Guidance Approach to Student Reporting System

The rationale and brief of the QEF project: School-based Implementation Model of 'Student Learning Profile': *I Tell You My Story*

Mr. Chung Yiu-bun
Project Coordinator

Mr. Moy Ka-yiu
Assistant Principal
The Church of Christ in China Heep Woh College

Ms. Wong Sau-wai
Gudiance Mistress
SKH Bishop Hall Jubilee School

Mr. Poon Kwai-choi
SLP Coordinator
United Christian College

"The work of a counsellor (teacher) can therefore be thought of as helping students become authors of the stories that will shape their lives" (Winslade & Monk, 2007, p.76)

Introduction

In most existing local practices, parents receive at least two or three written reports from the school every year. The student reporting system plays a significant role in communicating students' performance to parents. Its communication pattern used to be unilateral. The practice seems to be rather administrational but not educational and students are therefore totally passive during the reporting process. The limited nature of student involvement was also claimed to be one

of the most common weaknesses of student reports (Power and Clark, 2000). Although many innovations have been proposed to improve student learning since the worldwide curriculum reform, the reporting system in many countries and regions

most likely remains in traditional practice and is found weak links in modern learning and teaching practices (Guskey & Bailey, 2001; Haladyna, 1999). This is the reason why there are many critics by scholars that this administration oriented reporting system nowadays is not in line with the pace of the educational reform (Hogan, 1995; Guskey & Bailey, 2001; Stiggins, 2001).

In Hong Kong, under the new senior secondary curriculum starting in 2009, every student is encouraged to develop a 'Student Learning Profile' (SLP) that records his/her learning experiences and achievements before the end of his/her secondary education. Schools are advised to facilitate their students to design their own profile according to the school-based policy. Could the profile facilitate students' learning instead of being just a recording document? Why don't we just make slight changes to enable our students to learn more actively by engaging them in reporting? It will be the most suitable moment for us to make some improvements. "Student-led Conference" with the support by guidance is proposed as an alternative of the reporting practice in this project.

Student-led Conference

"Student-led Conference" simply means having students to conduct conferences with their parents and teachers. During the conference, students are able to share their learning stories, their achievements,

as well as their life goals. They could display their schoolwork or portfolio collection. Discussions on their learning goals, and strategies to achieve the goals are encouraged (Bailey & Guskey, 2001; Benson & Barnett, 2005). It is not new in some overseas and local international schools. Some schools have had more than ten years of experience in this practice. Significant improvement in students' learning[1] is obtained, particularly enhancing students' learning motivation, communication skills, as well as parent involvement in students' learning. Undergoing a guidance programme before the student-led conference could assist students to build up their profiles. Literatures show that using portfolio with guidance support to develop the profile could facilitate student self-regulated learning (Abrami et al., 2008; Chang, 2001; Hadwin et al., 2005; Mittendorff, et al., 2008; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006).

Reflections plus Dialogues

Using portfolio in guidance practice emphasises both the development process for learning and the product for showcase (Magnuson, 1997; Mittendorff et al., 2008). During the process, the strategy proposed could be summarised by the cycle of collection, selection, reflection, recording, planning and action taking (Klenowski, 2002). This guidance portfolio would be an integral part of the school-based guidance curriculum, in which an "Individual Student Planning" (ISP) is included (Mittendorff et al., 2008). Guidance portfolios not only help students reflect, review and assess their own development, but also provide

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[1] Scott Carpenter Middle School, Talent Middle School, East Forsyth High School, Floresville Middle School (More examples could be obtained through http://www.saskschools.ca/~outlook/ltech/report/sl_conf.html)

a forum for communication with parents (Magnuson, 1997). Since 1980, from the perspective of guidance, Neely & Schuley (1980) have already claimed that portfolio process could turn learning experiences into competency development and the portfolio itself will become a "functional" resume. They found that if combining narratives practices (e.g. interviewing), portfolios are particularly meaningful. They do provide more information on those competencies than do traditional resumes. Mittendorff et al. (2008) suggested that guidance portfolio was useful only when used in a dialogical context. Otherwise, it is only a coping behaviour or just for external purposes /credits. "If instruments were not used in a context of dialogue, students perceived them as irrelevant and refrained from using them to reflect on identity or future plans" (Mittendorff et al., 2008, p. 88). Under the framework of the whole school approach to guidance, it could be possible to integrate the reporting system into the scope of guidance.

Guidance Approach

"Guidance approach" is an orientation, attitude, as well as a strategy to take care of students' learning and development. "A guidance approach teaches the skills children need in order to get along with others, express strong feelings in acceptable ways, and solve problems with words – in short to function as citizens of a democracy." (Gartrell, 1994, p. 19). The approach, which fosters the link among teachers, parents and students as an interactive system, underlines the below assumptions (Gartrell, 1994):

✓ Human nature has potential for good;
✓ Democratic atmosphere is the base and the goal;
✓ Interactive nature with good relationship among people is the prerequisite;
✓ More focuses are put on preventive and developmental purposes;
✓ Self-esteem is promoted and supported

Since last decade, the direction of guidance service has gone away from remedial focus, which needs more professional counselling and even therapeutic skills in practice. Instead, the guidance approach is more preventive and developmental oriented. Preventive guidance

is focusing on anticipating the "critical incidents" which students may come across. It is more proactive and teachers are responsible to teach students effective coping strategies (Best, 1999). On the other hand, developmental guidance is usually run by a structured guidance curriculum. It aims to help students develop self-knowledge, self-esteem and character formation so that they are capable to get along well with the people and environment surrounding them.

Other than coping with the SLP policy, "student-led conference" itself is also a form of "Other Learning Experiences" in the new senior secondary curriculum. Through the learning process during preparation, students could acquire necessary techniques of interviews for future career or admission to tertiary institutions. The fruitful SLP document with good performance in interview will certainly be an advantage for being selected. Therefore, the student-led conference may be a good chance for such preparation beforehand.

Story Telling for Meaning Making

The rationale of this project is grounded on the theories of Narrative Approach, which is derived by Constructivism (Reid, 2005). "Telling their stories", everyone could be treated as a unique "Museum" of himself/herself, and accumulates a great deal of knowledge and valuable experiences. He/She could use a wide range of tactics to construct his/her own story. "Stories do not just describe what we see. They construct what we see." (Winslade & Monk, 2007, p.29). School education should enable students to make meaning on what they learnt by presenting their uniqueness in front of different people. It is as similar as being a museum docent. During the preparation process, students are requested to take up the responsibility of setting long-term and short-term goals within a positive communication atmosphere. While they are guided to reflect on what they have learnt, their learning capabilities could also be enhanced. At the same time, the chance of presentation in front of others will be an incentive to motivate their involvement in learning and they then become more responsible for their own development.

The QEF Project

In this project, the three school participants[2] could decide the frequency, the levels, and the modes of implementation according to their needs and contextual background. The project started from a small group of teachers. Teachers from other sections were welcome to join and had more co-operations progressively. Student-led conference would bring a lot of benefits to students in many aspects (Hackmann, 1996, 1997; Stiggins, 1994, Babar & Tolensky, 1996), which are also the aims of this project. They include

✓ Enhancing students' learning motivation to organise and produce quality work
✓ Strengthening students' communication and leadership skills
✓ Enhancing students' self-confidence, self-esteem, and their responsibility of learning
✓ Fostering positive communication among parents, students, and teachers

The project consists of 10 training sessions, one-day outdoor training, plus one inter-school residential over-night camp. The sessions and the outdoor training are designed to fit for the needs of individual school by picking up the materials from a preset manual. The sessions are constructed by a series of group works. Student participants in a school are divided into three groups and the group size is from 5 to 8. Teachers are responsible to lead groups throughout the project. Undergoing the cycle of collection, selection, and reflection, all students in the group are required to review their life history, reflect on their learning experiences, and plan for their future step by step. An art therapist is invited in one session to demonstrate the skills of storytelling and her career journey is expected to open up the minds of the students in the areas of helping profession. Within the group, the students are encouraged to keep positive dialogues in a trustworthy

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[2] C.C.C. Heep Woh College, SKH Bishop Hall Jubilee School, and United Christian College (in alphabetical order)

environment so that they could obtain immediate feedback from the teacher and peers. On the other hand, a framework for story formation is developed to enable the students to create their own stories.

The one-day outdoor training is conducted at the mid-way of the project. Students undertake a series of adventure-based games and they could know more about themselves through the comments by others in the moment of debriefing. During the residential over-night camp, students are provided chances to tell their stories to the fellows with whom they first get in touch. Different professionals are also invited to share their career stories in the camp.

Most student participants are recruited by teachers' recommendations. They are all at S4 level, the first cohort of the new senior secondary reform, and their academic performances are average. A small number of students are attracted by the goals of the project because they think that the training could provide them with advantages for future academic and career development. Although the goals and objectives of the project are well informed, some students may not see the relevance, as there are still three years to go before the end of secondary education. Since the project is also conducted as an extra-curricular activity and the attendance is on voluntary basis, students are easily be engaged by other ad hoc activities or after-school classes. There are also other different reasons, such as lack of commitment and limited space after school, that probably affect the smoothness of the project. Tailor-made measures are rolled out to make improvements during the process. On the other hand, it is easily observed that students are eager to share in the group and harmony relationship has been built among teachers and students throughout the process.

At the end of the training, every student is challenged to host a "student-led conference", in which he/she will share his/her learning experiences and achievements in front of their class teachers and parents. Before the conference, students frankly admitted that they were afraid of sharing their stories in front of the people, who know

them very well. After the completion of the project, an overall evaluation will be conducted to review the process and outcomes of the project. It is expected that more insightful ideas would be suggested to help the future development of this approach.

While schools are wondering what devices or systems are used to store the information, what kinds of templates to present the information, why don't we consider how students could be engaged in this valuable learning experience during the profile formation stage? Reflection and dialogue are essential components of this educational process. Using the process of portfolio combining the practice of student-led conference could be one of the strategies that schools may take careful consideration.

A report may tell a person who he/she is. Like a mirror, the self-concept of a student may be reflected through the report. To ensure positive self-image, guidance with unconditional caring is needed to interpret the message conveyed. The contents of a report card may reflect the essential ingredients of the education system. However, only the ways to present the report could convince our students how important they are. Shea et al. (2005) made a good illustration by using a well-known analogy, a half-filled cup, "we should start by understanding the contents of a cup half full --- children's accumulated ounces of development --- rather than speculating on deficits, or what's missing." (Shea, et al., 2005, p.xiii).

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