

Getting senior schooling to work: Work-based learning in a senior secondary school in Hong Kong.

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Abstract

The Hong Kong senior secondary school system is currently involved in a major reform process. The reform process involves expanding access and offering a broader range of curriculum choices for students including options for vocational education. This is a major challenge in a society where there is an emphasis on examination based academic studies and where vocational education is assigned a low status. This paper explores the initiatives of CCC Kung Lee College, an independent high school in Hong Kong, in introducing work-based learning as part of the new reforms to senior schooling. The College in partnership with the Centre for Lifelong learning Research and Developments at the Hong Kong Institute of Education successfully applied for a Quality Education Fund to implement vocational education programs using work-based learning in hospitality and tourism, IT and business studies. This paper, describes the processes of introducing a work-based learning program. It explores the key challenges of introducing vocational education into a secondary school in Hong Kong.

Introduction: Reforming Senior Secondary Schooling in Hong Kong

This paper discusses the implementation of work-based learning in the new Hong Kong Secondary School Curriculum (NSS) and documents outcomes of the placement of 23 fifteen year old students in an industrial setting as part of their schooling. In the context of Hong Kong schooling this is a new program developed with funding from the Hong Kong government and was designed and implemented by an independent secondary school, CCC Kung Lee College.

The implementation of this new program provides an interesting perspective on the acceptance and importance of vocational education in senior schooling in Hong Kong and also some of the challenges in ahead reforming the curriculum and the nature of the student experience in senior secondary schools in Hong Kong. The status and positioning of vocational education is undergoing some considerable changes as a consequence of the changing nature of the Hong Kong economy. The Hong Kong economy is currently undergoing a transition from being a mass-producer of low valued and cut-priced goods that uses a poorly trained, low paid, low-level skills workforce into one that is centred on high-skills service industries to respond to a knowledge-based global market (Adamson and Morris, 2000; Cheung and Wong, 2006).

These economic changes have also challenged the prevailing elitist model of secondary school curriculum which, to date have been based on narrow notions of disciplines and examination performance for university entry as the prime focus on learning. This new environment and imperatives have created demand for a more egalitarian model of curriculum based on an integrated and progressive mode of conceptualizing valued knowledge and learning (Morris, 2003). The educational reforms proposed by the Hong Kong government have sought to move secondary schooling away from a traditionally closed system, characterized by the curricular transfer of existing knowledge and culture, to a more open system directed to equipping learners with the skills and commitments with which to work effectively in a society characterized by change and contingency (Bagnall, 1999).

Recognizing that the prevailing academic curriculum is failing to prepare the majority of secondary

students for a both satisfying and productive life in contemporary society, a number of educational reforms are being attempted at this level. A current priority in these reforms is the embedding of vocational education in the NSS curriculum – in the form of ‘Applied Learning’ (ApL), (Cheung and Wong, 2006; Education and Manpower Bureau, 2006). Under the new Senior Secondary School Curriculum, ApL is included as elective study for the new Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) being introduced from 2009-10. This is because ApL does not have work placements. Trials of ApL curriculum and its provision have been continuing since 2003 using partnerships between secondary schools and tertiary vocational institutions, principally those which are members of the Federation for Continuing Education in Tertiary Institutions.

ApL is important in introducing the vocational education into the educational experiences of students at secondary school level. However, it is limited in its impact and scope and CCC Kung Lee College has an important role in broadening the scope and of what is available to students. Many students find themselves excluded and marginalized from schooling as a consequence of the traditional exam based curriculum oriented towards university study that dominates Hong Kong schooling. Many students found the orientation towards academic study a disincentive to participate in schooling as the curriculum is almost exclusively directed to university entrance. Also there is an absence of career advice does not assist students negotiate pathways to employment. The need for alternative forms of learning and curriculum that promote alternative pathways and career development is more urgent because the government has capped the number of available university places. There is a pressing need to reduce the exclusionary practices of traditional academic

curriculum and introduce elements to senior schooling that prepare students for the workplace learning and provide them with experiences that engage with their needs and promote a sense of well being and achievement.

Introducing work-based learning into senior secondary schooling in Hong Kong

This paper describes and documents a project entitled "*Work-based Learning in the New Senior Secondary Curriculum: Procedures and Guidelines for Partnerships, Curriculum and Assessment*".

This project directly responded to the policy changes designed to reform secondary education as has been commonly known as work-based learning (WBL). The chief objective of the project was to implement WBL in the program at CCC Kung Lee College. The immediate goal of the project was to support students participating in a pilot of work-based learning involving a placement in selected industries. The longer-term goal, though – and the goal that primarily informs the project was to develop, test and refine an approach to, and guidelines and procedures for, developing and managing WBL projects at senior secondary (SS) level in Hong Kong.

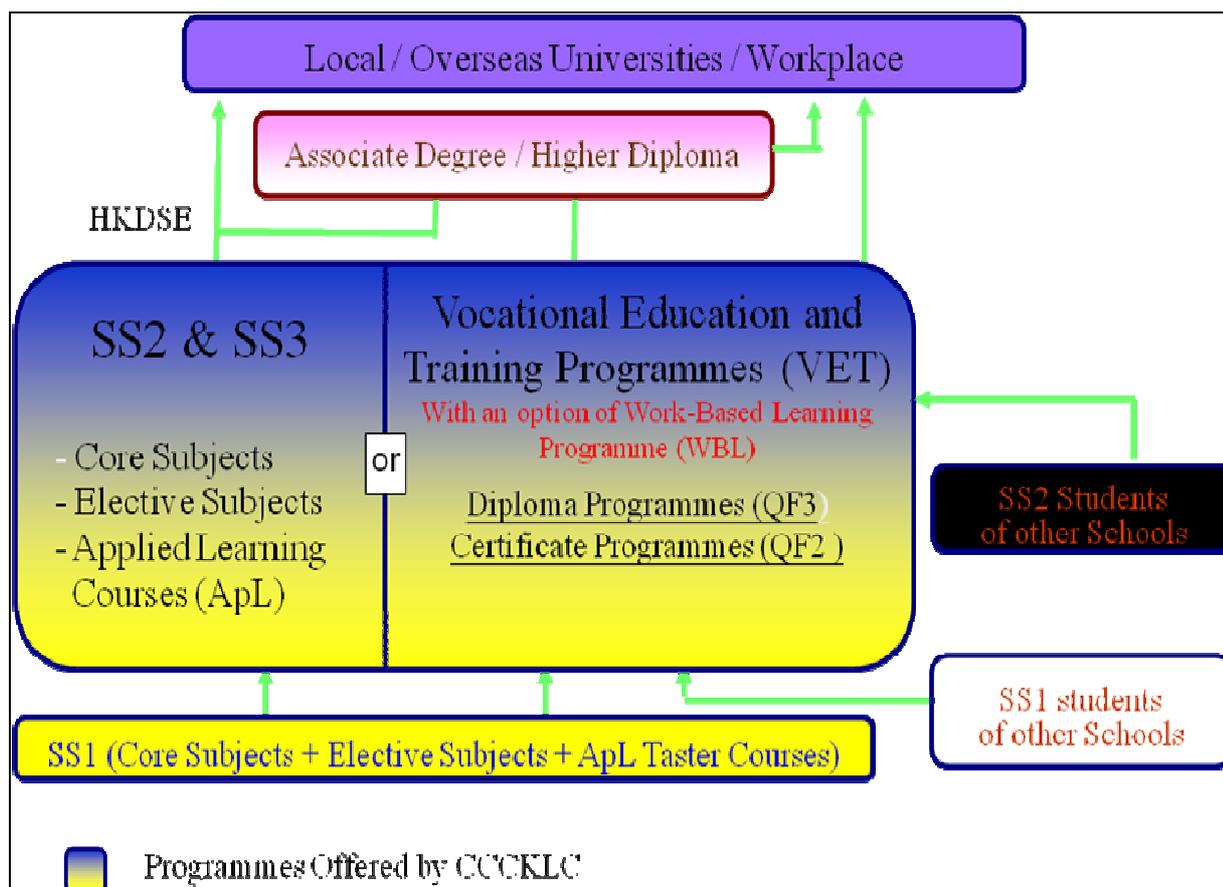
The partners in the project were CCC Kung Lee College and the Centre for Lifelong Learning Research and Development (CLLRD) of Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIEd) and the project was funded by a large 2 year grant from the Hong Kong Quality Education Fund in 2009. The CLLRD was involved in the project as an evaluation partner and as an advisor in implementing WBL.

CCC Kung Lee College has strong background in vocational education and career-related education, which identified it as an important institution in promoting and launching ApL in the NSS. CCC

Kung Lee College is subsidized by the Government under the Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) and has conducted a range of work and career related programs as a part of its portfolio. The College gained its Accredited Post-Secondary College status in October 2003 and in the same year, its first “Higher Diploma in Logistics and Business Practices program” was successfully accredited by the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ, then the HKCAA). In 2007, two newly established diploma program – “*Diploma in Hospitality and Tourism Management*” and “*Diploma in Business and Information Technology*” – was successfully accredited by the HKCAAVQ at Level Three.

In 2009, seven programs including three certificate programs (Certificate in Tourism, Certificate in Art and Design, Certificate in Business), and 4 diploma programs (Diploma in Business, Diploma in Information Technology, Diploma in Hospitality and Tourism Management, and Diploma in Art and Design) were successfully accredited at Level Two and Three respectively by HKCAAVQ. The College offers career-oriented programs with specializations in these programs, as well as offering the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) curriculum. The College also operates post-S5 vocational education and training programs up to Diploma level (QF 3). The relationship between the programs and age levels is documented in figure 1.

Figure 1: CCC Kung Lee Programs and the Qualifications (2009 – 2012).



The College had organized a Workplace Attachment Program (WAP) for its Certificate and Diploma students since 2005. Over 356 students have been placed in local companies and large corporations such as Muji, Fortress, Harbor Plaza and Hotel Metropolis. As a consequence of an invitation from Breakthrough Ltd., CCC Kung Lee College joined as a partner in the offering of a one-year full-time Modern Apprenticeship Program (MAP), which was sponsored by Sun Hung Kai Property Limited (SHK) (for 2 cohorts in 2006-2007 and 2007-2008).

The College pioneered the project in conjunction with Bamberg Institute for Chinese Students (BICS) in Germany having five registered students in vocational education & training programs travel to Bamberg, State of Bavaria, Germany in September 2007 (2007- 2008) and in September 2008 (2008-2009) for a six-month apprenticeship program (SMAG). The merging of the six-month apprenticeship program in Germany with the Diploma programs allows the students to have opportunities to receive and experience vocational training in another country. These students' internship experiences in Germany were awarded the "Diploma in Hospitality and Tourism Management", and "Diploma in Business and Information Technology", which are accredited by HKCAAVQ.

While many of these programs are accredited with Hong Kong authorities, these programs did not have a formal link with the senior school curriculum. These initiatives in Hong Kong and overseas have identified CCC Kung Lee College as having a specialization in work-based learning and this was a key rationale for its success in gaining Quality Education Fund project to integrate WBL in the Hong Kong NSS.

Why is work-based learning being introduced in Hong Kong Schools?

In recent years, educational reforms world-wide have been focused on the contribution of workplace education, and more broadly, on learning for work and how contributes to broader educational outcomes (Brodie and Irving, 2007; Peters and Smith, 1998; Raelin, 2000). Although

variously described, research and development in this field have coalesced under the term 'WBL'.

Broader definitions, such as those advanced by Berg et al. (2007) and Gray et al. (2004), emphasize not only work-place learning that contributes to the development of work skills, aptitudes and understanding, but also that which contributes to individual, social and political development more generally. It is with this sort broader notion of learning that the educational reforms in Hong Kong are concerned with promoting. Through the NSS curriculum, WBL is seen as contributing, not only of students' work-readiness and their capacity to transfer general educational outcomes to the workplace, but also their general educational attainment, especially in generic competencies. This dual role of WBL is exemplified in the Hong Kong educational reforms by the emerging importance of Applied Learning in the NSS curriculum.

WBL not only provides an opportunity for students to understand future career and educational alternatives and pathways, and to plan their future studies and careers, but also to widen their vision and acquire life skills, equipping them to face the challenges of a changing economy and society through co-operative and contextualized learning in real working environments (Streumer and Kho, 2006). The learning contexts of formal schooling and the workplace are demonstrably different (Hager, 2004). Different educational structures, resources and dynamics are thus called for – requiring the development of new types of educational expertise, guidelines and standards for WBL as part of the SS educational experience (Brodie and Irving, 2007). Different approaches to providing learning support are called for, involving a re-conceptualization of education as an activity and a profession (Clarke and Copeland, 2003).

WBL is also an educational activity which can be located in a diversity of different real-life workplaces (Boyd, Knox and Struthers, 2003). This suggests collaborative partnerships between educational providers and employers on a scale and of a depth that is unparalleled in recent educational history (Moore, 2007). Approaches to establishing and maintaining such collaborative partnerships, and the expertise involved, thus need to be developed, trialed and assessed. Approaches of this sort are necessarily specific to particular cultural contexts and traditions (Smith and Betts, 2000), requiring research and development work to be undertaken here in Hong Kong.

Through WBL, work activities become educational, allowing for the planned and structured transfer of knowledge and experience between education and the workplace. This transfer of knowledge and experience is a learning process in itself, occurring when a person learns to use previously acquired knowledge, skills or aptitudes in a new situation (Eraut, 2004). To optimize the educational value of WBL, it is important that it be accompanied by formal educational processes that facilitate such transfer and the critical reflection that is integral to it: both in ensuring the integration of WBL into formal educational outcomes and in ensuring the transfer of formal educational outcomes to workplace practices (Gray et al., 2001). The need for appropriate formal recognition of school based programs such as WBL in Hong Kong is important in the workplace as well as in the education system. The success of WBL, or otherwise, based on overseas evidence means that formalizing WBL in qualifications frameworks and credit arrangements that enable students to undertake both pathways in further education and employment are an important conditions for the success of such programs.

The WBL program at CCC Kung Lee College

The WBL program involved twenty three (23) fifteen year old students from CCC Kung Lee College who were placed with 15 industry partners for three days a week for a period of 15 weeks. The students undertook a total of 360 hours and would gain 9 credits for a level three qualification in hospitality, tourism, information technology or business.

The students were undertaking formal courses in the Diploma in Hospitality and Tourism Management (DHTM), the Diploma in Business (DB) and the Diploma in Information Technology (DIT). They were supported with learning materials developed by the College which included *Work-Based Learning Program Student Handbooks* and a *Work-Based Learning (WBL) Program Guidelines for Industry Partners*. These documents were an important foundation for future initiatives in the areas of vocational education or career-related learning in Hong Kong and were the first of its type.

The students were placed in commercial and corporate enterprises including hotels, travel agencies, clubs and retail outlets. The students were assigned a work supervisor in each of the placements and the school staff. CCC Kung Lee College has specialist staff with industry qualifications who negotiated placements, developed materials and liaised with the industry partners.

The students were formally assessed as well as evaluated by the industry partners and were required to undertake roles and duties which would normally be expected in any workplace setting. During the two days at school the students were debriefed and reflection on their experiences was encouraged. The students were also expected to complete formal assessment in their school based curriculum.

Research method: An evaluation of work-based learning

The research conducted by the CLLRD utilized a range of selected qualitative and quantitative techniques for the collection and analysis to ensure that each key feature of the project was illuminated both from different perspectives and by different types of data. Qualitative included individual interviews, focus group interviews and ethnographic observation. This data was complemented with a scan and analysis of related policy documents including government, school and industry related. This ensured the inclusion and collation and documentation of major government and industry reviews as well as college reports, the mission of the college, and key meeting minutes. In relation to quantitative data several questionnaire surveys were administered to the students at various stages of the project to identify shifts and changes in attitudes relating to work, careers and their response to work-based learning generally. As part of the evaluation pre-test and post-test surveys were administered to the students as well general semi-structured personal interviews and focus group interviews. The participants in the evaluation included 23 WBL students, 15 industry partners as well as members of project teams from CCC Kung Lee College

and CLLRD and the students' parents.

Findings from surveys of student expectations of WBL

Pre and Post surveys were administered to the WBL students to compare the difference between the students' expectations before and after their placements. The summaries of findings from the student survey provide an important indication of the attitudinal shifts, or otherwise that accompanied participation in WBL. The survey evaluated if the project had either met student expectations, or not, and was subdivided into a range of attitudinal statements about their experience of the work placements. The full results for these surveys are in Appendices 1.

The items which students indicated that the experience had exceeded or met their expectations were that the WBL program had helped students to;

- acquired an understanding of workplace ethics;
- acquire knowledge & skills in the real work,
- provided opportunities for students to learn about the nature of work,
- provided opportunities for students to solve problems in real work environment, and
- enhanced the independence of students' pursuit of knowledge and work requirements

In terms of some of items that exceeded or met their expectations the students recognized that the College provided;

- information on work codes and behaviors,

- technical and emotional support for students, and
- teachers as mentors were able to help students to reflect on their experiences in work settings.

The items where expectations of students were not met and there was improvement needed in the WBL program were a failure to;

- be able to apply what they have learned from textbooks into the world of work,
- enhance students' negotiation (between employees and employers) skills,
- enhance students' competitiveness for further study and clearer direction for further study and for work.

Kung Lee College was identified as having an important role in providing, adequate information about WBL for students, effective training and assistance for students in the application process and moral support for students throughout the work placements. The College was seen as needing to act as a bridge between students and employers. The students also said that employers needed to provide relevant information and training about work, technical support for students, feedback and suggestions for students' work.

Interviews with students: The experience of WBL

The focus group interviews with students were conducted after the survey exploring motivations and the experience of students. Before the work placement, the students said that the reasons they

participated in WBL were to earn 9 credits and to gain work experience. They also said they wanted to also explore the world of work, to “*jump out of the school fence*” to learn and to experience things which could not be learned from textbooks. Students also wanted to build social and business networks to enable them to find jobs in future. They had expected that employers would provide training before the actual commitment to work on site.

Comments from students’ interviews, self-reflective journals and final reports illustrate how the WBL work placement influenced the students. Many students disclosed that they matured after participating in WBL.

Aster described how participation had given her technical knowledge as well as some of the soft skills that are valued by employers, saying that;

“in addition to learning travel agent knowledge and interpersonal and communication skills, I made some friends in my work placement.”

Many students found the exposure to a real workplace had given knowledge about the careers and jobs that they wanted to undertake. This was expressed by Freesia who said;

“I discovered that I was interested in this industry because as a tour guide, I could go to many different countries and places....I saw some photos which were taken in Turkey, Greece, Kunming, Taiwan by my colleagues, etc...I felt amazed and told myself ‘if I could go to these places, my life will be wonderful.’

While this student was enthusiastic the work placement had also given her a more realistic and less romanticized view of the job;

Although I really want to be a tour guide, I need to think more about that because some colleagues told me that they had no time for their family which affected their relationships with their family.”

Many students found the experience of real work engaging and challenging both their skills and interpersonal skills. Gardenia one of the students said;

“I received a lot of reservation calls on Mother’s Day and Labor Day. Sometimes I really wanted to say that bookings were full. However, when I listened to their calls, my mood would be changed. I would be polite and tried my best to make the reservation for them. Even if it was full, I would ask them to leave their phone number, and I could call them back immediately when other guests cancelled their reservations....I would like to serve them, and hope that they could enjoy our services and food....when I could made customers felt like at home, I would feel satisfied.”

Student claimed that in working in an adult environment they had learned they had learned about their own capabilities and emotions, some like Limonium said;

“I discovered my weaknesses and strengths through participating in WBL. My weaknesses were that I could not speak confidently and concisely. I could not handle problems properly. However, my strengths were that I was punctual for work and I am a responsible person, who

is willing to learn.”

Another student Viburnum confirmed this saying;

“Working in the real work environment can gain precious experiences. It is beneficial to the students. After this program, I became self-confident and independent. I would join similar program in the future if the golden opportunity comes up again.”

After the completion of work placement, most students said they had learned the daily operations of the company and got to know about the real world of work. They had improved communication skills, problem solving skills, interpersonal skills, critical thinking skills and an understanding of the importance of having good work attitudes. Four students said that work placement helped them develop characteristics of persistence and patience, as well as a greater sense of responsibility. Most students felt more self-confident in talking with “strangers” and some students said their English had improved through the work placement experience. They also said they had gained experience in and working with others and as a consequence they felt that they became more mature in shaping their personalities and in encountering problems.

A case study of persistence and change

Not all students achieved success in the workplace easily and some encountered problems.

One student Bells described how she;

Had encountered lots of problems and frustrations, I overcame bravely which prepared me for the future....”

Another student, Amaryllis, had a similar difficult start but was a very special case because her

mother did not support her in participating in WBL at first but she was convinced after a teacher talked with them about the purpose and benefits of the program and her mother eventually, supported Amaryllis' participation in WBL.

Amaryllis did not have good work attitude at the beginning of her work placement. She said she cried at the first few days of work placement and she had one day sick leave every week during the first few weeks. Her supervisor and manager were not satisfied with her performances, and they would have dismissed her in the first few days if she was a part time employee.

Amaryllis was determined to finish her work placement because she did not want to lose face among her fellow students. The supervisor and her manager were willing to help Amaryllis to finish her placement by rotating her to the front office. After Amaryllis changed roles her attitudes changed and she performed satisfactorily and completed her work placement successfully. After a difficult start she said that she learned a lot of things such as customer relations, communication and interpersonal skills.

Many students found the experiences had enabled them to clarify educational goals previously only having low skilled employment. The experience of WBL had facilitated a recommitment to study at school and gain higher level qualifications to avoid working in low skilled jobs with heavy-physical-labor jobs after they graduated. They said their personalities had changed and they

were better at dealing with problems they encountered at work and that they had matured and gained confidence as a result of their experience.

Interviews with employers and supervisors: The experience of WBL with industry partners

The program leaders, the mentors and the researchers visited 19 students in the 13 workplaces where they were working from March to May, 2010. These on-site visits served multiple purposes, firstly, showing support for the program and liaising with industry partners as a way of strengthening the communication and collaboration between the College and the industry partners. Secondly, it was also important in collecting data for the evaluation of the project.

In Amaryllis' case, the on-site visit served as a turning point which enabled to help her finish the work placement. The CLLRD research team interviewed the managers and work supervisors during the on-site visits. Industry partners were generally satisfied with the students' performances in the work placements, even after some initial difficulties.

There were numerous positive comments from employers and supervisors. These served not only to boost the students' self confidence, but also to provide CCC Kung Lee College with some positive feedback. The following is an example from Carlos a supervisor in tourism and hospitality;

'the student was humble and teachable, I had asked them if I could train another student placement because the student we had was always on time for work and this

set a good example for other employees.'

Providing placement to the students satisfied many important needs for CCC Kung Lee College and industry partners. The industry partners could identify prospective staff while the students have opportunities to explore the world of work in an environment. The work supervisors/managers had opportunities to build their training skills through coaching the students which helped improve internal training systems. Providing work placements for the students also fulfilled social responsibility and the mission of organizations/institutes as caring institutions.

While these suggest good experiences and outcomes some industry partners expressed concern that some students were reluctant to take the initiative on solving problems and relied on others to tell them what to do. Some industry partners also expressed concern that the school timetable had contributed towards a fragmented experience as the students were only at work on Monday and Tuesday.

Interviews with teachers: New teaching settings for teachers

The implementation of the WBL was an important example of major school reform and was consistent with the changes to senior secondary school in incorporating vocational education. Many of the teachers expressed concern about extra workloads. Teachers agreed that accreditation and recognition of WBL in a formal way was essential to the future success of secondary reforms. Many teachers saw that WBL fitting into the routine of the school was an important issue but some were

concerned that spending 360 hours for work placement was too much time for a one year diploma program. Concerns were expressed over students spending 360 hours on WBL program and this was encroaching on study time core subjects. There was an impression that their commitments to work placements could place their academic progress in jeopardy.

Support from stakeholders is another important element for the success WBL. Parent attitudes and support have direct impact on the students' attitude towards WBL. Some parents were worried about how WBL may affect their children's academic performance. They had a preference for more a academic route which could prepare their children for further study. However, the findings indicated that WBL not only did not affect the 23 students' academic performance. In fact, WBL enhanced academic performance as all the students passed both the workplace placements and their school based program.

Finding appropriate work placements for students was also seen as a big challenge. The rewards and recognition from employers were seen as very important in motivating them to participate. The need for people to develop a more consistent view and a passion and commitment to WBL was identified as important. Perspectives were contradictory with some strongly supporting WBL while others were uncertain about the nature of skills that students required. Some valued generic skills and others saw specific job skills as important but overall there was developing awareness of the importance of WBL. The need to continue consistent and shared vision on this project was discussed and most of the teachers suggested this was still in a developing stage. The need for enhanced documentation and planning was seen as important in overcoming the gaps in corporate

knowledge. The importance of leadership at all levels was identified as crucial in generating this consistent and shared vision.

These occurrences and sentiments are typical of attitudes in schools undertaking curriculum reforms and implementing major VET initiatives. Part of the challenge of these initiatives was the need to develop new skills in the staffing profile to build strong communication across the school about WBL, skills in working with employers and skills and capabilities to responding to the need for different teaching and learning strategies. WBL challenges teacher centred notions of learning and required teachers to establish a new relationship with students based on facilitating learning and reflection rather than delivering content.

After the implementation of WBL, follow-up interviews were conducted with the teachers/mentors, the researchers, the external advisors and the parents to reflect the process.

Most teachers believed that the greatest success of WBL program was that all students were able to complete the work placement. Overall, the students had holistic learning experience and had developed generic skills and work-readiness skills.

The students had rewarding learning experiences which prepared them for development from adolescent to adulthood. The students learnt the daily operation of the organizations which

expanded their horizon and gave them clear ideas for work and for further study. WBL also helped the students find their interests and cultivated their talents as well as building the students' academic abilities. Some students were not good at writing and academic forms of expression but WBL provided an alternative platform for them to communicate their abilities and they were able to learn from the feedback of work supervisors.

WBL helped the teachers/mentors stay connected with the industry. Some industry partners offered jobs to the students after work placement which increased the recognition of the WBL. WBL also had an important function in clarifying the direction of CCC Kung Lee College as a specialist school which provided curricula that had the dual emphases of academic and vocational learning.

Rose said that the main purpose of WBL was to *“contribute to students' whole-person development through the development of generic skills and the development of work-readiness skills, aptitudes and understanding. Moreover, WBL provided an opportunity for students to explore different careers, and help them to build social and business network for finding jobs in future. Therefore, WBL was worthwhile program which the EDB should promote”*.

Daisy said that WBL program had;

“helped some students who did not perform so well academically. They were able to complete the diploma program because they participated in WBL”.

The perspectives of all stakeholders are summarized in Table 1

Table 1. A summary of stakeholder views on WBL.

Stakeholders	BENEFITS	QUESTIONS & SUGGESTIONS
Business Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fulfilled an important social responsibility • Enhanced internal training capacity in organizations. • Student's positive performance provide good benchmarks for staff • Identified quality prospective staff • Strengthened business-school partnership • Additional “employee” reduced internal staff workload. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for Continuity at work as 2 days is not continuous
Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers generally saw WBL provided good learning and growing experiences for their students. • The students learned things which they could not teach them at classroom. • The teachers also learned something from the students which helped the teachers with their own professional development and ability to understand the world of work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workloads (for example, on-site visit added to existing workloads) • How to conduct debriefing more effectively? • How to integrate WBL in other classes/subjects?
Parents	<p>Most parents are supportive because they wanted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their students to have work experience. • To have the experience help them to find jobs in the future. • The students to be more independent. • The students to learn different things and connect with the society. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents concerned about the students balancing academic performance and work commitments. • Some parents were concerned about fatigue.

Concluding comments on WBL in Hong Kong secondary schools

WBL is a viable and sustainable program which provides an alternative pathway for students to

undertake senior secondary study. The program has enjoyed good support from the students who participated, their parents and teachers as well as the College leadership. The students undertook the work placements and overwhelmingly achieved both good results in the technical aspects of work as well as what is termed generic or employability skills. In addition students gained a sense of maturity and accomplishment through their involvement and this sees work-based learning as providing a holistic and reflective approach to learning. The WBL program has influenced the students not only during their work placement, but after their work placement. Many were offered paid employment as a consequence of their placement.

The response from industry has also been encouraging as they have willingly undertaken the dual roles of effectively hosting the participants as well as providing valuable support to the students. Employers have been able to experience first-hand the needs of young people entering the workforce. This is a good development and has seen WBL provide a foundation of exchange of ideas. Importantly, employers have seen such a program as a way of exploring gaps in provision of on-the-job training as well as fine tuning is social responsibilities around assisting preparing school graduates.

The students have been able to experience the real world of work and gain some on the job training for an extended time. The occupations have included some of those jobs which Hong Kong will need to train workers to sustain a standard of living as a developed community. Jobs in IT, business,

hospitality and tourism are crucial to the economic and social welfare of Hong Kong.

The program itself is an important indicator of how school reform can be achieved through building mutually affirming partnerships. The program's success is also hinged on the "buy-in" and commitment of the partners and the support of each partner by others through the project. The response from industry has been very encouraging and there seems to be a sense of good will regarding this project which suggests that career related learning using extended work-based learning could achieve good support amongst industry in Hong Kong if the program was to be extended in CCC Kung Lee College and also more broadly across the Hong Kong secondary school sector.

There are a range of social, cultural and structural impediments which contradict or impede the potential for work-based learning and these are discussed.

The status and prestige of WBL and vocational education in Hong Kong

In general, vocational education is mistakenly seen as low status and a second class education. This is strongly apparent in Chinese society and culture where status and education are strongly aligned. Secondary technical schools are often seen as recruiting students with comparatively low academic achievement levels. The students in technical schools are seen as receiving less rigorous mathematics, science, and English courses than the students in comprehensive schools. Technical schools were also seen as working well in preparing the employees for entry-level jobs at a time when there were plenty of low and medium level skills jobs in the 1990s. These perceptions are

being challenged by changing times and developments such as those at CCC Kung Lee College.

Technology and global economic competition has reshaped and redefining the nature and character of workplace and work in the Asia Pacific. Most employers now demand a stronger combination of academic, technical skills and technological proficiency. The combination of academic and employability skills makes arguments about divisions between technical and traditional education meaningless. Academic subjects are now required to integrate with workplace needs and to be focused on employment outcomes for students. The perceptions on the low status of vocational education at a time that tertiary places are limited in Hong Kong is counterproductive and does not assist student make choices about employment in the new economy. In order to prepare the students for work, subjects, such as mathematics, Chinese, and English need to be both rigorous and also focus on the skills and outcomes that employers expect in the workplace.

“Learning by doing” and WBL

The nature of work-based learning at CCC Kung Lee College has enabled young people to experience the demands of the workplace “first hand” and to challenge their perceptions about work. It has enabled the assembly of new sets of skills and competencies as well as behaviors that are difficult to develop in more formal learning settings. Work-based learning provides an example of experiential learning which engages the learner in situated learning which involves active learning. Referred to as learning by doing this form of learning is substantially different from passive forms

of learning which are reliant on standardized curriculum, reproduction of knowledge from set texts and written assessment. Students are often not engaged in the tasks actively and the connection with learning outcomes is often superficial. Recall and reproduction of outcomes is often contingent of high levels of memorization but work-based learning requires a new repertoire of skills and behaviors from students who are required to demonstrate competence in a range of different settings and conditions and to demonstrate these competencies regularly. These new forms of learning based on active engagement of the learner in authentic tasks are challenging because they require different levels of commitment from learners and teachers. Students need to be fully engaged and committed to work-based learning as their performance is an issue of public scrutiny and judgment by a range of stakeholders. Likewise teachers need to be actively engaged in guidance, support supervision and cannot be reliant on ritualized approaches to responding to student needs.

A new teaching repertoire for WBL

Work-based learning requires the use of many of the “old” repertoires of teaching in a very different setting outside the classroom. The workplace is often much more discursive, complex and diffuse than the predictable confines of the classroom but many capabilities that teachers have can be transferred to these settings. These include of skills in negotiation, co-ordination, observation, evaluation and the communication of complex information. Teachers also need to use pastoral and guidance skills but often in conjunction with industry supervisors. Teachers are also required to conduct briefings which require different set of skills from teaching in classroom and this now

means that professional development for teachers is needed to help teachers understand the principles of WBL and assist them transfer existing skills into the new settings of work-based learning.

The success of WBL depends on how the school routine changes to incorporate new forms of work-based learning. Schools need to integrate WBL programs into school timetable, but also integrate WBL into the school routine and curriculum. Rather than seeing WBL as an additional or special program it should be seen as a core element of the senior school curriculum and part of the identity at CCC Kung Lee College. All stakeholders realized that it was hard for the students to cope with school work school whilst they are working. This means that timetabling and routine needs to be adjusted as indicated in the figure below. The length of work placement would remain the same but all WBL students would start and end the workplace at the same time.

Table 2. A proposed timetable for WBL programs.

Workplace (first 5 weeks)	School (half day or 1 or 2 hour consultation)	Workplace (second 5 weeks)	School
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CCC Kung Lee College has a task to help parents understand the value of WBL program and part of the message is that WBL prepares the students to be both “college ready” and “work ready”. The support of industry partners is a crucial factor in the success of this program and the quality and

preparation of industry partners has a significant impact on students' experience in work placement.

The nature of the relationship they adopt is also important because if they see themselves as a joint co-educator with the College, their role will also shift from being a "boss" to that of a mentor and a partner. This may mean that schools may have to provide more intensive training to supervisors, employers and teachers as well as the emotional support and coaching for students on placements.

The success of vocational education and work-based learning will be determined by the extent to which government addresses and responds to some of the issues identified in this section

Part of the success of the NSS will depend on how those elements of the curriculum such as ApL and other learning experiences, which are dependent on local design and delivery are supported in new ways which until now have not been common in the Hong Kong system. There is also an important role in promoting ApL, work-based learning and vocational education as an integral part of secondary school education. The experience at CCC Kung Lee suggests that there are significant social, economic and educational benefits to government, schools, industry and students in Hong Kong.

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Appendices 1. Pre and Post Test surveys of CC Kung Lee WBL students

The students' expectations from the WBL module	Strongly agree + agree		disagree + Strongly disagree		no comment	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
1.1 WBL programme helps student apply what they have learned from textbook into work	100	91.3		8.7		
1.2 WBL programme enhances students' vocational skills	98	95.6	4	4.3		
1.3 WBL programme enhances students' generic skills	96	78.3		8.7	4	13
1.4 WBL programme enhances students' negotiation skills	80	65.2	8	17.3	12	17.4
1.5 WBL programme helps students have clearer direction for further study	84	78.2	4	8.7	12	13
1.6 WBL programme helps students have clearer direction for work	92	87	4	8.7	4	4.3
1.7 WBL programme helps students learn interpersonal skills	100	95.6		4.3		
1.8 WBL programme helps students acquire knowledge & skills of real work	96	100	4			

The students' expectations from the WBL module	Strongly agree + agree		disagree + Strongly disagree		no comment	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
1.10 WBL programme provides opportunities for students to learn work ethics	88	91.3	8	4.3	4	4.3
1.11 WBL programme provides opportunities for students to learn about the nature work	84	91.3	12		4	8.7
1.12 WBL programme provides opportunities for students to learn on how to solve problem	100	100				
1.13 WBL programme enhances students' competitiveness for further study	96	82.6		8.7	4	8.7
1.14 WBL programme enhances students' competitiveness for work	92	86.9	4	4.3	4	8.7
1.15 WBL programme enhances students' self-confidence	96	86.9			4	13
1.16 WBL programme enhances the independence of students	95.9	95.6	4.2			4.3

	Strongly agree + agree		disagree + Strongly disagree		no comment	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
The students' expectations from Kung Lee College						
2. The college provides adequate information about WBL for students	76	52.2	20	30.4	4	17.4
3. The college provides effective training and help for students in the application process.	80	65.2	16	17.3	4	17.4
4 .The college provides information on work codes and behaviors for students	68	69.6	28	17.4	4	13
5. The college provides technical support for students	76	82.6	12	13	12	4.3
6. The college provides moral support for students	84	78.3	4	17.3	12	4.3
7. The college provides counseling for students	72	87	16	8.6	12	4.3
8. Teachers at the college lead students to reflect on their work attachment experiences effectively	84	86.9	4		12	13
9. The college acts as a bridge between students and employers	91.7	73.9		8.7	8.3	17.4

	Strongly agree + agree		disagree + Strongly disagree		no comment	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
The students' expectations from the industry partners						
11. Employers provide relevant information about work for students	92	78.2	4	17.4	4	4.3
12. Employers provide relevant training about work for students	96	91.3		4.3	4	4.3
13. Employers provide technical support for students	92	87	4	8.7	4	4.3
14. Employers provide a safe working environment for students	92	95.7	4		4	4.3
15. Employers provide work safety training for students	92	87		4.3	8	13
16. Employers provide feedback and suggestions for students' work	96	87		8.7	4	4.3