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The Four Common Myths of CLD:

"Inspirations from CLAP@JC's Hong Kong Benchmarks for Career and Life Development"

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Hong Kong Benchmarks for Career & Life Development (HKBM)

Career and life development (CLD) education has become a major concern for schools worldwide. In 2013 and 2014, the UK's Gatsby Foundation commissioned Sir John Holman and his research team to conduct a ground-breaking international study aimed at exploring the essential elements of high-quality career guidance. The research team conducted in-depth visits to six jurisdictions that are regarded as good-performing systems in the development of career guidance. They are namely Finland, Germany, Hong Kong China, Ireland, the Netherlands and Ontario, Canada. The study was to identify the good features in CLD education among these six regions. The research team compiled the key practical elements of good practice, and combined them with the theoretical support from the relevant literature. In 2014, the team finally concluded eight benchmarks for career guidance, known as Gatsby Benchmarks. These benchmarks aim to serve as measurable standards for schools to engage in ongoing self-evaluation in order to improve their CLD education provisions, ultimately helping young people achieve a smooth transition from school to the workplace (Holman, 2014). Building on these "World-class Standards" (Note 1), CLAP@JC tailored them to the specific context of Hong Kong schools and relevant policies to form the ten "Hong Kong Benchmarks for Career & Life Development" (abbreviated as "HKBM" in this article) (Holman & Yip, 2020).

Note (1): This set of benchmarks is described as the "World-class Standards". Source: Department for Education UK (2017) Careers Strategy: making the most of everyone's skills and talents. (P.18)

“HKBM” The Ten Benchmarks:

Core:

1. A Stable and Visible Career and Life Development Policy
2. Professional Competencies and Leadership

Student Focused:

3. Learning from Multiple Pathways Information
4. Addressing the Needs of Each Student
5. Student Engagement and Co-creation
6. Personal Guidance for Developing Career Roadmaps

Enabling Environment:

7. Linking Curriculum Learning to Career and Life Development
8. Meaningful Encounters with the Workplace
9. Meaningful Encounters with Further and Higher Education
10. Parent Engagement and Support

The HKBM provides schools and practitioners with a clear and easy-to-practice framework for implementing ‘good’ CLD education. It not only enables school leaders, panel heads and career masters, teachers and various stakeholders to understand "what good looks like", but also, through the standard-based content of the framework and operation-based discussion process, allows professional reflection on the strategic development of relevant areas, which could in turn yield ample practical wisdoms within the schools. Through the emergence of HKBM, we can gain some initial insights into several common myths or misconceptions held by schools about CLD education in Hong Kong contexts.

These myths (or misconceptions) are discussed in detail below:

Myth 1: "The responsibility for promoting career guidance/ CLD education in schools lies solely upon the Career Guidance Masters and their teams. For other school leaders and teachers, they only need to focus on tasks related to subject teaching, moral education, pastoral guidance and disciplines?"

Traditionally, Hong Kong schools have a rigid division of labour with clearly defined duties and responsibilities of individual teachers. Under such contexts, most Career Guidance teachers have become the sole drivers of career and life planning education in their schools. However, following the local education reforms in the school system and aligning with the ever-evolving complex world of work, the Career Guidance with strong focus on services that provide job and further study information and counseling, has been expanded into a much broader scope known as "career and life development education" (CLD). This expected transformation has brought great challenges to the Career Guidance Team in Hong Kong schools which often needs to work alone, gradually resulting to a "Working in Silo" effect (Education Bureau, 2018). Benchmarks 1 and 2 of the HKBM underscore the importance of "A Stable and Visible Career and Life Development Policy" and "Professional Competencies and Leadership", to address such common pain points. According to CLAP@JC experience, the active participation of school principals or vice-principals or other senior management team members, in the self-evaluation and planning meetings for CLD education is strategically important. Based on the project's qualitative data, senior management roles in CLD has been significantly changed under HKBM from *resource suppliers* and *policy balancers* to *co-creators* and *co-evaluators* of CLD as well as active culture shapers of the school in a wider scope. The CLD benchmarks (i.e. HKBM) provide a systematic self-evaluation platform to catalyse the school, as a *coherent* whole, to fully demonstrate their *mobilizing* and *networking* capabilities under the active blessings from senior management. During this multi-layered process, the Career Guidance Section takes up the central role of *coordination*, and hence it naturally becomes an effective agent to motivate the whole school to participate in CLD education under individual school contexts and needs.

In fact, a sound career and life development education should be the common good for the whole school. It not only advances the cultivation of students a positive sense of future, but also enhances students' motivation for subject learning and personal development of values education, thereby creating synergistic effects. This helps open up "the body's pressure points and connections" in the school organisation structure and write a new chapter in education by pulling together all functional teams of a school to collaborate on this mission. This also aligns with the Education Bureau's guidelines (2014; 2021) and echoes the concept of "Whole-school Approach". Judging from the experience of CLAP@JC, the HKBM actually helps or supports teachers from silo.

Myth 2: "In view of promoting career exploration or career-related experiences, schools must indiscriminately make every student participate in job internship?" ('Career exploration = job Internship or placement?')

Since the introduction of the "Learning to Learn" curriculum reform, "career-related experiences" has become one of the five essential learning experiences in school curriculum in Hong Kong and these activities should aim at learning, such as understanding certain job types, their demands and expectations on employees, examples of up-to-date career paths, and trends of today's working world. The emphasis is on learning and reflection on the world of work, rather than extensive job-matching, such as matching each student with a "trial occupation"?

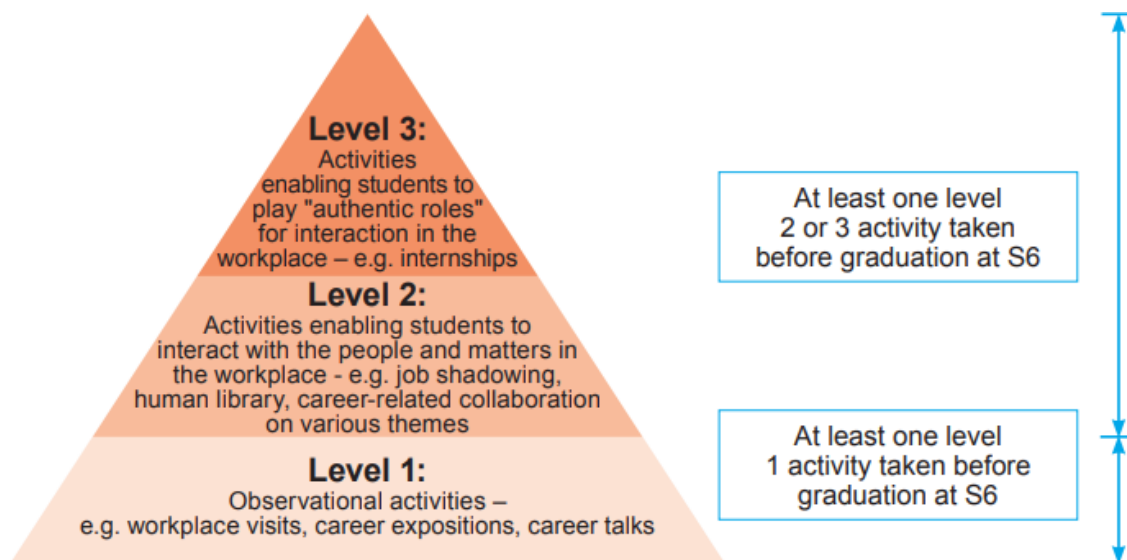
First, the title, "Meaningful Encounters with the Workplace" of Benchmark 8 (BM8) in HKBM carries profound meaning to career exploration. It is rightly pointed out that a "Meaningful Encounters" of career-related experiences encompasses not only observation and active participation by the students, but also students' active interaction with the people and environment in the workplace. Benchmark 8 makes a distinguishment among different levels of work-based learning activities in terms of degree of "interaction" (both quality and quantity) between young individuals and the world of work. There are three levels of activities in BM 8, namely Level 1 which refers to observation-based activities (e.g. career talks, workplace visits), Level 2 which covers activities highlighting "interactions with the world of work" (e.g. career projects with business mentors, job shadowing) and Level 3 which mainly refers to those activities that require students to take on an "authentic roles"

to interact in the real-life workplace (Figure 1). The contextualized "international standards" upholds the need of career exploration and career-related learning in secondary education through requiring 90% of secondary school students to take part in at least one activity from both Level 1 and Level 2 or 3 by graduation. This requirement also aligns with "the spirit" of Education Bureau's relevant guidelines that career exploration does not necessarily equate to internships where work experience in schools is not compulsory, and opportunities are scarce. Government statistics revealed that most Hong Kong secondary school students continue studying in further education (i.e. 93%, EDB, 2020). Assuming students will have more in-depth and focused work experience opportunities in further studies, secondary schools in Hong Kong should adopt the concepts of "meaningful encounters" to facilitate their students with a diverse range of experiential activities to gain a foundation and broad-based knowledge of the world of work, such as work attitudes, characteristics of certain industry, workplace etiquette and value-oriented life stories. At the same time, students may also learn the specific hard skills and knowledge of certain job types.

Many Western countries have long-established policies and supporting infrastructure for students to gain compulsory work experience through internships. However, the outcomes of work experience vary with only medium evidence strengths (Hughes et al 2016) and it highly depends on various factors such as the cooperation of individual companies or workplaces, student motivation, age requirements and timely intervention and support from teachers. This suggests that work experiences, such as internships, may not necessarily result in expected learning outcomes, or turn out to be a meaningful encounter. On the contrary, schools especially in Hong Kong are more comfortable to design "meaningful encounter" activities (BM8 Level 2 or 3) with the emphasis on students' needs and setting clear expected learning outcomes for building relevant knowledge and skills, especially transferable skills. Evidence shows that students are helped to reflect on and gain inspirations for future career development, achieving the effects of "Meaningful Encounters" with the workplace according to local database and in UK (Careers Enterprise Company 2021; P.3-17). Regarding internship experiences (i.e. Level 3 activities), career teachers can strategically plan in accordance with school-based circumstances to provide optimal opportunities to some most-needy students through alumni and school networks

(see Figure 1). In summary, nowadays young people's career exploration is a lengthy and complex process within the current life-long learning framework in Hong Kong, experiential learning-based activities can indeed lay the "first touchpoint" foundation for students' career development when they are still in secondary school. After all, the heart of these activities is learning about self and workplace, not narrowly on the occupation itself, as clearly elaborated in the HKBM.

Figure 1: The 3-level activities of Benchmark 8 – Meaningful Encounters with the Workplace



Myth 3: "Whole School Approach in CLD education = Every teacher in school must take part in CLD? Is this interpretation correct?"

The Education Bureau published the "Guide on Life Planning Education and Career Guidance for Secondary Schools" (EDB 2014; 2021), encouraging schools to implement life planning education in a "whole-school approach" model. However, the whole-school approach does not necessarily mean that all teachers or every single subject panel needs to participate uniformly. The essence of the so-called "whole-school approach model" is to prevent the career guidance team from "working in silo" to achieve the noble aim of life planning education under whole person development. In fact, the Education Bureau guidelines has explicitly clarified that, "Life planning education and career guidance services are not only the responsibility of the career guidance team. The provisions should

be led by school leaders, coordinated and monitored by career guidance staff, and require class teachers, subject teachers and other school personnel to support."

When schools implement high-quality life planning education, there are different levels of teacher participation depending on individual school circumstances. The key leveraging dimensions are (1) Strengthening the participation of Principals/ Senior Management (vertical connections); and (2) Coordinating with other committees/ teams to build Lateral Win-Win agendas (horizontal connections) -- "Let's produce better work together; Gaining Achievements Together" (e.g. career team and subject panels organising DSE subject tasters with CLD elements for S3 students). There are many collaborations with certain interested subject panels that can achieve "mutual benefits" under the HKBM framework. The existing baseline data collected under CLAP@JC also shows that good school based CLD education has a positive and significant correlation with students' "motivation," emphasis on learning, need for academic achievement, and "attitude toward school," etc., and most importantly, it is closely related to *academic subject learning*.

Based on the HKBM-oriented practices and qualitative research findings, HKBM enables schools to expand the conventional role of principals (and senior management) on CLD education and can 'catalyse' a unique "whole-school approach" with added values to existing CLD work. It is also found anecdotally that when school's senior management and career team maintain close communication under HKBM, it is likely adopting "distributed leadership" approaches, which would benefit the schools to foster collaborative culture in general as well as a more flexible, CLD-conducive ecology.

Myth 4: "High-ability students should only focus on entering university entry; Their CLD options should be as narrow as possible to focus their efforts in getting the best results in the HKDSE for prestigious degrees or colleges?"

In the Chinese society, schools have traditionally focused on the exam-oriented academic performance. Especially for students from the high-ability group, "getting into university" and "studying a prestigious degree" are seemingly the *only* options after schooling. In fact, such conception is not unique to the Chinese society. In Western countries, there is always

a conceptual notion of the so-called 'College Wage Premium' (Sandel, M. 2020). The philosophy behind the notion broadly shared with the Eastern one which is firmly grounded with the tradition of "life education" in Greater China. (Lee, Yip & Kong, (2021) P.27,252). The CLD in the East has always carries the cultural connotation based on Confucian heritage to enable a person to "settle down and develop own life values in attaining divine purpose" (安身立命) (Jin, 2015). Such mindset is perfectly understandable but in current contexts, it is impractical to regard public examination results as the only yardstick to judge a person's success and 'stifle' their other possibilities in terms of career and life development.

First, it is quite unreasonable that "going to university" (or entering for a certain degree) becomes an only-possible goal of student development in current HK systems. In view of the continuous decline in the student population and the boom of overseas study opportunities, studying in universities is less difficult. In addition, the provision of diversified multiple pathways under the new post-secondary education system, it is no longer difficult for them to "getting into university" in the end as different life-long learning paths may lead to the same destination.

In this light, when providing personal career counseling, there is no need to forcibly narrow students' possible future career possibilities as revealed by the HKBM. Instead, students should constantly learn and reflect from "Multiple Pathways Information" (HKBM, Benchmark 3) since the world of work and hence the higher education landscape are constantly changing. Under the big wave of automation and social change, some of the "prestigious degree programmes" and "prestigious jobs" that were labeled in the past, may no longer be applicable now. Therefore, young people's career development must not be over-confined in the rapidly changing world of work. On the contrary, schools should pay attention to "addressing the needs of each student (HKBM, Benchmark 4), through providing students with high-quality opportunities for reflection, exploration, and development according to their personal characteristics and interests, broaden their "possibilities", and cultivate flexibility of their *thinking habits* in life planning. Such kind of broadly defined career planning/ career guidance is more updated and is also more

worthy to be crowned as the most important kind of "education" offered to our young people to face the ever-changing future.

The CLAP@JC's "Hong Kong Benchmarks for Career and Life Development", which is consistent with international standards, pays great concerns on positive development of students' sense of future and hope. For instance, it requires each student be exposed to a wide range of career and life options before high school (HKBM, Benchmarks 3 & 8) and encourage them to have no less than three possible CLD roadmaps (HKBM, Benchmark 6), including some alternative possible paths (including slashers). Indeed, from the perspective of CLD and well-beings, it is the very first time for our secondary school students to make far-reaching plans for their lives. Undoubtedly, in the future, most of the younger generation will have a much longer and more complicated career life paths. As their life companions (whether teachers or parents), it is crucial to give them more positive supports and encouragements, show them the possibilities on their CLD paths, and thus reduce their pressure of this 'first-time' attempt. In addition to teachers, HKBM-Benchmark 10 also explains the importance of "Parent Engagement and Support", allowing parents to cooperate with the school to help their children gradually take over the "Seal of Command in Life", as well as enhance their self-worth/ confidence during the process, and learn how to integrate work, leisure and learning in future life.

Conclusion

The systematic and well-localised HKBM provides an easy-to-implement framework to guide schools to interpret the meaning of "good career and life development" based on their own school-based contexts. The success of the implementation highly depends on the participation of enthusiastic critical friends. With evidence, the CLAP@JC's cross-sectoral critical friend support work closely together with school leaders, teachers, and students to achieve students' dreams. CLD education under HKBM has a far-reaching significance to Hong Kong education landscape. It not only helps students make positive forward-looking plans for themselves, their society and country, but also can make their lives more exciting and self-fulfilling.

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