



New Tactics

in Education

by Chan Yuet and Winsome Tse

While tutorial schools have long been regarded as giving an extra boost to students when preparing for exams, they are now facing challenges in adapting their instructional method and business strategies as the education system prepares for the introduction of a new curriculum.

Starting from this September, local students will be required to take up four compulsory subjects including Chinese, English, Mathematics, and Liberal Studies under the New Senior Secondary (NSS) Academic System, more commonly known as the “3-3-4 education reform”.

Annoyed by the frequent academic changes, Hung Yik-ming, director of Legend Tutorial Centre, explained that tutorial centres need time to adjust to newly introduced reforms in the education system.

“We tried our best to change our teaching materials to cope with the change of the English Language examination syllabus in 2007. Now we are on the track but we have to change the syllabus again! It’s a waste of our time and effort,” said Mr Hung.

Operating at a small-scale tutorial centre in a shopping plaza in Tuen Mun, Mr Hung explained that most tutorial centres conduct their own research in order to derive a set of teaching materials for their students.

“We digest and analyse the syllabus ourselves. We explore every detail of it through discussions, and then we draw up strategies to adjust our tutorial approach,” said Mr Hung.

The tutorial school structures its teaching syllabus based on the teaching models of neighbouring secondary schools.

Mr Hung explained that secondary schoolteachers are often preoccupied

by extracurricular activities, which consume the teachers’ time and energy. So tutorial schools should act to complement and facilitate the teaching in local schools.

Though the Legend Tutorial Centre operates to facilitate the teachings of local schools, Mr Hung does not have a set agenda as to when the institution will offer a course on Liberal Studies, the newly added compulsory subject under NSS. Instead, Liberal Studies will only be inserted in their “Whole Subject Course,” which covers all the subjects that students are learning.

Yet many other tutorial centres in Hong Kong are putting on different courses on Liberal studies to adjust to the changing academic structure.

Best Tutorial Centre, a small-scale tutorial school in Ngau Tau Kok, will be offering Liberal Studies tutorial courses under the new academic curriculum.



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RAINBOW NGAI

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Representatives from tutorial institutions talk about their challenges under the new "3-3-4 Syllabus."

1. George Law Yuk-sun, Chief Executive Officer of King's Glory Education
2. Under the New Senior Secondary Curriculum, are tutorial schools the right choice for students?
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5. Siu Yuen, a Chinese tutor from King's Glory Education

While the tutorial centre said that staff has been structuring its courses according to the syllabus of local secondary schools. Its director, Elaine Wong Yin-ling, admitted that it is challenging to teach Liberal Studies.

"Some schools have not yet finished designing the content of the Liberal Studies syllabus," said Ms Wong. "Liberal Studies seems to be something like a combination of General Studies and History of Hong Kong. There are no solid instructions given by the government of what students should study in this subject."

Currently enrolled in a postgraduate programme in Liberal Studies at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, Ms Wong said, "Although we do not have a very clear understanding on the syllabus of the subject, it is obvious that Liberal Studies emphasises the nurturing and development of students' common sense and analytical ability to think independently."

So Ms Wong and other tutors at the tutorial centre take Liberal Studies out of the classroom. They take their students on visits to different places in Hong Kong in order to heighten the knowledge they have learnt from textbooks.

Before the tutors take students out on each field trip, they would devote a lecture to cover all the facts and information on the topic. The Legislative Council and the Eastern Harbour Tunnel were two popular destinations in last summer.

By taking their students on field trips around Hong Kong, Ms Wong is convinced that students can learn more general facts about the city than the textbooks provide.

Contrary to bombarding students with general facts, Dennis Yeung, a tutor who teaches Hong Kong Advanced Level (HKAL) Liberal Studies at Kings' Glory Education Tutorial Centre, prefers to give more exact guidelines to his students.

The current syllabus for Liberal Studies aims at exposing students to a variety of issues stemming from a central topic. But Mr Yeung sees the variety as problematic for students because it requires them to fully understand rationale of all the issues involved.

"The syllabus of Liberal Studies is too broad. There is no standardised instruction about the course content," said Mr Yeung, adding that it can be hard for secondary teachers to grasp the content of what they are supposed to teach in this subject.

"I know that one teacher teaches Marxism, which is too difficult for his students. And there are also teachers who do nothing but read newspapers with students during every lesson of Liberal Studies," Mr Yeung said.

Finding the most effective way to teach Liberal Studies can be time-consuming, but Mr Yeung believes the flow chart he offers to his students can help organise their work.

“The uncertainties we face under the NSS (New Senior Secondary) are the change in student population and future market demands.”

Yet the changes that will result under the “3 - 3 - 4 reform” can be quite alarming, even for tutors who offer assistance to the students.

“The change in the syllabus for English Language is horrifying,” said Dr F. Shum, Chief English tutor at King’s Glory Education after he analysed sample papers provided by the Education Bureau. “It tests students’ logical and abstract thinking ability. The context is so difficult that even A-level (Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination) students might find it hard to cope with.”

The new academic structure emphasises all-rounded education for students, which ultimately places emphasis on the analytical skills of the students.

For this reason, Dr F. Shum said he would teach students the skills to analyse rather than just complete exercises.

The overall change in the Chinese syllabus is less drastic under the new curriculum but students are still required to know more than basic language skills.

Siu Yuen, a Chinese tutor from King’s Glory Education said that the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination, the assessment measure in NSS, will require more creativity and the practical use of the Chinese language.

“The official guidelines about the new curriculum are not clear enough. Many details are not even finalised,” said George Law Yuk-sun, Chief Executive Officer of King’s Glory Education.

Without a clear picture of the new curriculum, drafting the content of tutorial courses is a frustrating task.

“Tutorial schools usually need to refer to textbooks to produce their own tutorial materials. Yet it is difficult for publishers to design for new textbook content now, without knowing about the fine details of the syllabus change,” Mr Law said.

Yet tutorial institutions have been adjusting their instructional method for different subjects to suit the changing academic structure.

“The urgency for students to take pre-exam tutorial classes will drop,” said Mr Law, “Because students will only be required to take one public exam in the “3-3-4 syllabus”.

The Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination will be the only examination that secondary students are required to take as an assessment for their education level. It is to replace the two existing public assessments, the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) and Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination (HKALE).

Mr Law predicts there will be one less student for every seven students in the tutorial market.

The introduction of preparatory courses on the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and the Test of English as Foreign Language (TOEFL) will also be the way for King’s Glory Education to increase its market share in the business.

Business outlook for pre-exam tutorials might have dimmed, but the dollars are expected to roll in through the Liberal Studies courses.

Lee Wai-lok, Executive Director of Modern Education, predicted Liberal Studies to be the runner up in popularity to English Language in the coming two to three years because

people are unfamiliar with what Liberal Studies will entail.

“The uncertainties we face under NSS is market need in the future, the number of students and the change in the market,” said Mr Lee.

Yet he said that the company would not shift their business from pre-exam courses to IELTS courses.

Admitting the lack of past examinations as reference materials for the teaching of subjects under the NSS, he said it important to maintain a good relationship with schools and to frequently discuss the curriculum with the schools.

Aside from communicating with secondary schools to find the appropriate instructional method for the new courses, Mr Lee added that tutors from Modern Education actively attend seminars and workshops conducted by the Hong Kong Examinations Assessment Authority to gain further insights on how to teach the new curriculum.

“Without the certificate-level exam (HKCEE) to filter out the weaker students, the disparity of exam results will be broadened,” said Mr Lee, adding that this will ultimately strengthen the role of tutorial schools. ▣

