making* act as the veins of a tree, figuratively speaking, to deliver the new nourishment to the rest of the tree.

The following are the principles proposed by the author that incorporate the notions of “fusions of horizons” and “heteroglossia” into a whole-school curriculum development model that is for the good of the development of LS.

Treasure as Many Different Expertise and Perspectives as Possible

Teachers are considered here as reflexive agents who learn from others’ perspectives and practices. In a whole-school collaborative learning community context, each teacher can contribute their own expertise and perspectives to the teaching of LS study. The summation of the gains arising from collating and disseminating a wide array of views, expertise, and modes of inquiry of the staff of the whole school is definitely more than that of a handful of trained LS teachers. Nias et al. (1992) found out that a “whole school” approach of pedagogy or curriculum development will have the advantage of having greater impact on “the nature, direction and pace of individual learning” (p. 135). In other words, a teacher can learn from his or her colleagues a more “subtle” way of approaching an LS topic, or he or she can find that there are multiple ways of pursuing an LS inquiry topic, or he or she might find that their pace of learning how to teach LS or understanding an LS topic be quickened if there is some input from others, deliberately or unconsciously. The school management should establish a kind of school structure in the form of a formal dissemination and discursive “platform” for cross-fertilization and sensitization of ideas and practices related to the teaching of LS among school staff. Opportunity (in formal and informal sessions, like informal peer learning sessions, or formal departmental, year or team curriculum meetings) should be given to willing teachers to try out and demonstrate innovative methods of teaching LS and to exchange critical views of LS issues with other colleagues. All teaching staff and students alike should be reminded that in the eyes of hermeneutists, differences are regarded and treasured as productive divergence or diversity rather than deviance.

Shared Beliefs and Goals Generate Growth and Change

If a school adopts a whole-school curriculum development model for LS, the school management has to, first and foremost, engineer good curriculum leadership to drive home the message to all staff that an LS curriculum is a “thinking curriculum” that will be for the benefit of all students and teachers of all disciplines. Themes commonly taught in LS like “equity,” “citizenship,” “globalization,” and “justice” must be given a lot of publicity and discursive space across the whole school to win the hearts and mind of the majority of the staff. This may result in a kind of shared visions in which non-LS teachers in the school can all contribute toward. One case in point is the development of generic skills like reading skills, communication skills, analytical skills, and inquiry skills in which teachers from other disciplines can contribute by incorporating those competences in their subject curriculum. At the same time, the school management should try to inculcate institutional values that will be conducive to the development and implementation of the LS curriculum.

In pinpointing the advantage of planning and implementing a whole-school curriculum, the National Curriculum Council (1989) of the United Kingdom issued the document *A Framework for the Primary Curriculum*, which provided evidence that more effective and coherent learning on the part of students and teachers alike will take place throughout a school where there is a shared understanding of, and commitment to, curricular goals. Nias et al. (1992) also reminded us that in schools where the beliefs and goals are running counter to each other, the energy and will-power of all those concerned will be drained away due to internal conflicts. For instance, teachers teaching LS subject who are advocating a child-centered discovery mode of pedagogy will feel their effort thwarted when their colleagues in the other subject departments are teaching in a didactic or transmission mode. In a “whole school” curriculum ethos, it will involve some degree of striving at a whole-school consensus of beliefs and goals which normally involves a compromise over values and aspirations among different staff members. Nias et al. pointed out for us the impact of such concerted efforts and shared beliefs:

If the compromise is voluntarily espoused, the resulting sense of collective aspiration strengthens and enriches staff members by giving them a sense of common purpose. (p. 154)

In the case of beliefs and actions not conforming to one another, the hermeneutical notion of “fusion of horizons” illuminates for us that it is not ultimately important that a consensus must be reached as long as people in the process of exchange of ideas feel that their ideas are being respected by others and most important of all, their original ideas or personal horizons are transformed, enhanced, and broadened after conversations with others. Thus, one feels that one’s perspectives and way of thinking have “grown” and developed. Only in this context of whole-school systematic support and sharing of institutional visions on LS can multiple possibilities of curricular and pedagogical experiments in teaching LS be generated.

Continuity and Coherence

In an environment of team-teaching and collaborative planning, values and goals embedded in subjects like LS can have a better chance of enjoying continuity and coherence by all the school personnel. All the school staff from the Headship to ancillary staff will work in alignment with the principles and values espoused by the LS subject. School personnel from top to bottom can, for example, act as role models for students and practice values espoused by the LS curriculum like equity, democracy, and civic-mindedness. Even with the departure of some trained LS expert teachers, the other teaching staff would have no problem in adhering to the communally agreed principles and practices of teaching LS in the school. A fluid and free-flowing stream of ideas exchanging between staff of different disciplines in formal and informal channels and an ethos of communality would not only produce continuity and coherence, but also avoid “balkanization” and promotes transparency of LS goals and sharing visions for the good of the subject’s renewal and betterment.

Pooling Together School Resources to Expand the Spielraum and Habitus for Teachers of LS

In a collaborative learning community, people with different “prejudices,” pedagogical orientations, praxis, and actions have the freedom and space to influence and be influenced by others. In such a habitus, the curriculum and pedagogy of a school will see a lot of

initiatives and experiments either inspired by others or are self-driven, with the result that the curriculum “space” of the whole school context will be expanded. Elliott (1998), based on Stenhouse’s (1975) premise that curriculum can be seen as “hypothesis to be tested,” posited that self-reflexive teachers should see curriculum as “experimental action hypotheses to test over a particular period of time and to be further modified in the light of evidence” (p. 39). This notion of curriculum as experiment is also in keeping with the hermeneutical notion of “projection of multiple possibilities.” Only when the whole school supports such kind of imaginative pedagogical mentality would the curriculum space or what Roth (2002) called the “Spielraum”³ of teachers enlarged and enhanced. If the “Spielraum” is expanded, the habitus for teaching LS in the school will also become more favorable and embracing. Thus, it is proposed that the school curriculum leadership should pool together school resources in terms of venue arrangement, teacher time and commitment, materials and equipment for that purpose. A whole-school attempt at resource management and facilitation for this purpose will be more advantageous than the piecemeal, isolated, and insubstantive efforts made by some individual teachers or a small team of teachers. More staff can benefit in their pedagogical knowledge and mindset of teaching LS when the school set aside timeslots and venue for all the staff to listen to some invited experts talk on a particular topic, or see how other schools’ LS teachers teach the same topic, or even to physically visit a place of interest to them for first-hand understanding about an issue.

The case school mentioned earlier also witnessed substantial degree of success when similar whole-school institutional policies, administrative style, and ethos are put into practice.

Concluding Remark

There is no denial that the kind of whole-school development approach for LS curriculum proposed here is to be attained more in a phased and developmental manner than in a “jump-start” fashion. Moreover, school context differs from one school to another, and each school should decide for itself when is the best time to implement a whole-school LS curriculum. Also there is no intention of critiquing the present form of implementing the LS subject — that is, by a handful of specially trained teachers teaching the subject as an independent subject in secondary

schools. We have heard about stories of how a handful of teachers have pioneered some curriculum project and in the end led to a successful whole-hearted support and embracement of that innovative idea by the whole school.

There are both pros and cons in adopting any one of the three approaches. Despite the avowed benefits of a whole-school approach, we can easily discern that there are a number of hurdles to overcome before we could reach that kind of “fusion of horizons.” For example, it usually takes a very lengthy time for the school staff to take to appreciating others’ perspectives and accommodating them into their own practice. Also such a hermeneutical learning community calls for a genuinely democratic school ethos and an egalitarian work force not vying for personal interests but always weighing the interest of the students in every of their consideration. This approach also necessitates the staff of the whole school instead of just a handful of them to undergo some in-service teacher development programs to acquire the desirable teacher mindset and pedagogical competences for teaching and understanding LS. This may prove too daunting for those non-LS teachers in the beginning. Nevertheless, in hermeneutics, it is believed that through such a “give-and-take” dialogical conversation with others, one will know about oneself and in the end one will transcend one’s former self and the whole society and human race will benefit. Rome cannot be built in one day. Despite some of the hurdles it has to go over, a whole-school approach can promise to be the one step in the right direction for the LS subject for it enhances the “Spielraum” of individual LS teachers’ self-understanding and contributes to a whole-school collaborative inculcation of a favorable habitus for the development of the LS curriculum.

Notes

1. According to Baert (1998), “habitus” is a notion couched by Bourdieu and is related to the kind of practical knowledge human beings possess and use to master the logic of everyday life. This kind of personal knowledge is neither conscious nor unconscious and is seen as the “taken-for-granted” practical logic of people’s daily existence. And “habitus” refers to an acquired generative scheme of dispositions. Dispositions generate practices, perceptions, or bodily “hexis,” adjusted to the constraints of the social world in which the habitus has emerged. Hence different social backgrounds will produce a different habitus. The habitus provides a

- “feeling for the game.” It makes it possible for people to develop any number of strategies attuned to an infinite number of situations.
2. Hargreaves and Macmillan (1995) define the form of “balkanized” teachers’ culture as those patterns that mainly consist of teachers working neither in isolation nor with most of their colleagues as a whole school, but in smaller subgroups within the school community and manifesting the following four characteristics of (1) low permeability, (2) high permanence, (3) personal identification, and (4) political complexion. In a nutshell, in balkanized cultures, subgroups are strongly insulated from each other and thus teachers’ opportunities for professional learning and exchange occur mainly within their own subgroup. What teachers know and believe in one department can become quite different from what teachers know and believe in another. Then subgroup members have a strong subject identity and this undermines the capacity for empathy and collaboration with others outside the subgroup. Finally, the balkanized cultures have political implications for promotion and status. Resources frequently are distributed between and realized through membership of these teacher subcultures.
 3. Roth (2002) studied how mastery teachers could have so many different possibilities opened to them for their deliberation and action at certain pedagogical situations even *without* much reflection. He attributes it to Dreyfus’s (1991) idea of “Spielraum” which he refers to as the “room to maneuver in the current situation in terms of the range of possibilities that he or she [a teacher] identifies without reflection” (p. 62). In other words, it is the room which teachers have developed over the years that gives them the space and possibilities for their maneuver.

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