

Assembly 12 November 2007

Is there too much choice?

As you are aware, the Form 1 and Form 2 students will no longer be required to take the HK Certificate of Education examinations at the end of Form 5 nor the HK A Level examinations at the completion of Form 7. Instead, they will be sitting for the new HK Diploma of Secondary Studies examination at the end of Form 6 and then moving on to higher education one year earlier. Of course, all of you in Form 3 to 7 will remain with the current system and at sit for the CEE and ALE as has been the case for many years.

The school is working hard on the changes that will need to happen when the new system is introduced in two years time; in September 2009. In particular, we have been looking at the new subjects and courses that are being offered and working out what we should be teaching at SPC. In the future, all students in Forms 4-6 will be required to take 4 core subjects: English language, Chinese language, Mathematics and a new subject called Liberal Studies. All students in all local schools in Hong Kong must study these four core subjects. After the core subjects, however, there are choices that can be made from a list of Elective subjects.

To help us make plans for this change, we have asked the senior students in Forms 5 to 7 to imagine that they were about to start Form 4 again and to tell us two things: firstly, which class, A-F, they would prefer to be in and secondly, which Elective subjects they would choose to study. The results were very interesting. We were expecting that the majority of students would have automatically have selected Classes E and F; but this was not the case. Furthermore, the students indicated that they would like a greater choice and be able to pick from a broader range of Elective subjects. Particularly interesting was the strong interest in subjects related to business, finance and commerce. Many students also told us that they would like to study a modern foreign language and picked French, Japanese and Spanish as their top choices. We are very grateful to the Form 5-7 students for thinking carefully when undertaking this survey and the data they provided will be very useful when we come to finalising the new curriculum for September 2009.

Of course, we would all like to have more choice. Having greater choice is something we are faced with in our daily lives and the amount of choice appears to be getting greater all the time. Consider for a moment what choices face you each evening when you have eaten your dinner and finished your homework. Most of you will have the choice of reading a book or magazine; going on the internet; watching television; listening to music; using your mobile phone. Once you have had a decision you need to refine that choice even further. Which book or magazine to read; whether to surf the web, look at YouTube or MySpace, log onto a chat line or play on-line games; whether to go to the local stations or switch to cable; whether to talk or to send a text message; or any combination of all the above. All this choice for what is such a short period of time.

I face a similar situation on Saturday evenings. The NOW television network broadcasts the English premier league football and gives you the choice of 5 different matches all being shown live and at the same time. Furthermore, NOW television also shows a live match from the Italian league. Six football matches to choose from! Of course, a sensible person would simply select one game and enjoy it from start to finish. In my case, however, I attempt to watch all six games, sometimes selecting two or three to watch using the split-screen function. But more often than not I use the remote control to switch quickly between channels.

My evening's entertainment is not very satisfactory. I become increasingly frustrated as the evening passes particularly when a goal is scored a few seconds after I have changed to another game. At the end of the ninety minutes, I often wish that I had selected just one game and watched the full match from start to finish. The choice is too great and I need to be more selective.

We live in a 'buffet world'. Rather like going for a buffet meal at a restaurant, we are faced with so many dishes that making a selection can be difficult. Most people decide to tackle a buffet meal by tasting as many dishes as possible. Often, this involves eating a small portion of each dish. However, some people will fill their plates regardless, taste the food and leave the rest to be thrown away. It is then back to the buffet for another plate and another selection of dishes.

How many times in our lives do we 'taste and throw away'? At last Monday's assembly I said that 'we should be open to new opportunities in life for we do not know where those opportunities might lead'. Yes, we should look carefully at all that is on offer. However, there comes a time when we need to make a selection and stick with it.

I mentioned earlier that our senior students said they would like to study a modern foreign language if they were going into Form 4 again. Selecting a language is one thing; sticking with it is another. There is little point in taking French in Form 4, Spanish in Form 5 and Japanese in Form 6. What is more important is that you research each language first; then select to study it; and then stay with your choice for the next three years (and hopefully in to the future). To 'taste and throw away' a foreign language is not very satisfying.

I am sure that you can think of plenty of other examples here at school. Many of you would have started playing a musical instrument or joined the choir when you were younger. I wonder how many gave up after a short time. Maybe you took up another instrument or another activity altogether. I wonder if you are still taking part in that new activity.

At this school we are proud to offer a large number of Clubs and Societies. Again, I would like to find out how many of you have not only joined a Club or Society but have stuck with it over the years as an active member. Students who select the Scouts or the Red Cross or any of the SA groups in Form 1 should then stay with their chosen activity right through their school years. You do not become a Scout for one year or a Red Cross

cadet for one year or a member of the Archery Club for one year or a member of the Debating Society for one year. Yes, I encourage you go along to a meeting and find out what the activity is like. Do your research. But once you have made a decision to join; stick with it.

None of us would argue that choice is not a good thing. However, too much choice can lead to a life made up of small bite-sizes pieces rather than a one complete, satisfying meal.