The Paradigm Shift and the Dilemma of moving Student Activities from the fundamental informal Extra-curricular nature towards the objective-based formal Co-curricular trend in Secondary Schools

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In the years of LS

My view:

- Exposure/Experience + Reflection
  - Construction of knowledge
- Enough knowledge + critical thinking/integration
  - LS

Student Activities (Extra-curricular/Co-curricular Activities) are essential for student Exposure/experience
Traditional Extra-curricular Activities as informal curriculum

- Informal
- Free and Leisure
- Usually outside the timetable
- For students’ interest
- Soft skills / generic skills
- Intrinsic motivation
- For students’ all-round development
- Usually, carry no academic scores

FUN! FUN! FUN!

Structured Co-curricular Activities in the formal curriculum

- Task-oriented (job, homework, assignment)
- Within/Outside the timetable
- Closely linked with subject contents
- Extrinsic motivation
- May not cater individual differences/interests
- Sometimes carry academic scores (high stake)

Scores, Awards, Positions 分! 分! 分!
Co-curricular nature

- Focus too much on academic development / subject contents / cognitive domain
- Affective / Psychomotor domains may be overlooked (especially in objective setting and in assessment of student learning in subject-related activities)
- Should be of integrated objectives / multi-purposes

The paradigm shift

- Past: Student-organised traditional informal extra-curricular activities
- Now: School-organised co-curricular structured LWL/OLE activities

Student autonomy: high to low
Some observations

- Increasing numbers of outbound activities
  - Most of them are one-off events (sight-seeing or comprehensive integrated learning?)
  - Teacher: insufficient competencies in leadership and organization
  - Expensive. Equal opportunity for each student? How about the low SES students, low academic achievers, and SEN students
    
    FUND! FUND! FUND!

- Outsourcing activities
  - Risk
  - How about teacher-student relationship?
  - Sometimes, quite expensive (e.g. instrument classes)
  - Funding (from parents/school/others)
  - Again, equal opportunities for low SES students?
Some observations

Counting hours (OLE)
- Some schools may only focus on hours and quantity, not the quality
- Sometimes, experiencing without learning
- Provide little time for reflection/debriefing

Time capacity of students and teachers
- SBA, too busy, too many. NSS curriculum is too difficult for ALAs
- Students and teachers are too busy after school
- Students have little time for ECA/CCA

Student Learning Profile (SLP)
- Utilitarianism for some students (extrinsic motivation)
- Indication of Participation / Awards?
- For low SES students, school ECA/CCA are the only source (have to aware the differences in opportunities between those privileged and underprivileged)
Some observations

- Teachers’ limited expertise in leading ECA/CCA
  - Practical skills
  - Management techniques
  - ECA/CCA experiential curriculum design

Some observations

- Universities are providing ECA/CCA for secondary schools
- Secondary schools are providing ECA/CCA for primary schools

Service Learning?
A marketing world
Implications for tertiary institutions

- SLP is good for student self reflection, but is not enough for considering the caliber of the applicants. (Think about the SES factors). Admission interviews are much more important for understanding applicants’ stories.
- Student activities play an important role in developing generic skills, personality, attitudes etc. for future life and career of the undergraduates.
- Team building activities for student mutual support are essential, especially for P/T programmes.

My last questions are:

- Nowadays, the number of student activities in secondary schools is increasing, especially those academic or subject related ones. At the same time, there is a trend of close supervision and objective-based monitoring due to accountability.
- But, what is the key difference between schools and private tuition centres? The answer is STUDENT ACTIVITIES.
- Then, can most of the student activities remain unstructured, informal, and just for fun, for interest, for leisure and for hand-on experience as they should be?
- Only then can school life be easier for students and teachers.
The Synopsis

The terms Extra-curricular Activity and Co-curricular Activity are sometimes, but not always, interchangeable. The term Extra-curricular Activity is still widely used in most of Hong Kong secondary schools. However, some schools may like to use the term Co-curricular Activity to reflect its importance and the close connection with student learning. In the recent curriculum reform, Life-wide Learning Activities in the Junior and Secondary school education, the Other Learning Experiences in the NSS curriculum, and the Student Learning Profile for reflection and university admission, are strongly emphasized. As a result, there is a trend for schools to restructure part of the informal Extra-curricular Activities curriculum to a formal one. Some of the student activities, which are originally scheduled for all-round education of the students, are no longer solely catering for the fun, the interest, the leadership and the personality development of students, but are now closely monitored and preset to connect with the formal school curricula for academic achievements. The author discusses the noticeable paradigm shift and the possible dilemmas in secondary school practices, and argues that it is time for stake holders to reconsider the way forward of the student activities in secondary schools.