

**A Study on
the Continuity of Curriculum
and
Teaching Practices
between
the Primary and Junior Secondary
Levels
of Education**

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Abstract

In response to the recommendation in Education Commission Report No. 1, the study was carried out with the following objectives, namely, to identify the differences in curriculum and teaching practices between primary and junior secondary levels of education; to identify the difficulties encountered by pupils on entry to secondary schools; and to suggest ways and means of facilitating the transition.

Preparatory work started in 1989, and four seminars on the topic were organized in November and December for school heads by the Advisory Inspectorate Division (AID). In 1990, the pupil sample was selected involving a total of 68 primary schools. When the project was implemented in 1990/91, one school closed down, thus leaving 67 schools with 2380 Primary 6 pupils in the sample. Owing to difficulty in tracing pupils after their promotion to Secondary 1 and failure of matching Pupils' questionnaires in separate administrations, the size of the sample was reduced from 2067 pupils at the beginning of Secondary 1 to 1927 pupils at the end of the year. Other target groups involved were parents, teachers, student guidance officers/school social workers and school heads. They were the people who interacted with the pupils in their learning environment.

The study on the aspect of curriculum in the project was carried out by means of paper analysis of the curriculum prepared by the Curriculum Development Council and recommended for use in schools by the Education Department and an analysis of the report on the four seminars mentioned above. The study on teaching practices was done from various perspectives, first, through a set of five questionnaires administered to the five target sample groups in Primary 6, beginning of Secondary 1 and end of Secondary 1; second, through the examination of pupils' academic achievement as reflected from their performance in Hong Kong Attainment Test - S1A and S1B in the subjects of Chinese, English and Mathematics and third, through classroom observations by subject inspectors of the Advisory Inspectorate Division. Any differences between the findings at P6 and those obtained at the end of Secondary 1 would indicate continuity problems.

School heads in the seminars considered that there was no continuity problem in the curriculum between Primary 6 and Secondary 1. The paper analysis on the prescribed curriculum also revealed that there was coherence in the aims/objectives, content and design of the written curriculum for subjects under study between the two educational levels. Comparison of pupils' academic achievement at the beginning and end of Secondary 1 demonstrated no significant difference. Likewise, the classroom observations also showed no significant difference in teaching practices between the two educational levels.

It is noted, however, from the data collected from the questionnaires, that pupils did encounter some forms of difficulty upon transfer from Primary 6 to Secondary 1. They found themselves getting less guidance and concern from their teachers and parents. They found the secondary curriculum board and they experienced difficulty with the new curriculum at the beginning of S1 and more so towards the end of S1. They needed more time to adjust to the greater use of English as the medium of instruction. They probably had some problems to build up good relationship with teachers and schoolmates, especially making friends with new classmates in the new learning environment of a secondary school.

Teachers and school heads, in general, did not show any significant changes in their attitude in the three administrations of questionnaires. But according to the student guidance officers and the school social workers, the discipline of pupils experienced a decline from P6 to S1 particularly towards the end of the year. Pupils' willingness to participate in extra-curricular activities in the school also dropped.

It is found that the aforesaid problems were not unique to any special groups of pupils. They were applicable to the whole pupil sample in general, irrespective of their initial academic aptitude.

For recommendations, it is suggested that there should be more communication between teachers as well as school heads of the primary and junior secondary levels on the curriculum (both the written and the operational and between schools and parents; and familiarization visits to secondary schools located in the same area be arranged for Primary 6 pupils. Parents and teachers should provide concrete help and support for the pupils to facilitate their transfer from Primary 6 to Secondary 1. Teachers should not over emphasize the importance of pupils' academic achievement. Instead, they should choose teaching strategies and teaching materials appropriate to the abilities and needs of their pupils.