

Stories about "From Good to Great" :

The Hong Kong Case of Building a Common Systematic Self-Improvement Model for Career and Life Development in Schools

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"To preserve one's heart, and nourish one's personality, is the way to serve Heaven. When neither a premature death nor long life causes a man any doublemindedness, but he waits in the cultivation of his personal character for whatever issue; this is the way in which he secures one's place in the world and establishes one's life."

(Mencius-Jin Xin I; 3rd Century B.C.E.)

The importance of Career and Life Development (CLD) among youth has been ever enhancing worldwide. Since the ground-breaking emergence of the Gatsby Foundation's 'Good Career Guidance' research authored by Sir John Holman (2014), the need of building a concrete and comprehensive career education in schools has unequivocally become a priority. As such, the world-renowned Gatsby Benchmarks, as well as its adaptations, have become the blueprint of career-related learning in several jurisdictions, including that of the United Kingdom.

In my short essay, "In Search for Effective Career and Life Development: The Map, Friends and Stories" (July 2020), it was pointed out that despite the long history of career guidance, schools in Hong Kong need a common map, which is well-tested by experts and educators, to illustrate "what good looks like" in career education. The essay was written during the time right before the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust launched its second phase of CLAP@JC in late 2020 to try out the adapted Gatsby Benchmarks, known as the Hong Kong Benchmarks for Career and Life Development (HKBM) (Holman and Yip, 2020). The response from schools was very positive in adopting the HKBM-based systematic self-improvement model.

HKBM has given the CLAP@JC, as well as schools, a new dimension of looking at improving the standard of CLD provisions. A new paradigm of 'from good to great' is emerging when school adopts HKBM as the core value of actions, which has 'naturalistically' been translated to various activities and policies, and eventually transformed the school community as a whole and at different levels. Despite COVID, evidence shows that schools (irrespective of their bandings) has made an average improvement of 25% in CLD effectiveness after adopting HKBM. The self-improvement model is also shown to be effective, supported by the outcomes of random longitudinal samples indicating that students' career readiness (Dodd, et al., 2021) demonstrated significant increases while the counterparts from non-BM schools decreased.

Now the project has more than one-hundred and twenty secondary schools joining the journey of self-improvement and co-witnessing the beauties of 'collective teacher efficacy' (Hattie & Zierer, 2018) as well as cross-sector collaboration that directly and indirectly catalysed by HKBM for building positive sense of future among our youths.

What makes HKBM successful in Hong Kong? It is surely a research question to pursue in-depth for a longer run. There are perhaps at least five specific "change drivers" (Fullan, 2021) to explain the "HKBM improvement story", borrowing Michael Fullan's latest bestseller, 'The Right Drivers for Whole System Success':

1. Good alignment with government policies:

HKBM aligns well with various Government policies related to CLD (Yip, 2020 b).

Specific policy themes or documents are listed below as examples:

- a. Guide on Life Planning Education & Career Guidance in Schools (second edition) (2021)
- b. School Self-evaluation (SSE) in the schools' quality assurance and accountability mechanisms
- c. Curriculum guides and specific policies (including Other Learning Experiences, Student Learning Profile, Values education, STEAM education)

2. Focusing Equality investments (Fullan 2021, pp. 27-31):

HKBM offers a reliable map for careers and life education that reflects both local characteristics and global standards. Talent development (including quality CLD) is a crucial strategy for a jurisdiction's competitiveness. The overall principles are firmly rooted from the belief of education for all.

3. Focusing on 'System-ness' (ibid, pp.32-35):

HKBM provides a concrete and succinct framework to enable school leaders to follow and learn, especially in a high teacher turnover period. In addition, HKBM's ten interlocking guiding principles provide concise descriptions of the expected quality, quantity, scope, and diversity illustrated with tangible desirable outcomes in CLD education through system learning.

4. Emphasising Learning and Well-being (ibid, pp.8-19)

HKBM promotes an agency-focused (rather than merely activity-based) and youth development model that emphasises multi-level empowerment of school organisations, from principals, career leaders, teachers to students. Like many education innovations, a good CLD requires conducive policies, infrastructure, resource-time re-allocation, and environments (including designated communities of practice) to yield the best results. Evidence shows that the key is to build 'sense of agency' as well as develop related values, attitudes, skills and knowledge among different key players for CLD improvement in each school as a coherent whole.

5. Highlighting social intelligence (ibid pp.20-28):

HKBM encompasses effective cross-sector/ multi-agency collaboration to enhance positive social trust (Fukuyama, 1995) and 'lateral energy' (Hargreaves, 2003) that

enables smooth transitions from school to work among youths. The model introduces 'critical friends' from education, youth work and enterprise sectors into the strategic core in schools' self-improvement journey.

All in all, HKBM and its ten guiding principles remind school educators that student diversity is more to be celebrated than to be catered, especially in CLD. It is particularly true in co-creating our students' future study and career paths which will be unimaginably diverse and non-linear. In terms of 21st century's school-to-work transitions, the existing multiple pathways in both the local and global contexts will become increasingly complex. Our new generations should entitle a much earlier and stronger intervention to nurture their habits of mind in proactively developing their own career aspirations and skills, while they are still in school. HKBM is perfect to serve as the holistic solution in paving such educational foundations for them to ongoingly 'author' their futures. Under such a rigorous framework, schools can connect inwardly between functional teams or initiatives as well as they can outwardly network with workplaces and the community effectively. From our invaluable CLAP@JC experience, I viewed that HKBM stories witnessed by multitudes of stakeholders are indeed the schools' success stories of coherence-making, and the collective will of self-improvement among professionals. As Sir John Holman says, "As we discovered, good career guidance means linking different activities together to form a coherent whole." (Holman, 2014, p5)

January 2024

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