Background of Liberal Studies

- A subject aims to **broaden students’ knowledge base** and **enhance their social skills** through the study of a wide range of issues.

- The modules focus on themes of significance to students, society and the world, designed to **enable students to make connections** across different fields of knowledge and to broaden their horizons.

- The learning experiences provided will **foster students’ capacity for life-long learning**, so that they can face the **challenges of the future** with confidence.

The rationales of Liberal Studies

- Provides opportunities for **students to explore issues** relevant to human condition in a wide range of contexts.

- Enables **students to make connections** among different disciplines

- Helps **students to develop independent learning capabilities** and cross-curricular thinking

Learner-centered environment

- The nature of Liberal Studies is, unlike other subjects, such as math and sciences, to promote **active learning** with the **student-centered approaches**

- Liberal Studies challenges traditional education, which focused on the transmission of facts and knowledge from teachers to students (Harpaz, Y., 2007)
**Learner-centered environment**

- With the student-centered approaches, students could acquire various skills which are required and useful for life-long learning

**Common characteristics of HK Students**

- Used to be spoon-fed by teachers
- Mainly teacher-centered with little students’ participation
- Selection of learning materials → focused on EXAM

**L.S. Teaching Practicum Experiences:**

- An EMI high-banding school in Kowloon
  - Junior form: English as MOI
  - Senior form: Chinese as MOI
    - Have a perception that they can use Chinese
  - Students’ learning abilities are highly diversified with very bright and very weak students in the same class

**Challenge 1**

- Students are used to teacher-centered or lecture-based learning environment
- According to Kwan, Eng & Ong (2000) it is common for Asian students to be passive in the classroom
  - Afraid of making mistakes
  - Full authority of the teacher (society norm)
Real life examples

- Even teachers ask questions frequently
- No one answers to the question
- One or two words response (not enough elaboration)
- Students have no questions
  - Do they understand everything?

Challenge 2

- Students are used to teacher-centered learning
- Takes time for students to adjust themselves into learner-centered learning environment.

Real life example

- Took around 1-2 weeks for students to adopt themselves into learner-centered learning environment
- Need to start as early as possible
  - Once students get used to lecture-based learning, it is hard for them to switch to learner-centered approaches
- Need to take gradual steps towards learner-centered learning environment
  - (will be explained later)

Challenge 3

- Too exam-oriented
- School schedule was too tight
  - Too many quizzes, tests, and dictations
- Didn't have enough time to discussions, and implement student-oriented activities
Real life example
• Daily quiz on vocabularies
• Dictation exercises on a weekly basis
• We have to follow the school’s approach in the lesson planning → confined our flexibilities

Challenge 4
• Too content-based
  • Textbook is used
  • The examination scale based on the textbooks
• This causes teacher-centered learning approach
  • Teachers have to cover everything on the textbook

Real life experience
• Underline key words from textbook
• Activities in the textbook were too simple
• Which requires less critical thinking
• Module by module
• Issue-based learning → more student-centered activities could be implemented
• IBL also allows cross-modular learning

Challenge 5
• Need more trust and respect
• Teachers shouldn’t underestimate students
• Teachers should trust students and challenge them
• Students are ‘able’ to adopt themselves in learner-centered learning environment, they just need more time and practices.
Challenge 5
- It is common for teachers to underestimate students
- Have a perception that they are not competent to do the group tasks
- Give too many instructions → students become passive
- End up with spoon-feeding students

Real life example
- Language-barriers
  - Some weaker students could not even spell the words
  - They wrote Chinese in the worksheets
  - They are not confident to ask questions
  - Scared of making mistake (English)
- Students become PASSIVE
Challenge 8

• How to get rid of the established culture

• How could we influence or give a positive impact on serving teachers

• Providing new ideas for ever-changing world

How to overcome with these problems?

• Took slow steps towards learner-centered learning environment

How to overcome with these problems?

• Increase Student Talking Time (STT)

• Create strong rapport with students

• Increase group tasks

• Conduct Student-oriented activities (issue-based learning, problem-based learning, IES)

Increase Student Talking Time (STT)

• Ask questions frequently (concept checking questions, open-ended question)

• Give positive reinforcement such as, praise, positive feedback, eye contact; to give them pleasure and the joy of learning

• To let students get used to share their ideas
Strong rapport with students

- Learner-centered learning environment can't be created without having a strong rapport with students.
- To create warm learning environment
- Students could feel relaxed while sharing their ideas.
- Would not be scared of making mistakes

More group tasks

- Give simple group tasks to let students get used to practicing collaborative skills in learning
- Grouping is important at this point
- In each group, there should be at least one high-achieving student
  - This allows all the groups to be on task
  - Encourage collaboration
  - Invite passive students to contribute

Conduct student-oriented activities

- Issue-based learning
- Problem-based learning
- Independent Enquiry Studies (IES)

Nature vs. Reality

- Public exam distort the nature of Liberal Studies
- Students care more about grades and memorization of knowledge instead of learning how to learn
- Students/ Parents focus more on academic achievement rather than the process of learning
- The existence of tutoring for Liberal Studies???
Our thoughts...

We believe that students’ learning process/ progress in Liberal Studies could be better evaluated in forms of continuous assessment instead public examination.