

Practicing Entrepreneurship Education for Secondary Pupils through the Operation of a New Year Stall in Hong Kong

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The existing business curriculum in Hong Kong secondary schools lacks significant programs in entrepreneurship education. This paper will look at the effect of the implementation of an entrepreneurial activity, the running of a New Year stall, on pupils. This research will look at three schools of different bandings which participated in the running of New Year stalls. Both teachers and pupils of the three schools taking part in the activity were recruited. In-depth interviews were conducted with teachers and pupils were both surveyed and interviewed. The findings in this study show the effectiveness of the activity as part of entrepreneurship education to teach secondary pupils many aspects related to work. This study clearly indicates that teachers and pupils found great value in entrepreneurship education and confirms that entrepreneurship education encourages the development of skills and attributes that employers are looking for such as teamwork, commitment and flexibility. It could also help to develop in pupils a realistic knowledge and understanding of business and working life.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship education, business curricular, Hongkong

Historically, Hong Kong emerged from an entrepôt in 1841 and today, it is one of the world's leading financial and business centers for the Asia-Pacific region, performing a 'hub' role as the gateway for China. Despite the abrupt changes in the global economic downturn in recent years, Hong Kong still excels and continues to prosper; this is partly because there is a pool of entrepreneurial talents who work untiringly to meet the demands of the ever-changing economic situation. At present, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) represent 98% of all local enterprises. It is no exaggeration to say that entrepreneurs are important to the sustainable economic development in Hong Kong.

Despite this, a recent survey conducted by Hugh Thomas, Associate Professor of Finance at Chinese University of Hong Kong, who helped conduct the survey for the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, noted that only three out of every 100 people in Hong Kong started their own business in the previous 42 months – ranking the city third to the last among the 35 economies surveyed. This was an unexpected finding, as the economy of Hong Kong holds its significance by relying on thousands of small business and hundreds of corporations in operation and it is a fact that entrepreneurs are one of the territory's most important assets.

As entrepreneurs are so important to our economy and the success of small business depends very much on entrepreneurship training (Ladzani & Van Vuuren, 2002), should schools be responsible for cultivating pupils with suitable entrepreneurial spirit and skills?

Unfortunately, the existing business curriculum in Hong Kong secondary schools lacks significant programs in either small business management or entrepreneurship. Business education was first introduced in the form of vocational training for people who wanted technical and secretarial training. Later, a business curriculum was introduced in the secondary school but was only limited to a few subjects such as business fundamentals, commerce, business studies and principals of accounts. Only in recent years have Information Technology and English Business Communication subjects been added to the secondary curriculum. Entrepreneurial training in secondary school does little to pave the way for pupils to pursue their future career planning and is unable to match the needs of the future society. Though entrepreneurial training is not on the official curriculum, some educators, realizing the benefit of providing opportunities for pupils to be exposed to the business environment, organize entrepreneurial projects in secondary schools, such as kiosks in the Chinese New Year's Market or a pupil-operated stall at school, so pupils can experience a real world business situation. Perhaps this is the first step to initiate entrepreneurship education in secondary education and this paper will thus look at the effect of the implementation of an entrepreneurial activity, the running of a New Year stall, on pupils.

The need for entrepreneurship education: Changes in the business sector and world economy

We live in the era of globalization, the impact of which is felt by large corporations and governments worldwide. Large companies are downsizing as a result of globalization and

information technology. Advanced technologies have drastically shortened the distance between markets, and suppliers all over the world now face keener competition. Big companies are sourcing out their functions resulting in less jobs in big companies. Governments are privatizing their operations in order to lower expenditure. Strong global competition accelerates the simplification of job processes, causing the loss of many jobs. The crisis is there but so are the opportunities. When working for a company is vulnerable, people start to think of becoming their own boss instead. When technology is advanced, jobs are limitless. When the government is outsourcing, that means more jobs are available on the market. This increases the number of small-to-medium-sized enterprises. Evidence in Europe showed that a change in economy leads to a growth in small enterprises, and naturally, in the demand for entrepreneurship programmes (Godtfredsen, 1995; Hayward & Sundes, 2000). A similar situation can be seen in the United States, and Kourilsky (1995) noted that these enterprises are the driving force for economic growth through the creation of jobs and innovative products and services.

THE SITUATION IN HONG KONG

Changes in the economy

Hong Kong is now undergoing the process of economic restructuring. The difficulties that the Hong Kong economy is facing are plenty. First, the Chinese government introduced an "open-door" international trade policy in the 1980s and encouraged foreign investors to set up business in China. In view of the comparative advantages, many Hong Kong businessmen were attracted to move their factories to China where the production cost is relatively much lower in terms of labour and rent.

Second, Hong Kong faced a serious economy recession as a result of the Asian financial crisis in 1997. Many businesses were forced to downsize or outsource to small firms in order to run their business operation in a more effective and efficient

way. The unemployment rate increased from 2.2% in 1997 to a new record of 8.7 % in July 2003. Another burden added to the already dismal situation is the large numbers of school leavers seeking jobs each year. School leavers who cannot find a place in a university or other tertiary institution are required to find jobs. However, there are not many suitable jobs for them, given their low education attainment. The Hong Kong government spent a lot of money to create temporary jobs in order to reduce the unemployment rate but was not successful. People merely become jobless again after the temporary jobs disappear. Furthermore, the government itself is suffering from a serious financial deficit.

Globalization also poses some serious challenges to the workforce. We are not just facing local competitors, but also competitors all over the world. In addition, with the rapid developments in information technology, many companies require much fewer staff. The result is a growth in self-employment as more organizations outsource work rather than employ permanent employees to do the tasks. People will need to be more flexible and creative in order to cope with this changing labor market. Consequently, people need to be enterprising and able to work autonomously, to take responsibility and decisions, to work in small teams and continually update their job skills.

What can be done to remedy the problem? It is advisable, in the long run, that the Hong Kong government train people to be independent and to create their own jobs to avoid continuously increasing her own financial burden. Entrepreneurship education, playing an important role to meet employment trends, may be the answer.

Policy in China leading to the demand for entrepreneurship education

The economy in mainland China is booming and there is an increase in the number of entrepreneurs. Furthermore, in order to promote the joint economic prosperity and development of the Mainland and the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, and to facilitate the further

development of economic links between the two sides and other countries and regions, China and Hong Kong have entered into a Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA). This new policy, aiming at promoting trade and investment facilitation, gives more opportunities to Hong Kong people to do business in Mainland China thus providing incentives for people in Hong Kong to start their business there.

Moreover, under CEPA, many cities in mainland China have allowed “solo tourists” to come to Hong Kong effective January 1, 2004. The Hong Kong tourism industry welcomes the scheme, because it would benefit not just only the local tourism, but also other sectors such as retailing, transport, business and service industries. It promises to provide a huge income for Hong Kong, and more opportunities to the entrepreneurs.

The needs of the youth

Faced with tremendous changes in the very competitive world of work today, employees must learn the importance of continuous development of skills beyond those required for a particular job. The structural changes of the world's markets have worked in the same direction as the cyclical downturn of the economy has exacerbated unemployment, especially among young people (O'Higgins, 2001). In order to survive, young people must possess some competencies, identified as “employability skills,” which are the keys to their job survival.

Education in Hong Kong has always been academically oriented with much of the focus on further studies, and little on pupils' career aspirations. The recent educational reform tries to narrow this gap between the education system and the workplace, and aims to help pupils understand a variety of issues concerning diversity, globalization, information technology, business ethics and responsibility so that they can face the new challenges of today's business world. However, there is a skill gap between the skills that pupils will need as employees and the skills that they learn in school, and the integration of the former into the general curriculum is an important

issue facing the policy makers of curriculum development.

There are many criticisms nowadays that young people lack the skills necessary for the workplace, and many employers complain that the school system does not prepare our youth for employment (Zemsky, 1994; Saul, 1998; Chang, 2002). In Hong Kong, Cheung and Lewis (1998) claim that "Secondary schooling... (in Hong Kong)... does not appear to be producing the well-motivated and well-rounded young people that employers would like to recruit" (p.109). They found in their research that employers would like to see in their employees both work skills and certain personal qualities, including communication skills, analytical reasoning, lateral thinking, practical orientation, interpersonal sensitivity, motivation, planning, decision-making, leadership and emotional stability (p.104). Not surprisingly, apart from basic academic skills, the skills required in the workplace are not taught in

the mainstream curriculum, thus resulting in a mismatch between the workplace requirements and the school curricula. Another survey done by the Education and Manpower Bureau (2000) on the opinions of employers concerning the performance of graduates showed similar results. The unbridled demand for diversified skills required today is different from that required in the past; employers are looking for well-educated employees with competent skills while many young school leavers do not possess either qualification or experience to meet the requirements (Cheng, 2001).

The role of SME in Hong Kong

Table 1 shows that there were about 290,000 SMEs in Hong Kong in September 2003. They accounted for over 98% of the total establishments and employed 1.34 million persons, about 60% of total employment (excluding civil service)⁽¹⁾ in March 2005 (SMEs in Hong Kong - Information Centre).

Table 1.
Distribution of SMEs (as at March 2005) ⁽²⁾

	No. of SME establishments	No. of persons engaged by SMEs
Total	285,662	1,339,256
Industry		
Manufacturing	15,239	100,453
Mining & Quarrying, Electricity & Gas and Construction	713	10,582
Services		
Import/Export Trades	95,574	410,455
Wholesale and Retail Trades, Restaurants & Hotels	79,810	371,270
Financing, Insurance, Real Estate & Business Services	51,780	213,928
Community, Social & Personal Services	32,625	169,836
Transport, Storage & Communications	9,921	62,732

Notes:

(1) Figures for total establishment and total employment (excluding civil service) are not meant to represent the overall situation and the entire labour market owing to the incomplete coverage of the Quarterly Survey of Employment and Vacancies.

(2) Figures now available can only give broad indication of the situation of SMEs in Hong Kong: the figures are compiled by counting an economic unit operating at a single physical location as one enterprise, and hence branch offices of a company at different locations are counted as separate enterprises.

Statistics show that there is a high percentage of people who would like to set up their own businesses. The Hong Kong government is very supportive and has extended help to these small businesses in the initial stage of their ventures. Various funding schemes such as “Business Installations and Equipment Loans,” “Associated Working Capital Loans,” and “Accounts Receivable Loans” have been introduced for these beginners. There are more than 60 supporting organizations coming from the various Trade and Industrial Organizations, the Universities and the different Industry Support Organizations. The financial and technical support given by all parties is very important as they will be perceived by all existing and potential entrepreneurs as encouragement.

This being the case, how would people learn how to become entrepreneurs, especially school leavers who may not have the passion to further their studies in tertiary institutions but want to try their luck starting a small business? Could schools provide entrepreneurship education for them?

The shortfall of the existing business curriculum

Although many young people are interested in starting their own business, they usually do not possess the experience and entrepreneurial skills to do so. The existing secondary curriculum does not provide any training for them to acquire the knowledge or skills to start a new business. Even for pupils taking the business stream in secondary schools, the present curriculum does not include much of the related entrepreneurial training program. There are complaints that today’s pupils do not possess real business knowledge, and that they are risk-averse, non-creative, passive, and are unwilling to handle responsibility. How can this situation be improved? As mentioned above, there is a distinct gap between the demands of the business sector and what the education system provides. Today, the business curriculum should be redefined to narrow the gap between the demand of business sector and the school curriculum. According to Bandura (1986 in

Gormon, Hanlon & King, 1997), “education can serve as a preparatory function in relation to new venture initiation or start-up, whereby the transfer of knowledge and acquisition and development of relevant skills would be expected to increase the self-efficacy and effectiveness of the potential entrepreneur” (p.56). So, why not provide entrepreneurial training for the young people as early as in secondary education? Entrepreneurship education is imperative as today young people are living in a market where unstable job, contract work, and unemployment are the norm.

Here a potential objection must be dealt with. It is often said that entrepreneurship cannot be taught, since entrepreneurs are born rather than made. According to this line of thought, entrepreneurship is about having such things as intuition, guts, and sheer intelligence, personal attributes that many consider to be impossible to impart in an academic setting. Why, then, should one believe that entrepreneurship education will be effective in providing pupils with the requisite knowledge and skills to start their own businesses? Why not believe that these qualities are, as is sometimes claimed, “in the DNA?”

The reply to this objection is twofold. First, the supposed “unteachability” of entrepreneurship is by no means a consensus among scholars. In fact, recent scholars tend to reject this view, believing that the key attributes of entrepreneurs can indeed be taught in academic settings (Henry, Hill & Leitch, 2005; Kuratko, 2005). Empirical studies also support this conclusion. For example, a study at the University of Arizona reveals that students who concentrated in entrepreneurship enjoy an annual income 27 percent higher than that of other business majors and standard MBAs (Charney & Libecap, 2000). In the same study, it was also found that entrepreneurship program alumni start more new businesses and develop more new products compared to their peers. Another study by Botha, Nieman & Van Vuuren (2006) found that women entrepreneurs who had received entrepreneurial training reported an increase in the number of employees, productivity and profit. Facts like these would be difficult to explain if

entrepreneurial skills consisted entirely of innate, unlearned qualities.

Second, although it may sometimes be the case that “education in the sense of a formal academic training dulls the cutting edge of commerce” (Bartlett, 1988, p.26; see Kirby, 2004 for a similar view), entrepreneurial education can take a variety of forms, both formal and informal, and it is arguable that it can have a greater impact on pupils when conducted in informal, real-world contexts (Fiet, 2000; Gorman et al., 1997). Indeed, as the study below demonstrates, effective entrepreneurship education can be carried out in real-life situations which involves learning by doing and provides opportunities for pupils to really engage in the entrepreneurial process. To focus just on the traditional delivery methods is to miss other potentially more effective teaching methods at the disposal of entrepreneurship educators.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION

Entrepreneurship education is significant in many aspects. Clow, Brantley and Davis (1997) explained that, first, the entrepreneurship process is very important for the health of any economy. US president George Bush (2002) stated ‘I know small businesses are the path to success for many Americans — especially women, the newly arrived, and minority Americans. Small businesses create jobs, and this is incredibly important for our economy at this time. Small businesses embody the American values of hard work, risk-taking, and independence Small businesses create two-thirds of new private sector jobs in America, employ more than half of all workers, and account for more than half of the output of our economy.’

Second, entrepreneurship education can also provide pupils with an understanding of business – its purposes, its structure, its interrelationship with other segments of the economy and society. Many studies have noted that an entrepreneurship course has a positive impact on pupils’ view on entrepreneurship. Mohan-Neill (2001) suggested

that pupils exposed to entrepreneurship education have more favorable views of small business. A study conducted by Waldmann (1997) indicated that entrepreneurship education at the high school level will have a great impact on the number of pupils who would seriously consider starting a business sometime after graduation. Similarly, Kolvereid and Moen (1997) observed that entrepreneurship graduates have stronger entrepreneurial intentions than other business graduates.

Third, entrepreneurship education focuses on life. The study of entrepreneurship can have a substantial impact on pupils’ career. Whether or not pupils study entrepreneurship with the specific intention of becoming an entrepreneur, an executive or a more informed stakeholder in general, once the pupil is immersed into the business world, that pupil will be affected by entrepreneurship. Since landing a position at a large organization is definitely hard for school leavers and more jobs are created by small and medium size companies, pupils will be faced with prospects of working at new and small companies. These companies will have to cope with innovation for long-term growth and in order to compete with other similar enterprises. In other words, pupils who work for these small to medium size companies will need to have the ability to manage the innovation process (Maranville, 1992). Entrepreneurship education will not only help pupils develop innovative skills but also provide complete entrepreneurial knowledge to keep up with this “entrepreneurship generation.”

Finally, and most importantly for our purposes, entrepreneurship education can develop in students the skills, attributes and behaviors characteristic of entrepreneurial individuals. This is different from the second significance of entrepreneurship education noted above—that of increasing pupils’ understanding about entrepreneurship and intentions to become entrepreneurs—because a student may desire to become an entrepreneur and know fully well what the career entails without knowing *how* to become a successful entrepreneur. In Jamieson (1984)’s taxonomy, entrepreneurship education should involve not only education “about” enterprise (dealing with raising awareness and

understanding) and education “for” enterprise (dealing with encouraging students to set up their own businesses), but also education “in” enterprise (dealing with the promoting the requisite skills and attributes). It is largely this latter aspect of the impact of entrepreneurship education that was explored in the present study .

THE RESEARCH

Though entrepreneurship education is not officially in the secondary curriculum, business educators recognize its importance, and activities have been conducted to equip pupils with a sense of entrepreneurship. One very popular activity is the operation of a kiosk before Chinese New Year. It has been a tradition that a few days before Chinese New Year, the most important festival in the minds of Chinese, people will sell things, ranging from flowers to toys, in temporary stalls located in a few parks where space is allocated for this purpose. A few months before Chinese New year, interested participants have to bid for the stalls. The successful participants then use the ensuing time to plan what they are going to sell in those few days of operation. For the past few years, many schools have participated in this activity, and teachers have recognized it as a good opportunity to teach entrepreneurship education.

Choice of schools

This research looked at three schools of different bandings which participated in the aforementioned activity. In Hong Kong, at the end of primary school, the pupils are allocated Form One places in junior secondary schools. Three “bands” in the order of merit are formed, based on the scaled internal assessment of pupils in the same school net. The top three pupils in the same school area go to the first band in the school area, the next into the second band, and so on. The main part of secondary education lasts for five years. It is made up of a junior cycle of three years, which is compulsory, and a senior cycle of two years, which is not compulsory but nearly universal.

Pupils have to take an examination in Secondary Five (S.5) and those who get the marks can continue their studies in S.6, preparing them for university entrance examination. In the present study, one school from each band was chosen to see if there is any difference of opinions between schools of different banding and whether pupils with better academic ability will have similar experiences with pupils of less academic ability.

Selection of participants

Both the teachers and the pupils of the three schools taking part in the activity were recruited. In-depth interviews were conducted with the teachers and the pupils were both surveyed and interviewed.

The questionnaires were administered twice to the pupils, before and after the activity, to see if there was any change in their perception and attitude towards the activity. Each questionnaire was coded to make it easier for the researcher to identify the change. The questionnaire contained three sections. Section A sought personal data, Section B inquired as to their reasons for participation, while Section C was concerned with the pupils’ perceptions of their entrepreneurial skills and attitudes, and drew on questions used in other studies of entrepreneurial skills (Cheung & Lewis, 1998; Education & Manpower Bureau, 2000). Some of the questions from the survey were used in the interview for further elaboration.

Measurement of entrepreneurship skills and attitudes

Given that the aim of the present study is to gauge the impact of an entrepreneurial activity on pupils’ entrepreneurial skills and attitudes, the question naturally arises as to what exactly those skills and attitudes are. What makes for an entrepreneurial individual? The skill set employed by the present study is based on a modified version of Rae (1997)’s proposal, which identifies the following skills as essential:

- communication skills
- creativity skills

- critical thinking and assessment skills
- leadership skills
- negotiation skills
- problem-solving skills
- social networking skills
- time-management skills

For the purposes of the study, the skills measured fall into three broad categories: 1) work-related skills, which are generic skills such as analytical and critical thinking, problem-solving and creativity; 2) interpersonal skills, including communication, social networking and negotiation; and 3) management skills, which include time management, staff management, and leadership skills. These skill sets are complemented by the fourth category of *work attitudes*, which encompasses such key entrepreneurial attributes as willingness to take responsibility, perseverance, and initiative.

THE FINDINGS

Background of participants

There were five teachers from the three schools which participated in this research. For school B, a band two school, and C, a band three school, two teachers were involved in this activity, whereas in school A, a band one school, only one teacher took part. The teachers all taught business subjects, and therefore had similar backgrounds. For the two schools with two teachers participating, one was female. The rest of the teacher participants were male. Their teaching experience varied from 3 years to 20 years. Table 2 shows their background.

Altogether, 50 pupils from the three schools participated in this activity and took part in the questionnaire survey. Twelve pupils (four from each school) were randomly selected for an in-depth individual interview that lasted for around an hour each. All the interviews were tape recorded. Table 3 shows their background.

Table 2.
Background of teachers

		Gender	Teaching experience	Main Subjects taught
School A	Teacher 1	Male	5 years	Business Studies
School B	Teacher 2	Male	15 years	Commerce, Economics
	Teacher 3	Female	7 years	English, Business Studies
School C	Teacher 4	Male	3 years	Commerce, English
	Teacher 5	Female	8 years	Commerce, Business Studies

Table 3.
Background of pupils

	Number of pupils surveyed (level of study)	Number of pupils interviewed (level of study)
School A	12 (S.4 and S.6)	4 (S.4 and S.6)
School B	14 (S.4 and S.6)	4 (S.4 and S.6)
School C	24 (S.3, S.4, and S.6)	4 ((S.3, S.4, and S.6)

Reasons for participation

Schools A and C participated for the first time, whereas School B had already been participating in this activity for three consecutive years. The reasons for participation were similar. Teachers saw the activity as an opportunity for pupils to integrate theories into practice. As stated by teacher 1:

I want my pupils to become successful in their business career upon graduation from university. It is a good thing if they could start early. This activity gives them an opportunity to see how theories could be integrated into practice. This is a one of a kind hands-on experience.

Teacher 3 echoed:

Classroom learning is dry. Pupils are not familiar with the real business situation. An activity like this helps them understand the real situation.

Teacher 2 elaborated further:

If pupils are to be taught about entrepreneurship, the best way of doing so is to give them the experience of being entrepreneurs themselves. Allowing pupils to run a stall will give them practical experience in the art of entrepreneurship.

Another reason for pupils to participate in this activity was that teachers saw it as a good chance for pupils to learn how difficult it is to earn a living. Teacher 5 commented:

My band 3 pupils did not have the motivation to study. They just wanted to get out of school to go to work. They thought it was easy. This activity told them what the real world was like. It was very difficult to earn money. You have to work hard to earn every dime. That was the message I want them to get from the activity.

For pupils, the reasons for participation were different. From the questionnaire survey, the overwhelming majority (88%) stated that they participated because it was fun. Only around a third (32%) wanted to take part in the activity because they wanted to learn more about theories in business. Most of those who had this view were S.6 pupils from School A, the band 1 school. In School C, only 1 S.6 pupil had this view (see Table 4).

The message was quite clear in the interview where most of the pupils wanted to take part in order to get out of the classroom and have some fun. A S.4 pupil from School B stated:

Lessons are boring. It will be fun to do anything outside.

Table 4.
Reasons why pupils participate in this activity

Reasons for participation	Strongly agreed and agreed (%)	I don't know (%)	Strongly disagreed and disagreed (%)
1. I could learn more from real business situation	32	24	44
2. It is fun	88	10	2
3. It is compulsory	0	10	90
4. Just to kill time	18	22	60

Table 5.
Related skills and attitude

<i>Work-related skills</i>	Before the activity	After the activity
a. Common sense (e.g. able to display a practical good sense in handling daily tasks)	3.5	3.8
b. Foresight (e.g. analyzing information logically and accurately)	3.0	3.5
c. Analytical mind (e.g. analyzing information logically and accurately)	3.0	3.9
d. Problem-solving ability (e.g. resourceful , able to identify problems / recommend logical and practical solutions)	2.8	3.5
e. Creativity (e.g. able to innovate / put forward new ideas)	2.8	3.4
<i>Work attitude</i>		
a. Willing to take up responsibilities and be accountable for the results	3.1	4.1
b. Ability to work independently	2.8	3.3
c. Perseverance (e.g. able to cope with difficult work environment / meeting deadline, patient in completing complicated tasks)	2.7	3.3
d. Initiative and drive (e.g. reacting to problems / opportunities without being told, improving oneself and actively seeking new challenges)	3.0	3.3
e. Willing to listen to the advice of superiors	3.6	3.8
<i>Interpersonal skills</i>		
a. Inter-personal relationship (e.g. capable of building rapport with classmates and earning respect from others)	3.3	3.7
b. Team work (e.g. able to cooperate with classmates, willing to listen to other people's views)	3.2	3.7
c. Negotiation skill (e.g. able to discuss with other parties and reach agreement in the best interests of your side)	2.8	3.3
<i>Management skills</i>		
a. Organization of work (e.g. having good time management, able to prioritize based on objectives, planning work efficiently)	2.7	3.3
b. Management of staff (e.g. able to guide and supervise subordinates)	2.7	3.3
c. Leadership (e.g. leading a group to achieve set targets)	2.8	3.2

A S.3 pupil from School C echoed:

I do not want to study and I do not think I have the marks to go into S.4 so I just want to play with some classmates in the activity.

A S.4 pupil from the same school summed it up:

It is an exciting activity where real money is involved.

Things pupils learned before and after the activity

Regardless of their reasons for taking part, it was noted that this activity did help pupils in many aspects.

Skills and attitude

From Table 5, it is observed that pupils did not rate themselves highly before the activity. After the activity, this survey recorded an improvement in every aspect.

i. Work related skills

Pupils thought that they had common sense in handling daily tasks before and after this activity; correspondingly, the positive impact on pupils' common sense is relatively moderate (a 8.5% rise from 3.5 to 3.8). Teacher 3 commented:

This activity is not compulsory. Some of them took part before and they know how to handle things. I could see the improvement in pupils after participating in this activity for 3 years.

The most significant improvement is in the area of analytic skills and problem solving skills, where 30% and 25% improvement are observed, respectively. Peter, a S.4 pupil from school B and a first-time participant in the activity, responded:

This activity helped me a lot. When I studied, the teacher always asked us to analyze issues but I did not know how. Now when I am confronted with a real situation in this activity, I need to think what to do to solve the problem. Subsequently, I think I am better now in solving problems and analyzing issues.

Wai-Ming, a S.6 pupil from school A stated:

I am a pupil from a prestigious school and my academic results are good. The only problem I have is a lack of creativity. It is not required in schools, though its importance is strongly emphasized. The reason is simple; you do not need to be creative to get good marks but real life situation demands

creativity. I am glad that I joined this activity as I needed to think hard and be creative all through the process.

His teacher, teacher 1 agreed:

This activity is better than case studies. You could fail in the latter at no cost but now if you make a mistake, you could lose money. I like the design of our stall in particular. It's so colorful and outstanding. It attracted a lot of customers. That's creativity.

ii. Work attitude

This is a major problem for pupils. Cheung and Lewis (1998) noted that employers expect a good working attitude in school leavers but many pupils failed to demonstrate that. This activity addressed this issue and it was good to see the change in pupils before and after the activity.

Teacher 5 stated:

I know it would be difficult for my pupils to further their studies in tertiary institutions. They will go to work very soon and they need to know that in school teachers may give them chances to improve and correct themselves but in reality, life is tough. You need to at least do the basics: going to work on time, being responsible, and listening to the advice of your superior. I hope after going through this activity, pupils will have a better understanding what the real world is like and how they could improve in their work attitude.

It is noted that the poor working attitude of pupils also worried other teachers as well, regardless of whether their pupils were academically brilliant. Teacher 1 exclaimed:

Young people nowadays are too irresponsible. Maybe times have changed. Many of them come from a family with one child. They have become too dependent on their parents. They cannot be entrusted with responsibilities. Though they have good marks to get into

university, it does not mean that they could survive in this world. I hope this activity help them see clearly they need good working attitude to excel.

The results show that the respect in which the pupils' work attitudes have improved the most is in their willingness to take up responsibilities, with a 33% rise from 3.1 to 4.1, far outstripping any other areas of attitude improvement. Mei Yee, an S.3 pupil from school C, responded:

I did not want to take up any responsibility at first because it means trouble. It is a burden if you do not do it right. People will point their fingers at you. That also happened in this activity but I have no choice for I was already assigned a role. What I could do is to try my best and later on I found that it was not as difficult as I originally thought. All I need is to follow instructions carefully. Gradually I picked up more confidence to be more responsible.

It is worth noting that Mei Yee's remarks indicate not only an increased willingness to take responsibility for one's own decisions, but also a reinforcement of two other distinctively entrepreneurial attitudes: self-confidence and willingness to take risks. Both classical economic theory and common sense support the claim that entrepreneurs are more predisposed to taking calculated risks than other members of the general population (Caird, 1991; Cromie & O'Donoghue, 1992), and work by Busenitz (1999) shows that entrepreneurs also tend to possess more self-confidence, an attitude that Koh (1996) regards as essential to any form of successful entrepreneurship.

Chiu Ming, a classmate of Mei Yee, echoed his comments:

I tend to give up very easily, especially in study. I prefer to play. In this activity, I could not give up. Even when I felt sick on the second day because I had too many sleepless

nights working on this project, I insisted on carrying on because of the encouragement I received from others. My teacher said that I have more EQ now and I think I could survive a bit more when tough times come.

This study indicates that pupils perceived that there was an improvement in their work attitude after the activity. During the activity, pupils showed their initiative and drive in taking responsibility. Teacher 5 commented:

Previously when the school bell rang, pupils rushed out of school. Now pupils were willing to stay in school late to prepare for the activity voluntarily. I was impressed. They showed a strong sense of responsibility and commitment to work. This was especially obvious in the case of those who were low academic achievers.

Michelle, an S.4 pupil from School C made the following comment:

I have never been so enthusiastic and committed to anything in school. I am not interested in studying. I feel bored during every lesson. This was the first time that I participated so actively in a school activity. I think I have learnt a lot of things that could not be found in textbooks.

iii. Interpersonal skills

In general, pupils were satisfied with their interpersonal skills before this activity though their teachers may have different opinions.

Teacher 4 exclaimed:

Pupils interact too much with computers. They do not know how to communicate with real people. That hurts their interpersonal skills.

Though the concerns of the teacher may be true, it is noted from later interviews with pupils

that they did not consider a big problem. Lai Fong, an S.4 pupil from school B, commented:

Young people can associate with one another easily. What we need is the patience to listen to adults.

However, through this activity, pupils had to face a real test, and there is room for improvement, as shown by the over 10% increase in interpersonal skills which they reported after the activity. One kind of test for the pupils is to deal with their customers, no matter young and old, and sell their products. Teacher 2 observed:

In this activity, pupils have to try their best, with good communication skills and listening ears, to make money.

Johnny, an S.6 pupil from School A noted:

I am known as a hot-tempered person. So I had to consciously remind myself to wear a smile when I was working at the stall, even when I was rejected by the customers.

The activity provided pupils with a completely different learning experience. Pupils worked in a group to run their own business. They could develop teamwork skills in different ways. Several pupils made the following comment:

In the activity, we learned how to share responsibilities. Some were responsible for purchasing goods, while others were responsible for designing promotional materials. No one could do everything all on his own. Success depended on teamwork.

Another teamwork skill that was developed was the ability to handle conflicts. Conflicts are bound to occur in every team, and the important point is whether they can be effectively managed and settled. One pupil commented:

We had different opinions on many matters, such as the kinds of good to be sold and the

prices to be set. We debated heatedly. We knew that unless all members felt that their opinions were respected and listened to, they could not commit to the decision. We tried to share our views openly to arrive at a consensus.

Moreover, in this activity, pupils were given the experience of dealing with both suppliers and consumers. Although the scale of their business was very small, it was nevertheless a real business. They had to negotiate with suppliers to get a good deal. If they failed to negotiate well and obtain favorable terms of trade, they would lose money.

iv. Management skills

Most pupils perceived that they lacked management skills before this activity. They did not think that they had good time management, especially in the case of pupils from school C. However, this activity gave them the urge to improve in the areas of management, and the result is impressive: in all three areas an around 20% improvement is observed.

A S4 pupil from school C, Patrick, noted:

I have a problem with time management. I am always late for school and never handed in assignments on time. I learned from this activity that time management is important. It is about setting priorities. Do the first thing first and do not wait until the last minute.

In the area of leadership, many pupils think they lack the ability to supervise and lead. This is normal, and although many schools claim to be educating the leaders of tomorrow, these claims do not always stand up to close examination. In many cases, schools do not provide the environment for leadership to be nurtured. In a lot of prestigious schools, academic results are the most important thing, whereas in band 3 schools school discipline is the major concern. That does not allow for much leadership to take place. The activity in the present study was different. It was a

developmental activity because it allowed pupils to learn from actual experience.

Teacher 1 commented:

Entrepreneurship and leadership are inseparable. As the leaders of a business, entrepreneurs are responsible for leading their fellow staff members to achieve the objectives set. This activity provides a good opportunity for pupils to learn leadership and management skills.

Teacher 4 echoed:

In regular school life, it is difficult for pupils to exercise leadership and management skills, especially in my school where pupils are disruptive. You have to deal with their discipline problems from time to time. How could a school trust them to lead and manage? In this activity, interestingly, after working for a certain while, pupils begin to take charge and lead. I remembered one incident when the products were so popular that they went out of stock on the second day. Johnny, an S.6 pupil, quickly took charge. He immediately contacted the supplier and assigned others to collect the goods. As a result, the stock shortage problem was solved.

One of the values of the activity was that it opened pupils' eyes and minds to the reality of entrepreneurship. After pupils were given the experience of running the stall, they understood better how real businesses worked, and this would give them more confidence if they have to start a business in the future.

During the interview, a pupil made the following comment:

Before the activity, I used to think running a business was not difficult. Now I realized that it is hard to run a business and earn money. Yet my desire to become a boss in the future has increased because I am more confident now. I have gained an idea of what an entrepreneur is.

Teacher 2 concluded by saying:

Throughout the process of planning and operating the business, our pupils set goals, communicate both orally and in writing, and develop leadership skills.

DISCUSSION

The findings in this study show the effectiveness of the activity as part of entrepreneurship education to teach secondary pupils many aspects related to work. While literature suggests the advantages entrepreneurship education has on the growth of economy and labour market (Brock & Evans, 1989; Acs, 1992; Carree & Thurik, 2002), this study clearly indicates that teachers and pupils found great value in entrepreneurship education, which could be summed up in Waldman's words (1997):

Encouraging a more entrepreneurial attitude in pupils can result in greater benefits than just educating potential entrepreneurs in how to start a business. It will also provide them with general skills and outlooks that are necessary for success in any venture (p.22).

This study confirms that entrepreneurship education encourages the development of skills and attributes that employers are looking for such as teamwork, commitment and flexibility. It could also help to develop in pupils a realistic knowledge and understanding of business and working life.

The recent educational reform in Hong Kong stated "Education serves the needs of both the society and the individual person. Education must help everyone to make a living and to meet the demands of their work. It should enable everyone to achieve their own success and to contribute to the economy" (Education Commission, 2000). The findings from this study show that entrepreneurship education can achieve these goals. It is interesting to note that pupils of different bandings share similar views. The message is clear.

Work-related skills and attitudes are necessary, sooner or later, for pupils of weaker academic ability who might go to work after high school, or pupils of stronger academic ability, who will go to work after university graduation. In either case, entrepreneurship education can provide the necessary training to equip pupils for their future career.

Hong Kong therefore should incorporate a comprehensive entrepreneurship education into its school curriculum. A complete entrepreneurship education program should be a life-long program catering to different stages for different age group of people, ranging from basic education in primary and secondary schools, to vocational institutions and universities as well as adult education centers. Entrepreneurship education benefits pupils, employers and the society, and deserves to be taken more seriously in Hong Kong.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

Data for this study were obtained from only three schools and thus the results may not be generalizable enough to describe the situation in Hong Kong. The findings, however, do convince us that a further research could be conducted to investigate the general situation.

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