

# **A study of the roles and duties of secondary 1 to 3 Form Teachers in Hong Kong secondary schools**

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The expectations of school administrators, teachers, parents and students on form teachers at secondary 1 to 3 levels, the feelings and opinions of form teachers, and their roles and duties in a local subsidized secondary school were studied intensively by interviews and questionnaires as a pilot. It was found that the roles of junior form teachers were important and their responsibilities were ever increasing. Duties of form teachers could be grouped into four areas: Daily Classroom Duties, Class Club Duties, Student Counselling and Communication with Parents. Students expected their form teachers to care for them and help them learn and grow. Parents appreciated the bridging role of form teachers. School administrators recognized the importance of effective form teachers to the good management of a school. Form teachers themselves wanted an effective and fair Form Teacher System and to spend more time on educational issues.

After the pilot, 1007 teachers from 85 schools were studied by referring to the questionnaire on the roles and duties of form teachers in junior forms. The data were then analyzed and some suggestions were proposed focusing on the problems found.

## **香港初中班主任的角色及職責**

本研究透過詳細測試一所標準津貼中學的學校行政人員、初中班主任、資深老師、學生及家長進行訪問及問卷調查，研究他們對班主任角色及職責的看法，發現初中班主任之角色甚為重要及職責日益繁重。班主任的工作有四大範疇，包括處理日常班務、班會事宜、學生輔導及家長聯繫。訪問中也發現學生期望班主任能照顧他們的學習及幫助他們成長。家長感謝班主任能作溝通的橋樑。行政人員確認了高效能的班主任對學校的管理甚為重要。而班主任自己卻期望能較專注於教育性質的事務上並且在任教的學校裏有一個公平有效的班主任制度。

測試後，筆者進行一個較大型的研究，有 85 所中學參與，共 1007 位老師接受了問卷調查。資料收集後，經數據分析，筆者嘗試針對問題作出一些討論及建議。

## INTRODUCTION

In Hong Kong, there are normally around 40 students in a class at the junior secondary levels. Usually one teacher is assigned to a class as the form teacher to look after the students' welfare, moral education and social development (Yau and Luk, 1986). Form teachers have to communicate well with their students to understand their needs and to establish good relationships with them so as to carry out their duties smoothly and efficiently. In fact, many form teachers have to assume part of a parent's role in the caring for their students. Form teachers act as twist-ties that bind together the community, the home and the school (Lam and Ho, 1995). They have to plan how to make use of the limited time available in form periods to handle class affairs and settle students' problems. As our society develops, the complexity of the job nature of a form teacher increases rapidly.

The adoption of the nine-year compulsory free education policy in 1979 has ever since burdened our form teachers. All students have to attend schools up to the age of fifteen irrespective of whether they are interested in study or not. It has been observed that there are many more student problems since then. Although there is additional manpower support of a part-time social worker from the Education Department, the help is very limited. It is acknowledged that form teachers are still the best persons to counsel students since very often a trust relationship has already in existence between them (Yau and Luk, 1986). Cheng and others (1997) mentioned the importance of a well-planned tailor-made school-based policy with clear and directional objectives to guide the work of teams of teachers to attain school goals. Thus, an effective Form Teacher System is of great importance in a secondary school to facilitate form teachers to perform their duties.

Nowadays, schools usually appoint teachers, as special duties in addition to normal classroom teaching, to look after certain important areas of school functions, such as discipline, moral education, sex education, civic education, extra-curricular activities, guidance and counselling, careers guidance, and among many others, including Form Teachers. Then what are the expectations of school administrators, teachers, parents and students on form teachers, especially at secondary 1 to 3 levels when students need a lot of care and guidance? What are the feelings and opinions of form teachers about their work and on their Form Teacher System? These are the research questions that this paper intends to investigate.

## **FOCUS OF THE STUDY**

In late 1997, a pilot study was carried out which aimed at investigating the current roles and duties of form teachers at junior levels in a local subsidized secondary school, and exploring the expectations of school administrators, teachers, parents and students on form teachers. An intensive case study of the school was carried out. An appropriate questionnaire and interview protocols were developed and tested for the study.

In 1999-2000, the main study was carried out on 85 secondary schools involving 1007 teachers. This paper mainly reported the results obtained from the case study carried out and the initial analyses of the data obtained from the main study.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Different countries have different education systems. Therefore, the expected role and duties of a form teacher are quite different in different parts of the world. The education system in China in early 1900s was much influenced by the United States of America. The education system in Hong Kong was originated from China but was much influenced by the British system gradually. In Hong Kong, a *form teacher* is sometimes called as a *class teacher*. The term *form teacher* will be used in this paper.

In the literature, it has been found that a form teacher could assume many types of roles, including but not limited to: as a parent to students (Lo & Fang, 1993; Yang & Wang, 1995; Yau & Luk, 1986), as a good friend to students (Lo & Fang, 1993), as a guidance or a counselor (Yau & Luk, 1986), as a significant tutor in students' development (Xin, 1990), as a moderator in school administration (Lam & Ho, 1995; Xin, 1990), as a classroom manager, instructor and organizer (Yang & Wang, 1995; Lo & Fang, 1993), as a facilitator to promote the class activities and class spirit (Meng, 1992), as a bridge between students and the school (Yang & Wang, 1995; Xin, 1990), as a bridge between subject teachers and students (Gan et al., 1995) and as a twist-tie to link up the school, the family and the society (Lo & Fang, 1993). Corresponding to those roles, there are a whole lot of duties for a form teacher. These roles and duties are expected to be different in different schools and in different education systems.

In the British system, the term tutor is used. It is the tutor who is to take care of a class of students. Generally, a junior form tutor has 3 types of duties, namely, to help students learn effectively in school, to help students' individual development, and to help students learn how to live and work with other people (Yau & Luk, 1986).

In China, a form teacher is responsible for the planning, organizing and exercising the various aspects of education, as well as unifying all educational resources for the class. The form teacher has the

responsibility to follow and work under the direction of the Communist Party. With these principles in perspective, the duties of a form teacher in China are described as follows:

- (1) “to get acquainted with each individual student through observations, conversations and careful studying of the students’ records;
- (2) to cultivate an energetic, aggressive yet unified group, and to seek out and nurture the affirmative members to become the core of the class, as well as to develop positive exposition and fine tradition through various aspects of education;
- (3) to pay special attention in selecting and nurturing the top students, and in observing the progress of those with potentials, thus motivating the entire class;
- (4) to provide different educational activities in accordance to the characteristic of each group in after-school hours or holidays through programs in association with the activities of the Communist Youth Party and the Youth Pioneers; and
- (5) to maintain a close relationship with the Communist Youth Party and the Youth Pioneers, parents, teachers of all subjects and educators in order to have a common understanding in what to ask for in a student, a unified pace, and a good cooperation, that a truly fine education may be sustained. (Yau & Luk, 1986).”

The importance of a form teacher is widely discussed in Mainland China. There seems to be a lot of expectations from the Chinese Government on form teachers. Meng (1992) described that in everyday life practice, the most appropriate and effective person to pursue moral education vigorously was the form teacher. He had to understand students, establish a class club, plan and fix the targets for the class, promote the class spirit and good customs, discipline the class, establish a healthy class public opinion, enrich class activities, insist the principle of socialism and collectivism. Ou-yang (1991) indicated that the work of a form teacher was the foundation work of moral education in school. He had to cultivate a person, to nurture them to become an ideal, moral, civilized, disciplined “four have” (i.e. with ideality, morality, culture & discipline) talented person. He also had to know about and practice continuously the principles of pedagogy, psychology, ethics, management, public relation and philosophy. Xin (1990) described that the education task of form teachers comprised of four aspects, namely organization, management, instruction and education. The main objective of their works should be to nurture people of satisfactory caliber of various types and various levels who would be able to face the modernization, the world and the future. Such an objective was realized in the process of organization and management of a class of students as a whole. To achieve the objective, the form teacher had to learn more and study more.

As early as in September 1988, the Chinese Government has issued the Temporary Regulations for Secondary School Form teachers. There were eight prescribed main duties:

- (1) “to pursue political and moral education;

- (2) to foster students to complete their learning tasks;
- (3) to guide students in participating labor work assigned by the school;
- (4) to care about the extra-curricular activities of students;
- (5) to pursue classroom management;
- (6) to coordinate all subject teachers of the class to discuss about the educational work of his own class;
- (7) to do the evaluation and grading of students' moral behavior; and
- (8) to contact with parents and cooperate with them (Chang, 1992; Shen, & Kuo, 1995)."

In China, it is clear that a form teacher takes a very important role in the holistic development of students as well as to the entire education system. There are many expectations on form teachers that there was even a subject focusing on Form Teachers and a handbook describing their roles and duties (Xin, 1900). But in Hong Kong, the Form Teacher System seems to be not well recognized as in China. We do not have formal document or any working rules defining the working areas and quantities of work of a form teacher.

In Hong Kong, there was a job description of a form teacher listed out in the suggested guideline of guidance work for secondary schools in 1986. So far this seemed to be the only official document describing the duties of a form teacher in guidance work. The term *class teacher* was used instead of the common one *form teacher*.

"..... the class teacher acts as a first contact in the delivery of pupil guidance. His role is to assist in:

- (i) "managing classroom discipline;
- (ii) identifying problems encountered by pupils;
- (iii) orientation and encouraging pupils to approach the guidance team or the school social worker whenever there is a need;
- (iv) making referrals to the guidance team or the school social workers, when and where appropriate;
- (v) cooperating with the guidance teachers or the school social workers in the intervention process, and
- (vi) assisting in the implementation of development and preventive program (Education Department, 1986)."

Yau and Luk (1986) carried out a research studying the functions and duties of form teachers in Hong Kong secondary schools. In the research, the information was mainly collected from teachers from 130 government and aided schools. The findings of the study showed that there were five main types of duties of a form teacher: counselling students, understanding students, motivation of class spirit, as a bridge between the students and other people such as the school, the parents, and other teachers, and

also doing clerical work such as collecting fees. Also, the study suggested to strengthen the traditional Form Teacher System in three main areas: conducting teacher training programs, providing school supporting facilities and workload reduction. Lam and Ho (1995) analyzed the functions of form teachers in secondary school administration and categorized them into five areas: academic, discipline, general affairs, public relations and personnel. In Hong Kong, the duties of a form teacher are usually school-based and there seems to be no official duties as specified by the government.

In the literature mentioned above, it was found that, very often, the duties of a form teacher mentioned were mainly expectations from teachers themselves or from the school administration or even from their Central Governments. There is little information related to the expectations from students or parents. In a survey “Super-talk through Internet” held from the 6<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup>, October 1997 (Ming Po, 1997), there were 74.95% of 535 young people indicated that they needed care from the teachers. Did this indicate a need to review the guidance work in school? Besides, 47.48% of them showed great opposition to the proposal of establishing a Teachers’ Day. Was it an indicator to point out that our teachers were not performing well? Or was it just a voice to reinforce a possible unsatisfactory teacher-student relationship? Therefore, it is hoped that with this study a more updated, relevant and holistic description of the roles and duties of form teachers would be obtained through the study of the expectations from various stakeholders including the school administrators, parents and students.

## **PILOT STUDY:**

### **SAMPLE**

The target school in the pilot study was a well-developed, symmetric<sup>1</sup>, Christian subsidized secondary school that had most of her students having good banding<sup>2</sup>. There were altogether fifteen classes at secondary levels 1 to 3. The students mainly came from neighboring private and public housing estates.

### **METHOD**

A participatory method, using interviews and a questionnaire survey (Merriam, 1990), was employed focusing on an intensive case study of a secondary school. One of the three researchers of this pilot study was actually a form teacher of the junior levels of the school. The pilot study consisted of two main parts, namely, various structured interviews with school administrators, teachers, students and parents, and a questionnaire survey for all the secondary 1 to 3 form teachers.

Data from students, form teachers and senior teachers were collected through separate small group interviews. Six junior form students, six junior form teachers and six senior teachers in the school executive committee were interviewed. All of them were randomly selected. Three randomly selected parents from junior forms were interviewed first by telephone and then face-to-face at the Parents' Night. Also, a classroom observation of an actual form period was videotaped.

After the initial analyses of the information obtained from the interviews, a questionnaire was developed to survey the opinions of all the fifteen secondary 1 to 3 form teachers.

Altogether fifteen completed questionnaires were collected from all the junior form teachers. Eleven of the form teachers were female. Ten were GM/SGM teachers and the remaining were CM/AM teachers. Six form teachers had two to five years of teaching experience, and another six had more than six years of teaching experience. Only one had just one year of teaching experience. However,

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<sup>1</sup> Symmetric school: there are equal number of classes from secondary one to five so that most of the students do not have to apply for other schools when they are promoted to higher forms.

<sup>2</sup> Banding in secondary school (to year 2000-2001), all primary six students in a district will be graded into five bindings according to their results in school by the Education Department of Hong Kong. The best 20% of students are graded as band one, and so on. A school is considered as having good banding if the majority of her students are of band one and two. At the advent of Education Reform, now 5 bandings is reduced into 3, since September 2001.

two did not disclose their number of years of teaching experience.

Descriptive statistical analyses were performed on the data collected from the questionnaire survey.

## **RESULT**

In this section, results obtained from the pilot were reported.

### **(a) *From the interviews:***

#### With Students

The interview with the junior form students showed that they did have a great deal of expectations of their form teachers. Most of the students emphasized the need of caring from their form teachers, their leading abilities to manage the class such as acting as a judge or a moderator among students. The form teachers were expected also as a bridge between the school, the students and the parents. To the students, they did not seem to have an understanding of the Form Teacher System in school, but they did mention that more form periods were necessary for the form teachers to help the classes handle classroom affairs. They had no adverse comment on the ongoing Form Teacher System.

#### With Form Teachers

The interview with the junior form teachers was a fruitful discussion on their duties related to time-consumption, meaningfulness, urgency and difficulties. The form teachers mentioned some important facts and contextual features of the school. In general, they realized their importance to the development of the students. However, they felt that some important and urgent duties assigned by the school did not have education values. It was always this non-educational related trivial work that was the most time-consuming and made them feel tired and exhausted. These duties would well be taken up by other non-teaching staff. Moreover, the current Form Teacher System in the school was not encouraging to them in terms of using the form periods for educational activities.

In the observation of the conduction of a form period, it was observed that the form teacher was acting as a facilitator to help the class club chairperson, a student of the class, to promote the class-club and school activities. The teacher also acted as an advisor to remind students how to prepare for the coming academic tests. In that form period, the teacher also carried out an educational activity to convey a message of moral education through a game, to look after the class discipline as well as to control the pace of teaching. It was observed that the form teacher had to do a lot of preparatory work in order to perform his/her jobs effectively. It could be seen that a form teacher was the spirit of the class, and form periods were important to students to learn new things other than academic subject matters. The form



period was also vital to form teachers in understanding the needs of their students.

#### With School Administrators

The information collected from the senior teachers showed that, from the viewpoint of the school administration, the present Form Teacher System had already taken care of the needs of the students and facilitated the work of the teachers. They recognized the importance of the effectiveness of a form teacher to the successful management of the school, however, they commented that it was very much depended on the teachers themselves, their characters, abilities and maturity, for carrying out the duties of a form teacher effectively.

#### With Parents

It was found that most of the parents interviewed relied on the form teachers to monitor their children in the school. They had great confidence on the form teachers and relied very much on them to take care of their children. They appreciated very much the “bridging role” of the form teachers. However, parents did not have any idea about the school Form Teacher System.

#### *(b) From the questionnaire survey:*

The questionnaire compiled after the analysis of the results obtained from the interviews consisted four sections as follows:

Section I: Form teachers were asked to respond to items which were related to the Daily Classroom Duties, Class Club Duties, Counselling Duties and Communication with Parents, with reference to the amount of workload, their educational importance and the requirement for formal training;

Section II: The personal feelings and opinions of being a form teacher;

Section III: Opinions on how to increase the effectiveness of a form teacher; and

Section IV: Opinions on the existing Form Teacher System in schools.

Since there were only 15 questionnaires, no sophisticated statistical analyses were performed. Observations collected are summarized as follows:-

#### **Section I: The Four Categories of Duties**

##### *(A) Daily Classroom Duties:*

The form teachers indicated that the workload in writing receipts and handling students' various

application forms was heavy but not important in terms of education values. The more important work was to look for missing students, and writing reports and remarks for students. It was the latter that training was required. Other than that, formal training for performing daily classroom duties seemed not necessary.

*(B) Class Club Duties:*

The form teachers agreed that the workload occupied in the management of class discipline was heaviest and this duty was the most important. The workload on promotion of class club affairs was also heavy and the duty was again important. Special training in these areas was necessary. On the whole, the workload, the importance in education values and the need of training were greater than that of daily classroom duties.

*(C) Student Counselling:*

Form teachers considered that the workload on writing responses to and comments on students' diaries, counselling and liaising with students was heavy. However, all of these duties, and the latter two in particular, were important duties of form teachers. Generally speaking, the workload on counselling students was heavy and indispensable in terms of education values. Moreover, quite a number of teachers opined that training on techniques on counselling emotional students was needed.

*(D) Communication with Parents:*

The workload on liaising with parents of students was not so heavy, but the job was found to be important. Training was considered necessary before formal meeting was held with parents. Home visit was not a common practice for the school and, up to 1999, no Parent-Teacher Association has been formed.

*(E) The Comparison of the Four Main Types of Duties*

On the whole, daily classroom duties, which were considered to be relatively less meaningful and important, occupied most of the time of a form teacher. However, these duties could be taken up by other non-teaching staff as they were relatively less difficult to handle. Student counselling, which was not easy to handle, was considered to be of utmost importance. For this reason, proper training and support from schools on student counselling were deemed to be necessary.

## **Section II: Feelings and Opinions from Form Teachers**

Form teachers did maintain a good relationship with students though the workload of the former was heavy. Time constraint severely affected the performance of form teachers. As negative feelings and

responses for being form teachers were expressed by certain form teachers, greater school support was needed in order to rectify the situation.

### **Section III: To Increase the Effectiveness of the System**

In order to increase the effectiveness of form teachers, it was found that the workload of form teachers ought to be reduced especially regarding those unimportant and miscellaneous duties. Clerical work would better be taken up by school clerks to help alleviate the burden of form teachers. The arrangement of experience sharing sessions for form teachers was helpful. In addition, it was suggested that the school should release the form teachers for at least a year or so after they had served as school teachers for several consecutive years.

### **Section IV: Opinions on the Existing Form Teacher System**

Form teachers reiterated that their performance would likely affect the effectiveness of the school, and hence the existing Form Teacher System needed to be improved. It was encouraging to note that quite a number of respondents indicated that every school teacher should have a chance to be a form teacher. It was also found that form teachers were not satisfied with the existing workload ratio between form teachers and non-form teachers.

## **MAIN STUDY:**

### **SAMPLE**

In mid-2000, 85 out of 86 randomly selected secondary schools in Hong Kong participated in the main study. A total of 1,007 copies of completed questionnaires were collected, an average of 11.8 per school. Normally, there were 15 junior form teachers per school, and hence the response rate was around 78.7%. Descriptive statistical analyses were carried out to find out the views of the form teachers on various aspects of their work.

### **METHOD**

The data collected from the questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS software.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of the main study were presented in **Tables 1a** to **1e**. The following sections highlighted the important findings. In general, the results found were in line with those in the pilot study.

### Section I: The 4 Categories of Duties

#### (A) Daily Classroom Duties:

It was found that the workload on preparing receipts and handling students' application forms was heavy but less important in terms of education values. Trainings on writing reports and reference letters were considered to be important by form teachers. As such, there was an urgent need to upgrade their language ability. We eagerly hoped that the government would develop concrete proposals to promote bi-literacy and tri-lingualism for teachers in the near future. Many of the daily classroom duties, such as collection of money and reply slips, were considered to be trivial and time-consuming, and these tasks could well be taken up by non-teaching staff. In the *Policy Address 2001*, our Chief Executive, the Honorable Tung Chee Hwa, had promised an annual provision of \$500 million to schools to free teachers from non-teaching duties so as to create a better working environment for them. Many schools could therefore, spend their allocation of fund to employ more staff members or purchase services from outside to alleviate their teachers' workload.

#### (B) Class Club Duties:

The main study reviewed that managing classroom discipline was the most important yet time-consuming duty of form teachers. Special training in this area was necessary. Generally speaking, the workload, the educational importance, and the need of training related to class club duties were greater than that of daily classroom duties. The establishment of the \$5 billion Continuing Education Fund in 2001 to support life-long learning in Hong Kong has fostered school teachers to study relevant training programmes. This new subsidy would help build a culture of continuing professional development and support many more teachers to equip and upgrade themselves.

#### (C) Student Counselling:

Form teachers of secondary 1 to 3 found that the counselling of disruptive and emotional students was the most time-consuming (the "agree" index = 4.4016 [Behavioural Counselling]; with 1= lowest, and 5= highest), but most important in educational value (the "agree" index = 4.5763[EQ Counselling]) and most urgent for training (the "agree" index =4.6172[EQ Counselling]) among all other aspects of form teachers' work. Recently, the Social Welfare Department in Hong Kong issued a report indicated that there was a sharp increase of child abuse from 1,100 cases in 1999 to 1,249 cases in the first

half-yearly of 2001, already outnumbering the total number of cases in the whole year of 2000 as well (Hong Kong Economic Times, 22 October 2002). Such a phenomenon may be attributed to a lack of knowledge of parents on how to handle children with behavioural problems. As such, these corroborated the importance and urgent need of teachers' or maybe even parents' training on counselling so as to facilitate their work in this particularly difficult role.

(D) Communication with Parents:

When the pilot was carried out in the target school, there was no Parent-Teacher Association (PTA). However, in 2001, a well-established PTA was already in place, with teachers working with parents in good partnership.

The results showed that teachers irrespective of their years of teaching experience had identified the task of "face-to-face interview with parents" as the most time-consuming but important duty. It was trendy that the more parents were involved in PTA especially at decision-making level, the more difficult for teachers to deal with parents, unless a school culture of appropriate degree of mutual understanding and co-operation had been established. That could explain why some form teachers had indicated that it was an area rather in need of training as well. Providing more opportunity for parents and teachers to work together in school will foster a better understanding among one another and was extremely beneficial in establishing such a culture.

## **Section II: The Comparison of the Four Main Types of Duties**

The main study reviewed that daily classroom duties occupied most of the time of a form teacher. These duties were viewed as not so meaningful, nor difficult to perform. However, they were considered to be the most important, a situation that was not in line with the findings from the pilot study. The employment of Teaching Assistants to look after the daily classroom duties could be a good idea to free teachers from this non-educational work.

Student counselling was considered as the most meaningful yet the most difficult duty to well handle. In this case, proper training and support from schools or the government were necessary.

The least agreed findings between the main study and the pilot test was that Communication with Parents occupied least of the time of a form teacher. This implied that either form teachers seldom contacted parents unless their children have serious disciplinary problems, or parents appreciated the bridging role of form teachers and hence, contacting form teachers was considered to be unnecessary. Moreover, PTAs tried to help form teachers in various ways. Among the least meaningful and least needed (*Table 1b*) jobs, form teachers placed Class Club Duties at the bottom rank. In the pilot test, Class Club duties, on the whole, were considered to be greater than Daily Classroom duties in terms of workload, importance in education values and the need of training. These results showed that both Daily

Classroom duties and Class Club duties, though different in nature, were considered to be less meaningful and less difficult by the form teachers.

Daily classroom duties and Class Club duties were routine work but the latter has long lasting effects. Student counselling and Communication with Parents were occasional tasks and impressive that the effects were easily noticed. In fact, all jobs were important and need professional training.

### **Section III: Feelings and Opinions of the Form Teachers**

Given the workload of form teachers was heavy, time constraint became a major factor that severely affected the effectiveness of form teachers, though respondents opined that form teachers would have the privilege to get closer to their students. All in all, form teachers, both experienced and inexperienced, needed greater support from their schools.

To ensure the success of current education reforms, it was understandable that teachers need profound support. Teachers believed that it is within their power and responsibility as class teachers to exert control over the class. However, just having expertise, qualifications, and curriculum knowledge in teaching, alone or in combination, would not make a teacher effective. The ability and availability of time of a teacher to understand the students they taught, to react and respond to the needs of each student in a class through positive interaction and other skills, are necessary to build a positive classroom climate<sup>3</sup>, and eventually a successful education.

The key problem of teachers in Hong Kong nowadays was time constraint. It was not easy for them to have enough time to talk to their students in a relaxed and comfortable manner. We should try our best to enable our teachers to have a balance among continuous professional education, their daily school work and their family life as well. This arrangement for teachers should be put as the top priority on the agenda of the education reform in the new century.

Undoubtedly, as the editors of *Teachers' Digest, July 2001* said, schools could adopt the support measures according to their own situation and needs. Nevertheless, if activities such as “pre-school-term induction” could be arranged for secondary 1 “new-comers” during the summer vacation to help them adapt to the new learning environment, the results could be more fruitful. It could somehow lessen the heavy burden of workload of the form teachers in junior forms.

It was essential to allow time for revivification and reflection of the teachers who were exhausted

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<sup>3</sup> Classroom climate is defined in Bluestein J. (1988) “21<sup>st</sup> Century Discipline – Teaching Students Responsibility” ‘Self-central’ Scholastic Inc., Jefferson City, as the synthesis of the physical, intellectual and emotional environments created by the interactions among and between the teachers and students in a classroom, which either support or inhibit learning.

with their teaching duties. It was when the teachers understood what constituted a comfortable classroom climate and were willing to implement procedures and activities to reach that end, that success would be achieved by most students. This understanding brought with it an awareness that teachers' behaviors might need to be repeated, altered, or eliminated in order to maintain a consistent positive climate. Such awareness was not easily achieved unless there was substantial support from the principal or from the school.

With a view to supporting and motivating the form teachers, some incentive initiatives, such as a big smile, words of praise or prizes for the outstanding form teachers, etc., could be offered and would definitely be well-received by the form teachers.

#### **Section IV: To Increase the Effectiveness of the System**

In order to increase the effectiveness of form teachers, it was found that the workload of form teachers ought to be reduced especially those miscellaneous duties. Clerical work would be better taken up by other non-academic staff to alleviate the burden of form teachers. Along with it, the procedure of the form teachers' jobs could be streamlined. The arrangement of experience sharing sessions for form teachers would be helpful. Also, the school should release the form teachers for at least a year or so after they had served as form teachers for a number of consecutive years. Possible solutions to these problems were discussed as follows:

##### **(A) Using the Financial Support from the Government:**

Public-sector schools could maximize the use of the Capacity Enhancement Grant (CEG) (HK\$ 300,000 for each secondary school in 2001 as stated in *Policy Address, 2001*) to relieve teachers' workload so that they could concentrate more on meeting the diverse learning needs of their students. For instance, by making use of CEG, some schools employed a few teaching assistants to take up teachers' workload on preparing teaching materials, administrative duties and processing of student information, while some schools engaged several secondary seven graduates of the school to provide tutorial classes for secondary 2 and 3 students who were poor performers in the English Language subject. By so doing, teachers or form teachers could spend more time in designing an appropriate curriculum for their students, devising different teaching strategies for the periods, and providing guidance to students with learning difficulties or with disciplinary problems.

##### **(B) Providing Clear and Detailed Guidelines for Form Teachers:**

Quite a number of schools had well-documented Teachers' Handbooks for their teachers to follow. For instance, there were two well written school-based teachers' handbooks (Good Hope School, 1998 and Tung Wah Group of Hospitals, 1998). One of which has put down a comprehensive list of duties for form teachers on 1<sup>st</sup> September (the first day of the semester) and the roles expected of form teachers.

Insofar the jobs and duties of form teachers in general were not so specific, *The Teachers' Digest(2001)* suggested 4 main themes for the form periods:

- (1) Making full use of ones' time: prepare and draw up a working schedule;
- (2) Having good study methods: effective memory methods;
- (3) Having a clear image: I grow up this way; and
- (4) Aiming for higher goals: four steps of setting targets.

The Education Department had organized a number of professional development programs for the teachers in the past years. Some programs were commented to be helpful in assisting teachers to enhance the self-awareness of their students and improving their academic achievements. Teachers could benefit from attending all these kinds of programmes in the future if available.

#### (C) Experience Sharing in Counselling and Discipline

Form teachers treasured the chance of experience sharing, and in particular, experiences on counselling. Teachers preferred to discuss the scenarios of different cases and share the solutions among themselves. Counselling techniques such as ice breaking, listening, acceptance, empathic understanding, structuring, reflection, clarification, leading, respect, genuineness, confrontation, immediacy, self-disclosure, and termination, etc., are useful for form teachers to get acquaintance with.

What was also urgent for form teachers to handle was disciplinary problem. Form teachers needed time to build up good teacher-student relationship with their class and to change their own minds about the concept of discipline. In some instances, discipline in the 21<sup>st</sup> century means to give up the old values dated back to the industrial revolution, e.g. getting ahead through obedience, dedication, and persistence, etc. At present days of the information age, business leaders tended to make use of skills such as networking, co-operation, negotiation, flexibility, creativity and divergence, etc.

Discipline in the 21<sup>st</sup> century could pose quite a challenge for form teachers who were unfamiliar with the win-win management models. Support from their principals would encourage these teachers to try new approaches and to help build confidence in developing new techniques. It was important to realize that implementing successful techniques in the classroom took much time and effort. A win-win approach, which involved relearning and retraining, could take a form teacher a number of years for full implementation.

#### (D) To mitigate negative feelings:

It was expected that teachers did express their negative feelings and responses as being form teachers and hence, they would like to abstain from the duty as form teachers for a year or two. The authors affirmed



that open communications among different stakeholders were strongly recommended.

(E) To promote life-long learning:

Despite the pressure of economic downturn on public finances, our government's resolution in investing in education remained unshaken (Policy Address, 2001). The trend for life-long learning became even more prominent through the Government's strong support of people who took part in life-long learning initiatives in order to meet the needs in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The culture of life-long learning should be promoted in schools as well.

## **Section V: The Opinions on the Existing System**

The data of the main study confirmed what was found in the pilot test that the effectiveness of form teachers would affect the effectiveness of a school, and hence, the existing Form Teacher System needed to be improved. It was astonishing to discover that many respondents indicated that every school teacher should have a chance to serve as a form teacher. It seemed that the existing workload ratio between form teachers and non-form teachers should be reviewed in many schools.

The respondents suggested some new practices, for example, the establishment of a "Double Form Teachers System" with 2 form teachers looking after one class. Some schools had tried this system and found it to be beneficial.

Generally speaking, the results obtained from the questionnaire survey indicated that the form teachers themselves recognized their importance in school education, that they have an important role in taking care of the full development of students, affecting their attitudes to life, their behavior and their growth in a positive manner. But at the present moment, they were not so satisfied with the working environments. They further opined that certain important and "urgent" duties were trivial and time-consuming which made them feel exhausted and yet these duties did not have much education values. It was suggested that these duties could well be taken up by clerks. When form teachers had difficulties with their work, help and support from the school should be provided as far as possible. Moreover, relevant staff development programmes were essential to the success of form teachers. As the existing Form Teacher System was not clearly defined and well structured, nor was it encouraging to be the form teachers, something must be done to improve the present situation.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

On the whole, the results obtained from both the qualitative and quantitative studies were promising and meaningful. A questionnaire was developed after the qualitative study. The current expectations of form teachers by different stakeholders were gathered and the difficulties faced by the form teachers were found. Students expected their form teachers to care for them and help them learn and grow.

Parents appreciated the bridging role of form teachers. School administrators recognized the importance of effective form teachers to the good management of a school. However, form teachers considered that their work was important to the development of students and they wanted to spend more time on educational issues rather than handling clerical affairs. In general, the duties of form teachers could be grouped into four areas: Daily Classroom Duties, Class Club Duties, Student Counselling and Communication with Parents. Form teachers indicated the importance of counselling work and the necessity of proper training in this area. They did not favor the heavy non-academic trivial work that might be taken up by clerical staff. In order to enhance the effectiveness of the form teachers, a closer look at the fairness of workload allocation in school was necessary.

As far as opinions on the present form teachers system were concerned, the respondents considered that every teacher could be appointed as a form teacher. School teachers became “specialists” in taking care of specific areas of work as a result of the division of labor in schools, such as taking up specific responsibilities like moral education, handling disciplinary problems, implementing extra-curricular activities, etc. Under this arrangement, form teachers were likely to act as front-line workers handling all types of work and would refer students to “specialists” only when they felt incapable or inappropriate. Therefore a responsible form teacher could help relieve the burden of “specialists”. Their working areas were not specific but they were the moderators of all kinds of specific work. Also, school policies could be effectively implemented through form teachers. Thus, the quality of form teachers would affect the effectiveness of a school.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

When young people lost their directions, they tended to dissipate themselves blindly into entertainment, illusions of the mass media, and fun-seeking companionship (Lam & Ho, 1995). Form teachers, being the most important leading models to the young people, are expected to be the most appropriate front-line educator to help the development of students. This implies that we need devoted and conscientious form teachers. A good Form Teacher System will foster the proper functioning of form teachers. Hence, the following strategies are recommended for an effective Form Teacher System:

- (i) The appointment of form teachers should use a rotation system so that teachers would not be appointed for more than two consecutive years as a form teacher;
- (ii) The duty of a form teacher should be taken as equivalent to at least four teaching periods per week;
- (iii) There should be a coordinator at each level to facilitate the work of form teachers;
- (iv) A teacher should undergo staff development or proper training in counselling before he/she is being appointed as a form teacher; and
- (v) One or two clerical staff should be assigned to look after the non-educational affairs such as fees collection, etc.

In order to avoid form teachers from becoming passive or eventually burnt out as their workload became heavier and heavier day by day without any encouragement or supportive recognition, school administrators would be responsible to help form teachers keep a good and healthy balance of their lives by recognizing their efforts made, and develop a good atmosphere and culture in the working environment. From the management point of view, a clear form teacher policy and job descriptions are necessary to enhance the work efficiency of form teachers. These can bring the potential of form teachers into full play so as to attain high quality school education.

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**Table 1a: Form Teachers' Opinions on the Workload, the Relative Importance and the Need of Professional Training Concerning the Roles and Duties of Secondary 1 to 3 Form Teachers in Hong Kong**

A. Daily Classroom Duties	(1) workload	(2) relative importance	(3) the need of professional training
1. To complete the forms on student particulars	3.5005	3.1192	1.6593
2. To make roll calls	2.7106	3.7594	1.6309
3. To chase after leave application letters	3.4879	3.5710	1.7510
4. To chase after absentees or truants	3.3935	3.9595	2.3553
5. To collect the fees and prepare the receipts	3.7381	2.5443	1.5524
6. To fill in the academic results of students and make remarks accordingly	3.9829	4.1541	3.3837
7. To make record on students who have failed to bring homework and course books to the class	3.5736	3.3655	2.0610
8. To prepare the lesson records	2.7640	2.9540	2.1524
9. To deal with all application matters of students (e.g. travel subsidy)	4.2116	2.8679	2.1905
10. To prepare reference letters for the students	2.8529	3.5087	3.4219

B. Class Club Duties	(1) workload	(2) relative importance	(3) the need of professional training
1. To handle disciplinary problems in the class	4.3766	4.5248	4.3506
2. To coordinate and promote class affairs	3.9585	3.9757	3.7480

3. To arrange the seating plan	3.2984	3.6677	2.9889
4. To organise class clubs	3.2141	3.5365	3.1750
5. To hold meetings for the class clubs	2.9636	3.2452	3.1107
6. To arrange inter-class competitions	3.0910	3.1560	2.9847
7. To promote large-scale class club activities	3.4158	3.3462	3.2725
8. To hold regular weekly meetings	3.3068	3.4811	3.6296
9. To encourage students to join the extracurricular activities	3.4087	3.6390	3.3844
10. To establish a positive class culture	4.1270	4.4331	4.1768

C. Student Counselling	(1) workload	(2) relative importance	(3) the need of professional training
1. To liaise with the subject teacher of a particular student	3.5460	3.9707	3.2460
2. To communicate with the students outside classes	4.2719	4.4580	4.0730
3. To correct weekly reports	3.6900	3.8000	3.2940
4. Career counselling	2.9061	3.5355	3.9037
5. Behavioural counselling	4.4016	4.5707	4.5869
6. EQ counselling	4.3293	4.5763	4.6172
7. Study counselling	4.2099	4.4586	4.3229
8. Daily life counselling	3.8693	4.1805	4.1680
9. To attend inter-form class meetings to discuss class affairs	3.2573	3.6626	3.2933
10. Referring problematic students to personnel concerned	3.3263	4.0839	3.6890
11. To help resolve the contradiction among the students	4.0262	4.2556	4.1756

12. To help resolve the contradiction between the teachers and the students	3.5980	4.0941	4.0848
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D. Communication with the students' parents	(1) workload	(2) relative importance	(3) the need of professional training
1. Telephone communication	3.9014	4.2336	3.7925
2. Face-to-face communication with parents	3.9396	4.3064	4.0888
3. Home visits	2.2805	3.0525	3.7484
4. To join parents' day and seminars	3.6307	3.7901	3.7163
5. To join case study meetings	3.2134	3.7090	3.6994
6. To join the Parent-Teacher Association	2.9731	3.2611	3.3209

N = 1007

Index: 1- the most disagreed

5 - the most agreed





**Table 1b: Form Teachers' Opinions on the Time Needed, Meaningfulness, Necessity and Degree of Difficulty of the Four Main Types of Duties of Form Teachers**

	The least time-consuming			The most time-consuming
1. Time needed for completing the duties	D	B	C	A
	The least meaningful			The most meaningful
2. According to the meaningfulness of the job nature	B	A	D	C
	The least needed			The most needed
3. According to the necessity of the job nature	B	D	C	A
	The easiest task			The most difficult task
4. According to the degree of difficulty of the job	A	B	D	C

A = Daily Classroom Duties
B = Class Club Duties
C = Student Counselling
D = Communication with Students' Parents

**Table 1c: Personal Feelings and Opinions of Form Teachers**

1	Giving me a sense of achievement	3.5751
2	Helping me to understand my students	4.1955
3	Bringing the distance between the students and I myself more closer	4.2482
4	Enriching my professional knowledge on counselling	3.5081
5	Enhancing my techniques on classroom management	3.6910
6	I need more support from the school	4.4604
7	Helping me to develop my career	3.1066
8	I need more support from the students' parents	4.1463
9	I feel frustrated	2.6785
10	Heavy workload	4.4412
11	Unable to support so many different roles at a time	3.8134
12	Prone to create emotional problems	3.3651
13	Bringing the potential into full play in face of the challenging job nature	3.3509
14	Enhancing my interest in teaching	3.1016
15	Destroying the relationship between the students and I myself	2.0680
16	What I contribute is in direct proportion to my efforts paid	2.7279
17	I feel tired	3.5452
18	I want to change my career	2.2917
19	I like my job	3.6911

20	Time constraint becomes my major obstacle in serving as a good form teacher	4.3401
21	Destroying the relationship between colleagues of the counselling team or the disciplinary team and I myself	2.1623
22	If there is an option for me, I would like to be the form teacher in next school year	2.7015
23	Destroying the relationship between other teaching staff and I myself	1.9249
24	A lack of professional training makes me unable to work as a good form teacher	2.6030
25	An outstanding form teacher and an outstanding school administrator should both enjoy words of praise and an equal chance of promotion	3.9634

N = 1007

Index: 1- the most disagreed

5 - the most agreed

**Table 1d: From Teachers' Opinions on How to Enhance the Effectiveness of Form Teachers**

1	To enhance the professional training on teaching	3.9919
2	To provide teachers with EQ counselling service	3.9970
3	To provide information for teaching	3.8443
4	To provide teachers with continuing education opportunities	4.1731
5	To increase opportunities for the exchange of ideas among teachers	4.0709
6	To streamline the daily duties of the form teachers	4.7364
7	To reduce the trivial duties of the form teachers	4.8079
8	To reduce the teaching load of the form teachers	4.5566
9	To empower the form teachers	3.9443
10	To establish a reward system which serves as an encouragement to the form teachers	3.9838
11	To increase the number of clerical staff in order to reduce the workload of clerical duties of the form teachers	4.7664
12	Those who had consecutively served as form teachers would be allowed to abstain from being form teachers for one year	4.6036

N = 1007

Index: 1- the most disagreed

5 - the most agreed

**Table 1e : Form Teachers' Opinions on the Form Teacher System**

1	You understand the Form Teacher System	3.7897
2	You are satisfied with working under the present Form Teacher System	2.8220
3	You consider that there are rooms for improvement under the present Form Teacher System	4.0516
4	You consider that the school values the job of the form teachers	3.1469
5	You consider that the support from the school is enough for the form teachers	2.5375
6	You are satisfied with the job allocation between the form teachers and the non-form teachers	2.2034
7	You consider that the form teachers are very effective in working in line with the school administration	3.1340
8	You consider that the performance of the form teachers will affect the effectiveness of the school	4.1326
9	All teachers should have a chance to serve as form teachers	4.5587

N = 1007

Index: 1- the most disagreed

5 - the most agreed

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